

WOMEN OF MALI

Say "NO" to a proxy war

"The fish is wrong if he thinks that the fisherman has come to feed him"

" Le poisson se trompe s'il croit que le pêcheur est venu pour le nourrir "

Karamoko Bamba (Mouvement Nko)

"We no longer want it ignored that beneath our colored scarves we hide, with a rapid movement, not only the serpents tightly woven into our black or white braids, but ideas."

"Nous ne voulons plus qu'on ignore que, sous nos foulards colorés, nous ne dissimulons pas seulement, d'un geste rapide, les serpents indomptés de nos noires ou blanches chevelures tressées, serrées, mais des idées."

*" L'Afrique mutilée", Aminata TRAORÉ et
Nathalie M'DELA-MOUNIER
Editions Taama 2012*

INTRODUCTION

From the dramatic situation in Mali comes a terrible reality seen in other countries in conflict: the instrumentalisation of acts of violence against women to justify interference and wars of greed for the riches of their countries. African women must know this and make it known.

Just as the amputation of two thirds of Mali's territory and the imposition of sharia on the populations of the occupied regions are humanly unacceptable, so too is the instrumentalisation of this situation, and the fate of women, morally indefensible and politically intolerable.

In this situation we, women of Mali, have an historic role to play, here and now, to defend our human rights against three forms of fundamentalism: the religious, through radical Islam; the economic, through the commercialization of everything; and policies of formal democracy, corrupt and corrupting.

We invite all those in our country, in Africa and elsewhere who feel concerned about our liberation from these fundamentalisms to join their voices with ours and say "No" to the proxy war looming on the horizon. The following arguments justify this refusal.

1. THE DENIAL OF DEMOCRACY

The demand to deploy African troops in northern Mali, transmitted by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) to the United Nations, is based on a diagnosis that is deliberately biased and illegitimate. It is not based on any national dialogue deserving the name, neither from the top nor the base. This diagnosis furthermore excludes the heavy moral and political responsibility of those countries that violated Security Council Resolution 1973, transforming the protection of the Libyan city of Benghazi into a mandate to defeat the regime of Muammar Gaddafi, and to kill him. The coalition of separatists, from Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its allies who defeated a demotivated and disorganized Malian army, also owes this military victory to the arsenals resulting from the Libyan conflict.

Will the same Security Council in the coming days approve the plan for military intervention approved by the African heads of state, pretending in this way to correct the consequences of an unjust war by a war as completely unjust?

Marginalised and humiliated in the management of the "Libyan" crisis, can the African Union, should it, rush into this adventure in Mali without meditating on the lessons learned from the fall of the regime of Muammar Gaddafi?

Where is the coherence in the conduct of the continent's affairs by African leaders, the majority of whom opposed NATO's intervention in Libya in vain, when they agree on the necessity of a deployment of military forces in Mali, with incalculable consequences?

2. THE EXTREME VULNERABILITY OF WOMEN IN CONFLICT ZONES

The International Crisis Group correctly warns that: "In the current context, an offensive by the Malian army supported by the forces of ECOWAS and/or other forces has every chance of provoking additional civilian victims in the North, of aggravating the insecurity and the economic and social conditions in the group of countries, of radicalising the ethnic communities, of favoring the violent expression of all the extremist groups and finally, to pull the region as a whole into a many-sided war without a front line in the Sahara". (*« Le Mali : Éviter l'escalade » International Crisis Group - <http://www.crisisgroup.org/fr- 18 juillet 2012>*). These consequences are particularly grave for women. Their vulnerability, which is on everyone's lips, should be present in everyone's mind when decisions are made, and a deterrent when war can be avoided. And it can be. It must be, in Mali.

Let us remember that the cases of rape that we deplore in the occupied zones of the North risk to be multiplied with the deployment of several thousand soldiers. Added to this risk is that of increased prostitution, more or less disguised, which generally develops in zones of great precariousness, with the resulting risks of spreading HIV/AIDS. Does the plan for military intervention that the Security Council will consider foresee means for realistically protecting the women and girls of Mali in this kind of disastrous situation?

Let us also remember that in the territory as a whole, economic sanctions imposed by the international community upon the Malian people in the name of a return to a discredited constitutional order especially affect the most vulnerable groups. Because of the sexual division of labor, women face enormous difficulties on the domestic level to provide their families with water, food, domestic energy and medicine. This endless daily struggle for survival is in itself already a war. In the precarious and vulnerable circumstances of the population, and of women in particular, the military option now in preparation is a remedy that may well be worse than the malady, while a peaceful alternative, coming from the Malian society, civil, political and military, would be constructive.

3. THE INCOHERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Each of the representative powers of the "international community", as well as ECOWAS and the African Union, has discussed the terrible things happening to women in conflict situations.

Honor where honor is due, French President François Hollande, who plays a role at the head of the line in defense of the military option, has underlined the suffering of women "the first victims of the violence of wars" (*Kinshasa -- fourth summit of the International Organization of the Francophonie*).

And still, on September 26, 2012 at a special meeting on the Sahel on the fringes of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, he declared: "I know that there could be a temptation to carry out negotiations. Negotiate with terrorist groups? That's out of the question. Every delay, every process that delays can only serve the terrorists' game."

Why does France, now withdrawing its soldiers from Afghanistan, think that Mali and ECOWAS should engage their troops on the ground in the framework of the struggle against the same terrorism? "You need to know how to finish a war," is what the American and French Presidents seem to say. "The war in Afghanistan extended beyond the original mission. It provokes the rebellion as much as it fought it. It is time to put an end in good time to this intervention and I will take a lead in this," declared candidate François Hollande, in his inaugural speech of the French presidency.

The American Secretary of State for foreign affairs Hillary Clinton, whose visit to Algeria on October 29, 2012 was partly in order to convince President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to join the war camp, addressed the African heads of state meeting in Addis Abeba in these terms: "In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the acts of violence against women and girls and the activities of armed groups in the eastern region of the country are a constant source of concern for us. The African Union and the United Nations should spare no effort to help the DRC respond to these constant security crises."

The initiative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, entitled "United to put an end to violence against women," launched on January 25, 2008, pays particular attention to the women of West Africa. This was before the wars in Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) and Libya which greatly compromised the stated objectives of this initiative. We understand his reserve concerning military deployment, and hope that he will not support the intervention plans of the heads of state of ECOWAS. War, he reminds us, is an extreme act of violence against the civilian population, thus women. It can only distance us from the objectives aimed at in this initiative.

Why don't the powers of this world that are so preoccupied with the fate of African women tell us the truth about the mining, oil and geostrategic interests of the wars?

The president of the commission of the African Union, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, for her part, underlines that: "It is crucial that women contribute to, and are actively involved in, research for a solution to the conflict. Their voices must be heard in the efforts to promote and consolidate democracy in their countries. To this end, you can without doubt count on the support of the African Union, as well as my personal engagement." (*Meeting of the Support and Follow-up Group on the Situation in Mali - 19 November*

2012.)

The nomination of a woman for this post for the first time could be a real factor in the political emancipation of women and thus the liberation of the continent, if Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma agrees to expand the base of debate on African women by integrating them into the global stakes that have been concealed from us.

4. OUR SAD STATUS AS HOSTAGES

Mali is a country simultaneously under attack, humiliated and taken hostage by the political and institutional actors who don't have to account to us for anything, starting with ECOWAS. One of the translations of this reality is the enormous pressure put on the Malian state. The interim president Dioncounda Traoré is the first of the Malian hostages. If he thought he must remember, on October 19, 2012, during a meeting of the Support and Follow-up Group on the situation in our country, that he is not a president held hostage, it is precisely because he is. Otherwise he would not have repeated three times, on September 21, 2012, the evening before the anniversary of the independence of our country, that he favors dialogue and consultation, and asked the United Nations three days later for an immediate military intervention. "I am aware of being the president of a country at war, but the first choice is dialogue and negotiation. the second choice is dialogue and negotiation, and", he insisted, "the third choice remains dialogue and negotiation. We will go to war if we have no other choice," he declared in his speech to the nation -- before changing his mind.

In addition to the interim president, we are all hostages, prisoners of an unequal and unjust economic and political system that excels in the art of breaking resistance through financial blackmail. The cancellation of foreign aid translates in the year 2012 to a loss of 429 billion francs CFA (*US\$ 849,420,000.*) Almost all public expenditures have been suspended. The closing of numerous enterprises has resulted in the dismissal and unemployment of tens of thousands of workers, while the price of commodities soars. The most important losses are registered in the sectors of construction and public works. Tourism, artisanal work, hotels and restaurants, which since 2008 have suffered the consequences of Mali being put on the list of countries at risk, are gravely affected, as they were sources of substantial revenue for the regions occupied today, especially that of Timbuktu.

Reference is made to the status as hostage not to de-dramatise the insupportable ordeal of the European hostages and their families, but to remember the equal gravity of the situation of all those human beings caught in systems for which they are not personally responsible. The question is at the same time to know how to react in such a way that our country can reclaim its territorial integrity and peace, and also that the six French citizens detained by AQIM can return safe and sound to their families, without their liberation opening the path of military intervention imperiling the lives of hundreds of

thousands of inhabitants in Northern Mali who are equally hostages.

5. THE PROXY WAR

The choice of war is inspired by insufficient knowledge of the real stakes involved. For those who want to seize upon it, Jacques Attali has written a key phrase that proves, if needed, that the military intervention under consideration is a war by proxy. According to him, France should act: "... because this region (the Sahel) can become a rear base for the formation of terrorists and Kamikazes who will attack western interests throughout the region; and even, through the various means of passage, in Europe. They are now not more than a few hundred; if nothing is done, they will soon be several thousands, coming from Pakistan, Indonesia and Latin America. And the uranium deposits in Niger, essential to France, are not far away." (*Blog Attali. May 28, 2012*)

The distribution of roles between France, ECOWAS, the African Union, Europe and the UN is clear. ECOWAS, whose shady game is still not understood by many Malians and Africans, is on assignment in Mali. According to Jacques Attali, the sub-regional organization should act "to return to the civil authorities decision-making, without fear, to reestablish security, to restructure the military forces and get economic activity going again. In the North, to put an end to this secession a military action on the ground will be necessary, with logistical support from a distance, with means of observation, drones and a capacity for strategic encirclement.

Who can do all that? Clearly not the Malian government alone, which has neither the weapons nor the authority. Nor can ECOWAS, which does not have sufficient military means to assure all the necessary actions and which cannot even hope to receive the request for these from the Malian government, under the influence of uncertain forces. And also not the African Union, in any case not alone. So who? The UN? NATO? This question will quickly be asked. It is already asked. Here again, Europe must be united and put itself in a situation to decide and to act. But it isn't. Yet, if the current mediations fail, it will soon be necessary to consider putting in place a coalition of the kind that operated in Afghanistan. Before the equivalent of September 11th, 2001 will impose it." (*Blog of Jacques Attali: May 28, 2012*)

So everything is clear. The war envisaged in Mali will be a continuation of that in Afghanistan, where France and the United States are pulling out after eleven years of combat and heavy human, material and financial losses. Because the Sahel is in the French zone of influence, it will take charge of affairs concerning Mali and subcontract the military violence out to ECOWAS. This transfer is politically correct, so as not to be accused of colonialism and imperialism, and will also reduce the costs of war and avoid loss of additional lives. Western public opinion is less and less tolerant of having their nationals die in defense of "our" causes. Thus, in the same way as the Senegalese

"tirailleurs" (*West Africans fighting for France in WW II - ed.*), African troops will be called on to come to France's assistance.

6. THE GLOBALISATION OF EVILS AND NETWORKS

In such a context religious radicalism does not need northern Mali to spread in West Africa and the world. The economy globalised on the basis of injustice and inequalities is a machine to crush local economies, and the societies and cultures offering it the necessary fertile soil.

From the Red Sea to the Atlantic, from Afghanistan to Nigeria, from Toulouse, where Mohamed Merah acted and was shot down, to Timbuktu, the stakes involve -- at the same time -- ideology, civilisation, identity, but also economics, politics and geostrategy. The actors and forces involved are almost the same, with local variations to manipulate, as with the Tuareg rebellion in Mali.s

Furthermore, Afghanis, Pakistanis, Algerians and other preachers are not new arrivals in Mali. They made their appearance in the mosques from the 1990s, at the time when the dramatic social and human consequences of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) began to be felt in employment, revenues and social cohesion.

7. THE "BADENYA" PERSPECTIVE AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO WAR

Malian and African women saturated by the stakes and mortifying wheels of neoliberal globalisation do not support wars. To the warlike and predatory values of the dominant economic order, we counter with pacifist values that reconcile us, the ones with the others, as well as with the rest of the world. *Badenya* (*children of the mother*) is one of the values that we, women of Mali, must increasingly cultivate, opposing the masculine value *fadenya* (*the children of the father*) which, in its ultraliberal version, authorises the wild race and fratricide for profit, in order to sell off profitable public enterprises, to give up agricultural lands to the powerful and accept the partition of national territory.

Deeply anchored in the perspective of *badenya*, our rejection of war is rooted in an understanding of procreation in which bringing a child into this world is already a kind of "women's war" (*musokele*). And the number of those among us who die in childbirth is too large. Day after day we battle against hunger, poverty and disease, so that each child can develop and take on their own responsibility.

Also, in each soldier, as in each rebel and each new convert to jihadism who will face each other in case of war, each of us recognizes a brother, a son, nephew or cousin. Yesterday they were seaching for social status through employment, income or maybe a visa. Often in vain... Now in their trembling hands they hold the weapons of war.

Lucidity and political maturity ought to be our weapons in this world without faith or law.

There is no reason for Mali to get involved on a field where France and the United States of America are pulling back, despite the power of NATO's weapons.

To the economy of war, we women of Mali counter with the economy of life, in making the current transition an historic opportunity to stand up against the triple challenges of knowledge, citizenship and dialogue. The evolutions now taking place, including the willingness of Ansar Dine and the MNLA to negotiate, the constant modifications of the balance of force as well as the strategies and interactions between the different groups present must be examined with the necessary attention, not just to prevent a potentially tragic war but also to avoid the rocky shoals of previous accords.

The national dialogues contemplated for months should finally take place, permitting Malian society as a whole to meet and define for itself the foundations and conditions for a solution devised (and not imposed) for the present conflict. We, women of Mali, will contribute fully, as tomorrow we will contribute to the reorganization of our country according to the values of the society and culture familiar to us.

All in all, it's about making credible, and reinforcing, the capacity for analysis, of anticipation and proposals from the Malian society: civilian, political and military.

We ask all those who share our approach to contact the principle actors in the international community immediately, in writing or other forms of expression, urging that the Security Council reject a resolution authorizing the deployment of thousands of soldiers to Mali.

Signataires : Aminata D. TRAORE ; SISSOKO Safi SY ; SANOGO Sylvie KONE ; IMBO Mama SY ; Kadiatou TOURE ; TRAORE Sélikèné SIDIBE(Vieux) ; DICKO Rokia SACKO ; Ténin DIAKITE ; DOUMBIA Fanta DIALLO ; KONE Mamou TOURE ; TRAORE Sarata SANOGO ; TRAORE Penda DIALLO ; DIABATE Kadiatou KOUYATE ; Aminata BOCOUM ; Oumou KODIO ; Assatou KAREMBE ; Awa KOÏTA ; Aminata DOUMBIA ; Fatoumata COULIBALY ; Badji BOIRE ; Awa TOURE ; Bintou KONE ; Fatoumata MARIKO ; Mariam KONE ; Minata DIARRA ; Oumou KEITA ; Kadiatou DIALLO ; Kankou KONE ; Rokia NIARE ; Kadia DJIRE ; Ada NANTOUMA ; Awa COULIBALY ; Soungoura DOUMBIA ; Fanta KANTE ; Safiatou COULIBALY ; Djaba TANGARA ; KONE Mama DIARRA ; Ismael DIABATE ; Karamoko BAMBA ; Doumbi FAKOLY ; Coumba SOUKO ; Clariste SOH-MOUBE ; Nathalie M'DELA-MOUNIER.

Translation from the French original: Women and Life on Earth internet project, Nov. 2012. www.wloe.org