
**FROM CHILDHOOD TO WOMANHOOD-LIFE EXPERIENCE: A STUDY OF
ASHA BANDELE'S SOMETHING LIKE BEAUTIFUL**

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ABSTRACT

The exploration of *Something Like Beautiful* enables me to discover Asha Bandele's unfortunate-life experience as a black female character in the United States. This unfortunate-life experience results in her concern of violence against black women in this great nation. Described as a victim of loneliness, sexual abuses and verbal attacks from her childhood to her womanhood, Bandele experiences different forms of inhuman treatments due to her blackness and parent's irresponsibility. These treatments finally push her to put the blame on white American authorities as a way to fight for justice in American society, for she even wonders how to raise her child in such a society where racism is viewed as a mode of life. Such a sorrowful experience of life which intertwines with that of the authoress is therefore what urges me to confess that *Something Like Beautiful* is a revisitation of the real-life Bandele's sequences of life in the white man's world.

Keywords: The United States, Asha Bandele, Childhood, Womanhood, Life experience.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article examines Asha Bandele's childhood and womanhood life experience in the United States in *Something Like Beautiful*. Published in 2009, this novel appears as the authoress's portrayal of her own sequences of life in this "powerful nation", for she acts as the writer, the main character and the narrator, telling how she has become a mother and how she is considered by her counterparts. As a young-black girl, Bandele experiences not only violence by Whites because of her blackness, but also rejection by her own parents who seem to accept their white peers' racist attitude towards Blacks after being taught that the white skin color is the symbol of beauty, happiness and perfection, whereas the black one symbolizes dirtiness and misfortune.

My choice of *Something Like Beautiful* for this exploration is justified by the authoress's endeavors to account for her own life experience as a young-black girl who fights for her own well-being in a racist nation. Denn Milner who first scrutinized it, thinks that "*all black women should be blessed with the intellect and the insight Bandele brings to motherhood; the struggles, the joys, the fears, and the hope*".¹ As for Eddy Robson, "*black women should act after a fashion of Bandele, because she has transformed pain into something like beautiful by fighting against the white man's racist system*".² For these reviewers, *Something Like Beautiful* is a transformative narrative, for they see how the authoress, through the portrayal of her own life experience in "a so-called land of peace and justice", fights for her consideration as a true woman with her black skin color. This fight for such a consideration by a female character is therefore what interests me to write on the authoress's novel. For, I have a strong desire to show how difficult it is to be a black mother in the United States when looking at Bandele's experience which urges me to concentrate on the answer to the following question: To what

extent is *Something Like Beautiful* about the narrator's episodes of life in the United States? I hypothesize that the authoress's reference to the themes of sexual abuses, precocious marriages and racial discrimination attests of her endeavors to account for Bandele's life experience in the white man's world from her childhood to her womanhood.

Being concerned with a literary text linked to the main character's life experience which mirrors that of the authoress herself in the United States, I find it necessary to resort to the biographical, the sociological and the psychological approaches to better conduct the above hypothesis. The biographical approach enables me to know more about the life of Asha Bandele as the authoress of *Something Like Beautiful*. For, according to Jim Laurent, "*the biographical theory refers to an account of the author's episodes of life written by somebody else*".³ The sociological approach helps me analyze the life experience of the narrator as a rejected black American woman in the United States, for Krutch tells the reader that "*art is not created in a vacuum, it is the work not simply of a person but of an author fixed in time and space, answering to a community of which he is important...*" (Krutch quoted by Scott Wilbur: 1962, 123). In almost the same way, Foster also states: "*In the novel, we can know people perfectly, and, apart from the general pleasure of reading, we can find here a compensation for their dimness in life. In this direction, fiction is truer than history, because it goes beyond evidence...*" (Foster: 1962, 70). This quotation evidences that a novel being a literary genre, incorporates some events which occur in its writer's community, as confessed by Toni Morrison in these terms: *If anything, I do, in the way of writing novels or whatever I write is not about the village or the community or about you (the African Americans), then it is not about anything* (Morrison: 1984, 339). The psychological approach, however, enables me to examine Bandele's trauma after being ill-treated by her own fellows for the simple reason that she is black, for "*the criticism that employs this approach assumes that psychology can be used to explain fictitious characters*" (Scott, *ibid.*, 72).

Two main points are discussed in this article: The first is Asha Bandele's childhood experience as an adopted black girl in the United States. The second tackles her womanhood-life experience described through her different love adventures and concern of violence against women in American society.

1.1. Asha Bandele's childhood-life experience

In *Something Like Beautiful*, Bandele describes herself as being alone in the world. She thinks that her parents are the main cause of her loneliness in the country that judges its citizens not according to the content of their knowledge, but according to their social status and racial belongings. To make the reader understand how lonely she feels in such a country which, she thinks, is also hers because built up with the sweat and blood of her ancestors, she portrays how she is adopted by a new family at the age of three while her biological parents are still alive:

Having been adopted near my third birthday, I had never seen at least to my memory, one person who looked like me, or shared my blood and particular genetic makeup. I may never understand why this hurt me so badly, left me feeling for my whole life as though I came from nowhere, belonged to no one. But it has. It always has. And it was there all during my pregnancy. It was there during all the time I refused to see myself as a single mother (*SLB*, p. 48).

This passage reveals the true identity of Bandele's parents. For, one sees how irresponsible they are when they accept to give their only child to another family forever because of money.

This irresponsibility attests of their hatred for this young-black girl who, instead of deserving good treatments from them, is welcomed with rejection. She is affected by her parents' inhuman attitude towards her when she for example voices it out that "it hurt me". This means that Bandlele calls into question her parents' decision to get rid of her through adoption. Her complaint here is that of a young girl who hopes to be raised by her own parents in order to feel parental affection. For, she knows it in advance that she is likely to suffer within a new family's home because of her status of an adopted child. What her parents seem to ignore is that their inability and unwillingness to take care of her have constituted a great hindrance to her evolution in life. At the age of fourteen years old, for instance, she has been victim of sexual abuses by her adopted father:

Because I grew up in the years before sexual abuse was discussed openly or at all I did not understand, for example, that the thirty- Something year-old man who claimed me as 'his girl' when I was fourteen was a predator. I did not understand anything that happened to me any of the times they happened I only knew that I felt dirty, wrong, and misplaced in the world (SLB, p. 15)

The author's account for the theme of sexual abuse is a way to put the blame not only on Whites, but also on all those black Americans who rely on their white counterparts when it comes to adopting their children. For, he shows how these children, instead of being cherished and loved, are unfortunately raped mercilessly by their adopted fathers who consider them as sexual toys capable of satisfying their libido. What motivates these fathers to rape them whenever they want is their awareness about their racial belongings which are not shared by them. Such a humiliating experience viewed as the result of Whites' hatred for their black counterparts is linked to what Martin Luther King considers as "*a system of a far deeper malady within the American spirit*" (King: 1967, 41). By portraying this pitiful experience which seems to be part of her own sequences of life in the United States, she certainly warns the black community to stop believing in their white peers' promises. For, it is still out of question for them to look at Blacks as human beings, except when it comes to performing hard tasks for their interests. This means that they do not adopt black children to help them succeed in life, but to exploit them physically and morally. It is indeed with regard to this exploitation that Bandlele is pessimistic about the future of her child within a white man's house:

Would she know how to speak to me? Would she know how to speak to me, as I did not know how to speak to my parents? Would I know how to listen to her, hear what she was telling me, read between her lines? My parents, in all of their brilliance and commitment, were unable to do that for me. During my adolescence, teenage angst became the nomenclature for what eventually revealed itself as a clinical depression that its worst spiraled down into suicidal ideation (SLB, p. 24).

The interrogations Bandlele puts here are those of a mother who has love for her daughter, for she does not want her to be victim of ill-treatments after being adopted. The remembrance of her own childhood victimization makes her call into question the issue of black children's adoption by Whites. Her parents' irresponsibility which is to some extent the cause of her suffering within a white man's house appears through their incapacity to take care of her and their willingness to give her to another family with the exchange of money, ignoring that many black girls are victims of sexual abuses in the United States:

Sixty percent of black women in United States suffer from depression. Forty-three percent of Black women in United States report that they were verbally

or emotionally abused during their childhood. Forty-two percent report that they were sexually or physically abused during childhood. Every single day in America, this big and wealthy nation of ours, somewhere there is a mother dying during childbirth, somewhere else there are four children who being killed by abuse, five more who are committing suicide, another eight, still dead from firearms, thirty-three from presentable accidents, still another seventy-seven who will not know their first birthdays (SLB, p. 157).

This passage is a report of black women's condition in the United States. The authoress claims for better conditions of this minority which still suffers because of their black skin color in this powerful nation viewed as the land of justice and democracy. This is to say that Blacks are not considered as American citizens yet. The novel even reveals that their death is not considered as real death but as the death of animals or insects by their white counterparts who want to get rid of them so as to create an America composed solely of Whites. In other words, Blacks' victimization in the United States is a strategy put into practice by white Americans to suppress the black race which surrounds them. For, the sentence "forty-two percent report that they were sexually or physically abused during childhood" attests of these white Americans' opposition to the conception of racial mixing extolled by black leaders like Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, to quote only two. This opposition is therefore what pushes a black soldier in John Oliver Killens's *And Then We Heard the Thunder* to consider the United States as "*the United Snakes of America*" (Killens: 1963, 87).

Bande's mention of the above percentage is a way to inform the reader about the American Government's failed policy concerning the protection of adolescences. For, there is in her creative American society an important rate of infant mortality due to white Americans' racist system: "*The infant mortality rate in Mississippi would not have doubles almost exclusively because of Clinton's welfare policy, which has made getting prenatal care almost impossible for the poorest of mother*" (SLB, p. 182). Through this quotation, the authoress pictures American authorities' lack of seriousness on black questions with reference to the historical Bill Clinton, the former and forty-second American President whose "welfare policy" does not meet Blacks' expectations, especially when looking at the way they are treated in American hospitals. Her reference to Bill Clinton appears as a strategy to denounce the American authorities' sanitary reforms which are almost a failure with regard Blacks' care. It is indeed with regard to these failed reforms that Bande who is described as a victim of discrimination claims for white American authorities' consciousness, for she even wonders how to raise her future children in such a racist and violent nation.

Seeing her commitment in the fight against racism in the white man's world, one may argue that the psychological pain deriving from her forced-sexual intercourses by her adopted father still weights so heavy on her mind that it still seems difficult for her to forget about her past. But having no satisfaction with regard to this fight, she keeps on wondering how a black child can do to gain reputation, respect and consideration in the United States: "*What qualities must a child possess to be chosen, accepted, taken in and loved?*" (SLB, p. 51). What may attract the reader's attention in this utterance is the introduction of the noun "qualities" which appears in plural. This means that there are undoubtedly qualities which make a person American in this "so-called democratic nation". One of these main qualities is the color of the skin which must be white like that of all white Americans. Another important quality which puts Bande in the margin of the American society is the kind of blood running in her veins. For, according to white Americans, to be accepted, loved and considered as a true American citizen is to be white bloodily. Through the authoress's presentation of Bande as a victim of

childhood rejection, one discovers the failure of white American authorities with regard to the protection of the children's rights.

It is clear that Bandele's parents embody all Americans who express no sympathy to their children and end up obliging them to make personal sacrifices to protect themselves. Bandele who endures this lack of sympathy in her childhood from her biological and adopted parents still worries about this childhood: "*I told him of my missing childhood*" (SLB, p. 98). The portrayal of this female character's missing childhood is, for the authoress, a reverberating cry for all parents' responsibility towards their children for fear of seeing them suffer in life. She certainly invites them to do their best to raise their children even with a miserable salary rather than giving them to Whites with the exchange of money. For, their childhood-sorrowful experience often has some negative impacts on them all along their life, as evidenced in the section below.

1.2. Asha Bandele's womanhood-life experience

Another aspect that renders *Something Like Beautiful* rich and more attractive for the reader is the authoress's genuine to incorporate in this work of fiction some obscure sides of the narrator's life as a grown-up individual. For, this novel reveals that except her childhood victimization within her house of adoption, Bandele also appears as a victim of love deception from her first husband who, after some years of marriage, is no longer ready to continue sharing his marital life with her because of her racial belonging: "*My first husband, good-hearted and kind, did not wind up being a person with whom I shared similar passions, and before our marriage really began, we'd devolved into a silence that swelled so large it stole all the air and then it was over, our marriage*" (SLB, p. 10). Although this quotation may engender different interpretations, it is important to recall that its very significance rests on the authoress's use of the preterit which throws light on her exactness about her account. Her portrayal of Bandele's first divorce, far from being a mere invention, is something real. For, like Bandele who is mercilessly rejected by her first sweetheart, the true Bandele too has been victim of such a similar-marital experience: "*After my first marriage broke up for no reason at all, I started finding no interest in sharing my life with Whites*".⁴ This utterance, as it can be seen, attests of the encroachment between history and fiction in *Something Like Beautiful*, for one sees how the historical Bandele's sequences of life intertwine with those of the fictionalized one.

The authoress's account for her own divorce in such a work of art appears as a form of fight for the rights of all black American women who never have a chance to share a long-lasting love relationship with their white partners because of the latter's racist attitude towards them. She certainly claims for their protection by American authorities who are often mute about their victimization. For, when she, for example, draws the reader back to her divorce with her first husband, one sees how she raises not only the question of her own suffering, but that of all of black women married by Whites. This implies that black American women never enjoy the full fruition of life from their love adventures with their white counterparts. Such a lack of enjoyment embodied by Bandele who appears not only as a victim of divorce, but more of her husband's verbal attacks, ends up causing her psychological pain and loneliness:

My first marriage was not a romantic affair to be sure, and besides, I was a teenager, literally, when I became engaged, barely a woman, twenty-one, when I married. And of course, with Rashid, well, with Rashid there was the prison. But here I was, thirty-three years old with a new baby and, like it or not, a new life. And now I was in places with this pretty man whom I could

be with whenever we wanted, whenever I wanted. I could make love to him whenever, wherever (SLB, p. 99).

Through this passage, the authoress expresses her complaint about her first marriage which is characterized by the lack of affection from her beloved partner. This search for affection is reinforced by her traumatic-childhood experience which she decides to repair through a precocious marriage. Instead of being cherished, loved and respected during this precocious-marital experience, she is unfortunately welcomed with hatred and ill-treatments from her spouse who takes her for granted because of her black skin color. Consequently, her new-born child, being part of the black race, is not excluded from these inhuman treatments. Such a pitiful-marital experience described in *Something Like Beautiful* is far from being from the authoress's personal imagination, for in *The Sportswriter*, for instance, Richard Ford, another American writer also portrays the issue marital deceptions through X and Bascombe. In fact, after sharing life together as a couple for so many years, X is no longer ready to support Bascombe's sexual behaviors. She finds it better to go abroad in order to restart her life as a single woman rather than being betrayed most of the time by a man who is never sexually satisfied. The remembrance of all acts of infidelity endured by her within her home, such as caught letters of love sent to women by her husband, makes her reject all his pleadings for reconciliation:

X found the letters in a drawer of my office desk while looking for a sock full of silver dollars my mother had left me, and sat on the floor and read them, then handed them to me when I came in with a list of missing cameras, radios and fishing equipment. She asked if I had anything to say, and when I didn't, she went into the bedroom and began tearing apart her hope chest with a claw hammer and a crowbar. She tore it to bits, then took it to the fireplace and burned it while I stood outside in the yard mooning (Ford: 2001, 15).

Through this passage, one sees how Bascombe is caught after betraying her wife by sending several letters of love to his girlfriends. Ford's mention of these letters is a way not only to inform the reader about one of the main causes of his characters' divorce, but more to condemn such an attitude of married men in love affairs. He certainly means that a married man should not have any love contact with another partner for fear of doing harm to his spouse. When the narrator, for example, states that "she went into the bedroom and began tearing apart her hope chest with a claw hammer and a crowbar", he shows how shocked and difficult it is not only for X, but also for any woman on earth to support such a betrayal from her husband. This female character's marital experience which mirrors that of the protagonist in *Something Like Beautiful* shows how Asha Bandele joins the long list of writers who portray regular facts through their creative literature. Her endeavors to account for black American women's marital experience become more evident when she informs the reader about Bandele's second marriage with her beloved partner named Amir. Despite her trauma deriving from her divorce with Rashid, the novel reads that in the beginning this second marriage makes her feel the sense of true love thanks to Amir's affection and tenderness: "*Amir was the first man I ever experienced full-blown, adult romance with*" (SLB, p. 99). One understands that Bandele is happy to meet a romantic partner capable of helping her forget about the kind of love she received from Rashid who, bound to the racist system observed in the United States, did not show his true love for her.

It is indeed thanks to Amir's sense of responsibility which differs from that of Rashid that Bandele ends up finding the smile she has been looking for as a married woman: "*Amir was different and that was okay. I told myself this, that he seemed to relegate my past to the past*" (SLB, p. 98). This quotation evidences the paroxysm of Bandele's attachment to Amir whose love for her shows no signs of betrayal in the beginning, as she continues to voice it out in these terms: "*I had never had such a time with Rashid. Never had these simple moments. Not even during my first marriage. Really, I'd never had the simple romance of sharing a day, letting the hours fall where they would, answering to no one but ourselves*" (SLB, p. 96). Another passage which evokes Bandele's strong attachment to Amir appears when she claims that her new love is perfectly good enough, compared to the previous one which she considers as nightmare:

No man in my life had made me feel valid in quite that way Amir was superman to me. In the beginning. In the weeks and months after the deportation order and after the end of the marriage that had meant the world to me, but to no one else, he, this new man stopped in and said I counted and made me feel a though there was a coming tomorrow that would erase the sad yesterday. He said things that bolstered and renewed me at the very time, the very hour when I was sure I didn't matter much anymore, couldn't be renewed (SLB, p. 106).

Through Bandele's utterances which evidence Amir's deep love for her, the authoress shows the reader the true nature of a given love affair. She certainly advises men to be more affectionate to their sweethearts. For, the latter's happiness within their homes is conditioned by the affection given to them by their husbands. Such a piece of advice urges me to classify her into the category of feminist writers, because she stands as the defender of women's rights not only in the United States where black women's rights are violated because of their racial belonging, but in all the spheres of the world where men's true love is needed by their beloved partners. But what the reader may find shocking is the way Amir's impressive love for Bandele quickly turns into a nightmare. For, the novel reveals that after some years of trustful love relationship, he becomes very violent and unrecognizable to his wife's eyes: "*Where was my kind, my beautiful black man who talked about babies with me? In the very start of our relationship*" (SLB, p. 105). Through this quotation, the authoress introduces the reader to the narrator's bitterness, because one sees how she is both shocked and astonished with regard to her new partner's recurrent violence against her. The authoress's intention in accounting for this theme of violence against women in the United States appears as a way for her to invite American authorities to take harsh measures to eradicate this social evil which continues to mutilate the women's rights in this part of the world.

Another aspect that shows Amir's wrongful behavior towards Bandele is that he goes beyond boundaries by revealing this female character's intimacy to their peers. In the following quotation, for example, one sees how the authoress accounts for Bandele's complaint about such a behavior from someone she considers as a trustful-beloved partner: "*Why were things okay for me but rough for him? Inevitably, unbelievably, in language I could not retain it was so mean, he began to insinuate that I was where I was because I was fucking my way into assignments, because I was a slut*" (SLB, p. 101). What the novelist denounces here through Amir is nothing else but the behavior of all those partners who, for one reason or the other, are often ready to betray their sweethearts by revealing their weaknesses to their fellows. This denunciation evidences not only Amir's impoliteness towards his wife, but also condemns

such a boyish behavior which very often results in the destruction of the good atmosphere needed by lovers in their love relationships. The authoress's reference to a word like "slut" is viewed as a reverberating cry for the redress of men's behavior towards their spouses. Knowing that this word refers to a prostitute, she invites them not to insult their beloved partners despite their weaknesses, for one sees how Amir's consideration of Bandele as an easy-goer woman ends up pushing him to apply physical violence against her:

I wasn't prepared when he grabbed me and rushed me down to the floor of my living room, my foot catching and twisting under the base of my sofa on the way. It snapped apart, my foot did, I didn't know. I was in shock. It hurt but I thought I was a sprain. I didn't find out until the next day when two friends took me to the hospital. It was a compound fracture; my entire foot was shattered. A month later when the swelling went down enough for surgeons to rebuild my foot, the chief of podiatric surgery asked me if they could take pictures for a book he was working on. He said he had never seen damage so complete. And then I went under and woke up eight hours later in a cast I wore for the next two months (SLB, p. 104).

Here again, the novelist introduces the reader to a dramatic scene crammed with features revealing Amir's violence against Bandele. When the latter, for example, argues that "I wasn't prepared when he grabbed me and rushed me down to the floor", she reveals the atmosphere of fear and brutality which dominates this scene. It is undoubtedly true that grabbing and rushing one's beloved partner down to the floor is both painful and condemned by the law in some of the world's societies. Bandele's denunciation of such violent acts against women evidences her urge to take quick actions in order to put not only herself, but also her daughter out of similar-social situations in a country which judges its citizens with regard to their racial belongings rather than to the content of their knowledge:

But I worried most of all, though, about protection. Would I be able to raise a Black girl safely in a world that seems only to expand in its ability to hate and destroy? In a culture whose practices—from health care to policing—tip toward death, with Black people and women more often than not the stand-ins for the bull's-eye, would the life of one Black girl be honored by anyone other than me? (SLB, p. 23).

The phrase "its ability to hate and destroy" stands for the American society which is described as a great purveyor of violence against Blacks. Bandele who is still victim of this violence tries to use a suggestive image to announce the oncoming drawbacks on the life of her daughter. For, she does not see how to raise this daughter in such a violent and hating society where the black minority is still seen with disdain by the white majority. The portrayal of this society crammed with hatred against Blacks is far from being from Bandele's personal imagination, because in *The Bluest Eye*, for example, Toni Morrison also describes it through Pecola, a female black character who never feels loved by her peers because of her blackness and ugliness. These wrongful qualities attributed to her urge her classmates to put her in the margin of the mainstream American society through daily mockeries: "*Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadaddsleepsnecked. Black e mo black e moyadadd sleeps necked. Black emo...*" (Morrison : 1970, 65). This song brings evidence that in *The Bluest Eye*, the authoress

“represents beauty as the symbol of integration and ugliness as the source of rejection” (Nzambi-Mikoulou & Massala: 2019, 193). Similarly, in *Something Like Beautiful*, Bandele accounts for this rejection through her protagonist’s ill-treatments by her fellows due to her black skin color which makes the latter refuse to accept her American citizenship. The reading of this narrative makes the reader understand that her rejection in American society is both physical and moral, for when she goes to see a medical Doctor for treatment, features revealing her psychological trauma are obvious:

“Ms. Bandele,” she said, voice calm and sort of mid-western flat, “you have post-traumatic stress disorder”. Post disorder traumatic stress disorder? The war disease? The Vietnam legacy? Yes, she Said, but it doesn’t affect only soldiers emerging from combat. It can impact anyone, she explained, who has lived through a traumatic and life altering experience, one in which grave harm occurred or was threatened. Nearly eight million Americans suffer with it, albeit in varying degrees (*SLB*, p. 169).

This passage crammed with dramatic effects shows the narrator and the medical Doctor’s trauma caused by social problems which depress them daily. Bandele who is victim of this moral attack symbolizes all black female characters who are facing such a psychological trauma due to their black skin color which, according to their white peers, dirties the United States. Being a victim of different forms of abuses in this great nation, she decides to go and see a doctor to cure her from her psychological pains, as do all the survivors of abuses:

Like survivors of abuse. Ms. Bandele, she Said again in that matter of fact voice I came to rely on in the time WE worked together. And just like that, there they were. My wounds, without recrimination, without minimizing, without excuse, simply acknowledged. I would argue that that was when we really began to work. We worked in ways I had never worked before with a doctor. We worked until I was well enough to manage my own care. We worked for months that long winter into spring. We sat in my doctor’s home office until we developed a clear plan about what to do going forward. We worked until I had no more money to afford the sessions and then she allowed me to barter with her - I did some editing for her - so that the work could continue (*SLB*, pp. 170-171).

What the reader may find shocking with regard to the narrator’s victimization is the fact that there is no one who can listen to her and it seems useless for her to complain about the cause of black women in American society. This means that the authoress’s intention in mentioning this passage is to let the reader discover that in the United States, the rights of black women are not respected because of their status of second zone citizens. To make the reader feel the presence of post-traumatic stress for black women, the narrator accounts for the history of many black women who are seen coming to participate in a workshop in New Orleans. This workshop is described as the only one occasion for these women to speak plainly their mind, as Bandele who is one of them recalls her memories about their depression in these terms:

I was in New Orleans participating in a workshop about depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, particularly but not exclusively in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. And sister After sister would come up to the microphone

and speak of her life and here, I mean her life beyond, before, Hurricane Katrina hit with each grown woman, we heard take After tale of sexual assault, racist humiliations, missing fathers, murdered children, domestic violence. At the end of the panel, after all questions had been asked one of the women who worked in the venue approached the mike. She Said she simply could not understand all this talk, she said she had survived Katrina despite enduring the inhumanity we saw night after night on the news in the days that followed August 29, 2005 (SLB, pp. 158-159).

Through this passage, the authoress portrays sexual abuses, racist humiliations, murdering of children and domestic violence as the main causes of black women's moral depression in the United States. Because of these social evils compared to a storm that destroys the nature, black women feel betrayed by this nation's government which, they think, is still very weak with regard to the protection of their civil and human rights. This weakness is therefore what urges Bandele not only to worry about how to raise her daughter in such a society where injustice and violence reign, but more to fight for their full rights so as *"to build their own lives, not in a racist country, but in a world where they will be considered as human beings"* (N'zambi-Mikoulou et al.: 2016, 1822). It is indeed with regard to this aim that in the following passage, for example, one sees how the narrator start her fight for peace by putting questions about the insecurity observed in American society:

How do I keep you safe, Nisa, keep you from the monsters when the truth is that the monsters are intertwined in our lives? That's the question that visits me, night after night. It's been there from before you were born, that one question. And it should not have been. Here's what should have been the only questions to dance in my head (SLB, p. 60).

This passage evidences the narrator's questions about the American society which she considers as an unsafe place for her to live with her daughter. For, she lets the reader understand that in this society, young black girls are exposed to insecurity perpetrated by men called "monsters". This calling is viewed as a metaphor used by her to refer to white men who, like monsters, kill their black counterparts because of their physical appearance. To show the authoress's endeavors in denouncing such inhuman acts which also attest of the failure of the American police, Bandele describes a scene in which one sees how black women are mistreated by Whites in front of the police who refuse to intervene because of the victims' blackness:

You were not yet two months old on that night when we were curled up together in my room. The news was on and the anchor was reporting mayhem at the annual Puerto Rican Day parade. There were disturbing reports about women being snatched up, shoved among the men gathered there. The women were being grasped; they were being grasped violently. The police who were at the scene, Nisa, the same ones this society Will tell you are there to serve and protect you, were laughing at the girls, who at this point were crying. This was on the news that night Nisa, the news you could not understand it, I do. Le, the mother of a girl child. Me, who was once a girl and who remembers cops like this. Cops who laugh at young girls being groped (SLB, p. 57).

What is portrayed here is Bandele's complaint about the attitude of the American police when it comes to solving problems which confront Blacks to Whites. This complaint is viewed as a way for her to denounce what the American police do to Blacks; their inability to play their role without racial or sexual distinction. Bandele's intention in denouncing such an attitude of this police is certainly a way to invite white Americans to understand the drawbacks of social injustice, for they seem to ignore what the founding fathers of the United States claimed during the proclamation of its independence on July 4th, 1776. Her complaint about her daughter is an illustration of some black American women's participation in the fight against Whites' racist system which is also observed in places of education:

Do I begin in 1993 with Snoop and it ain't no fun if my homies can't get none swiped a credit card down white chocolates ass? Do I start with a bitch is a bitch? Or should I let it all go and get right to the heart of the matter? Maybe I need only mention the girls in the schools in Colorado, Canada, and Pennsylvania who were singled out, lined up, sexually assaulted, and then murdered, murdered? And while everyone expressed concern about the spate of violence in American schools (SLB, pp. 58-59).

This passage illustrates black girls' victimization by their white counterparts in American schools, for one sees how they are victim of the latter's atrocities. It is certainly because of these unbearable atrocities that Bandele wonders about the future of her daughter. Knowing that school has become a place where black children are exposed to inhuman acts such as racism and sexism, to quote only two, she goes on asking various questions about how to secure all Blacks' female children. Her decision to end such barbaric practices which appear as "*a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit*" (King: 1967, 41) is that of a female character who has taken time to investigate these problems of racism and sexism before acting. When she tells of these inhuman practices, she shows a new form of slavery inflicted on Blacks who are deprived of the rights to enjoy the full fruition of the American democracy after their emancipation proclamation. This means that in the United States, Blacks do not have freedom of speech. They cannot dare to express their opinion for fear of being beaten or killed, as a character named Sheriff Simpson tells Bobby in Julius Lester's *And All Our Wounds Forgiven*: "*Killing a nigger really didn't qualify as murder, you could only accuse somebody of murder if they killed a human being*" (Lester: 1994, 111). This means that the theme of Blacks' fear to be killed described in *Something Like Beautiful* is really part of the latter's sorrowful experience in the United States:

The truth is African Americans come from a long line of women who've been beaten down for speaking up. And we, you, me come from a long line of women who we're forced to live their lives with the fear that if we speak, we will lose, we will be separated from our children. From slavery to the sisters right now today, who get picked up, often on charges that are minor or else false, but because the court system move sob dreadfully slowly and because if bail is set, it is often set too high for our mothers to make, and so by the time we are released from jail, pour babies have been places in foster place (SLB, p. 63).

Through this passage, the authoress denounces the white man's racist system towards their black counterparts. Her discourse involving black women's marginalization in American society is an address to the American authorities to take quick measures and sustainable laws capable of protecting all Blacks regardless of their gender. For, like black women who are daily victimized in this society, black men also suffer the same victimization because of their physical appearance. In Matt Taibbi's *I Can't Breathe: A Killing on Bay Street*, for example, one sees how a black male character named Eric Garner is innocently killed by the American police: "*I can't breathe. The four officers bent and twisted Garner's great body around so that his arms were now behind his back, his face pressed into the sidewalk entrance to the beauty supply shop*" (Taibbi: 2017, 112). From this quotation, "*one understands that the title of Matt Taibbi's novel, I Can't Breathe: A Killing on Bay Street, derived from Garner's cry, I can't breathe. When he adds to this title, A Killing on Bay Street, he means that he is not dead of a given disease but mainly of white American police officers' hatred for him as a black person on the American soil*" (N'zambi-Mikoulou: 2021, 73).

2. CONCLUSION

At the end of this exploration, I have discovered that Asha Bandele is a real victim of racism in the United States. Her life experience in this "so-called democratic nation" is crammed with bitterness due to her blackness and parents' irresponsibility which bring not only about her sexual abuses by her adopted father, but also about her precocious love adventures with unconscious beloved partners. Her sufferings described through these love adventures added to the white man's violence against black Americans in general and black American women in particular, are conceptual tools which evidence her similarity with the real-life Asha Bandele. This violence is therefore what urges her to fight for Blacks' full integration in American society through daily complaints.

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¹ <http://www.en.Wikipedia.org//DennMilner/> “The narrator’s participation in the fight for black women’s rights in the United States”: A Study of Asha Bandele’s *Something Like Beautiful*, consulted on December 12th 2024, 3 p.m.

² <http://www.ebay.com/EddyRobson/> “Black women’s concern of violence in the United States: A Scrutiny of Asha Bandele’s *Something Like Beautiful*”, consulted on March 17th 2025, 4 p.m.

³ <http://www.en.Wikipedia.Org/JimLaurent/> “The use the biographical approach in the analysis of literary works”, consulted on March 18th 2025, 5 p.m.

⁴ <http://www.en.Wikipedia.org//RobertAshley/> *Asha Bandele’s Marital Life Experience*, consulted on March 25th 2025, 9 a.m.