

Kathryn Lasky, “Women’s Voice Counts”

Daniel Tiaⁱ

Department of English, American Studies,
University of Felix Houphouet-Boigny,
Abidjan, Cote d’Ivoire
orcid.org/0000-0002-2928-3257

Fatonde Olivier Dovonouⁱⁱ

Department of English, American Studies,
University of Felix Houphouet-Boigny,
Abidjan, Cote d’Ivoire

doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/ejells.2013/vol12n63853>

Published August 18, 2024

Citation: Tia D. and Dovonou F.O. (2024) Kathryn Lasky, “Women’s Voice Counts”, *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, Vol.12, No.6, pp.38-53

Abstract: *The American women did not await the 21st century to express their disapproval of matters of general interest. At every stage of human history, they always assert their presence as agents of social development and promoters of liberties; they prove their ability to serve humanity. In all parts of the world, despite the deliberate ideological restrictions inflicted upon them, they show integrity, decency, and honesty; their pragmatism, literacy, actions, and ideas serve as bow. Those qualities enable them to free themselves from all forms of ostracism and subjugation. Along the march of history, when defending their common cause, some of them sometimes lose their lives, others are incarcerated, but the survivors remain committed and hopeful. They continually fight to climb the social ladder. In socio-professional and political sectors where men are hostile, they demonstrate absolute resilience. A retrospective glance at the US history helps to revivify the American women’s involvement. Labeled as vulnerable and passive beings, they embark on a timeless struggle whose purpose is to restore their tarnished image and dignity. Better still, their awareness enables them to eradicate the prejudices, social inequalities, and barriers, which disadvantage and devalue them. Like other Western countries, the United States has a long tradition of marginalizing women. Its excluding policy is narrowly connected with patriarchal tradition; a practice, which emerges not only in the family sphere, but also on the political stage, where women are deprived of their suffrage. In such circumstances, they suffer from male domination with impunity. That burning social injustice is pictured by writers, such as Kathryn Lasky whose literary works pay tribute to the American suffragists for their boldness and great sense of duty in the construction of democracy in America. As a field par excellence for the symbolization of social facts, literature appears as a location where the American women’s bravery and ingenuity are realistically expressed. Therefore, the study of Laskian female characters’ trajectories through the textual prism is advantageous. For that purpose, the use of Derridean deconstruction as a methodological tool will be helpful. This will scrutinize the political scope of Laskian female characters’ struggle for suffrage through two axes: “A masculinized political system” and “women’s awareness and US democracy.”*

Keywords: woman, freedom, suffrage, ostracism, resilience

ⁱ Corresponding Author: yawejanet@yahoo.com

ⁱⁱ Co-Author: fatondedovonou@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The biological difference between men and women has given rise to heated debates in all human societies, notably about women's ability to think like men, to do the same jobs as men, to have the same privileges as men.

From one civilization to another, from one vision to another, the answers to these questions are almost identical. Women are declared the weaker sex and men the stronger. Other prejudices are constructed to define them as second-class citizens. Extensive critical studies by various specialists have already revealed that artificial injustice. In books such as *L'évidence de l'égalité des sexes: Une philosophie oubliée du XVII^e siècle*, Elsa Dorlin maintains that by positing a feminine essence, we correlatively posit a masculine essence. Women's defenders are necessarily obliged to value what their opponents stigmatize: not women, but their nature, their essence, their difference. They can ask for more justice, more consideration, more respect, even more equality, but their demands will go unheeded. Insulted or praised, femininity in any case determines an essence and a destiny outside institutional power, outside knowledge reserved for men. No matter what arguments are put forward in favor of the inferiority or superiority of the female sex: as soon as an essential difference is recognized, forbid everything that is the prerogative of men and the will in any case to women because of their difference, however noble it may be. The only viable argument is that of complementarity, not equality.ⁱⁱⁱ In her book *Masculin/Féminin II: Dissoudre la hiérarchie*, Françoise Héritier asks a fundamental question: Are women really people?^{iv} On the face of it, the American politicians described in Kathryn Lasky's book are part of a dynamic that denigrates the humanity of American women.

Obviously, because of the difference between sexes, divergent points of view on the relationship between men and women emerge, thus giving the impression that both human entities are in conflict. Men's selfishness, their desire to rule without associating with women, sometimes takes on alarming proportions. As a result, women are perceived as victims. The example of the American society shows the extent to which women are despised. Certainly, much progress is made; today, white and black women hold leading positions in the United States, but they are viewed with hatred. Conservative minds persist and are unwilling to contribute to the emergence of women's voice. Worse still, women's success today is the fruit of a relentless struggle, for the years preceding 1920 recorded the darkest pages for the American women. Victims of an

ⁱⁱⁱ "En posant une essence féminine, on pose corrélativement une essence masculine. Les défenseurs des femmes sont nécessairement obligés de valoriser ce que leurs adversaires stigmatisent : non pas les femmes, mais leur nature, leur essence, leur différence. Ils peuvent bien demander plus de justice, de considération, de respect, voire d'égalité, leurs requêtes resteront lettre morte. Insultée ou louée, la féminité détermine de toute façon une essence et une destinée hors du pouvoir institutionnel, hors des savoirs réservés aux hommes. Qu'importent les arguments avancés en faveur de l'infériorité ou de la supériorité du sexe féminin : dès lors qu'est reconnue une différence essentielle, tout ce qui est l'apanage des hommes et la volonté sera de toute façon interdit aux femmes en raison de leur différence, si noble soit-elle. Seul l'argument de la complémentarité et non de l'égalité, est alors viable." (2000, 23)

^{iv} "Les femmes sont-elles vraiment des personnes ?" (2002, 88).

unprecedented policy of denigration, they were disenfranchised and stripped of their right to vote. In the management of the American society, they were pariahs.

While that exclusion flourished for centuries, it should be recognized that it was fought with fervor. Various women's Associations denounced successive governments. Kathryn Lasky's non-fiction, *A Time for Courage* relates the essential steps of the struggle for the women's suffrage. Excluded from the political scene, deprived of the right to vote, the American women had no political existence; they were politically invisible. Having no political identity, they were unilaterally subject to the men's will. Their desire to build a political identity in order to participate in political debate can be seen as a major awakening. Before accounting for Lasky's *A Time for Courage*, it is relevant to point out that few studies exist on her vision. Apart from few comments from Journalists and other observers, Lasky's book remains a fertile and promising project for critics. Nevertheless, further critical studies do exist on women's suffrage. In the book, *The History of Woman Suffrage*, Ida Husted Harper relates the long march towards victory as follows,

The Federal Woman Suffrage Amendment went into effect' in August, 1920, and the following winter there was a greater amount of advanced legislation in the various States than had taken place in the preceding ten years collectively, and the resume of existing laws that had been prepared for this volume was soon at least partially obsolete in many of them." (1922, iv).

As we can see, the fight for women's suffrage was a long and gradual one. Several women initiated it, but did not benefit from the results. In essence, Lasky's shows that struggles for freedom and equality are always waged for the social well-being of posterity. Better still, in her article, "A Tract in Fiction: Woman Suffrage Literature and the Struggle for the Vote," Claire Delahaye is interested in the suffragists' concerns. According to Delahaye's approach,

Suffragists used different types of writing to promote women's right to vote. Essays, articles, histories, biographies, letters and pamphlets were among the forms chosen by women to appeal to American public opinion. But suffragettes also used fiction to promote reform movements, which contributed to the creation and continued viability of these movements. (2016, 3)

Clearly, to conduct the fight for suffrage, the American women used every possible means; except those promoting armed rebellion. According to the NWP's philosophy, conservatives had to be reasoned with words. Following the same idea, Madison M. Weber examines the social significance of the struggle for women's suffrage. Her article, "The Ways in Which Women's Suffrage Affected Healthcare" shows that "women obtaining the right to vote changed healthcare in America in a variety of ways" (2021, 1). Through a critical study of the American women's struggle, Claire Delahaye and Fatma Ramdani avers,

Women were active in many social and political movements, participating in street assemblies, parades, riots, conventions, and signing petitions, exploring the many different ways they could express their voices. (...) Their experience of self-determination was at the crossroads of collective organizing and individual activities, from very informal to more conventional practices. They discussed their social justice agenda in their homes and churches, (...). They debated issues, discussed strategies, elected delegates, (...). They took on the roles of journalists, lecturers, chairwomen, leaders, and community organizers. (2022, 2).

Through pragmatic acts, the NWP helped to write the history of American women. No one can claim the American democracy's greatness without vigorously citing the leading role played by women. Critical reflections on the women's suffrage are varied. From a qualitative viewpoint, they

are noteworthy; they help to understand that the emergence of the disenfranchisement policy was contradictory to the ideals of the American Constitution and that the American women's struggle was worthy. Certainly, the explanation of those aspects proves that the above review of literature is contributive, but it is finite. It does not address aspects, such as the masculine feature of the American political system and the young female characters' involvement in the struggle for suffrage. From the incipit of Lasky's book, the young narrator (Kathleen Bowen) exposes her active commitment. Narrated by that little girl, Lasky's narrative is permeated by children's emotion due to the absence of their parents. With time, they are disappointed. Obviously, Lasky's text constructs various values that need to be scrutinized. Jacques Derrida's deconstruction will serve as a theoretical and methodological framework.

According to Gilbert Hottois's analysis, deconstruction is applied to texts, most often texts from the history of philosophy. The strategy consists in revealing in those apparently homogeneous texts a univocal intention of meaning, undecidable terms.^v In line with Derridean thinking, the American political system in its pre-1920s form was discriminatory, depriving women of full citizenship. Maintaining such a system made the emergence of democracy impossible. It was essential to dismantle the system in favor of an inclusive, democratic one. In *Masculin/Féminin : Dissoudre la hiérarchie*, Françoise Héritier notes, if humanity has two bodily aspects, masculine and feminine, and if democracy is one of the political modes of managing human communities, individuals of both sexes are equally qualified to represent each other. (...) the notion of democracy implies that of equal rights and opportunities for all individuals.^{vi} Through Derridean deconstruction, the current study will show how the struggle of American suffragists contributed to constructing inclusive political changes for the benefit of the American people. To carry out this work, two lines of thought will be considered: "A masculinized political system" and "awareness and US democracy."

A Masculinized Political System

This stage shows, on the one hand, how the American political system is masculinized, and on the other hand, it indicates how that system ill-treats the American women.

Before proceeding with this analysis, let us underscore that the historical context described in Lasky's book takes into account the first half of the 20th century. What stands out in that socio-historical background is the emerging of an exclusive political system rendering the American society as a location of conspiracy. Men consider women as a threat and vice versa. Socially, there is an incomprehensible line of demarcation between both entities arousing great tension within the political class. Lasky's book focuses on the period between January 1, 1917 and December 4, 1917, a full year. According to her homodiegetic narrator, that epoch was marked by global and

^v "La déconstruction s'applique à des textes, le plus souvent des textes de l'histoire philosophique. La stratégie consiste à faire apparaître dans ces textes apparemment homogènes et traversés par une intention de sens univoque, des termes indécidables" (1997, 402).

^{vi} "Si l'humanité a deux aspects corporels, masculin et féminin, et si la démocratie est un des modes politiques de gestion des communautés humaines, les individus de l'un et de l'autre sexe sont également qualifiés pour se représenter mutuellement. (...) la notion de démocratie implique celle d'égalité des droits et des chances pour tous les individus." (2002, 261)

nationwide tensions. Globally, Europe was being devastated by war. Concerns increased among young Americans, for any involvement of their country in the European war could compel their political leaders to go to war. The narrator maintains,

Now, if I were a seventeen- or eighteen-year-old boy, I suppose I would be worrying about America entering the Great War. I might be having soldier dreams of glory and nonfatal wounds, but wounds big enough and in the right place so that the scars are visible – nothing badly disfiguring, just dashing. Oh, yes, I hear these boys talking, especially my cousin Henry and his friends. (3)

The possible involvement of the United States in the war could also lead to the conscription of many American citizens. Yet, none of them wanted to die for a cause, which was not their own. In terms of foreign policy, the US President Woodrow Wilson was in favor of a negotiated solution to the war. Lasky's female narrator confirms his view as follows,

President Woodrow Wilson made a big speech today about the Great War and he spoke in favor of what he called 'peace without victory,' which means that all the countries who are fighting should get together and figure things out and he will help them. (27)

Through this passage, Woodrow Wilson discloses his neutrality and readiness to urge the countries in conflict to give up their belligerent posture and get involved in promoting peace. He calls for a meeting between the belligerent States to make his project possible and concrete. In that respect, his vision is salutary, for the achievement of such a proposal can put an end to the massacre of European citizens. However, President Wilson's suggestion is contrasted by that of the National Woman's Party (NWP), which exhorts him to improve his domestic political environment (United States) by settling dispute between the political leaders before paying attention to the one prevailing in other countries on a global scale. Despite discrepancies, the NWP is fervently opposed to the United States involving in the European war. The ensuing textual clues substantiate the American women's concerns,

You see, the Woman's Party is against America entering the war. Alice Paul says, Why should Americans go and fight for democracy abroad when our president does not defend it at home? Nell doesn't quite agree. She feels that the Great War should be a separate cause from that of suffrage. She says there are actually other women in the party who feel this way too, but not Alice Paul and not Mother and not Auntie Claire. I am not sure what I think. It does seem rather silly to be going all across the ocean and having young men get killed for democracy, when there is a battle right here and those poor women are freezing their feet and getting sick. (32)

In this excerpt, President Wilson's domestic political situation is vehemently criticized. To Alice Paul, the President Wilson has little concern about women's pitiful political conditions. To her, Wilson's policy is troublesome; his only political commitment is to strengthen his country's foreign policy through concrete actions, in particular by honoring his international friends and helping them construct peace in the world. Indeed, Wilson's administration considers Germany as a threat; its aggressive attitude towards the other European States including the United States is unacceptable. Accordingly, this leads to a breakdown in diplomatic relations between both nations (United States & Germany). Despite the US President's good will to make peace, peace occurs. In response to German threat, President Wilson decides to arm the American merchant ships. The narrator describes that tension as the instance of climax in Lasky's book, "our country and Germany have officially stopped talking. President Woodrow Wilson ordered it. And he has also asked for the power to arm all American merchant ships against German U-boats in case of attack" (33). Obviously, Wilson's dissuasive measures do not make him a proponent of war. Rather, his

circumspection has a preventive scope; it aims at protecting his country from external aggression. To counter German Armed Forces' destabilizing plans, President Wilson provides a counterweight by instructing his Armed forces. However, this does not prevent Germany from attacking the American merchant ships, thus forcing the United States to enter the war.

Besides, let us note that President Wilson is interested in advocating democracy around the world. In one of his speeches on democracy, he advises Puerto Rican political leaders to promote women's suffrage. While that initiative is generally laudable, Puerto Ricans severely criticize it, for President Wilson behaves as if his country were a model of democracy. In essence, the American women are despised. To quote Frédéric Titinga Pacéré (one of the famous African writers), if the branch wants to flower, let it honor its roots^{vii}. In other words, Puerto Ricans urge Wilson to carry out further reforms to make the American system more democratic and enable all his fellow citizens to participate in his country's political life. The following excerpt appears as a response to Wilson's proposal,

President Woodrow Wilson made a speech in support of self-government for Puerto Rico. Now the women on the picket lines are making new signs demanding that he look in his own backyard and give women the right to vote. It seems to me that the farther you are from the White House and the more in need of democracy, the better the chance that Woodrow Wilson will come to your aid. (38)

As far as the American foreign policy is concerned, it differs from the national one; the President Wilson gives lessons in democracy to other countries; however, what seems inconsistent is that in his own country, women are disparaged. Only men have the right to vote. The American women's voice is muzzled; politics is exclusively devolved to men. Worse still, the political system itself shows no interest in the debate on women's suffrage. Women's cause is overlooked; this means Woodrow Wilson's Administration ignores the demonstration organized by the National Woman's Party (NWP) in front of the White House. This exclusive policy is not recent. According to Elizabeth Frost-Knappman's and Kathryn Cullen-DuPont's critical work on women's suffrage in America,

Most state constitutions specifically denied the vote to women. But New Jersey was an exception. On July 2, 1776, the state adopted a constitution that gave the vote to all free inhabitants who met legal age, property, and residency standards. But by 1800 local politicians were condemning the practice of women voting, arguing that soon the legislature would be "filled with petticoats." Men claimed that married women had no independent income and thus should not be allowed to vote. By 1807 the legislature passed a law restricting the right to vote to white propertied males. (1992, 3)

In terms of priority, the concern of the National Woman's Party (NWP) is to deconstruct the American political system and open it to all American citizens. Nevertheless, Woodrow Wilson varies strategies to prevent them from succeeding in their struggle. Indeed, the President shows no interest in the American women's political integration. The above excerpt underlines the exclusive feature of *Wilsonian* political system. Wilson's domestic policy is far from being gleaming. Referring to the relationship between, Woodrow Wilson and his wife (first lady), the National Woman's Party considers the President as an unreliable leader; he does not deserve women's love because he shows no love for them. Those grievances emerge because under his leadership, only

^{vii} "Si la branche veut fleurir, qu'elle honore ses raciness" (2004, 4).

men exert political activities. As to women, they are reviled; the American Journalists caricature them through the pejorative and disparaging expressions or phrases below,

Alma and I are making a list of all the mean, nasty words the newspapers use to describe women and even some of them that are not so nasty but in many ways are just as bad. Here they are: NASTIES/freakish/unsexed/mannish/witches/succubuses on society (had to look up succubus: a demon in female form, a she-devil). NOT-SO-NASTIES /weak/ silly/ distractible/ illogical/ dependent/flighty. (29-30)

In line with the professional Journalist's code of ethics, it is advised that the latter should inform objectively without yielding to the slightest personal emotion. Indeed, in his book *Propagandes, Médias and Démocraties*, Noam Chomsky and Robert-W. McChesney maintain that the rule underpinning professional journalism is that information should no more be influenced by the political agendas of owners and advertisers than by the opinions of editors and journalists themselves. At its crudest, that doctrine is known as objectivity^{viii}. This journalistic vision is contrary to the one depicted in Lasky's book. Here, a propagandistic strategy is skillfully set up, thus keeping the American women off the political stage. The media machine is used to apply the political leaders' discriminatory project.

The preceding pejorative epithets demonize and inferiorize the American women denying their right to vote. Through those stereotyped considerations, they are not regarded as men's equals; their sense of humanity is called into question. Due to such prejudices, constructed on invalid arguments, the American women are rejected. In micro-spaces (families), parents such as Bayard embrace the phallographic ideology advocated by the American political system. Those heads of household have no respect for their wives; they make discourteous remarks, in front of their own children, showing their disinterest in women's cause. Attached to patriarchal ideology, they consider their own wives as second-class citizens, who should not be given a voice, i.e. they should only be concerned with marital issues. In the excerpt below, the homodiegetic narrator revitalizes Bayard's disregard,

I hate Uncle Bayard. I think he is the most narrow-minded man I have ever met. Clary has come down with bronchitis. Father is treating her, and Alma and I and of course, Mother and Auntie Claire are all to blame. He found out about Clary going with us to the picket line. Now he is saying that if it hadn't been for this fool 'woman's thing,' as he calls the suffrage movement, and stupid silly girls (...) and even sillier women (...), his precious Clary, who does not have 'natural sense' – not that we have any more, he says — would not now be at death's door. He blames Auntie Claire most of all and his words are simply poisonous. Father tried to calm him down. He speaks in such ugly ways. He talked about how poor Clary's brain is 'deficient.' (39)

Plainly, husbands, such as Bayard are numerous in the American society; they act as defenders of Woodrow Wilson's power. Their actions reinforce the decisions taken by the political figures, notably the denial of women as men's counterpart. Instead of supporting their wives' cause to lift them out of the throes of sociopolitical bondage, they paradoxically participate in dehumanizing them. More importantly, the police's discriminatory deeds towards the suffragists in front of the

^{viii} “Le principe sur lequel reposait le journalisme professionnel était que l'information ne devrait pas plus être influencée par l'ordre du jour politiques des propriétaires et des annonceurs que par l'opinion des éditeurs et des journalistes eux-mêmes. Dans ce qu'elle a de plus fruste, cette doctrine est désignée sous le nom d'objectivité.” (2000, 112)

White House strengthen President Wilson's authority. Indeed, at President Wilson's swearing-in ceremony, Alice Paul and some of her collaborators write a memorandum in which they express a plea for women's suffrage. However, the police tear that project to shreds, thus preventing them from meeting the President-elect. Not only does this contempt frustrate the American women, but it also reinforces the President's contempt towards the NWP's supporters. The following example describes their deep anger,

Read President Woodrow Wilson's war message that he delivered to Congress last night in this morning's paper. It was very stirring. He wants to make 'the world safe for democracy.' These are his very words. I copy them from the paper exactly. 'We are at the beginning of an age in which it will be insisted that the same standards of conduct and of responsibility for wrong done shall be observed.' Can't he see that it is not only Germany that has done wrong, but also that here at home there is a wrong because women can't vote? It is as if there are two sets of rules – one for Europe and one for here. (82-83)

Those textual decry Wilson's domestic policy. Certainly, they underline Wilsonian vision about global politics, but they also reveal the insults directed at women or a group of individuals in the American society. No one can deny, in a political system where women cannot vote, there is no democracy. Accordingly, decisions made in such a system are illegal and embody punitive damages. Alice Paul considers both German and American political leaders as troublemakers. To her, America is a disgrace to democracy, for it does not have a glowing past in terms of democracy. For years, its rulers scorned and confiscated the American women's suffrage for no good reason. However, that injustice could not continue indefinitely, for the American women's struggle for equal rights was a compelling, which demand; it precluded any form of compromise.

Ideologically, it embraces Derridean vision. Indeed, in the book entitled *La dissémination*, Jacques Derrida avers that what criticizes, deconstructs, forces the traditional, hierarchical opposition of writing to speech, to the system: idealistic, spiritualist, phonocentric, first of all logocentric^{ix}. Clearly, by decrying the shortcomings of Wilson's domestic policies towards the American women, the NWP hopes to reform the political system and make it democratic. To that end, Alice Paul and her fellow activists combined words and deeds. Despite the repressive measures, the American women strengthen their struggle to fulfil their ambition. The more the repression intensifies, the more they increase denunciation through meetings and marches throughout the country.

In view of the preceding analysis, the American political system is masculinized. Women are deprived of the suffrage. As far as the following point is concerned, it will show the extent to which the American women's growing awareness favored the advent of democracy in the United States.

Women's Awareness and US Democracy

The purpose of this point is to show how the American women's awareness was decisive in the US democratic construction process.

^{ix} "Ce qui critique, déconstruit, force l'opposition traditionnelle et hiérarchisée de l'écriture à la parole, de l'écriture au système (idéaliste, spiritualiste, phonocentriste: d'abord logocentriste) de tous ses autres" (1972, 10).

Lasky's book reveals that the American women's leadership was not only individual, but also collective. Through the National Woman's Party (NWP), they took concrete, peaceful actions, including verbal, written denunciations, and protest movements. The book entitled *A Time for Courage* begins in Washington, D.C., on January 1, 1917, and ends on December 4, 1917. From its onset, Kathleen Bowen, the homodiegetic narrator, puts forward the substantial idea according to which no human being exists without a mission. To her, human beings follow a trajectory by performing actions, which determine their lives. The more altruistic those actions are, the more they serve the human community. Bowen describes the mission of three individuals: her mother, aunt, and sister. Each of them has a role; they are all aware that only their devotion can contribute to improving their political conditions.

Focusing on the importance of women's awareness in her book *Ces femmes qui reprennent le pouvoir sur la vie*, Susan Nolen-Hoeksema maintains that if you do not accept your feelings, they remain imprisoned, under pressure, and can explode later. Because women are not afraid or ashamed of having emotions, they are able to accept their negative feelings, try to understand them and act on them appropriately^x. The women portrayed by Lasky have understood their emotions and act in a reasoned and thoughtful way. The two former devote their time to the activities of the National Women's Party, and the latter is in charge of divulging the NWP's projects. In this narrative, Bowen is a teenager, but her age does not prevent her from carrying out relevant missions; her actions and those of some of her friends are illustrated in Lasky's book as an energy-producing substance, which supplies all the organs involved in the American women's struggle. The ensuing quotation is a perfect illustration of Bowen's commitment,

Alma and I delivered to Mrs. Belmont's, well, our fingers are just about worn out from sewing banners for the pickets to carry. Alma helps too. We tell her father that we are staying after school for Latin Club or the drawing and painting circle. Yes, it's a lie. But Alma and I say no one is getting hurt by our lie and then we go over to the Woman's Party headquarters on Lafayette Square and help make banners. They need a steady supply for the women in the picket line. (21)

As a 13-year-old teenager, the narrator is unaware of the interest of her mother's political involvement. Nevertheless, she is impressed by Alice Paul's tireless struggle. Although the National Woman's Party is not allowed to take part in the national elections, it has a political feature. Through the voice of its President, it decries the violation of the American women's rights. It also educates and raises awareness. Better still, the Woman's Party plays an essential role in instilling the notion of equality in the American women's mentalities. Alice Paul's struggle aims, above all, to draw her fellow citizens' attention on one fact: women and men have the same natural right. They were born equal and have the same rights before the law. At this level, Alice Paul's externalizes her thoughts, her vision of the world. Examining the concept of *parole* in her book *Acheminement vers la parole*, Martin Heidegger avers that no one would dare describe as inaccurate, or even reject as useless, the determination that characterizes speech as the sound externalization of inner psychic movements, as human activity, as symbolic and conceptual

^x "Si vous n'acceptez pas vos sentiments, ils restent emprisonnés, sous pression, et peuvent exploser plus tard. Comme les femmes n'ont pas peur ni honte d'avoir des émotions, elles sont capables d'accepter leurs sentiments négatifs, d'essayer de les comprendre et d'y agir de manière appropriée." (2023, 139)

expression^{xi}. Here, Alice Paul's major struggle is therefore to make the American women understand that their exclusion from the political scene is not the expression of divine will, but rather that of the American political leaders. Through a book on the American women's political struggle, Linda Ford asserts,

Seeking to breathe life into the complacent movement, the new suffragists looked elsewhere for inspiration, adopting the British brand of militancy to the American situation in their own particular nonviolent style. Led by its 'Chairman' Alice Paul, the NWP (first called the 'Congressional Union') tried a spirited but unsuccessful campaign of aggressive congressional lobbying, and then organized women of the western states to vote in a bloc against the Democratic Party in the 1914 and 1916 elections. As the National Woman's Party, they confronted the Wilson administration with incessant picketing and protests, resulting in eventual imprisonment. (2002, 174)

Alice Paul's teachings urge the American women to unite around the feminine cause, i.e. the ideals defended by their Party is the following, "the [National] Woman's Party wants to demand women's suffrage, the right for women to vote" (5). By that logic, she proves uncompromising with continuous media noise, disturbing President Woodrow Wilson's quietness. She respectively discloses the President's bad faith, lack of respect for the American women and inability to comply with his own commitment. Indeed, the joint initiative of Lasky's female characters shows that their awareness is on constant progress. That is why Woodrow Wilson compares Alice Paul to a mosquito,

Rumor has it that President Wilson said that Alice Paul was worse than a thorn in his side, that she was a bloodsucking mosquito in his ear, because unlike a thorn she makes an incessant noise that could drive a victim mad while sticking one for blood. (5-6)

Clearly, mosquito is physically insignificant, but it is a disruptive insect, which keeps individuals awake and threatens their health. In terms of metaphor, Alice Paul gives no respite to the American political leaders of her time. Through media hype, she exposes their selfishness towards their fellow citizens. This open criticism sometimes irritates Woodrow Wilson, prompting him to make promises that he never keeps. His slanderous attitude makes him an unreliable President. Describing him, the NWP's leader maintains, "President Wilson is very slippery about all this. He often says he agrees with them but he does nothing" (5). As months go by, the American women's mobilization increases. They are aware of the need to put pressure on their President to resolve their precarious political situation. Despite denigration of all kinds, they remain determined. The female narrator, Bowen, depicts their awareness as a truly national event,

The entire suffrage movement, women's right to vote, had been considered no more important than some department store gewgaw that Mrs. Wilson had purchased on her latest shopping expedition. It was terrible. The women were incensed. But did they stop marching? No. All day through the stinging wind-driven rain they continued, and more and more women joined them. (68)

Faced with President Wilson's unpredictable behavior, Alice Paul steps up her activism, organizes demonstrations, and decries the culpable silence of the members of the U.S. Congress. She exhorts Congressmen to take urgent actions in favor of the American women. Drawing on the ideals of the US Constitution about the human equality, she requires a frank exercise of political power, the one

^{xi} "Personne aussi ne se risquera à qualifier d'inexacte ou même à rejeter comme inutile la détermination qui caractérise la parole comme extériorisation sonore de mouvements psychiques intérieurs, comme activité humaine, comme expression symbolique et conceptuelle" (Heidegger, 1976)

that guarantees the rights of all citizens without exclusion. Within the NWP, Alice Paul inspires all supporters; she teaches them rigor and objectivity. To her, no one else can fight in the Women's place. In all parts of the country, she urges women to join her Party. Disclosing Alice Paul's qualities, the homodiegetic narrator, Kathleen Bowen avers,

[Alice Paul] is so much the opposite of everything I expected. I mean, Alice Paul, this woman of action who has led marches and confronted congressmen and senators, well, what I shall always most remember about her is her utter stillness. She is almost without motion, even when she does move. She is the calmest, loveliest creature. Not a bit unwomanly or mannish as the papers often say. She is slender and delicate with an utterly peaceful face framed with wavy brown hair. There is a cunning dimple in her chin that gives her an almost playful look, until you look at her eyes, which are large and gray and very serious. But it is the stillness of her that most impresses. It is not the stillness of a statue nor one of a dead person. (9)

In this excerpt, the female narrator contradicts the erroneous discourse entertained by Wilson's administration to disparage or tarnish Alice Paul's good image. According to Bowen, Alice Paul is a charismatic woman with a humanistic vision. Her positive picture postulates her serenity and firm commitment. Indeed, due to the brutality of the State power, she adopts appropriate and several strategies. Within the NWP's stances, the use of violence is ruled out; non-violence is the prescribed weapon. In addition, despite the America's involvement in the war, the American women's political struggle is in full swing. Through that stratagem or subterfuge, the leaders vary their deeds on the ground. Indeed, Alice Paul's outspokenness helps to move lines in a stubborn and meaningful way. It is also worth noting that Alice Paul is inspired by various ideals. Scrutinizing her activism, Linda Ford writes, "Alice Paul, the leader of the Woman's Party, was influenced by earlier American feminist activists, as well as contemporary British militant suffragists" (2002, 175). Clearly, allowing women to participate in political debate is an extremely high challenge for Alice Paul. That is why she and the NWP's leaders or sympathizers use every peaceful and legal means at their disposal to take it up. These include protest marches and sit-in. In Lasky's book, one of the most decisive actions carried out by the female characters is the picket line. Through this strategy, the NWP's exert a strong political pressure on Wilson's administration. Susa Ware describes that boldness as follows,

By 1917, a new issue challenged the suffrage movement when the United States formally entered World War I in April. Many women felt torn between their suffrage advocacy and supporting the war effort. While some radical suffragists bravely opposed the war for pacifist reasons, most mainstream suffragists, including Molly and Polly, lined up behind the Wilson administration, vowing to continue their agitation for the vote. The Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Association complied with this dual policy, but Dewson's enthusiasm for the suffrage cause waned in direct proportion to the amount of war-related work she was called on to perform. (2019)

To put it differently, Alice Paul's dream is to destroy all the social barriers and divisions, which are deliberately instituted to keep the American women at the bottom of the social ladder and turn them into submissive or passive beings – individuals whose survival exclusively depends on men, i.e. they are incapable of existing without clinging to men. The NWP's President refuses to see the American women being judged as *hermit crabs* (individuals who cannot stand on their own feet). Like Anne-Marie Pelletier, the President of NWP challenged the American politicians of her time to admit that what is experienced by women is not only legitimate to speak of, but can and must speak to the other, her male counterpart, for the benefit of all^{xii}. This is one of the concerns in the

^{xii} "... admettre que ce qui se vit au féminin, non seulement est légitime à parler, mais peut et doit parler à l'autre, son vis-à-vis masculin, pour le profit de tous" (2006, 11).

suffragists' struggle. Clearly, Alice Paul dreams of an America of justice and equality where the citizens' rights are respected, regardless of sex. The achievement of that dream is viewed in Lasky's book as a challenge. According to Patricia Bradley, "enthusiasm for suffrage was firmly linked to women's expectation that if they got the chance to vote, they could vote to make liquor illegal" (2005, xiii).

Noticeably, the violent repression of the NWP's demonstration is regarded as an evil, a *stumbling block*, a *shadow*. According to François Jullien, that shadow in the picture of life will be the picture of life will be death, suffrage, illness, war, injustice, etc., all of which we wish we could avoid. However, it is also one of the oldest motifs of thought, and even among the most hackneyed, to show that shadows were needed to bring out the colors, so that we could admire this that we can admire this one; and that, likewise, without suffering, illness war, death, etc., we would not know what goodness, health, peace, [justice justice], nor life.^{xiii} It is therefore necessary to clean up the American political scene, so that the State power could be exerted by lucid figures. Despite the arrests orchestrated by Wilson's administration, the NWP and its leader Alice Paul remain resilient and uncompromising; their actions clear up any ambiguities and bring a new perspective to the picture of life. They avoid any violent actions, which can compromise their struggle. To Ellen Carol DuBois, "women's culture, I contended, was an interpretation that focused on women's ability to relocate themselves away from the pressures and limitations of male dominance in an environment defined more by their own repressed needs and perspectives" (1998, 6). In essence, the American women are weary of Wilson's policy of demonization and categorization. As the story unfolds, the purpose of Alice Paul's struggle takes on significant proportions. All the American women's contribution to the protest movement aims at constructing an American society reconciled with itself. Arguably, the objective of Alice Paul's struggle is to demasculinize or deconstruct the political system embodied by Woodrow Wilson. According to Gerasimos Kakoliris's approach to Derrida's philosophy,

The aim of deconstruction is to go beyond the metaphysical system of conceptuality, and this presupposes a radical rearrangement of the conceptual field through the reinscription of the new (privileged) term, in a new extended form, into the body of the system. This new term is 'undecidable,' from the perspective of the old field of binary oppositions, in order to prevent its reappropriation by the metaphysical structure of this field. (2017, 58)

In line with the above thesis, it should be emphasized that President Wilson's leadership is discriminatory. Due to the radicalization of his political system, the acquirement of the American women's freedom is impossible. This prevented them from fully benefiting from their citizenship. Instead of improving their political conditions, Wilson's administration intimidates them with imprisonment and other verbal threats. It also restricts their different movements. In other words, Wilson's political system turns the American women into subhumans. In spite of that troublesome political era, the NWP attempts to disorganize that perilous system. The work undertaken by the NWP is crucial, as it takes into account all pre-established norms. In the end, the norms initially

^{xiii} "Cette ombre perçue dans le tableau de la vie sera la mort, le suffrage, la maladie, la guerre, l'injustice, etc., qu'on voudrait pouvoir ne point affronter. Or, c'est aussi un des plus anciens motifs de la pensée, et même parmi les plus éculés, que de montrer qu'il fallait des ombres au tableau pour en faire ressortir les couleurs et qu'on puisse admirer celle-ci ; et que, de même, sans la souffrance, la maladie, la guerre, la mort, etc., nous ne saurions ce qu'est le bien, la santé, la paix, [la justice], ni non plus la vie." (2004, 9)

defined as being definite are destabilized in favor of another. Indeed, through peaceful actions, such as inscribing slogans on banners during meetings, the American women express their disapproval. On some banners, one can read the following, “LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY” (125) / “WE DO NOT ASK PARDON FOR OURSELVES BUT JUSTICE FOR ALL AMERICAN WOMEN” (132).

As we can notice, language plays significant roles in the NWP’s struggle. Its female leaders are well trained and have the exact language to describe their political situation. Through an insightful discourse made of critical rhetoric, those women reveal Wilson’s political amateurism. Addressing the function of language, Lois Tyson notes “because it is through language that a culture’s ideologies are passed on, it is not unreasonable to say that it is through language that we come to conceive and perceive our world and ourselves” (2006, 255). Through language the American women expresses their vision of a new America. The capital letters in the above utterances exemplify the greatness and nobility of the women’s cause. In essence, the new political order brought further reforms; the American women appreciated them; however, conservatives, i.e. political leaders with a reductive ideology of women, disparaged them. They considered the NWP’s policy of demasculinization as a *virus in blood*. However, the purpose of that Party was to restore justice, thus establishing equality between the American citizens. Indeed, from the beginning of Lasky’s book to the end, its female characters perform no prejudicial acts. After several months of uninterrupted protest, they remained determined enough. In spite for President Wilson’s contempt for them, they solidified their actions around a single ideal, which was their suffrage. Thus, without any diversion, they compelled the Senators to act in their favor. The narrator describes the commitment of Alice Paul, the NWP’s President as follows, “we are being imprisoned not because we obstructed traffic, but because we pointed out to the president the fact that he was obstructing the cause of democracy at home while Americans were fighting for it abroad” (172).

In response to the NWP’s march, Wilson’s administration manipulates a number of women who agreed to march by decrying the NWP’s actions. In terms of political significance, their aim was to discredit the NWP’s successful fight for women’s suffrage. A critical look at this anti-suffrage march reveals its incongruity. The homodiegetic narrator, Bowen, argues that “there was a picture in today’s paper of an anti-suffrage march in New York showing two women carrying a sign that read: “NEW YORK STATE DENIES THE VOTE TO CRIMINALS, LUNATICS, IDIOTS, & WOMEN. Can you imagine two women agreeing to carry such a sign?” (171). The manipulation of public opinion illustrates Wilson’s refusal to meet the NWP’s needs. Instead of initiating frank discussion with the National Woman’s Party, President Woodrow Wilson intensively arrests and convicts its members. Believing that the repression of the NWP’s leaders could discourage the other members, Wilson declined any forms of discussion. However, he was astonished to see both national and international mobilizations in favor of the American women. The American States, such as New York dissociated themselves from Wilson’s bigoted policies by granting the American women the right to vote. Bowen, the homodiegetic narrator, asserts,

Guess what? Lunatics, idiots, and criminals did not get the vote in New York BUT women did. The state of New York with more people than any state in the Northeast is now a women’s suffrage state. It was passed with a

referendum vote. This is really good news. Father says it is really going to put the pressure on President Wilson and Congress to pass an amendment. (175)

To keep up the pressure, convicted women went on hunger strike in every American prison. Better still, in front of the White House, the women's protest intensified. That mobilization disrupted Wilson's calm more than ever. For almost a year, his domestic policy towards women was incredibly decried. To avoid the worst, he and his administration felt compelled to order the release of the American suffragists. From an interpretative point of view, this release represents a victory over evil. After being released, Alice Paul and various other suffragists continued their struggle. Scrutinizing the struggle of those Movements, Delahaye and Ramdani assert: "Women organized public demonstrations of disapproval, which could have disruptive potential. Such transgressive agitation points to the fact that, despite some of its ideological ramifications, women's suffrage remained a radical demand that challenged traditional gender roles and political norms" (2022, 3).

Obviously, Lasky's book spans one year, but the women's struggle did not stop in 1917; it persisted, culminating in the granting of the right to vote to American women in 1920. As such, one can infer that the role of the American suffragists remains memorable in the history of the US democracy. Delahaye and Ramdani reveal that the American women's struggle notably contributed to the advent of democracy in the American society. According to their analysis, "women's voluntary associations also played a central role in the vitality and practices of US democracy." (2022, 7). Lasky's book shows that freedom of expression and protest are some of the cardinal values of democracy. Indeed, the NWP's popular marches, sit-ins and President Alice Paul's harsh criticism against *Wilsonian* administration have fostered enormous political breakthroughs.

CONCLUSION

This critical reflection interrogated Kathryn Lasky's *A Time for Courage: The Suffragette Diary of Kathleen Bowen*. Structured around two major axes (masculinized political system and women's awareness and US democracy), this study used *Derridean* approach to demonstrate how the American women contributed to democratizing the American political system.

In the first stage, the logocentrism of the American political system was highlighted. Here, the American women's precarious situation was disclosed. The political discourse prevailing in the American society promoted exclusion; it provided women with no escape; only men's vision was regarded as a reliable power. In the second stage, the techniques or strategies used by the American women to destabilize *Wilsonian* masculinized political system were addressed. Particular attention was paid to marches, sit-ins and meetings with political leaders. This section disclosed that despite male political brutalities, the American women remained resolved keeping on decrying disenfranchisement. As we can notice, "through the properties of *Derridean* approach, the American women's fierce and relentless struggle brought a change in mentalities and made possible the advent of democracy. In this sense, the use of deconstruction was advantageous. The above results substantiate its operability.

However, it should be noted that Lasky's text is at variance with the American current political realities. Issues, such the American women's political representativeness, the role of journalism and justice in promoting democracy are promising fields for today's critics.

Funding Statement: This research received no external funding.

Acknowledgements: Sincere gratitude to Kouadio Germain N'Guessan, Department of English, for his unconditional academic support.

Conflicts of Interest Statement: The authors of the current article declare no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

- Bradley, Patricia. *Women and the Press the Struggle for Equality*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2005. Print
- Delahaye, Claire. A Tract in Fiction: Woman Suffrage Literature and the Struggle for the Vote. *Special Issue: Intimate Frictions: History and Literature in the United States from the 19th to the 21st Century*, 11(1), 2016, pp. 1-20. Web
- Delahaye, Claire & Ramdani, Fatma. Introduction: The Complex and Reciprocal Relations between Suffrage and other Forms of Activism. *Transatlantica*, 1, 2022, pp. 1-16. Web
- Derrida, Jacques. *La Dissémination*. Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1972.
- Dorlin, Elsa. *L'Évidence de l'égalité des sexes: Une philosophie oubliée du XVII^e siècle*. Paris : Éditions L'Harmattan, 2000. Print
- DuBois, Ellen Carol. *Woman Suffrage and Women's Rights*. New York & London : New York University Press, 1999. Print
- Ford, Linda. Alice Paul and the Politics of Nonviolent Protest. In Jean H. Baker (pp. 174-188). *Votes for Women: The Struggle for Suffrage*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Frost-Knappman, Elizabeth & Cullen-DuPont, Kathryn. *Women's Suffrage in America: An Eyewitness History*. New York: Facts on File, Inc, 1992. Print
- Harper, Ida Husted. *The History of Woman Suffrage*. New York: J. J. Little & Ives Company, 1922. Print
- Heidegger, Martin. *Acheminement vers la parole*. Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1976. Print
- Héritier, Françoise. *Masculin/Féminin: Dissoudre la hiérarchie*. Paris : Éditions Odile Jacob, 2002. Print
- Hottois, Gilbert. (1997). *De la Renaissance à la Postmodernité: Une histoire de la philosophie moderne et contemporaine*. Paris-Bruxelles : De Boeck Université, 1997. Print
- Jullien, François. *Du mal/Du négatif*. Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 2004. Print
- Kakoliris, Gerasimos. Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction of Western Metaphysics: The Early Years. *Dia-noesis: A Journal of Philosophy*, 4, 2017, pp.43-62. Web
- Lasky, Kathryn. *A Time for Courage: The Suffragette Diary of Kathleen Bowen*. New York : Scholastic, 2002. Print
- Noam, Chomsky & McChesney, Robert-W.. *Propagandes, Médias et démocratie*. Montréal : Les Éditions Écosociété, 2000. Print
- Nolen-Hoeksema, Susan. *Ces femmes qui reprennent le pouvoir sur la vie*. Paris : Nouveaux Horizons, 2022. Print

- Pacéré, Frédéric Titinga. *Pensées africaines: Proverbes, dictons et sagesse des anciens*. Paris : L'Harmattan, 2004. Print
- Pelletier, Anne-Marie. (2006, 11). *Le signe de la femme*. Paris : Les Éditions du Cerf, 2006. Print
- Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York, London, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006.
- Ware, Susa. *Why they Marched Untold Stories of the Women who Fought for the Right to Vote*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019. Print
- Weber, Madison M. The Ways in Which Women's Suffrage Affected Healthcare. *The Review: A Journal of Undergraduate Student Research*, 22, 2021, pp. . Web

About Authors

Daniel Tia graduated from University of Felix Houphouët-Boigny in 2016; he conducted a dissertation on Paule Marshall's fictional works. His current research focuses on transgression, gender issue, identity construction, post-colonial issue, immigration and subjective space. He teaches American literature in the Department of English at the aforementioned institution. He is a member of the Laboratory of Literatures and Writings of Civilizations/English (LLITEC). He is a member of the following Journals: *International Journal of Culture and History*, *International Journal of Social Science Studies*, and *International Journal of European Studies*.

So far, he has published several articles: Geographic Space and Its Semantic Heterogeneity: an Ecocritical Reading of *To Da-Duh, in Memoriam* by Paule Marshall (2022), Female Leadership through the Prism of Hypermodernity (2022), Reading Deuteronomic Vision in Literature (2022), Re/flux migratoire : une lecture sémiotique de *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* de Julia Alvarez (2023), Migration, Identity and Proleptic Dynamism (2023), Narrative Devices in Paule Marshall's Fiction (2023), Transgressive Forms in Gainesian Fiction (2023), Formes de violences à travers le prisme de la fiction (2024), A Comparative Approach to Identities in Toni Morrison's and Léonora Miano's Novels (2024), Exilic, Becoming Beings (2024), and Emerging Evil in Post-colonies (2024).

Fatonde Olivier Dovonou is a Master student; he studies the American literature and civilization. His research paper is based on Peggy Kerl's *No Way Out*. Mr. Dovonou is interested in themes such as narrative authority, crime, and education.