REPRESENTATIONS OF SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN WOMEN IN COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL NOVELS IN FRENCH

by

RAMÒNU ABIODUN SANUSI

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of Romance Languages
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

June 2004

"Representations of Sub-Saharan African Women in Colonial and Post-Colonial Novels in French," a dissertation prepared by Ramonu Abiodun Sanusi in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of Romance Languages. This dissertation has been approved and accepted by:

Dr. Karen McPherson, Chair of the Examining Committee

17 2004

Date

Committee in Charge: Dr. Karen McPherson, Chair
Dr. Evlyn Gould
Dr. André Djiffack
Dr. Laura Fair

Accepted by:

Dean of the Graduate School

An Abstract of the Dissertation of

Ramonu Abiodun Sanusi for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the Department of Romance Languages to be taken June 2004

Title: REPRESENTATIONS OF SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN WOMEN IN COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL NOVELS IN FRENCH

Approved: Dr. Karen McPherson

Critics have tended to examine the portrayals of women in African literature either by focusing mainly on works by men or by emphasizing only women's texts. My dissertation looks at both men and women authors, tracing the representations of women in African writings from the earliest literary endeavors of Francophone African writers to contemporary times. By considering at least two authors of each generation of men and women writers, the thesis examines the interplay of colonialism, religion, patriarchy and traditional practices and their contribution to the subordination of African women. My adoption of the term subalternity to read African texts draws on Gramsci's idea of revolt, the episodic march of the oppressed to achieve what he called permanent victory. My use of the word subaltern here relates to the African woman subordinated by colonial, religious, patriarchal, and traditional forces.

Francophone colonial and post-colonial writings such as Senghor's *Chants d'ombre*, Diop's *Coups de pilon*, Beti's *Mission terminée* and *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, Kourouma's *Les Soleils des indépendances* and Ousmane's *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* represent traditional depictions of women by male authors. Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* and *Un chant écarlate*, Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femme*, Kéita's *Rebelle* and Yaou's *Le Prix de la révolte*, in contrast, illustrate the roles of women as seen through the eyes of African female writers. My aim in considering literary works by both men and women is to offer a balanced account of the evolution of the portrayal of women in sub-Saharan African narrative. I make a judicious use of certain Western theories even though I work within the framework of Third World cultures. I am aware of the social and cultural differences that make it important to heed Nnaemeka's warnings that anybody working on African texts should listen to the heartbeat of Igboland and respect African values. Nevertheless, I am convinced that listening to the heartbeat of the West can help to redefine some of the African traditions that subalternize women.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Ramonu Abiodun Sanusi

PLACE OF BIRTH: Saki, Nigeria

DATE OF BIRTH: July 28, 1961

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon
University of Ibadan
O.A.U. Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo

DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Philosophy in Romance Languages, 2004, University of Oregon
Master of Arts in French, 1994, University of Ibadan
Bachelor of Arts in French/Education, 1992, O.A.U. Adeyemi College

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Francophone African and Caribbean Literatures
Colonial Discourse Analysis and Post-Colonial Theories

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Fellow, Department of Romance Languages,
University of Oregon, Eugene, 1999-2004

Instructor and Translator, Federal Airports Authority,
Lagos, Nigeria, 1993-1999

Alliance Française, Ibadan, Nigeria, 1992-1993

GRANTS, AWARDS AND HONORS:

Doctoral Research Fellowship, Department of Romance Languages, University of Oregon, 2002-2003

Graduate Student Travel Award, University of Oregon, 20002-2003

Research Grant, Center for the Study of Women in Society, University of Oregon 2001-2002

Graduate Student Research Award, Graduate School, University of Oregon, 2001-2002

Bourse Scientifique de Haut Niveau, French Government, 1999

University First Class Honors Roll, O.A.U., Adeyemi College, 1992

Prof. Adeniyi Adaralegbe Prize, Adeyemi College, 1992

Best Undergraduate Student Prize, Adeyemi College, 1990

PUBLICATIONS:

Sanusi, Ramonu. *Mama Tutu et Cris Nègres.* Ibadan: Bounty Press, 2003

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I give glory and recognition to God. He participated in the conception of the idea behind this dissertation and its ultimate delivery.

I am indebted to my supervisor Professor Karen McPherson for her thoroughness, tenacity and interest in this work. Despite her tight schedule, she not only contributed to my intellectual growth, but she also found enough time for the supervision of this dissertation. She gave me a real feeling of what scholarship should be and I hope to justify her faith and confidence in me.

Professor Evlyn Gould also invested so much in me during my stay at the University of Oregon. As a teacher, Head of Department, and a mother, she still created time to read my work. I thank her for being a source of inspiration.

My sincere gratitude goes to Professor André Djiffack for his continuous interest in my research. I am indeed grateful to him for his interest in my progress and for his brotherly advice.

I thank Professor Laura Fair for her contributions to my academic pursuit. Her remarks have been invaluable to the accomplishment of this dissertation.

Professor Aduke Adebayo, Professor Irène d'Almeida and Nathalie Etoke have been wonderful sisters. Pius Adesanmi, Philip Ojo and Tunde Ayeleru—you have been wonderful brothers. My relationship with these scholars has contributed in shaping my scholarly thoughts.

Finally, I thank Biodun Akindolie, Cari Vanderkar, Laurie Goren, Vorapanya Sermsap, Kimberly Anderson, Carol Boeth, Christina Vandervorst, Karin Almquist, Crista Gillette, Pedro Perez, Alain-Fleury Ekorong, Ramon Fonkoué, Jean-Eudes Biem, Léopold Mvuezolo and all the staff of Romance Languages. My sweet mother, brothers, and sisters—all of you have added in one way or another to my general academic culture...

DEDICATION

In memory of my wife Ronke Sanusi whose untimely death still remains a MYSTERY and to the courage of my daughter Tobi Sanusi who had to cope with my long period of absence.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

THE FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN NOVEL AND AFRICAN FEMINISMS

Historical Background of African Novel and Feminism

This dissertation will address the oppression of women with respect to traditions, colonialism, neo-colonialism and other patriarchal cultural ethos. I will examine how African women are portrayed and subordinated socially, culturally, educationally, politically, and economically by traditions, colonial and post-colonial regimes that reinforce male hegemony. Some texts by African men played a part in reinforcing the subaltern status of the traditional non-elite African women by maintaining that African women did not live in bondage and thus did not need to be liberated. The emergence of African women writers, however, would seek a redress of the situation by challenging and transforming some of the colonial, patriarchal and cultural norms that pave ways for the oppression of women. The selection of texts for this study covers sub-Saharan Africa's geographical space. The different generations of writers whose works I will examine are from Senegal, Mali, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, and Gabon. They are all African texts in French due to the fact that these countries were once French colonies. I decided to approach them from the perspective of the historical and

cultural elements they have in common. I will refer to them as Francophone African texts/writers. My intention is not to gloss over their differences; I will put emphasis on what unites rather than what divides them because African cultures, societies and traditional institutions share many similar features.

The development of novel-writing in Africa can be traced back to the era of the colonization of the continent. This imperial mission of the Europeans subordinated Africans to the colonizers' rule and imposed new ways of life on them. Colonialism established policies based on what Aduke Adebayo in *Critical Essays on the Novel in Francophone Africa* describes as "the prejudiced notion of the innate inferiority and deficiency of civilization of the African" (2). Furthermore, Adebayo asserts: "The ultimate goal of the French colonial policy was to frenchify the African in every conceivable way especially through a highly structured administrative system, western education and the Christian religion. The end product of such process was the "évolué" (2). It is clear from Adebayo's remark that the objective of the French was to assimilate Africans into the French modes of life.

Before the colonizers' arrival Africans had their ways of life and their established cultural traditions. A majority of African literary critics argue that literature long existed in Africa in the form of oral tradition before it was essentially buried and forgotten by European invaders. There is no doubt, however, that the colonization of the continent introduced written literature to sub-Saharan Africa. This literature was started by the colonizer himself in his

own language and continued the education of Africans in that Western language, which was eventually passed on to the colonized people. It is not surprising that after being armed with the colonizers' language, the African man appeared on the African literary scene to tell his own stories and to attack erroneous colonial writings, combat arrogant views of the superiority of European culture, and expose the colonizer's misdeeds on the continent.

Aimé Césaire, Walter Rodney among others, believe that colonialism undermined African development. They affirm that the imperial mission destroyed many African traditions and disrupted the once peaceful continent. Similarly, critics are conscious of the asymmetrical power relationship that arose from colonialism as Europe set out to establish its hegemony in Africa.

In *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Albert Memmi vehemently opposes the claims of the colonizer who thinks that he alone is qualified to speak of or for the colony. Memmi thinks that the colonizer sees himself as civilized and the colonized as savage, hence the need for the colonizer to use his civilizing experience to make Africans know about their continent from his perspective. The colonizer views the colonized as an empty individual who does not know anything and has to learn much from him.

In his *Course on General Linguistics*, Ferdinand de Saussure argues that signs have meaning only through binary opposition to other signs. Bill Aschcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies* corroborate the Saussurean thought and assert that "binary opposition is the

most extreme form of difference possible" (23). The implications of these postulates become important when we enter the discussions of imperialism, colonialism and feminism. In colonized lands, a majority of intractable binaries were created, which today largely determine modes of life in parts of Africa, Latin America and Asia. Similarly, Aschroft notes that "this pattern of structuration in European and many other languages, lies at the root of the ceaseless pattern of conquest and domination that has formed the fabric of our life" (28). The social cleavages that erupted as a result of colonial conquest had a serious consequence for Africa. First, the colonized people adjusted the way they lived to that of the colonizer. Second, the colonized depended on the colonizer for everything and turned his back on some of his habitual ways of life so that he could be accepted as civilized. The contact between the colonizer and the colonized created paradigms that are still today noted in the games of domination and subordination manifested in all aspects of people's life, be it socially, culturally, religiously or literarily. Ranu Samantrai in "Claiming the Burden: Naipul's Africa," notes that this teleology is

> a strategy so common to the West's thinking about the Rest that is hardly possible to speak of relations between nations without drawing upon the adult-child paradigm. [...] Developed/developing, backward/advanced, First World/Third World: all suggest that if they are obedient and follow the leader of their parents, the Rest will grow up to become just like the West. (56)

As Samantrai asserts, it is common today to see colonized people trying to imitate the West by copying their patterns of life so that they can be seen as

civilized. The sad aspect of it is that by trying to be like the other, Africans lost some of their cultural heritage, and furthermore, cannot fully blend in as Westerners.

Africa has witnessed many difficulties which were recorded at different stages of its evolution by Western and African writers. Bernth Lindfords in *African Textualities* observes that:

> Over the last century Africa has experienced a great deal of turmoil, has heard many war-drums and seen lots of battles. Initially these were colonial conflicts; today they tend to be civil wars or struggles between unelected leaders and the peoples they misrule. The story of these turbulent years has not been an easy one to tell, but many writers have taken a stab at it, putting on record at least a small portion of Africa's contemporary history in fictional terms. (3)

A close examination of literary production in Francophone black Africa offers a series of narratives and counter-narratives by both colonial and African writers. African writers first attacked the colonial writers on issues of the misrepresentation of African facts. The theme of colonialism has been persistent in African literature. African writers denounced European writings on Africa and argued that Europeans' invasion of Africa disrupted the continent. Mineke Schipper corroborates this view:

> La situation coloniale trouble les rapports humains entre les deux groupes. Les maîtres font tout pour maintenir leur position puissante et privilégiée. Coûte que coûte, il faut empêcher le Noir de revendiquer ses droits bafoués depuis l'arrivée des conquérants. (28)

The second oppositional stance taken by African writers was directed against the new African leaders who emerged after the colonialists left. These

new leaders were not different from the colonizers. The majority of Africans, who dreamed of a better life after the colonizers left, were engulfed in despair and frustration created by the new leadership. One witnesses here a situation in which a subalternized colonial subject emerges as a leader to become a dominant oppressor of the same group to which he formerly belonged.

In a third phase in the development of novel writing, the African female writer wrote in opposition to her African male counterpart on issues of the misrepresentation of African women in fiction. The presence of African female writers on the African literary scene meant that one could begin "to look at woman in African literature standing on her own rather than in the shadow of men" (viii), as Anne Adams Graves puts it.

Feminism as a post-colonial discourse in texts by African women is a response to historical conquest and hegemonic ideologies of the powerful colonial master passed down to the re-created African man. When the colonizer got to the continent, he assimilated the African man and later used him to propagate the subordination of his own people. He placed him in power as his stooge, in order to maintain his firm control over the continent. African chiefs recruited their subjects and sold them as slaves to the white men. Much later, some leaders of independent African countries managed the affairs of their nations in accordance with the white man's agenda. Therefore, the colonizer still controls the country politically and economically indirectly. Significantly, this

allows the same subordinating ideology to survive while a majority of Africans, particularly women, are nowhere to be found either politically or economically.

After independence the conditions of African women did not change much because independence failed to recognize women as capable of contributing to nation building. In politics, women were not fully represented in some Islam-dominated areas of Africa where religion imposed strict codes of conduct on women and excluded them from public life. Needless to say, some patriarchal attitudes that favor the education of the male child over his female counterpart did not help matters but rather contributed to subordinating women. African men have to recognize and accept the positive role that African women can play in the nation's development if the whole continent is to move forward.

One of the major functions of literature is to create awareness of societal issues and African literary texts have at various stages played this role, with writers acting as spokespersons for their communities.

The French Colonial Novel

The French presence was firmly established in Africa after the Berlin conference of 1884 when Africa was split up among the European powers. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, after the slave trade was abolished, there was a growing need for overseas markets, and many Europeans thus turned to Africa. Although European presence in Africa was frequently justified as a humanitarian mission, the truth was that these European nations were more

interested in economic and territorial gains. During the height of the colonization of Africa, European hegemony was firmly established and Africa became the scene where the continuing drama of imperialism was being staged.

A great number of French colonial writers ventured into the African continent during this same period of colonization, to write fabulous things about Africa. French presence in Africa gave rise to French colonial literature. European writers who wrote about Africa include Paul Adam, André Demaison, Jean d'Ésmer, Hans Grimm, J. Francis-Boeuf, Maurice Delafosse, André Gide, Paul Vigné d'Octon, Les frères Tharaud and Pierre Loti. While some of their writings talked about love and exoticism, others pleaded the cause of imperialism.

By and large, the ambition of a majority of these writers was to depict Africa from the European point of view and to show the world the great tasks accomplished by colonialists in Africa, while at the same time justifying the natural servitude of Africans. African critics view French colonial literature as the literature of officers, conquerors and administrators. Colonialism as a political and economic enterprise was to bring honor to France, and many writers found opportunities to launch propaganda in favor of France by writing exotic literature about her colonial mission.

Pierre Loti's *Le roman d'un saphi* (1881) easily comes to mind as typical of this literature. Using exotic scenes, Loti depicts the enthusiasm of a French soldier who leaves France for Africa and later realizes that he is far away from

his motherland. Jean Peyral, the central figure of the novel, is seen suffering from nostalgia and solitude but consoles himself with the fact that he will be promoted in the military at the end of his mission. Paul Vigné d'Octon's *Au pays des fétiches* (1891) is similarly rich in exotic scenes. This novel reveals some of the problems of colonial conquest. The writer notes that the French living in the colonies suffer from nostalgia and are adversely affected by climatic conditions. Paul Adam's *La ville inconnue* (1911) is another striking colonial novel in which the author pleads the cause of France. Adam notes that colonial enterprises were occasioned by France's determination to liberate oppressed people of Africa from their tyrant leaders.

Colonial writers took advantage of Africans' inability to read and write in European languages to produce fallacious stories about Africa and to sell them in the European markets. As the Nigerian critic Cyril Nweze, in his *Africa in French and German Fiction*, notes:

> If the colonial writer decides to falsify already false ideas, it is with the precise intention of adapting them to his purpose — notably, to make the black man a comic character for the amusement of his white readers on the one hand and, on the other, to enhance the prestige of the white hero who in the colonial novel pursues his civilizing mission among the *savage and comical* Africans. (7-8)

Colonial writers reproduced stereotyped views about Africa with conventional pictures of primitivism, savagery and the impenetrable forest, thus exacerbating erroneous concepts and prejudices about the black race simply to justify the need for the civilizing mission of the white man. Nweze refers to the

literary productions of the colonial writers as "alienated literature," because it was written by foreigners and not by Africans.

These writers were very conscious of the fact that their European brothers in their homeland were ignorant of what was happening in the colonies. To them, it was an opportunity to feed propaganda to those who were thirsty for news about the ways of life of the so-called "savage people" of the colonies. Even the Tharaud brothers, who had never been to Africa, embarked upon writing imaginative stories about Africa after realizing how appealing this material was to European readers.

Emergence of the French African Novel

The French African novel owes much to René Maran's *Batouala* (1921), considered by many as the first novel written by a black man representing African realities. Branded "*Le véritable roman nègre*," *Batouala*, is an anti-colonial novel that earned Maran the anger of the French government. In response to colonial fiction and imperialist enterprises in Africa, this black author of Martinican descent published his novel. Considered a groundbreaking work by many African novelists, it depicts the injustices of colonialism. As Aduke Adebayo remarks: "Some Negritude writers took over from where *Batouala* left off" (12).

Even though Maran did not advocate the end of colonialism, his book helped to prepare the ground for an anti-colonial revolt. African novelists look back to *Batouala* as a turning point in the history of the Negritude movement.

Soon after the publication of this work, many of the first generation of African authors born before 1920 launched serious attacks on the misrepresentations of Africa and Africans by colonial writers. To Aduke Adebayo, Negritude is a rallying cry of revolt against the oppression and exploitation of Africans by European colonialists. African writers of the era channeled their grievances against the Europeans through this new movement to champion the cause of Africans. Their mission was not only to envision a new society but also to re-create the Africans whose continual subjection to imperial and colonial ideologies became unacceptable.

Léopold Sédar Senghor, Jean Malonga, Birago Diop, Bernard Dadié, Abdoulaye Sadji, Camara Laye and Cheikh Anta Diop are among those who laid the foundations for Francophone African literature; their works brought colonialism and African culture to the attention of the outside world. The Negritude movement was their brainchild. Seminal works of these writers include Senghor's *Chants d'ombre* (1945) and *Hostie Noire* (1948), and Birago Diop's *Les contes d'Ahmadou Koumba* (1947). To provide an outlet for their literary productions, Alioune Diop founded *Présence Africaine* in 1947 which is considered a landmark in the Negritude movement. It is worth noting that some first-generation African writers are Negritude poets.

The second generation of African writers, born between the two world wars, was also male. This is understandable since only men benefited from the formal education fostered by the colonial institutions and colonial administrators.

Among this second generation of writers are Mongo Beti, Ferdinand Oyono, Sembène Ousmane and Ahmadou Kourouma to mention a few.

One common denominator that binds the two generations together, in addition to being male, is that their works were characterized by anti-colonialism. The attacks on French colonial policies in Africa were strongly echoed in Negritude and fictional writings. Besides, the preoccupation of these writers was to portray their deep love for Africa's rich cultural heritage, which was despised by the Europeans. While uplifting African cultural values, a particular attention was devoted to the African woman depicted as subordinate and docile—attributes some of these writers considered as good qualities.

African novels of the 1950s concerned themselves largely with the miseries of the time. Most African authors wrote to demystify and challenge the erroneous writings of the colonial fictions. These writers were animated with the desire to condemn the humiliations and deprivations imposed on Africans by Europeans, from slavery to the bastardization of African cultures. Femi Ojo-Ade in *René Maran The Black Frenchman*, remarks that:

> Born out of slavery, colonialism and human degradation, black literature has grown and persevered in the midst of oppression, first mired in self-denial, and self-hate and later awakened by the voices of self-affirmation and self-love [...] to fight feverishly against the dehumanization imposed upon the colonized by the perfidious colonizer, to reclaim the socio-political independence long denied the race by the so-called civilized dominators. (5)

A majority of literary critics later called the literature of this period a "protest literature" because of the militant tone and harsh condemnation of

European deeds. Mongo Beti's *Ville cruelle* (1954) and *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* (1956); Ferdinand Oyono's *Le vieux Nègre et la médaille* (1956) and *Une vie de boy* (1957); and Sembène Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* (1960) give an account of the colonizer's wrong doings in Africa. In their books, these authors criticize vehemently cultural imperialism and social injustices meted out on Africans by Europeans. These novels were later followed by transitional novels of the post-colonial period, characterized by the disenchantment of the African people deceived by their new leaders. Many Africans expected independence to bring fortune to their homes and farms and provide them with work and food. They thought that their sufferings would be over. All were rejoicing, singing and dancing in advance and later discovered that nothing had really changed for the better. Soon, they found that the new leaders were more terrible than the colonizers. The disappointment of Africans after independence is summed up in the following words by a young character in Alioum Fantoure's *Le cercle des tropiques* (1972) during his conversation with Bohi Di,

the novel's protagonist:

> - Tu sais, dans nos villages, nous nous demandons ce qu'est l'indépendance. Notre vie n'a pas changé, nos récoltes sont toujours mauvaises, nous travaillons toujours durement comme avant. Les impôts ont augmenté, ce qui est pire qu'avant, et puis les délégués du Parti nous dépouillent lors de leurs tournées et ils en font plusieurs par mois; si ce n'est pas l'un c'est l'autre. Si c'est ça l'indépendance, mieux valait supporter les toubabs [les Blancs], car maintenant nous supportons et les toubabs et les chefs indigènes. (168)

The situation as described in Fantoure's novel, after the new African leaders took over power, is not particular to Guinea but to a majority of independent countries in Africa.

The writers were highly critical of these new leaders for their indifference to the endemic poverty of the masses. They denounced their corruption, their incompetence and their complicity with foreign powers. Political leaders were criticized for indulging in opulence. Kembe Milolo summarizes the preoccupations of those novels:

> La dénonciation des nouveaux maîtres qui n'ont pensé qu'à régner et à tirer les avantages que leur conféraient leurs fonctions. Ils sont devenus plus tyrans que les colons. D'où l'amertume de la population devant le manque d'organisation économique et politique dont ces nouveaux dirigeants d'Afrique sont les symboles. (10)

Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les soleils des indépendances* (1970) and Alioum Fantouré's *Le cercle des tropiques* (1972) are examples of novels that criticized the new African leaders and societies. These writers cast a dispassionate look at the moral, economic and political decay of newly independent African nations. This new literary tone paved the way for African literature that moved from attacking colonialism to instead focusing its critique on the new African leaders. Besides Kourouma's *Les soleils des indépendances*, other novels testifying to the African nightmare after independence include Ibrahima Ly 's*Toiles d'araignées* (1972), Sembène Ousmane's *Xala,* Mongo Beti's *Perpetue* and *Remember Ruben* (1974), and most recently his *Trop de soleil tue l'amour* (1999) and *Branle-bas en blanc et noir* (2000). These novels portray African

leaders as tyrants and show how Africans may be their own worst enemies as noted by the white man Sept-Saint Siss while talking to Dr Malekê, in *Le cercle des tropiques*:

> - Docteur, il y a une chose que j'aurai apprise pendant mon séjour d'une trentaine d'années sous les tropiques. C'est que vous êtes plus cruels entre vous que ne le sera jamais un toubab à votre égard. Croyez-moi, le venin ne vient pas de l'extérieur. Vous secretez vous-même votre propre poison. (142)

It is an undeniable fact that Africans were the architects of their own downfall after the colonizers left. Problems that emerged after the independence of African nations were created by the irresponsible and insensitive attitudes of many leaders to the people they governed.

Emergence of Writing by Women

Another important and remarkable stage in the sub-Saharan Francophone African literary scene is marked by the arrival of African female writers. The Nigerian feminist critic Chioma Opara discusses Virginia Woolf's celebrated notion that a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction. Opara notes that at the time Woolf was making this exhortation in the 1920s, the African woman had neither a room of her own, nor a pen of her own, nor the means to write. In fact she was weighed down with illiteracy. Today, with the rapid trend in female literacy, African women not only may have a room of their own, but many spaces and many pens of their own as well.

The emergence in the late 1960s of African women on the African literary scene previously reserved for African men is evident in the inclusion of their names in a number of critical anthologies. Indeed, sub-Saharan Francophone African women writers are today among the most audible voices in the social, economic, political and literary scenes of the continent.

Just as the first and second generations of African writers reacted to what went before, this third generation of writers spoke out to condemn the role played by some of their African male predecessors in perpetuating the inferiority of African women in their novels. These women used their writings mostly to seek to redress the situation by portraying a positive image of the African woman and by challenging the domination of African life socially, politically and economically by African men. They hoped through their writing to bring about changes in society, to remove obstacles that had for so long silenced and dominated women. As Aduke Adebayo affirms:

> Most African female writers create out of the necessity to tell their own stories in thinly-veiled fictional forms; seeing themselves as representatives of African women and correctors of certain well-worn prejudices concerning African women. In short, they tell it as it is. This explains the predominance of the semi-autobiographical mode and the sociological orientation of their writings. (39)

Through their works, African women writers destroy the culture of silence imposed on African women, a culture that is responsible for their lack of participation in literary and public domains.

The arrival of women on the African literary scene is aimed at deconstructing the patriarchal order. In attacking patriarchal traditions and striving to create positive images for African women, these writers sought to bring women out of invisibility. They demystify African cultural as well as Christian and Islamic myths that emphasize the main roles of women as maternity and domesticity.

Francophone women's writings of sub-Saharan Africa date back to the first known published literary piece written by Thérèse Kuoh-Moukoury, and entitled *Rencontres essentielles* (1969). This novel laid the foundation for later women's writings. The year 1975 is, however, considered a landmark in African women's writings. Aside from being the International Year of Women, it was marked by many publications. Aoua Kéita published *La vie d'Aoua Kéita par elle-même* (1975), Nafissatou Diallo wrote *De Tilène au plateau: une enfance dakaroise* (1976), Aminata Sow Fall authored *La grève des Battú* (1976) and Mariama Bâ published *Une si longue lettre* (1979). Mariama Bâ remains one of the most respected and influential Francophone female writers of that generation. The publication of *Une si longue lettre* brought particular attention to African women's texts.

Since the 1970s, the African literary scene has been flooded with works of fiction by women, including Aminata Ka Maiga's *La voie du salut* suivi de *le miroir de la vie* (1985), Calixthe Beyala's *Tu t'appeleras Tanga* (1987) and Angèle Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes* (1989). In the 1990s, female literary

production increased. Evelyne Mpoudi Ngolle published *Sous la cendre le feu* (1990), Regina Yaou wrote *Le prix de la révolte* (1997), Fatou Kéita produced *Rebelle* (1998) and Abibatou Traoré published *Sidagamie* (1990),.

These writers denounce the African woman's condition, her marginality, and address other customs and attitudes that are designed to keep women under men's control. Female protagonists play significant roles in the works of these writers for they convey the author's message to the public and aim to initiate societal change.

A number of female literary works that I have chosen for this project emphasize controversial African traditions such as forced marriage, female circumcision and polygamy, traditions which seem to have impeded the progress toward the liberation of sub-Saharan African women. Ramatoulaye, Mireille and Emilienne, the protagonists of *Une si longue lettre*, *Un chant écarlate* and *Fureurs et cris de femmes*, struggle against traditions that oppress women but these women do not finally overcome all the obstacles. Malimouna and Affiba, protagonists of *Rebelle* and *Le prix de la révolte,* continue the struggle initiated by their predecessors and come out successfully in their quest to liberate women from their oppressive situations.

The coming into writing of African women has disrupted the traditional binary of male oppressor versus the oppressed woman. African women writers use literarture as a weapon to challenge certain injustices done to women. The re-creation of women by Francophone African women writers of the last decades

particularly, helps women to assert their own identity. Today African women achieve visibility not only in literature, but also in society, in politics and in the economy.

Subalternity

The works of Mongo Beti, Ahmadou Kourouma and Ibrahima Ly reflect the realities with which Cameroonian, Ivoirian and Malian women traditionally are confronted. These authors depict patriarchal traditions and show how these institutions subordinate women. In most cases they represent their female personae as subaltern individuals, silenced and dominated by traditional, social, religious and cultural practices. Kembe Milolo observes that

> [l]es écrivains noirs, sans prendre de position, présentaient la femme africaine telle qu'elle se situe face aux us et coutumes de son pays. Les exemples typiques sont ceux de la mère et de la fille résignées, que nous voyons dans *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba*, du Camerounais Mongo Beti. (123)

In the novels of these authors the power exercised over women and young girls by their ruthless husbands or authoritarian fathers, creates the condition for subalternity. This exercise of power is often legitimized by religious and traditional codes of life.

John Beverley affirms that subalternity is about power, who has it and who does not have it; while Ranajit Guha defines it as subordination whether in terms of class, caste, race or gender. This study recognizes the need to transform the term subalternity in adapting it to an analysis of the phenomenon of

subordination in African writings. I am using "subalternity" here to refer to the subordinate position and inferior roles attributed to women in many African societies. I am considering subalternity in terms of gender, with particular attention to how it applies to sub-Saharan African women in the texts that I have chosen to examine. In other words subalternity is defined here as a narrative inside which African woman is inferiorized by patriarchal hegemony and traditional/religious prescriptions.

My use of the term subaltern is drawn from the work of the Italian Marxist scholar, Antonio Gramsci, who used it to explain the domination/subordination structure of class divisions. In Gramsci's work, "subaltern" refers to the non-elite, the peasant, who is oppressed by the ruling class. Gramsci examines class divisions within the political matrix of the state and concludes that subalterns are subject to oppression by the dominant or ruling class. Gramsci's hoi polloi is the equivalent of Fanon's "wretched of the earth," Paulo Freire's "oppressed," and Albert Memmi's "dominated." The subaltern in the African context is a product of colonialism, cultural imperialism and neo-colonialism, all of which reduced African men and women to inferior status. E. San Juan. corroborates this view and states that "from the perspective of the Indian Subaltern Studies group, the term "Subaltern" has been redefined to encompass all subordinated populations oppressed by colonial/post-colonial regimes" (85).

African women were more subordinated than men during colonization. As Spivak puts it: "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no

history, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in the shadow" (287). The subordination of woman was further played out in a majority of novels by African men of the colonial and post-independence era. Chemain-Degrange asks: "la colonisation en donnant des responsabilités à l'homme, et à lui seul, n'a-t-elle pas renforcé le pouvoir de l'homme colonisé sur la femme colonisée? Sans compter la sujétion de la femme indigène à l'administrateur blanc ou au prêtre" (159).

The gains of subaltern studies were first used by Gayatri Spivak to champion the cause of women. Her subalternist approach to the study of Third World women helps us to understand the plight of the historically muted non-elite subaltern woman. Spivak asserted that "the subaltern cannot speak." This observation caused an uproar in academic circles. The implication of Spivak's position is that the subaltern has to be spoken for or has to speak through someone else. Here again we are confronted with another problem, the question of speaking for others and the dangers inherent in it. As Linda Alcoff, among others, has warned, there are serious problems involved in speaking for others.

Bill Ashcroft, in his book *Post-colonial Transformation* (2001), after qualifying Spivak's question as "notorious," and "as problematic as ever," comes back to assert that: "The phrase: 'the subaltern cannot speak' need not imply that the subaltern is silenced and has no voice whatsoever. Rather it suggests that the voice of the subaltern does not exist in some pure space outside the dominant discourse" (46). Ashcroft acknowledges the fact that Spivak's

statement is open to multiple interpretations. Another interpretation of Spivak's remark is that at the moment the subaltern is able to speak and to be heard, she has vacated the identity of subalternity. My position on Spivak is that her works examine and analyze the problems of the silenced subaltern woman by the patriarchal powers and, at the same, suggest that the subaltern woman can positively change her muted condition by speaking out in a way that matters to the oppressors. In contrast with Spivak's subaltern, Adesanmi reminds us that:

> In Africa, the subaltern woman, despite her positional disadvantages, has always spoken. Whenever necessary, she has "inflicted" her voice on the social space, as evidenced in the Senegalese concept of *sani-baat* or voice-throwing, a process through which women intrude into, interrupt, alter or disrupt discourse by literally "throwing in" their voices. (32)

In this study, I will have Adesanmi's assertion in mind while examining the subaltern African woman in Francophone African texts that I have selected in order to see how this statement is relevant. My thesis will focus on the struggles of the subaltern African woman to free herself from habits of subservience and obedience, for subalternity, as Fredric Jameson points out, is bound up with a "feeling of mental inferiority developed in situations of domination" (76). In my examination of African novels, I will consider how writers depict the patriarchal and cultural ethos that subject African woman to man's authority and dominance. Furthermore, I will show how the subaltern woman translates her experience through writing into the discourse of the dominant power in order to be heard.

African Feminism: Background and Definition

The word feminism connotes different things to various people, societies, feminist writers, and critics. To a majority of people, feminism brings to mind the idea of challenging male supremacy. No matter how it is defined, feminism's goal remains the same — to fight against all forms of the oppression of women and for the equal distribution of socio-political and economic power between men and women in the society.

Some critics link the origin of feminist movements to the United Kingdom with the publication of Marie Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), which was considered by many to be the first feminist book. Wollstonecraft described the state of ignorance in which society kept women and argued for better educational opportunities for them. Others locate the roots of feminism in the 18th century movement led by Lady Amberly to demand British women's voting rights and career opportunities. Defining feminism as a social movement advocating equality between the sexes, Elizabeth Ogini finds it present in the women's liberation or women's rights movements that became pronounced around 1800 in Europe and America. Women's rights were also a focus of abolitionist activities of Sara M. Grimke, the American anti-slavery leader who wrote *Letter on Equality of Sex and the Condition of Women* in 1833. She presented a strong argument against religious leaders who claimed biblical support for the inferior position of women. Grimke is of the belief that men and women have complementary roles to play in the betterment of humanity.

Women's struggles for certain rights in Europe and America eventually paid off. As Elizabeth Ogini asserts: "from 1800 to 1900 a remarkable turning point in societal history manifested itself as feminism grew in power and won a good number of rights for women including legal and economic rights" (11). With the victories recorded by Western women in their liberation movements, changes in the status of women began to occur more frequently.

I would argue that one can find the roots of feminist movements or modern feminisms in many different parts of the world and at different historical moments. What all feminist movements have in common is their focus on issues of justice, equality and respect for women.

Feminist writers and critics have defined feminism variously. No theorist captures the universal notion of woman as an inferiorized being better than Simone de Beauvoir as reflected in her *Le deuxième sexe* (1949). Beauvoir defines feminists as women and men who seek to change women's condition in association with the class struggle. As a socialist, she thinks that socialism is incomplete if women are prevented from participating in and benefiting from societal development. Western and non-Western feminists borrowed insights from Beauvoir's thoughts to fashion a feminist approach to literary criticism.

Among the many vehicles that women used to advance the course of feminist movements, such as rallies and demonstrations, the literary approach has played an important role. According to Toril Moi feminism appeared as a vital

political tool in the 1960s. In her *Sexual Textual Politics*, she argues that feminism rejects male oppressive and dominating traits in society.

Mainstream Western feminism has on several occasions tried to project a universal definition of feminism. This universality of feminism, however, received an angry charge from other feminists especially from the Third World.

In her introduction to *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* Chandra Mohanty points out the complexity inherent in the definition of the term feminism. Feminism should bear in mind differences in socio-cultural contexts if the struggle to end women's subordination is to be successful. As Pierrette Herzberger notes, experiences are not the same for all feminists:

> Le féminisme africain est né dans un autre cadre historique. Il inclut les expériences de l'éducation traditionnelle, de la colonisation, du développement du patriarcat souvent au détriment d'un matriarcat effectif, perceptible dans presque toutes les civilisations africaines avec son pendant des coutumes aujourd'hui non appropriées telles que l'excision, et actuellement du poids de l'endettement et de la pauvreté de l'Afrique. (347)

Many African feminists think that the militant feminist posture of the West could be out of place in Africa where the resolution of male-female problems is approached through compromise.

Within the African context, the term feminism is itself often at issue. Obioma Nnaemeka branded herself a negofeminist, since she believed that the term feminism, which was created, designed, and defined by white women, was exclusionary. Nnaemeka argues that black women were neither accepted nor invited into the movement defined by Western feminists. She stresses the need

for African women to create a more feasible, workable terminology for themselves. This critic went further by concluding that long before the advent of Western feminism, black women were actively participating in social, economic and political functions in their societies.

Prior to the arrival of Christianity and Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa — that is in pre-colonial Africa — some anthropologists and traditionalists believe that women played significant roles and were worshipped and respected by men in those societies. The Ghanaian feminist writer and critic Ama Ata Aidoo corroborates this view, noting that:

> In pre-colonial times, fighting women were part of most African armies, a well-known example being the all-female battalions of Dahomey (ancient Benin, early nineteenth century), who sought to protect their empire against invaders and internal treachery. [...] Yaa Ashantewaa, queen of the Asante (Ashanti, Ghana), led an insurrection against the British [...] True, all of these women were reigning monarchs who found it relatively easy to organize armies against foreign occupations. (40-41)

Brave women who fought during wars to defend or liberate their people from invaders are still honored and recognized in African societies where their portraits are frequently engraved on museum walls.

Similarly, there were many important goddesses among the Yorubas and Igbos of Nigeria and the Akans of Ghana. Historians assert that women were consulted before many events in society could happen. In Yoruba culture for instance, the goddess of the river and the goddess of thunder were consulted before all important events. Indeed, the presence of powerful female divinities in pre-colonial African societies is frequently cited by African feminists as evidence of the vital roles women played in the past. Diedre Badejo remarks that:

> In the Yoruba example, Osun is the goddess of wealth, femininity, power and fecundity. [...] According to the mythology, she is the only woman present at the creation of the world [...] A woman of alluring beauty and the most powerful historical leader of Osogbo [...] as an African woman, Osun plays many roles that emanate from the central role as woman and mother. (96)

These assertions suggest that women held responsibilities as important as those of men in Africa for a long time before the arrival of the Europeans.

Colonialism, Christianity, Islam and neocolonialism played important roles in the oppression of African women. Indeed, colonialism was instrumental in shifting the balance, focusing on educating African men in the interests of assimilation into Western and Arab cultures. This ultimately led to the strengthening of the position of African men at the expense of women. In fact this politics of assimilation destroyed many pre-colonial African cultures that once empowered women.

Both Christianity and Islam imposed religious doctrines that tended to subordinate woman to man's authority and this perhaps influenced the male writers who were beneficiaries of Western and Islamic education, giving them permission to depict women as subaltern in their writings. The vilification of women in Christian and Islamic religious discourses associated with the supposed "original sin" of the woman in the Garden of Eden has some effects on how women are treated in these societies. Such ideas implanted by both religions still persist in many African societies. As a result, we cannot talk about the difficulties that African women go through today without mentioning the

imperialist forces that destroyed those African socio-cultural values that once favored African women throughout the entire continent. Zulu Sofola remarks that:

> Assailed by western and Arab cultures, she has been stripped bare of all that made her central and relevant in the traditional African socio-political domain [...] Europeans and Arabs with their philosophy of women's inferiority arrived on the scene and succeeded in institutionalizing the superiority of men. Chaos set in and women were made irrelevant, a fact that is now full-blown in today's European / Arab systems of governance in contemporary Africa where our women have been rendered irrelevant, ineffective and completely de-womanized. (52-59)

The position of traditionalists who hold that African women played a significant role in pre-colonial Africa did not go unchallenged by Mineke Schipper. This Dutch Africanist critic in her essay "Mother Africa on a Pedestal," reveals that the condition of African woman in pre-colonial time was not as bright as the traditionalists put it. Maryse Conde in her *La parole des femmes*, however, argues that irrespective of the condition of African woman in the pre-colonial era, colonialism played a great role in inferiorizing her.

Feminism today, to borrow Elizabeth Ogini's phrase, has gained acceptance in Africa "among the downtrodden and long abused African women and their sympathizers" (14). Feminist activities in both Anglophone and Francophone Africa are very significant. Crucial theoretical works of feminists from both regions have contributed much to fashioning socially and culturally appropriate African feminism. One distinguishing aspect of these African feminisms is their insistence upon the importance of responding to specifically African conditions. Many African feminists such as Molara Ogundipe, and Buchi

Emecheta, for instance, seek to identify themselves with African feminism by preaching the complementary role between men and women.

Diedre Badejo states that:

> African feminism recognizes the inherent multiple roles of women and men in reproduction, production and the distribution of wealth, power and responsibility for sustaining human life...Mutual female-male independence, complementary and self-reliant roles contextualize the content and dominate the discussion of our victories and challenges. (94)

Similarly, Carole Boyce-Davies notes that "a genuine African feminism recognizes a common struggle with the African men for the removal of the yokes of foreign domination and European /American exploitation and that it is not antagonistic to African men" (8-9). African feminism thus acknowledges its affinities with international feminism but delineates a specifically African feminism whose needs and goals arise out of the concrete realities of women's lives in African societies. Molara Ogundipe adopts the acronym "Stiwa" — "Social Transformation Including Women of Africa"— to define African feminism and her feminist agenda for African women. She posits that the transformation of African society is the responsibility of both men and women.

Another important area of difference between African feminism and Western feminism lies in attitudes toward maternity. Many African feminists condemn what they view as attacks on maternity launched by some Western feminists. Feminists like Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett and Jeffner Allen offered critiques of motherhood as women's natural roles. The Cameroonian feminist critic Juliana Nfah-Abbenyi, however, warns that:

> The critique of motherhood (that views women as forced mothers) and heterosexuality (that views women as sexual slaves) [...] can be problematic to most African women simply because motherhood and family have historically represented different experiences and social practices to Western and African women. [...] Whereas many Western women may view multiple childbirths as both oppressive and restrictive [...] most African women find empowerment in their children and families. (24)

Many African feminists seem to be intolerant of Euro-American feminism. Calixthe Beyala, however, in her manifesto *Lettre d'une Africaine à ses soeurs occidentales,* advocates embracing Euro-American feminism. She is of the view that since the oppression of women is universal it therefore needs a universal solution. Beyala's feminism, which she calls *féminitude*, rejects the complementary roles between men and women. She argues that Euro-American theories, struggles, and victories helped African women to liberate themselves. Attracted by Western feminist ideologies, Beyala's feminism appears largely antagonistic to African feminism's belief in complementary roles for men and women. This writer-critic says: "Seules les tricheuses rêvassent sur les nouvelles formes de relations homme-femme et parlent de complémentarité dans les couples. Je suis venue en Occident attirée par vos théories, vos combats, vos victoires" (10).

Works by African-American feminists such as Barbara Christian, Alice Walker and bell hooks, who operate under the banner of Womanism to express the oppression of women of non-white descent, offer additional insight on the issues of feminist cultural differences. As Ogini affirms: "African women and

African-American women seek to show the peculiarity of Black women's problems which are not experienced by White women" (16). One can argue that the discrimination of black women by their white counterparts led to the creation of African-American feminism tagged Womanism, because it was difficult for both white women and black women to bond together on equal terms and fight the common enemy- sexism. bell hooks in *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*, asserts that:

> The condescension [white women] directed at black women was one of the means they employed to remind us that the women's movement was "theirs"- that we were able to participate because they allowed it; after all we were needed to legitimate the process.
> They did not treat us as equals. (11)

hooks and her African-American feminist colleagues criticize the aims and goals of feminism as conceived by white American women. Womanism recognizes that the needs of the black woman are not the same as those of the white woman. This movement gave nourishment to African feminists who thought that they were sidelined by their Western counterparts. African feminists closely identify with Womanism to draw a line between their own brand of feminism and Western feminism. Womanism as adopted by African feminists preaches the complementary roles between men and women. As Elizabeth Ogini asserts: "Womanism is a special culture that reminds men with special indication that without women's full involvement in the system man is incomplete in action as well as in achievement and this is the implied preaching of Sembene Ousmane" (18).

Senegal ranks among the first countries to consider feminist issues seriously with the publication of its feminist magazine "*Fippu*" in 1987. The magazine's objective as spelt out by Marie-Angélique Savané was to think and act on situations of women in the present and in the future. The project of "*Fippu*" was to involve all Senegalese women irrespective of their social class. The primary objective of their feminism was to wage war against all forms of women's oppression. Irène d'Almeida remarks that: "the Senegalese model shows that the women of the movement do place their struggle in a historical, political and ideological frame, but they are not interested in theoretical issues. They are engaged in what I would term a practical African feminism" (18). The feminist movement in Senegal is amplified by extensive literary production. In a similar vein, Cameroon contributes to a growing feminist movement with the activities of its women writers and theorists. Indeed, African feminist theorists and women writers have contributed immensely and positively to the evolution of feminism in Africa.

Critical works by prominent Francophone feminist and post-colonial theorists both from Africa (Pierrette Herzeberger, Irène d'Almeida, Awa Thiam, Calixthe Beyala, and Madeleine Borgomano) and from Western countries (Arlette Chemain-Degrange, Françoise Lionnet, Jean-Marie Volet) bring a feminist critique to some of the socio-cultural aspects of African societies. The works of these critics have shed light on issues such as marriage, domestic arrangements, maternity and female circumcision.

As much as I appreciate the approaches of Western feminists, critics, and theorists on African literature, my ears cannot be deafened to the advice given by African feminists and critics. With deeper reflection on major historical events, most African feminists, critics and theorists warn that researchers on African studies should pay some attention to the realities in Africa because of its peculiar social climate. In this respect one can easily appreciate the position of the Nigerian writer and critic Buchi Emecheta who sees herself as a feminist with a small "f" because of her tolerance for men. It is probably important to heed Obioma Nnaemeka's warning that any critic approaching African women's writing, should "pay less attention to Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigary and *écriture féminine* and listen more to the rhythm and heartbeat of Igboland" (84). Nnaemeka is of the belief that if African literature is to win anything, it has to win it on its own terms. Herzberger-Fofana also seems to share Nnaemeka's position while she observes that: "La recherche d'un langage féminin comme le revendique les romancières linguistes européennes ne constitue pas l'un des objectifs des femmes-écrivains en Afrique" (24-25).

This is not, however, to say that Western approaches cannot yield productive results despite differences in cultural values. As Henri Lopes remarks:

> La femme africaine n'est pas la femme européenne. Chacune porte en elle et transmet à la descendance dont elle a la charge, une civilisation et des traditions bien définies. Elles n'élèvent pas leurs enfants de la même façon. L'une les promène dans un landau, l'autre les porte sur le dos. Mais au-dela de ces singularités, quand elles font connaissance, elles en viennent vite à des dialogues dans lesquels on sent courir, dans les deux sens, un courant de compréhension. (12)

There is no doubt that women from First and Third Worlds meet in conferences and other forums where they dialogue to exchange ideas that are mutually beneficial to their work. The ideas of Western feminists are indeed relevant to the study of African women's writings even though their work reflects a different context and different circumstances. One needs to recognize their contributions while keeping in mind the problems inherent in applying any external theory with its own biases. Even though some of the ideals of Western feminism meet with stiff resistance in African terrain, I believe that Western feminist values may help address, analyze and correct some of the gender inequalities inherent in African societies.

As an African man, my goal has always been to see my African sisters enjoy the same rights and receive the same consideration as men. My dream is to see African societies eradicate those cultural rites and practices that enslave women and subordinate them to male authority. Since mutual respect and equal rights are important values, African men have to make it their duty and responsibility to see that women in Africa participate equally in social, economic and political affairs of their nations. It is only through this attitude that the campaign going on can achieve its dreams and guarantee equal opportunities and offer equal challenges for African women so that they can compete with their counterparts worldwide.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONSTRUCTS OF SUBALTERN FEMALE PERSONAE IN AFRICAN MALE WRITINGS

> African literature is a male-created, male-oriented, chauvinistic art. [...] Male is the master; male constitutes majority. The fact is well documented in our colonial history. The white civilizer, as cunning as ever, carefully chose his black counterparts to run the affairs of the 'Dark Continent'. Woman is considered to be a flower, not a worker. Woman is supposed to be relegated to the gilded cage; she is not the contributor to, the creator of, a civilization.
>
> Femi Ojo-Ade (1983: 158)

Religious and Cultural Constructs of African Women

The colonial experience, and particularly the introduction of Christianity and Islam, did not just disorganize African societies by disregarding certain important African cultural values, but also introduced new practices to the colonized people. As a result of the activities of Christian missionaries, Africans were forced to embrace Christianity and made to turn their backs on their customs and former ways of life. European and Arab missionaries diligently spread their religious beliefs and particularly the negative image of women.

Colonialism masculinized any territory upon which it inflicted itself and dismantled the matriarchal system that coexisted with patriarchy in some pre-

colonial African societies. Religion also played a central role in sustaining certain kinds of social structures for it provided an ideological framework for the social roles of women.

Feminist discourse that focuses on the subjugation of women in most African societies as a result traces the origin of the inferiority and subordination of women to either the Bible or the Koran. It is generally believed by a number of feminists that men interpreted both the Bible and the Koran to suit their agenda so that they could have control over women. Some point to the Biblical story of the Garden of Eden as critical because it was written that Eve seduced Adam into eating the forbidden fruit. Feminists believe that this alleged action, interpreted by generations of Bible readers as "sinful," led women to be viewed variously as "sinners" or "evil." Other feminists from the Muslim world trace the subordination of women to traditionalist/conservative interpretations of the Koran. Fatima Mernissi, for instance, focuses on the controversy between traditional and modern Muslims over the roles of women. In *Beyond the Veil* she discusses how some Muslims use the Koran to support their belief in the relegation of women to the domestic sphere:

> The desegregation of sexes violates Islam's ideology on the woman's position in the social order: the woman should be under the authority of fathers, brothers or husbands. Since she is considered by Allah to be a destructive element, she is to be spatially confined and excluded from matters other than those of the family. The woman's access to non-domestic space is put under the control of males. (xv)

Mernissi also holds that European Christian societies came to the same conclusion as Muslim ones in their belief that women are destructive to the social order. The effect of the interpretation of the Bible and the Koran to serve a specific male agenda relegated women to the background tending to deprive them of certain roles in the society, such as holding positions in mosques, churches, public or government spheres. Both Christian and Islamic religious theories, as interpreted by men and social institutions, seem to have been designed to curb women's power. Indeed, as Mernissi points out, Islamic doctrines do not explicitly claim the inferiority of women: "On the contrary, the whole system is based on the assumption that woman is a powerful and dangerous being. All sexual institutions (polygamy, repudiation, sexual segregation, etc.) can be perceived as a strategy for containing her power" (xvi). Since it was believed that woman was responsible for man's expulsion from the garden, she is not only regarded as having destroyed the peace of the paradise but is feared for being powerful, hence the need to portray her as destructive and contain her overwhelming power by various means.

Woman is further assumed to be inferior to man because it was written in the Bible that she was constructed from man's ribs. As Mineke Schipper notes, "the story of Genesis tells us in great detail how first man was created and then woman, how she was taken from him and is thus part of him" (23). Schipper asserts as well that a similar patriarchal culture is to be found in the Koran: "Men are the managers of the affairs of women for that Allah has preferred in bounty

one of them over the other" (*The Holy Koran*, Sura 4: 34). It can be argued that it is through Biblical and Koranic constructions of woman that her image in various societies has come to be negatively viewed. Many interpretations of the Bible and the Koran also stipulate that woman has to be submissive to her husband. The implications of these religious interpretations, which persist in many societies today, are that woman is reduced to a subordinate subject controlled by patriarchal powers. Such Biblical and Koranic representations of women have rendered African women inferior and subservient as evidenced in the writings of a majority of African authors. Molara Ogundipe notes: "African woman is discriminated against, excluded from real power, exploited at all levels and derided most of the time in the society. She is usually seen as the cause of whatever happens negatively in the country. The national scapegoat. The cause of the nation's decline" (67). It is sad to note, as Ogundipe observes, that in sub-Saharan African societies women are often considered demonic and are blamed for whatever goes wrong. This attitude toward women leads to their oppression which in turn, serves to render them irrelevant in the society. " 'Mother Goddess,'as Adrienne Rich puts it, is gradually devalued and rejected; the human woman finds her scope and dignity increasingly reduced"(120).

Any study on the subjugation of African women that ignores religious theories as propagated by preachers of these sacred books and their effects with regard to domination of women by men religiously, socially, economically and politically, is incomplete. Buchi Emecheta in *In Their Own Voices*, asserts that

African women suffered because they embraced Christianity and Islam, two religions that jeopardized their positions and helped to subordinate them. Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana concurs, noting the negative effects of Islam on the status of African women:

> Introduite à partir du 10e siècle en Afrique, l'Islam a modifié le statut de la femme et donné la prééminence au système patriarcal. [...] Religion d'origine arabe, l'Islam se fondant avec les rites traditionnelles, a donné naissance à un culte spécifique: "l'Islam noir" qui s'est adapté aux réalités africaines, incorporant les pratiques animistes et les interférant au dogme religieux. (145-146)

Islam, as Herzberger remarks, was mixed with traditional African practices. This mixture gave birth to a new form of Islam that men firmly established in their traditional societies to relegate women who, in the words of Awa Thiam, "jadis ont eu leur mot à dire quand il fallait prendre des décisions de grande importance" (17). Futhermore, in certain societies in Africa today, customs, traditions and beliefs persist that keep women under subjugation and make them feel inferior to their male counterparts. Some of these institutions include customs associated with marriage (such as polygamy, bride price, arranged marriage, widowhood and female circumcision).

The Poetic Constructs of African Women

In the poetic works that have entered into the canon of African literature, the topic of colonialism is conspicuous because the colonial experience played a critical role in shaping the identity of most African societies and ways of life. Soon

after African men tasted Western education, a number of them who became writers quickly realized how much their customs were swept under the carpet by the colonizers and decided to uplift African cultural values. During this entire process of rehabilitating African customs however, Negritude writers particularly depicted African women in their poems as docile and passive and considered those attributes as good qualities. The textual representation of women by men in the early phase of written African literatures played an important role in the subordination of women.

The construct of the subaltern female in African poems traces its roots to the attitudes and beliefs that European and Arab missionaries passed down to African men. The colonial administrators and Arab missionaries in most colonized lands of Africa carefully selected men to assist them in their duties and influenced them to work for and support their male-dominated agendas. African men thus came to play a central role in all aspects of the society while women were systematically excluded. Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana affirms that: "Seuls, les hommes qui constituaient la main d'oeuvre utile aux besoins du colonisateur percevaient un salaire – les femmes étant exclues de la vie économique – selon l'idéologie occidentale. Cette transposition d'idéologie a été fatale pour la gent féminine" (286).

Similarly on the educational scene, African men were given the unique privilege of benefitting from Western education as colonial schools were opened to men first in the name of the civilizing mission but eventually to suit a specific

male-oriented colonial agenda. The privilege accorded to the African man through colonial education has considerable implications for African literature because most of the early texts were by African men. African literature became a male enterprise. As Carole Boyce Davies in *Ngambika*, observes, European colonialism, as well as traditional attitudes to women, combined very successfully to exclude African women from the educational processes that prepared one for the craft of writing.

Some of the African men educated by European and Arab institutions and who became authors assimilated the attitudes of foreign patriarchal cultures to depict the uneducated African women in very limited and traditional roles. They tended to glorify women in subaltern, domestic and maternal tasks. African male poets and writers such as Leopold Sedar Senghor, David Diop, Camara Laye and Abdoulaye Sadji glorified women and at the same time went at portraying them often as mothers in terms of their nurturing capabilities. By doing so, they maintained women in an essentially powerless position. Senghor's "Femme Noire," for instance, portrays the idealized African woman thus:

> Femme nue, femme noire
> Vêtue de ta couleur qui est vie, de ta forme qui est beauté!
> J'ai grandi à ton ombre; la douceur de tes mains bandait mes yeux.
>
> Femme nue, femme noire
> Je chante ta beauté qui passe, forme que je fixe dans l'Éternel
> Avant que le Destin jaloux ne te réduise en cendres pour
> Nourrir les racines de ta vie. (*Oeuvres poétiques* 16-17)

Senghor in this poem depicts the African woman as a mother whose sole role is to rear and nurture children. He glorifies her beauty and her maternal role; however, his portrayal objectifies her and thus keeps her in a subaltern position.

The idealized representation of African woman by Senghor is also echoed in David Diop's poem "Afrique," dedicated to his mother:

> "A ma mère"
>
> Afrique mon Afrique
> Je ne t'ai jamais connue
> Mais mon regard est plein de ton sang
> Ton beau sang noir à travers les champs répandu
> Le sang de ta sueur
> La sueur de ton travail
> Le travail de l'esclavage
> L'esclavage de tes enfants. (*Coups de pilon* 23)

Africa is regarded as his mother destroyed by colonialism. The image of woman here is that of an Africa humiliated and subjected to colonial domination. The poet who considers his mother as Africa therefore chants its suffering and victimization.

Similarly, the introductory poem "A ma mère" in Camara Laye's *L'enfant noir* has been described by Adebayo as a "maternal epic" (179). This nostalgic remembrance of his childhood beside his sweet mother focuses on the woman's patience and resignation:

> Femme noire, femme africaine, ô toi ma mère
> je pense à toi...
>
> O Dâman, ô ma mère, toi qui me portas sur le dos, toi qui m'allaitas, toi qui gouvernas mes premiers pas, toi qui la première m'ouvris les yeux aux prodiges de la terre,

> je pense à toi...
>
> Femme des champs, femme des rivières, femme du grand fleuve, ô toi, ma mère, je pense à toi...
>
> O toi Dâman, ô ma mère, toi qui essuyais mes larmes, toi qui me rejouissais le coeur, toi qui, patiemment supportais mes caprices, comme j'aimerais encore être près de toi, être enfant près de toi!
>
> Femme simple, femme de la résignation, ô toi, ma mère, Je pense à toi... (*L'enfant noir* 7-8)

Not only did these African male poets and writers subalternize female subjects in their writings, they also defined women exclusively on the basis of their relationships to men and in terms of their maternal roles. Henri Lopes observes this in their works, with a critical tone:

> La femme africaine n'est qu'un objet poétique. Elle est muse. C'est le lot de toutes les mères et nourrices qui avec les berceuses et les contes font déjà éclore la sensibilité et le goût du merveilleux chez ces bouts d'êtres qui aiment à s'endormir sur leur dos. (9)

Certainly the African women depicted by the poets are valued, idealized and glorified as sweet mothers and as nurturers of children. Their depictions show the patience, resignation and suffering of African women, all evidently considered positive values by the male authors. But these textual representations reflect social realities and are rooted and implicated in power inequalities in the societies that produced them. These patient women were also those who suffered domination from oppressive husbands. Buchi Emecheta states that: "the good woman in Achebe's portrayal, is the one who kneels down and drinks the

dregs after her husband. [...] In his view that kind of subordinate woman is the good woman" (42). What Emecheta describes here is a situation where a woman accepts to eat the most worthless part of the food that remains after her husband has eaten the juicy part of it. This kind of submissive wife is considered as the perfect African woman.

The cause of African women has not been well served by the majority of African men in their writings. They treat issues that deeply concern women such as childbearing, motherhood, the subordination of women to men inadequately and with bias. In Negritude literature, as Adebayo observes, "the mother is an object of reverence and symbol of patience, long suffering and fecundity, while Africa is conceived and eulogized sometimes in terms of a woman, a mother who is ravaged by years of colonial spoliation" (178-193). Adebayo's remarks shed some light on the construct of the subaltern female personae. By chanting women's beauty in their poems the Negritude poets particularly Senghor, maintains that women are not in bondage and thus need not be liberated. In *La parole aux négresses* Awa Thiam takes these writers to task, by saying that rare are those among them who talk with objectivity. Thiam states that they do not preoccupy themselves much with women and when they do, they only sing and glorify women's femininity and their sufferings. Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana agrees with Thiam, asserting that:

> Parmi les différentes images que le poète [Senghor] et ceux du même mouvement littéraire exaltent, l'image de la mère occupe une place prépondérante. Personnage mythique ou imaginaire, la mère devient symbole du royaume de l'enfance et du paradis perdu. Aux heures de

> détresse, d'amertume elle est celle qui efface la souffrance et redonne l'espoir à l'exilé. Cette idéalisation et mystification de la femme africaine caractérisent les poètes mais également les romanciers de la même période. Ainsi Abdoulaye Sadji et Camara Laye offrent dans leurs romans un portrait semblable de la mère sublimée. (326)

Both Thiam and Herzberger argue that this glorification of African women as idealized mothers veils their submission and exploitation. They insist further that to African male writers, this image of the mother symbolizes tradition and an often idealized native land. Irène d'Almeida in *Francophone African Women Writers* lends her voice, noting that "when women were not flat, secondary characters, they were placed on a pedestal and idealized to such an extreme as to neutralize their existence as real people" (8).

African novelists inherited a subalternized and domesticated image of African women from both the colonial system and the Négritude poets. A majority of African male texts depict women as inferior and subordinated to men so as to reveal the full authority that men have over women's lives. The power exercised over the subordinated African women was imposed on them and no room is left for them to partake in any decision that affects them and thus they are perpetually silenced. It should be equally borne in mind that even after independence, the condition of African women did not change much because independence failed to absorb, transform and accept women as individuals who might contribute to nation building. In politics, they are still not fully represented especially in societies where women are largely subjugated to Islamic dictates and Sharia laws. Religious rites confine them to housekeeping and most of the

time, prevent them from playing active roles in societies. They are educationally handicapped and unlike their male counterparts are not equipped with a Western education that can prepare them to participate in administrative jobs.

The Fictional Constructs of Subaltern African Women

Some writers who followed Negritude poets represented women in subordinate conditions in their writings but with the difference that they denounced certain Islamic, Christian and African rites that facilitate the oppression of African women. The themes of the subalternity of the African female subject and of her oppression by patriarchal forces run through Mongo Beti's *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* (1956) and *Mission terminée* (1957), Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les soleils des indépendances* (1970) and Ibrahima Ly's *Toiles d'araignée* (1972). The four novels depict the condition of traditional African women in Cameroon, Ivory Coast and Mali. The female characters referred to in these novels are confronted with traditional attitudes in their societies, which abuse and enslave women and which are enforced by patriarchal ethos.

In *Mission terminée*, *Les soleils des indépendances* and *Toiles d'araignée*, the issue of bride price is central and puts Niam's wife, Salimata and Mariama, the female characters of these novels, in a subaltern condition. It could be said that their parents "sold" them and that they came to be the "property" of their husbands and under their control. These women, though, attempted to free themselves by running away. Niam's wife abandoned Niam's house and

Salimata escaped from Tiemoko's home. But they were not really free after leaving their husbands' homes especially when the bride price was not returned. In these African cultures, the brides' families would be expected to repay the bride price if the bride left the husband.

Contrary to the idealized portrayals of African women by Negritude poets, Beti, Kourouma and Ly show pity for the condition of African female subjects in their texts. Referring to Kourouma, Arlette Chemain-Degrange observes that:

> La remise en cause des coutumes connaît, avec Ahmadou Kourouma, puis avec Ouologuem, une acuité non encore atteinte auparavant. Excision, infabulation, viol rituel faisaient partie du domaine réservé à l'ethnographe, et Ahmadou Kourouma est le premier romancier négro-africain à avoir violé ces tabous. (342-343)

The novels of Beti, Kourouma and Ly specifically depict woman's exploitation by man and her subordination to him in marriage, sex and domestic roles. Works by these authors also give an account of the harsh conditions that these female characters endure. Pierrette Herzberger remarks that:

> Ces ouvrages reflètent certes la sensibilité artistique de l'auteur et la sympathie qu'il éprouve pour la femme africaine, mais donnent une vision imparfaite de la psyché féminine. Le rôle de la femme n'est défini qu'en fonction de celui qu'elle joue dans la vie de l'homme et non pour elle-même (20).

In *Mission terminée*, the female character around whom the plot is centered is caught in a quagmire of domination and subordination. After his wife leaves him, Niam demonstrates his masculine arrogance: "Moi, je suis le sol. Elle n'est qu'une feuille morte qui vient de se détacher de l'arbre. Elle a beau tournoyer,

elle a beau faire: elle ne peut éviter finalement de tomber sur le sol" (23). Niam's wife works as a house-wife and takes care of his farm as well. Her absence leaves his house in shambles and shows his inability to take care of himself. The author is nevertheless aware that the wife's role is more complex. This traditional portrayal of Niam's wife shows her as a servant good only for taking care of the house and farming. The narrator notes that:

> Au bout de six mois de ce régime, Niam n'y tint plus. Il se rendit d'abord une nuit auprès de Bikokolo, le patriarche, le sage du village, à qui il avoua, non sans peine parce qu'il était un orgueilleux, qu'il désirait récupérer sa femme dont il avait grand besoin pour tenir sa maison. Au vrai, il était beaucoup plus interessé que cela: il avait raté une saison d'arachides depuis le départ de sa femme, puisqu'il n'avait personne d'autre pour travailler dans son champs (23).

In Niam's eyes his wife is just a piece of machinery, a function in his service. The subservient position of the wife is subtly critiqued in the way she is portrayed. It is obvious in the novels written by Beti and Kourouma, that most of the female characters are represented as secondary and defined in relation to male characters. Irène d'Almeida asserts that:

> La femme est rarement un personnage principal aussi bien dans la trame narrative que dans la thématique où elle occupe une place tout-à-fait secondaire, se situe à l'arrière plan et ne se trouve définie que par rapport aux hommes. (137)

It is true that Niam's wife in *Mission terminée* and Salimata in *Les soleils* appear frequently in the novels but the principal characters of *Mission terminée* and *Les soleils* are male characters. Although the first part of *Les soleils* admittedly covers Salimata's life, Fama, her husband, is unquestionably the protagonist of

the novel. The second part of the novel is devoted to Fama and the main focus is on his travails in post-colonial Africa. Similarly, in *Mission terminée*, Niam's wife is omnipresent but Jean-Marie's adventure overrides other themes, and he is seen as the protagonist. It is true that the plight of Niam's wife remains important to this literary piece but Jean-Marie Medza is the main character. Bikololo, the patriarch of the family, asked him to go to Kala to bring back the wife of his cousin Niam who had run away. The principal actors in *Mission terminée*, *Le pauvre Christ*, *Les soleil des indépendances* and *Toiles d'araignée* are male. The female characters only play secondary roles. Beti admits this during an interview with Kembe Milolo:

> Enfin le personnage principal du *Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, c'est bien le prêtre, le missionnaire blanc. Et s'il faut absolument trouver un deuxième, un autre personnage central, ce serait plutôt le jeune garçon qui voit. Parce que tout est vu par le regard d'un enfant qui est l'enfant de choeur et qui sert de boy à ce missionnaire. Il est vrai que la femme occupe une place importante dans ce roman. Mais ce n'est pas la place principale. (276)

This remark by Mongo Beti is in line with the traditional portrayal of women as secondary characters in the society, a reality reflected in a majority of African male texts. Male characters are vocal and visible while the female characters remain silent and in the shadows.

Since African traditions place an emphasis on male superiority, the wife is placed under the authority and will of her husband. In such arrangements, a woman is trained to obey and respect all members of her husband's family. On the contrary, the husband or the male child is trained to rule his household

knowing quite well that when it comes to important decisions, his wishes prevail. By virtue of this societal arrangement the husband-wife relationship is like a master-servant relationship. This norm of living gives women powerless status and they are frequently abused by their husbands as it is the case with Niam's wife:

> Niam traitait une femme aussi travailleuse exactement comme si elle avait été une chienne! Et encore, une chienne, ça peut toujours faire des chiots, tandis que, elle qui n'avait pas d'enfant, était jugée bonne pour toutes les injures et tous les mépris. (21)

African tradition, generally speaking, vests much power in men while the place of women is understood in the context of man's identity. The mother rears the children while the husband contributes very little to their daily upbringing. Yet when it comes to making major decisions on matters that affect children, the father does that alone. This custom, transmitted from generation to generation, is largely pursued to subordinate women for it is believed that no woman should have power over a man. Women are assigned domestic responsibilities such as cooking, washing and cleaning. It is not surprising that in most African societies, women play the roles of wives, mothers, sisters and daughters — roles named in definition to their positioning with men. The power of patriarchy is manifested in all aspects of life, for the husband makes the final decision in the house.

Medza, the protagonist of *Mission terminée*, testifies to that patriarchal power when he avers that: "[Ma mère] me supplia, en larmes, de m'éloigner, de ne pas offenser davantage mon père, de ne pas mériter sa malédiction" (246).

Children are often trained to listen to their father in order not to incur his wrath for if a child disobeys his father, his mother is blamed for not rearing him well. The irony, however, is that the father and not the mother takes credit for his successful children. It is also assumed that the success of the child lies in the hands of his father and not those of his mother. For the child to be successful, the mother, as the tradition has it, must be obedient, passive and submissive to her husband.

Similarly, in Ibrahima Ly's *Toiles d'araignée* one notices how the power of patriarchy functions. The father, in this case, decides who marries his daughter, and his expectation is that the daughter will obey his orders and not question them: "Si j'entends de toi la plus petite objection, je te maudis, tu quitteras la maison et aucun de mes parents ne te recevra" (48). The narrator describes Mariama's dejection and decries her state:

> Mariama est éperdue. Elle a le même reflexe que l'iule qui se love pour se protéger du danger, elle se contracte davantage et ferme les yeux. Ce barrage est rompu par le torrent qui bouillonne en elle. Des larmes chaudes coulent de ses yeux, et comme dans un rêve ou les cauchemars abondent, elle voit défiler la chaîne des événements qui ont fait d'elle un ballon de chiffons sur lequel tapent non pas des enfants, mais des adultes; des êtres qu'elle craignait et vénérait. (37-38)

The author shows the inability of the young woman to help herself amidst the adult men who decide her fate. Mariama does not only respect them but she also fears them because she knows that once they take a decision, nobody can change it. The tears rolling down her cheeks are signs of her unhappiness and of her weakness to challenge the elders. This patriarchal attitude is also evident in

many African novels where we frequently find ruthless husbands and authoritarian fathers lording it over docile, obedient mothers and helpless girls. Seydou Badian depicts this situation in *Sous l'orage* and shows how Kany, the female character around whom the story is centered, is victimized by her authoritarian father. S.M. Battestini in his *Seydou Badian écrivain malien* describes how Kany is faced with patriachal domination:

> Elle pleure beaucoup, ce qui n'est encore qu'une forme de soumission. Elle met peu de conviction à tenter de se défendre, de s'imposer; finalement de façon brutale, on peut déplorer qu'elle n'ait pas de caractère. Mais est-il aisé d'en avoir après des siècles de tradition où justement l'individu n'existe pas, mais ne fonctionne que par rapport au groupe? (33)

As Battestini observes, one can say that certain aspects of the traditions make it very difficult for individuals to be themselves and make their own decisions without any interference from the parents or the community. A similar trend is observed with Mariama, the female character in Ly's *Toiles d'araignée*, who tries to confront the patriarchy but suffers for her action. Her struggle is futile in a society that strongly believes in its entrenched patriarchal values.

Marriage and the Subordination of African Women

It is commonly agreed that subordination can only be understood in a binary context of which the other is domination. Patriarchy is a relationship of domination and subordination imposed on women in marriage or otherwise in order to subjugate them. Adrienne Rich provides a useful definition of patriarchy:

> The power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which female everywhere are subsumed under the male. (57)

My intention is to demonstrate that in a traditional African family or marriage, patriarchal power keeps the woman in a subaltern position. Needless to say men usually make important decisions that affect the family without consulting women. This implies that men are responsible for both their lives and those of their wives and children as well. This attitude appears in many Islamic societies where it is often said that a woman can only go to paradise through the mediation of her husband, hence she has to obey him and comport herself in such a way as to qualify for the "eternal life" hereafter. In Kourouma's *Les soleils des indépendances*, the narrator notes: "Allah a dit que le paradis de la femme se gagnait dans la fumée de l'accomplissement du devoir de son mari. Alors Allah pouvait prévoir pour Salimata une place de repos dans son paradis éternel" (170). This religious doctrine is a vital tool in the construction of male hegemony and in the subalternization of woman.

Marriage in many African societies is considered sacred and a woman who is not married does not command any respect. In traditional society, marriage is often arranged and leaves the concerned young woman out of the decision-making. In some cases, if the woman is lucky, her mother informs her about her father's choice of her husband prior to her marriage and her duty is to obey and not to challenge this decision. If she resists, she and her mother are

punished. In *Toiles d'araignée*, Mariama's mother (Hawa) rebukes her daughter when Mariama objects to the marriage:

> As-tu perdu la raison? Comment oses-tu parler ainsi devant moi? Comment oses-tu dire que tu ne l'aimes pas en ma présence? Serais-tu devenue folle? Aurais-tu perdu tout sens de la pudeur? Veux-tu faire de moi la plus misérable des mères, après avoir été la plus malheureuse des épouses? Je t'ai appelée pour t'informer. Penses-tu qu'on m'avait demandé si j'aimais ton père? (46)

A married woman has to be patient and submissive to the wills and dictates of her husband even when subjected to the most distasteful treatment. The narrator of *Les soleils des indépendances* summarizes the subordination of African women in an Islamic culture in the following words: "La soumission de la femme, sa servitude sont les commandements d'Allah, absolument essentiels" (45). Similarly, Beti depicts that subordination by portraying Niam's wife as family property when Bikokolo sends Jean-Marie Medza to bring her back. The whole community is agitated and this remains essentially the men's affair. Jean-Marie Medza relates how Niam succeeded in bringing other men to his side: "Niam avait tous les habitants mâles du village dans sa manche. J'ignore comment il s'y était pris. Ils manifestaient tous leur désir de me voir accepter d'aller là-bas faire peur aux beaux-parents de Niam" (26-27). When it comes to marital issues, men always come out en masse to help.

Niam himself, convinced by the rule of tradition, tells Jean Marie Medza that: "Cette affaire n'est pas seulement la mienne, c'est l'affaire de toute la tribu. Cette femme n'est pas seulement la mienne, c'est notre femme à tous. C'est

donc nous tous que la situation actuelle affecte" (26). When Bikokolo the patriarch assigns this special mission, Medza dares not refuse. Besides, Medza speaks the white man's language and the assumption when he is being sent to Kala is that he will be able to intimidate Niam's wife's father so that the latter forces his daughter to return. Bernth Lindfors notes that "Medza's job is to present Niam's case to the errant girl's father and demand her return. In other words, he functions as an enforcer of traditional moral codes, an agent of social conformity" (23). Medza has no choice but to carry out the assignment.

The task of bringing back Niam's wife even involves the village's chief who lends his bicycle to Medza so that he can ride it to Kala to fetch back Niam's wife. Medza adds to his earlier statement: "Le chef de canton daigna consentir à apporter sa petite pierre à cet édifice national: la récupération de l'épouse Niam. Il me prêta son vélo" (34).

Niam's wife complains about a husband who always beats her. This compelled her to run off with a man from a neighboring tribe. By running away Niam's wife shows that she is not willing to be his property. However, her act indirectly defies the whole community. Arlette Chemain-Degrange observes that:

> La conduite de l'épouse de Niam, la tante de Khris, constitue un défi à la soumission exigée des femmes. C'est elle qui a laissé le pauvre Niam désemparé devant son champ inculte. [...] Son attitude de paysanne émancipée ne correspond pas au portrait type cher aux premiers poètes. (199)

Chemain-Degrange views Niam's wife's decision to abandon her husband as an act that defies the patriarchal arrangement. Niam's wife's action can also be

interpreted as a shrewd way of freeing herself from the oppressive men without necessarily having to confront them or engage them in a fight. Her departure from Niam not only created a vacuum in his house but also in his farm. Niam wants his wife back because of the work she does for him both in his house and his farm.

In most African societies when a married woman runs away from her husband's house, relatives of her husband go to look for her, especially when a bride price is paid to the woman's parents during her marriage. The bride price is a practice in which a bride's parents receive money and goods from the bridegroom in exchange for his right to marry their daughter. To some, it is as if this woman is for sale. If the woman decides to abandon an abusive husband, she often runs to another man whom she likes and who she thinks can pay back the bride price her parents received from her former husband. This is exactly what Niam's wife did when she left her husband.

The issue of bride price is complex and at times it clearly amounts to the traffic in women between two men. The woman's freedom is crippled and that of her parents is, too, in some cases, particularly if her parents do not have money to pay back. Zambo, Medza's cousin who accompanies him to Niam's father-in-law, rebukes the father-in-law in the following terms: "Ainsi donc, fit observer durement Zambo, tu serais prêt à appuyer ta fille si elle voulait divorcer? C'est donc que tu te sens capable de rembourser sa dot?" (66). Even though Niam's father-in-law says that his daughter is free to do what she wants, the issue is not

as simple as that. For the marriage to be dissolved locally, the father has to give back the bride price that he received from Niam because failure to do so would mean that his daughter would still remain Niam's legitimate wife.

The question of bride price frequently appears in African texts. Indeed, it is a central theme in Ibrahima Ly 's novel. Iman Ngondo notes that bride price and the notion of the woman as merely a pawn in an alliance between groups continue to dominate marriage practices. The obligation to refund a man's bride price in case of divorce originally represented an attempt to stabilize a marriage. When a bride price was paid, the woman was compelled to remain in her husband's house regardless of what might be done to her. Ngondo argues, however, that it may have the opposite effect, pushing a woman who must endure an unfortunate marital situation to search for a suitable partner outside of marriage. This is the situation in which Niam's wife finds herself when she decides to run away with another man. Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price* and Guillaume Oyono Mbia's *Trois prétendants un mari* also address this complex issue. Lauretta Ngcobo echoes that: "Sometimes even the death of one partner does not invalidate the marriage itself. If it is the wife who dies, the husband may go back to his in-laws to ask for another wife for more or less the same dowry" (142). In such a case the family may need to give another daughter without another bride price.

A woman may also find another man who is ready to pay back her bride price to her husband, thus freeing her to remarry. If not, the society and most

especially the parents of her husband still consider her to be his wife. Niam's wife is a victim of this traditional arrangement. It is this same practice that is being forced on Mariama of Ibrahima Ly's *Toiles d'araignée* when Bakary, the old man proposed to her by her father, distributes money to all:

> On la conduisit chez Bakary avec la lâche complicité de l'ombre. Le mariage avait déjà été noué la veille. Le marché était déjà conclu: le fiancé donnait deux cent mille francs du Béléya à son beau père, douze vaches laitières à sa nouvelle épouse, une seule à sa belle-mère, un boubou à chaque frère ou cousin de Mariama, une robe à chaque soeur ou cousine. Il s'engageait à donner devant le témoin, les vingt mille francs de dot réglementaires, et qui devaient selon la loi couvrir l'ensemble des dépenses du mariage. De l'argent a été distribué jusqu'aux grand-parents de la jeune fille. (57)

Mariama's marriage was like a product being sold whereby all parties involved agreed on a price and she was disposed of as an object of merchandise. With Bakary paying the bride price to his in-laws, he has sealed his marital contract as required by the traditions.

Another disturbing issue besides selling off a woman into marriage is the negative image of divorced women in most African societies. Ngcobo argues that only rarely do divorcees earn the understanding of the community, for instance in cases where the woman has a clean reputation that contrasts sharply with her husband's maltreatment of her. Even proven cases of assault or abuse against the woman by her husband may not be enough to justify her abandoning her matrimonial home.

In *Les soleils des indépendances*, Salimata ran away from Tiémoko to marry Fama. I believe that Arlette Chemain-Degrange's view of Salimata as an

emancipated woman needs to be reevaluated. True, Salimata frees herself by running away from Tiémoko's house to meet Fama in the city. Does this act make her an emancipated or modern woman? I will say no. I admit that Salimata made a free choice for the first time by marrying Fama but she did not escape from the traditions that oppress women. Salimata still remains a subordinate woman in Fama's house as evidenced in the subservient roles she plays.

From a feminist perspective *Les soleils des indépendances* can be considered as an account of traditional Ivoirian society where women are still subjected to patriarchal rules encoded in Islamic and traditional rites. Salimata was first given in marriage to Baffi, immediately after her circumcision ceremony when she was still suffering the pains of her genital alteration. At the death of Baffi, as tradition dictates, Tiémoko stepped into his deceased brother's shoes and inherited Salimata as his wife. The poor treatment she received from Tiémoko forced her like Niam's wife in *Mission terminée*, to free herself from his violence by running away to marry Fama. Both novels depict reality that women often run away from husbands imposed on them when they are treated poorly. This does not necessarily constitute liberation. Although Salimata chooses her husband, her problems are not over because as the narrator puts it, "la dot étant payée, le mariage célébré, Salimata vivra dans la cour de son mari comme une femme pour la cuisine, les lougans" (42). In addition, Salimata must also work hard to feed Fama: "Et c'est Salimata, l'épouse qui doit assurer le riz" (3). She must also take good care of her husband and make sure that he is well-fed and

respected. Such treatment, which can be likened to the way the servant treats the king, gives women in typical traditional African societies the qualities of a "good wife." "La bouillie avait cuit; elle réserva une assiétée bien sucrée à Fama. Avec les soins que la femme doit, quel qu'ait pu être le comportement de l'homme, quelle qu'ait pu être sa valeur, un époux restait souverain" (45). In contradiction with the expectations of the husband's roles in a traditional African society, Salimata is the provider of food and not Fama. Traditionally for a man to be considered as a deserving husband he should be the provider of food and shelter. Nevertheless, although Salimata is seen to feed her husband, this does not accord her a primary place in the house. The belief that the metaphysical essence of women is to be mothers and in the service of men continues to attribute power to men.

One notices that Niam's wife, Mariama and Salimata all have their roles defined by men and are still in the shadow of men (husbands or fathers) in most cases. Not one of the women is free from cultural bondage and masculine enslavement. Even though they attempt to free themselves, the burden of tradition still weighs heavily on them. By and large, all of these female characters are depicted as victims of oppressive situations in their matrimonial homes.

In traditional African societies women are instructed by traditions to obey and comport themselves according to traditional or religious dictates. The patriarchal pedagogy they receive from infancy teaches them simply to obey. They are also educated to copy the docile and passive attitudes of their mothers

in order to succeed as good wives later in life. These dictates leave no room for women to query; they must accept things the way they are established. Any attempt to go against the constituted norms is rewarded with severe punishment as is the case in *Toiles d'araignée* where Salamanta rebukes Mariama in the following words:

> Tu n'as pas voulu de ton mari parce qu'il est vieux. Jusqu'ici, je ne t'ai fait subir aucune violence. Nous avons simplement organisé pour toi une réception digne de ton rang. Tu méprises ce que notre société vénère. Tu paieras. A partir d'aujourd'hui, tous les soirs, tu seras enfermée avec Tiécoura dans la cellule. Tu seras la femme d'un lépreux. (191)

In the texts in my study that represent the first generation of post-Negritude male writers, it is pertinent to note that the female characters have little voice. Men are often seen deciding their fate, their destiny. Moreover, the reader gets to know these female characters only through the accounts of male characters who are either protagonists or narrators. In *Mission terminée*, Medza, the first-person narrator plays this role; in *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba*, Denis, also a first-person narrator, does this; in *Les soleils des indépendances* and *Toiles d'araignée*, an unidentified third-person male narrator plays this role. By and large, male characters interpret women through their own lenses.

Physical and Sexual Exploitation of African Women

Beti's, Kourouma's and Ly's novels depict men sexually and physically exploiting women. Although the younger female characters in their novels are exploited, they become slowly conscious of the conditions and situations in which

they live. This is not, however, true of the older generation of women in their texts. These women consider what they experience in their daily life as normal — it is all their cultural and religious practices have allowed them to know and expect. Molara Ogundipe states that: "African women are more than wives. To understand their multi-faceted identities beyond wifehood, we must look for their roles and statuses in sites other than marriage" (13). What Ogundipe implies here is that women, besides accomplishing matrimonial responsibilities, also do a lot of other things in the society.

The village women in *Mission terminée*, for instance, accept their prescribed roles within domestic and agrarian domains. The same is true of Mariama's mother and other women of her generation in *Toiles d'araignée* and of several of the women in *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba*. Reflecting on how Beti's novels depict the exploitation of women, Arlette Chemain-Degrange observes:

> Le premier critère du choix d'une épouse est sa rentabilité à l'ouvrage. [...] Les romans de Mongo Beti confirment cette réalité: La femme est recherchée pour son travail. [...] Le rôle essentiel de la femme cultivatrice est mis en évidence par la leçon que l'épouse de Niam donne au village. [...] Niam contemple avec attendrissement "les femmes des autres courbées sur la terre," lui qui a perdu son ouvrière. Cette compassion pour les cultivatrices penchées sur la terre, et la reconnaissance du travail qu'elles fournissent remonte au deuxième roman de Mongo Beti: *Le pauvre christ de Bomba*. (178-179)

Awa Thiam corroborates Chemain-Degrange's view and states in her *La parole aux Negresses* that women in sub-Saharan Africa are saddled with domestic and tedious agrarian work by their husbands whom she calls "Dieu-son-mari" (22):

> Elles remplissent les taches ménagères et agricoles [...] Ces travaux sont pénibles à exécuter. C'est le cas du pilage du mil, de la préparation du couscous à base de farine de mil, du ramassage du bois mort pour le feu, de la préparation des mets, de la lessive. [...] La Négro-Africaine moyenne ne connaît ni la cuisinière, ni le réfrigérateur, ni les "Moulinex" et autres appareils ménagers. (21)

Most of the older female characters depicted by Beti, Kourouma and Ly are traditional women who do not attempt to liberate themselves from their suffering. These women are traditional in the sense that they accept their role as mothers and housewives. Domestic work ranges from cleaning the house, washing their husband's and their children's clothes and cooking huge meals for the large family. In most cases, they have to work on farms as well.

In *Mission terminée*, the author situates his scene in Kala, a typical village where women work to their fullest in farming activities. The narrator referring to Niam, says that: "Pendant ce temps, il errait à travers les champs comme un fantôme: il contemplait les femmes des autres, courbées sur la terre et remuant doucement le sol avec leur petite houe" (24-25.) Women instead of men are seen largely engaged in farming activities. In this scene Niam does not have his wife to do similar work for him. Instead of Niam working on his farm he spends his time contemplating women working. His attitude shows that he needs his wife to do the physical work for him. She is exploited in this fashion. The narrator notes that: "Si cette femme n'a pas d'enfants, elle a au moins la force de travailler à la maison et aux champs" (47). Kembe Milolo affirms that specific roles are assigned to women in African societies. In her reading of Beti's *Le Pauvre Christ*

de Bomba, she asserts that: "Dans le pays de Mongo Beti (Cameroun), les travaux ménagers et agricoles et les soins des enfants prennent à la femme beaucoup de temps" (95). The narrator of *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* confirms this:

> Ici, les mères de famille travaillent énormément malgré l'heure tardive, elles écrasaient des arachides sur la pierre ou elles hachaient de la viande ou elles faisaient des lavements à leurs enfants. Elles ne se fatiguent jamais. (91)

The narrator's observation clearly illustrates the physical exploitation of sub-Saharan African women. Similarly, in *Mission terminée* the narrator's description of his uncle's wife testifies to her physical deterioration as a result of hard work and multiple childbirths:

> Sa femme était presque aussi grande que lui. Jeune, elle avait dû être splendide; maintenant les maternités successives, les travaux des champs ou dans les plantations de cacao l'avaient fanée. Elle était douce, charmante, serviable, effacée comme une sainte. Elle ne parlait guère, probablement par ce phénomène de mimétisme qui, dit-on est courant dans les vieux ménages. (63-64)

In Beti's novels women are frequently used by men for their own selfish ends. For instance, the Kala chief in *Mission terminée* gives his daughter Edima in marriage to Medza believing that Medza, an educated young man, will be well-disposed to represent his (the chief's) interests in town. We learn of this in a dialogue between Fils-de-Dieu and Zambo.

> -Je parie que depuis l'arrivée de Jean-Marie à Kala, [le chef] n'avait songé qu'à une chose: comment coller sa fillette au petit. [...] Mais quel profit peut-il bien escompter de l'événement? C'est ce que je ne vois pas encore très bien.

> -Tu parles, dis Zambo, il est certain d'avoir désormais quelqu'un à la ville pour l'aider plus efficacement dans ses sales combines. Et quelqu'un d'instruit s'il te plaît. (215)

This same commerce is noticed in Beti's *Le roi miraculé* whereby each clan in the village gives one of their daughters in marriage to Essomba, the village's king, so as to receive certain privileges from him. This becomes glaringly clear when the king converts to Christianity and decides to repudiate his wives. In this situation, each clan struggles to have their daughter be the king's sole choice as a bride in order to allow the clan to continue to benefit from the king's favor. This story clearly shows again how men use women for their own benefits; women here are instrumental in the negotiations of the community's interests.

In *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba*, in an attempt to expose missionary practices in Cameroon, Mongo Beti reveals not only the failure of Reverend-Father Drumont, the overseer of Bomba's Catholic church, but also deplores the misery, exploitation and oppression of the young women caged in the "sixa." Catherine, Monique, Marguérite Anaba and many other female characters in the story are presented as prostitutes, mercilessly exploited by the Europeans and their African male agents. The depiction of female characters as prostitutes is common in Beti's novels. In Beti's *Perpetue* a mediocre civil servant prostitutes his wife to a higher officer in order to get promotion in his work. It is also noticeable in *Mission terminée* where the narrator says:

> Ma mère me donna beaucoup plus tard sa version de la brouille [de] l'époux Niam. Selon elle, madame avait eu des relations scandaleuses

> avec un petit voyou de la ville, market-boy de sa profession, lequel lui offrait des cotonnades et d'autres choses agréables à voir et propres à séduire une jeune femme. (21)

Similarly, in *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba*, women of the "sixa" are all depicted as prostitutes because they are compelled by the system set up by Drumont to sell their bodies cheaply in exchange for food. This attracts them to Zacharie, the RPS's cook:

> Les femmes qui couraient après Zacharie, peut être qu'elles n'ont même pas regardé sa haute taille, ni ses chaussures de cuir; peut être qu'elles viennent seulement pour des choses enfantines: une miche de pain, une boîte de conserve, sachant que Zacharie est cuisinier. Mon père dit souvent que les femmes ressemblent aux enfants par leurs désirs. (28-29)

Female characters who dwell in the "sixa" are symbols of exploited women through the missionaries' religious practices because not only are they used in construction works but they are also unpaid for the work they do. The Christian religion brought by Drumont, for example, was a means to exploit women and not to liberate them. Throughout the novel one notices the subaltern roles of women. They clean churches, carry luggage to the church and are used as laborers in erecting church buildings. Drumont himself recognizes that he exploits these women when he says:

> La femme indigène, la petite femme noire si docile, quelle machine idéale! [...] Nous nous amenons, nous, les chrétiens, nous, les messagers du Christ, nous, les civilisateurs. Et qu'est-ce que vous croyez que nous faisions? Que nous rendons à la femme sa dignité? Oh! surtout pas, mon Père. Ah, non! Nous la maintenons dans sa servitude. Mais, cette fois, à notre profit. (327)

This remark from Drumont shows us once again how Christianity oppressed women through its machinery. Similarly, the "sixa" that Drumont erected in Bomba claimed to prepare young women for marriage, but in reality it designated what their roles were to be as wives. They were there to receive domestic education. Perfect wives, according to Drumont's religious ideology, were the ones molded to be obedient and docile. They were also to play traditional roles as mothers rearing and educating children. By and large the female characters that Beti features in *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba* are oppressed women whose roles in this novel are fashioned by Christian religious practices implanted by missionaries in Southern Cameroon. Mongo Beti asserts that:

> Le problème féminin est posé, mais d'une façon accessoire, d'une façon assez parallèle et simplement par le biais d'une institution catholique (la Sixà) qui est typiquement sud-camerounaise et qui appartient à l'époque missionnaire au Sud du Cameroun où les missionnaires profitaient du rôle qu'ils jouaient pour faire croire aux femmes que pour avoir un mariage qui soit vraiment valable, il fallait qu'elles fassent d'abord un séjour à la mission catholique. Et pendant ce séjour, naturellement, la mission utilisait cette main d'oeuvre gratuite. (276-277)

Mongo Beti's critical portrayal of missionary practices reveals to what extent Christianity did harm to women. Raphael, the catechist vested with the responsibility of taking care of the "sixa," makes love with the women and spreads his syphilis. Raphael also offers these young women as prostitutes to his friends. The young women prefer this to the hard labor he would assign to them otherwise. It is clear that these young women of the "sixa" are forced into prostitution through economic dependency, which Raphael guarantees in

exchange for sex. Gerald Moore describes this situation in the following terms: "Raphael, the catechist-director of the "sixa," has been systematically debauching the girls in his charge and infecting them with syphilis [...] the girls are cruelly overworked and constantly intimidated by the catechists" (79).

One wonders why Raphael's role was not given to a woman. It is true that Reverend-Father Drumont did not know about the sexual exploitation of the women in the "sixa." However, he was largely responsible for what happened to them because this terrible institution is at the root of the prostitution and victimization of women. When Drumont came back from his tour of Tala village and heard about the scandal at the "sixa," he conducted a medical inquiry and this revealed the harm done to these young women. They had essentially become inmates of this institution, living in poor conditions in unhealthy dormitories. To worsen the already bad situation, Drumont proceeded to inflict inhumane punishment on these women. It is only during Reverend-Father Drumont's robust interrogation that we see the women of the "sixa" speaking for themselves. After these poor girls were forced to confess their sexual lives, they were brought one after the other to be beaten by Anatole at the order of the Reverend-Father Drumont. Reverend-Father Drumont himself failed to discipline his male workers who turned these young women into sexual slaves and instead blamed what happened on the innocent women. As is commonly the case in patriarchal societies, these women were the scapegoats, held responsible for

whatever went wrong in the society. The unpaid labor at the "sixa," furthermore, revealed the exploitation to which these young women were subjugated.

African Women as Scapegoats of Sterility

Female circumcision practices are partly responsible for women's sterility in many African societies. Kourouma's *Les soleils des indépendances* comes to mind here. Salimata is a traditional woman who suffers the atrocities of female mutilation and carries this unfortunate experience with her throughout her life. In a series of flashbacks, Kourouma evokes her memories of circumcision, rape and sterility. Chemain-Degrange views Salimata's sterility in light of the female circumcision that she endured and avers that: "Il faut saisir le destin de Salimata dans son ensemble pour comprendre la portée de ce premier élément du récit: l'initiation. La conséquence en est le maléfice de la stérilité, véritable obsession pour la généreuse épouse" (325). The circumcision operation has a devastating effect on Salimata's life.

Kourouma criticizes traditions by exposing the problems Salimata is going through, especially sterility. Female circumcision often damages women's reproductive organs and consequently results in women's sterility. The issue of sterility is handled with seriousness in most African societies for women are valued first as mothers. A number of African male writers and poets exalt women in their maternal roles and consider sterility as a negative thing that can happen to a woman. Herzberger-Fofana corroborates this view: "La plupart des écrivains

africains exaltent les fonctions maternelles de leurs héroines et considèrent la stérilité comme une malédiction divine qu'il convient de conjurer" (229). A barren woman is an isolated woman because children are viewed in many African societies as inheritance. In most cases when a woman is considered barren she tries in every possible way to have a child even by visiting village spiritualists to ask for help. Kourouma describes the travails of Salimata in her efforts to become pregnant: "Et que n'a-t-elle pas éprouvé! Le sorcier, le marabout, les sacrifices et les médicaments, tout [...] Rien n'en sortira"(27). By doing all this, Salimata was attempting to appease the spirits and God in order to have a child and thereby become fully integrated into her husband's family.

The norm is that a sterile woman is a nonentity, and the family of the husband encourages him to take another wife. Fama, being from a royal family, has an enormous weight on his shoulders if he is to remain with a woman who cannot give him a child. The narrator remarks: "Au village, on avait médit Fama: un légitime, un fils de chef qui courbait la tête sous les ailes d'une femme stérile" (93). Fama had affairs with younger women in his desperate efforts to have children and even inherited Mariam, his cousin's wife. However, no children apparently result from these liaisons. The reality is that Fama is as infertile as Salimata. But women are usually blamed for sterility, not men. The narrator puts it in the following words: "La femme est l'arbre de vie; elle seule peut être accusée de stérilité, car on n'attribue jamais cette responsabilité au mari. Aucune

femme mariée ne demeure volontairement sans enfant et la stérilité totale est la pire des malheurs qui puisse lui arriver" (30).

Women found to be barren are often treated with disrespect to the extent that they must abandon their matrimonial homes. In *Mission terminée* Niam's wife is held responsible for the couple not having children and is insulted by the society and ill-treated by her husband. The narrator remarks that:

> C'est le sort commun chez nous à toutes les épouses sans enfants d'être en butte à un étrange anathème dont il faut chercher l'origine chez nos frères bantous. Une épouse mère, elle, se voit pardonner toutes les infidélités, tous ses caprices. Mais vous devez savoir tout cela. Bref, la femme Niam était partie. [...] C'est toujours ainsi qu'elles partent, du reste: de nuit. Et c'est pour cette raison qu'on les appelle
> les enfants de la nuit. (22)

Commenting on the poor treatment of women considered as barren in traditional African societies, Bernth Lindfors argues that Niam's wife has been a disappointment to her husband as a wife. What Lindfors implies here is that by failing to have children, Niam's wife has not lived up to her side of the marriage contract. This has won her the contempt of the entire adult community. It is therefore not surprising that she should seek release from the miseries of her home life by involving herself in a romantic affair with a stranger. The supposed sterility of Niam's wife in a way liberated her because she was able to leave her husband's home for a while and avoided his beatings.

The subjugation of African woman makes her the victim in many situations. Even if she is not responsible, she is always blamed for what goes wrong. This attitude might be in line with men's belief that woman is "evil."

Nothing however proves that Niam's wife is barren; this assumption is simply due to the fact that the society at large attributes this failure to women. Jean-Marie Medza, the narrator in *Mission terminée*, says the following about Tante Amou who cannot have any children: "Je suis convaincu aujourd'hui que Tante Amou faisait un complexe parce qu'elle n'avait jamais pu avoir d'enfant" (21). Barren women have complexes not only in their matrimonial homes but also among their fellow women who have children and in the society at large.

Kourouma is from a Muslim background and his representation of African woman in his novels reflects both an indigenous and Muslim point of view. His handling of sterility in his novel is to criticize traditional attitudes toward women. Salimata, like Niam's wife, is perceived as a barren woman by her society. The childless woman in some traditional African societies is considered as a devilish creature and regarded as a useless woman in the house. She seeks desperately to quit this pitiful condition by opting for various sacrifices recommended by village or Islamic spiritualists whom she visits for help. Kourouma's *Les Soleils des indépendances* reveals the multiple sacrifices made by Salimata in order to have children. This issue most of the time is of more concern to women than to their husbands because the women are desperate to keep their marriages from collapsing. They will run to perform rituals in order to have children. In *Les soleils des indépendances* the narrator tells us about this ritual.

> Le sacrifice protège contre le mauvais sort, appelle la santé, la fécondité, le bonheur et la paix. Et le premier sacrifice, c'est d'offrir; offrir ouvre tous les coeurs. Et sait-on jamais en offrant qui est le secouru, le vis-à-vis?

> Peut-être un grand sorcier, un élu et aimé d'Allah dont un petit mot suffirait pour féconder la plus déshéritée des femmes. (61)

A childless woman finds herself in such a difficult situation that she is willing to give whatever she has for a child in order for her place in the marriage to be secured. At times women who find themselves in these situations try to be mothers to other children by adopting a relative's child with the permission of their husband. This is not, however, to say that these women abandon their struggle to have their own children for their husbands. Children in most African families are a must because a majority of communities need them to help with their farming activities. Families with many children mean much work can be accomplished in the farm, thus ensuring a huge economic revenue. Beti and Ly place much emphasis on farming activities considered traditional activities and show how women and children are laboring to increase the family's productivity.

African Women and Polygamy in Men's Fiction

Beti, Kourouma and Ly all describe polygamous settings in their depictions of everyday life for African women. Women in their texts do very little to oppose or reject polygamy; even if they are not happy about it, they end up accepting it. One notices particularly that women of the older generations keep quiet in order not to provoke the wrath of their husbands or their communities. Some women who are unable to conceive even seem to welcome their husbands'polygamy. Salimata welcomes her husband's new wife. The narrator says: "Salimata avait salué avec joie la coépouse et expliqué avec grand coeur et esprit qu'une famille

avec une seule femme était comme un escabeau à un pied, ou un homme à une jambe; ça ne tient qu'en s'appuyant sur un étranger" (157). Salimata's kindness to her co-wife, however, is contradictory to her later behavior. Salimata later fights Mariam whom she had greeted with enthusiasm on the first day of her arrival. The narrator throws some light on this:

> Salimata devint jalouse, puis folle et un matin elle explosa, injuria. Les deux co-épouses comme deux poules s'assaillirent, s'agrippèrent l'une au pagne de l'autre. Mariam voulait coûte que coûte tomber le pagne de Salimata afin que chacun vît "la matrice ratatinée d'une stérile," et Salimata dévêtir Mariam afin que tout le monde reconnût "la chose pourrie et incommensurable d'une putain." (152)

One remarkable thing here however is that Salimata stopped respecting her husband after he brought a new wife home. Arlette Chemain-Degrange corroborates this view: "Salimata ne se sent plus d'obligations envers l'époux qu'elle vénérait auparavant. Plus de tendresse. Elle refuse à faire bouillir sa marmite avec le produit de son propre travail" (284). With the arrival of Mariama, Salimata has learned that her sacrifice for her husband has to stop; she has also decided to abandon her unreserved subordination to him.

Polygamy has long existed in Africa. Beti's *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* shows his male characters very reluctant to abandon this way of life that they claim was passed down to them by their ancestors. Issues related to polygamy in Africa today are variously interpreted by a majority of African feminist critics. Buchi Emecheta for example believes that polygamy empowers the African woman. She argues in her article "Feminism with a Small 'f'!" that:

> In many cases polygamy can be liberating to the woman, rather than inhibiting her, especially if she is educated. The husband has no reason to stop her from attending international conferences like this one [...] Polygamy encourages her to value herself as a person and look outside for her family and friends. It gives her freedom from having to worry about her husband most of the time. (178-179)

The issue of polygamy in Africa has to be properly addressed, because the majority of African women, those who are the most affected, are illiterate and very different from the few educated ones whom Emecheta thinks that polygamy can liberate. Education being a powerful tool for the liberation of women, Buchi Emecheta might be correct in her analysis. She has to remember though that feminism is out to correct all forms of domination to which the generality of women are subjected. Emecheta's postulate is very limited. Polygamy does not do any good to women in African societies ultimately it does not even benefit educated women because they also suffer subordination. Fatima Mernissi decries polygamy and asserts that: "Polygamy entitles the male not simply to satisfy his sexuality, but to indulge it to saturation without taking into consideration the woman's needs, the woman being considered a simple "agent" in the process" (16).

Beti's *Mission terminée*, *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba* and *Le roi miraculé* are all written before independence and depict the subaltern role of uneducated women. Kourouma's *Les soleils des indépendances* and Ibrahima Ly's *Toiles d'araignée* are written after independence but the condition of women in these novels by men remains fairly unchanged. Independence, as portrayed by these

authors, failed to alleviate the sufferings of women as their status remained subaltern. It is nevertheless pertinent to recognize and applaud the attacks launched by these authors on certain Christian, Islamic and traditional African practices that subjugate sub-Saharan African women, even though the authors still depict their female characters as subaltern. Their criticisms of the religious and traditional rites that plague women portray women differently from the Negritude poets and from writers who glorify the subaltern roles of African women.

CHAPTER THREE

READING SEMBENE OUSMANE AND THE METAMORPHOSIS OF THE FEMALE PERSONA IN MALE FICTION

> Ousmane, perhaps more than any other African novelist, gives a privileged and dynamic role to women. The most striking example in this respect is provided by *God's Bits of Woods* in which women constitute a catalytic element and take an active part in the demonstrations of the rail workers during the strike.
>
> Martin Bestman (1975: 143)

Ousmane and the Rehabilitation of African Women

Sembène Ousmane, whose feminism Martin Bestman captures in our epigraph, deserves to be studied by scholars of African literature because aside from his feminist posture, Ousmane remains one of the most accomplished African writers of the pré and post-independence periods. Born in 1923 in Ziguinchor, Senegal, Ousmane worked variously as a soldier, a docker, a bricklayer, a mechanic and a trade-union leader before becoming a writer and filmmaker. This novelist belongs to the second generation of African writers and as a witness of colonial atrocities in Senegal, he vehemently criticized the colonial enterprise in Africa and more specifically the wrongs done to Africans. Ousmane does not, however, limit his writings to the condemnation of colonial

practices; he also attacks the political and religious practices as well as leaders of post-independence Africa. This prolific writer denounces the subordination of Senegalese women in his texts mainly through his condemnation of polygamy. He fights for the liberation of African women in his writings and is committed to their cultural, political, economic and social emancipation.

Ousmane is a self-taught writer. He published, among other works, *Le Docker noir (1956), Ô pays mon beau peuple (1957), Les bouts de bois de Dieu (1960)*, *Voltaïque (1961), L'Harmattan (1963), Le Mandat* suivi de *Véhi-Ciosane (1964), Xala (1973)* and *Niiwam (1999).* He has also produced several films that have won prizes. By filming a number of his novels Ousmane adds cinema to literature as a catalyst of social change. Realizing during his writing career that many Africans are still illiterate, he believes that the film medium can be an effective means of getting his message across. His is a quest for an equitable society in which women can be treated equally with men and work as partners in nation-building.

Ousmane, like many African writers of his generation, features in his first novels a principal protagonist on whom the plot of his novel centers. *Le docker noir*, *Ô pays mon beau peuple* and *Le mandat* are concrete examples. Martin Bestman corroborates this view:

> On notera avec intérêt que le récit des deux premiers romans est centré d'emblée sur un héros, un personnage autour de qui convergent les événements et dont le romancier raconte l'aventure singulière, plus ou moins individuelle, si l'on peut dire. Mais à partir des *Bouts de bois de Dieu*, l'on s'aperçoit que l'auteur se dégage de cette voie-là; il s'éloigne

> d'une intrigue simple pour faire vivre toute une foule de personnages, ce qui donne une ampleur nouvelle au dessein du romancier. (395-396)

Le docker noir and *Ô pays mon beau peuple* are characterized by an individual's revolt. Ousmane's novels have a revolutionary tone and this perhaps makes his novels different from those of his contemporaries. In *Xala*, *La noire de...* and most especially in his masterpiece *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, one can clearly discern Ousmane's revolutionary posture against all forms of oppression. This novel reveals Ousmane's artistic response to the radical social changes taking place to overthrow the unjust and oppressive white apparatus. The novel is based on the Dakar-Bamako railway strike of October 1947 to March 1948 when workers agitated for better working conditions. Ousmane is devoted to people's causes; his works show a social commitment to transform the society. A committed writer such as Ousmane uses his texts not solely to inform but also to evoke an individual's social, economic and political awareness.

Ousmane closely observes Senegalese society and in his fiction attacks the injustices suffered by the people. He is very suspicious of bourgeois African intellectuals who distance themselves from the masses. *Le mandat* and *Xala*, works in which he attacks post-independence Senegal, come to mind here. In *Le mandat*, he criticizes in particular the administrative system of independent Senegalese society, class divisions, religion, and the oppression of women. According to Frederik Ivor Case, Ousmane

> étale devant nous la misère et la décadence d'un état, d'une société et d'une religion qui vivent en porte-à-faux avec les principes moraux

> fondamentaux de la culture du peuple. L'égoïsme qui caractérise ceux qui ont l'autorité bureaucratique et le pouvoir économique influe sur toutes les couches de la population et détruit systématiquement la dignité humaine de tous. (42-43)

Dieng is the protagonist of *Le mandat*. Even though he is illiterate and unemployed, he has two wives — Mety and Aram — whose presence is felt throughout the novel despite their subordination to Dieng's authority. These women are passively submissive to their husband and live as traditional women under his roof. Surprisingly, these women are more courageous than their husband in confronting outsiders who cause him problems. Dieng is very weak outside his matrimonial home, and his wives are the ones who rescue him from his troubles.

In the stories in *Voltaique* (1961), the author exposes the institution of polygamy and shows the weakness of this practice when women come out gradually from their docility to rebuke the male oppressor. In "Ses trois jours," Noumbé suffers enormously because Moustaphe, her polygamous husband neglects her. Moustaphe is always absent and unable to meet the requirement prescribed by polygamy that says that the husband should sexually satisfy his wives and love them equally. The narrator describes Moustaphe's failure to meet this expectation:

> La nouvelle se propagea dans la maison: que Moustaphe avait découché, alors que c'était les "trois jours" de Noumbé. Les ménagères la plaignaient. Ce n'était pas la règle du jeu, que Moustaphe découcha. La polygamie avait des lois, qu'il sied de respecter. (58)

Despite all the preparations Noumbé makes to receive her husband, including going into debt and depriving her children of the food she cooked to please Moustaphe during his supposed three-day visit, the latter at first failed to show up. When he finally appears, Noumbé shows him through her cold reception of him and his two friends that she is not to be treated as a nonentity. Noumbé's attitude leads one of Moustaphe's friends to observe that: "Notre épouse n'est pas très éloquente aujourd'hui [...] Moustaphe, nous allons partir, déclara encore l'homme sentant la froideur de Noumbé" (69). The narrator gives us more details about the event. "Moustaphe comprenait bien que Noumbé se moquait de lui et cherchait à l'humilier devant ses pairs" (69). Notably, Noumbé, who initially submitted herself to masculine domination metamorphoses into an individual who effectively rejects polygamy by ignoring her three nights with her husband. The dialogue between Moustaphe and Noumbé throws more light on the unfolding plot and shows how Noumbé moves from a passive acceptance of polygamy to an active struggle against it.

- Tu aimes vraiment plaisanter. Ne sais-tu pas que ce sont tes "trois jours"?
- Oncle!... Je te demande pardon. J'avais complètement oublié cela...Me voici épouse indigne, (lançait-elle, toujours assise, regardant droit sur Moustaphe.)
- Vraiment tu te fous de moi!
- Oncle! comment oserais-je...Moi?...Et qui m'aiderait à entrer au paradis?...Sinon mon digne époux. Jamais, je ne me moquerais de toi ni dans ce monde ni dans l'autre.
- On le dirait.
- Qui? demanda-t-elle.

- Tu aurais pu te lever à mon arrivée pour commencer...

- Oh!...mon oncle, pardonne à ton épouse égarée, éblouie par la joie de te revoir. Si ma maison s'égare, qui en est le responsable, Oh! Oncle?
- Au juste que contiennent ces trois plats? demanda Moustaphe vexé.
- Ces trois plats!... (Elle regarda le mari...un sourire malicieux au coin de l'oeil.) Rien... Si plutôt "mes trois jours". Rien de ce qui t'intéresse... Y a-t-il quelque chose qui t'intéresse ici...oncle?.... (69-70)

In the above dialogue Noumbé summons the courage to confront Moustaphe for the first time since her marriage to him. She heatedly makes him realize the problems inherent in a polygamous marriage. To make the situation worse for Moustaphe, Noumbé deliberately breaks the three plates containing the food she had prepared to welcome her husband: "Exprès Noumbé renversa le premier plat [...] Elle cassa les deux autres plats" (70). Female protagonists in three of Ousmane's other stories attack polygamy and masculine dominance: the mother in "La mère;" Nafi in "Lettre de France;" and Yacine in "Souleymane." In "La mère," for instance, the courage of the mother is notable. She confronts and challenges the king, who sleeps with every woman and abuses his royal status by reducing every woman to his sexual property. The mother ridicules the king and plots to overthrow him. The narrator's commentary interspersed throughout the dialogue clarifies what happens to the king after the mother defies him.

> -Sire, dit-elle, à te voir, on dirait que tu n'as pas de mère...De ta naissance à ce jour, tu n'as combattu que la femme, parce qu'elle est faible.
> -Tuez-la, hurla le roi.
>
> L'assistance n'obéit pas. Les paroles avaient touché. Le roi, beuglant, hurlant de colère, injectait son amer fiel dans un langage vulgaire. La mère sans orgueil ni fierté, reprit:

> -Vous fûtes témoins quand il se servit de vos soeurs, sur ses ordres vos pères furent assassinés. Et maintenant il s'en prend à vos mères et vos soeurs... A vous voir, tous, on dirait que vous ne possédez plus de diginité...
>
> De plus en plus furieux, le roi se leva brusquement, d'un revers de main, il envoya la vieille sur le sol. Mais ce geste ne fut pas renouvelé. Le roi se sentit saisi par les poignets, soulevé. Pour la première fois, les sujets armés de courage se révoltèrent et leur roi fut destitué.... (40-42)

The mother's courage liberates all; her words are like a piercing sword and a catalyst of consciousness to others who rally around her to dethrone the oppressive and womanizing king. One may wonder why Ousmane first presents female characters in his novels as docile before they confront the men in the stories. This trend is noticeable in *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* where the women in the text are first depicted as submissive but later emerge as strong and active women during the strike. By portraying women as subservient Ousmane opens up an avenue for them to become conscious of their condition and it is this "prise de conscience" that pushes them to act. Brenda Berrian, when referring to some of the women in *Voltaique*, suggests that:

> Sembène opens up opportunities for African women to develop a more positive self-awareness and to draw upon capabilities that have laid dormant within themselves. In order for Senegalese women to move forward, they must cast off outdated ideas and modes of behavior and view their plight realistically. In short they must place themselves on the outside in order to look in. By doing so, they may begin to take steps to eliminate ignorance and mass illiteracy and improve their status in the twentieth century. All four women — Yacine, the mother, Noumbé, and Nafi — challenge the traditional order, which condemned them to a secondary role. (203)

More than any other woman portrayed in Ousmane's short stories, the mother in "La mère" demonstrates exemplary courage and can be regarded as a liberator of her people. This is so not only because as a woman she defied a man, as did Yacine and Noumbé, but also because she defied a powerful, tyrannical man who was the decider of the people's fate, a man who was venerated and feared by all.

It is ironic that in many Islamic countries such as Senegal, men are allowed to have as many wives as they wish while women may only have one husband. Women who are caught engaging in adultery are severely punished. Brenda Berrian argues that in Muslim societies, attitudes toward adultery are one-sided. Some married men engage in extra-marital affairs and are not regarded as committing adultery. It is believed that only women can be adulterers. The Senegalese community is based on a patriarchal system governed by Islamic codes of conduct. The consequences of masculine-controlled religious practices are noticeable in some of the judgments passed on women. The people who pass judgment on women are most often men, and in the male-dominated society, the woman is always the victim.

Ousmane's radicalism is aimed at reconstructing Senegalese society. In his universe, men, women and children are all victims, and all must fight to free themselves from oppression. To put it in Marxian terms, as Adebayo noted in her *Critical Essays on the Novel in Francophone Africa*, by uniting in order "to confront their bosses, the workers have nothing but their chains to lose" (89).

This is particularly true for the women whose roles were redefined at the end of the strike.

In *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, Ousmane first depicts the social condition of African women and then shows how the women participate and struggle in the strike of the railway workers. Through the strike, it was possible for the women to change the conditions in which they were living by removing some of the previous restrictions imposed on them by religious or traditional rules.

Ousmane portrays women's roles differently from Senghor, Diop, Beti, Kourouma and Ly in transforming women considered as objects into women of will. Many traditional women in his *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* renounce some of their traditional roles and engage in the struggles first for national freedom and second for themselves. With their experiences and roles in the strike, they take on new responsibilities. Ousmane believes that no society can develop effectively if it undermines the roles of its women. He steadfastly engages in the fight for women's liberation from the traditions that enslave them. He admires the roles played by women during the struggle against foreign invasions and always campaigns for recognizing women's contributions and giving them a place in society. In an interview with Kembe Milolo, Ousmane stated:

> Il m'est difficile de séparer l'homme de la femme dans ma tête, dans ma vie privée. Je ne les prends pas séparément. Je refuse de tomber dans cette catégorisation où la femme est ici et l'homme est là. Mais pour le mouvement auquel nous avons participé dans les années 40-60, les femmes ont pris leur part. Et lorsqu'on retrace honnêtement ce mouvement, on doit rendre à la femme sa place. (299)

In moving female characters in his novels from a secondary role to a stage in which they reject their subaltern condition, Ousmane is without a doubt a pioneer African writer. His works show that women are relegated to the bottom of the ladder in some traditional societies and in those where Islamic culture has left its imprint. Ousmane is a staunch advocate of women's freedom; his respect for women is communicated to us by the narrator of "La mère" :

> Respecte la femme, pas pour ses cheveux blancs, pour ta mère d'abord, puis pour la femme elle-même. C'est d'elle, la femme, que découle toute grandeur, celle du maître, du brave, du lâche, du griot, du musicien... Dans un coeur de mère, l'enfant est roi.... (41)

The feminist perspective of Ousmane's work and especially of *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* is quite striking. Ousmane shows the political force and capabilities of women, most of them traditional women who do not know how to read and write. There is no single individual working alone in *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*; people function as a collective, including female characters who come together to participate alongside the men in the strike action. The strike becomes an eye-opening experience for women as it raises their level of consciousness and for men as well because they realize the capabilities of the women. The consciousness is therefore from both sides leading to changes in the society and in the way things are now perceived.

Categorizing Women in *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*

African society is founded on family. In the traditional African case, however, it is mostly polygamous. *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* clearly testifies to a hierarchical order where men are on the top and women are at the bottom and serve the men. The different categories of women present in the novel include the traditional women (Niakoro, Assitan, Fatoumata, Ramatoulaye, Mame Sofi, to mention a few). These traditional women, molded by traditions, are very submissive to their husbands prior to the strike. The most senior of them is the old mother, Niakoro, who symbolizes old traditions. It is by virtue of her life experiences ranging from domestic affairs to the various strike actions she has witnessed that she warns her granddaughter:

> Tu n'as jamais vu une grève, toi! Ton petit père en a vu une lui, et il était encore jeune. Des soldats vont venir. Ils tireront. Et toi, au milieu des hommes, tu seras comme une chèvre au milieu de chameaux en débandade. Tu n'as donc pas peur? (LBBD 19)

Assitan was a traditional woman prior to the strike, "une parfaite épouse selon les anciennes traditions africaines: docile, soumise, travailleuse, elle ne disait jamais un mot plus haut que l'autre" (LBBD 170-171). According to custom, she was married off without any consideration as to her feelings for her first husband, and at his death, she was remarried to Bakayoko, her deceased husband's brother. She obeyed the traditions blindly after she was led into this second marriage without being consulted.

> Neuf ans auparavant on l'avait mariée à l'aîné des Bakayoko. Sans même la consulter, ses parents s'étaient occupés de tout. Un soir, son père lui

> apprit que son mari se nommait Sadikou Bakayoko et deux mois après on la livrait à un homme qu'elle n'avait jamais vu [...] De nouveau, l'antique coutume disposa de sa vie: Elle fut aussi soumise à Ibrahima qu'elle l'avait été à son frère. (LBBD 170-171)

Assitan is not the only female character in *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* subjected to masculine or cultural domination. Fatoumata respected her husband like a "demi-god." "Fatoumata s'installa derrière son mari et resta ainsi durant tout le repas en signe de politesse" (LBBD 29). Ramatoulaye, Awa and Dieynaba were also faithful and obedient wives. Before the strike these women were apparently happy in their roles as mothers and housewives and accepted their situation as normal. Unconscious of their subaltern condition, they were content to live under their husbands' dominance in the name of tradition or religion. Nouréini Tidjani-Serpos corroborates this view:

> Avant la grève, la plupart des femmes trouvaient leur condition normale, elles ne se posaient pas trop de questions. La tradition avait crée la condition féminine telle qu'elle était, la colonisation s'en accommodait, la routine la maintenait tant bien que mal et chacun acceptait la division sexuelle du travail telle qu'elle était établie. (135)

The second category is the westernized woman (represented by N'Deye Touti). N'Deye Touti was molded in a Western way and therefore accepted the status quo for different reasons. She saw everything in the colonial system as good. Patriarchal and foreign hegemony over women both faded away with the advent of the strike. Patriarchal power was overthrown because the economic power that sustained it was destabilized with the strike. The colonial institutions that helped enforce patriarchal power were equally attacked. Foreign hegemonic

ideology and patriarchal arrangements that once combined to subdue women were contested. Western values and education that were tailored to perpetuate European hegemony and which condemned any form of revolt crumbled. N'Deye Touti, enjoying the privileges of a Western education and elite status, rejected the idea of women taking part in the strike because the Western education she had received had taught her not to rebel against any constituted authority.

> C'était N'Deye Touti qui répondait. [...] Elle n'avait pas pris part à l'échauffourée et désapprouvait la conduite des femmes, y compris celle de sa tante Ramatoulaye. On lui avait appris à l'école qu'il y avait des lois et que nul n'avait le droit de se faire justice lui-même. Pour elle, tout ce qui venait de l'école ne pouvait être mis en question. (LBBD 177-178)

N'Deye Touti did not know much about her own society. She lived in a fantasy world dreaming of Europe with all its beautiful things. She did not care to know about her home country because her life was totally focused on the West. The Europe that she knew through her books and education represented the better world. She, therefore, defied the striking women and condemned their activities.

> - Parce que vous n'avez pas le droit de faire ce que vous avez fait. Lorsque les alcatis sont venus, ils ont demandé Ramatoulaye et vous leur êtes toutes tombées dessus. D'après la loi, c'est un délit! (LBBD 178)

Humiliated by the same authority that she had refused to defy at the beginning of the strike, however, N'Deye Touti later changed her opinion and ended up challenging the oppressors.

Ad'jibid'ji the little girl, represents the third category and a new generation of woman. Very courageous and talented, this young girl insists on playing a role

in the strike. Similarly, Ousmane's portrayal of Ad'jibid'ji, who speaks up to the astonishment of her grandmother, embodies the redefined status of the Senegalese woman. Both the young girl and her grandmother, irrespective of their age differences, play significant roles in the strike. It is as if the young girl pushes her grandmother Niakoro to metamorphose into a strong woman before her death. Ad'jibid'ji incarnates the changes taking place when, at her tender age, she already talks confidently with Niakoro about the strike, which is a colossal issue that even scares adults.

> - Mais tu ne sais donc pas qu'aujourd'hui ils tiennent un grand palabre, sur la grève? [...] Et toi, au milieu des hommes, tu seras comme une chèvre au milieu de chameaux en débandade. Tu n'as donc pas peur?
>
> - De quoi, mama?
>
> - De quoi? Tu me demandes de quoi? Mais qu'est-ce que tu as dans la tête?
>
> - Du cerveau, mama, rien que du cerveau, repliqua Ad'jibid'ji. (LBBD 19)

Ousmane is an exception among writers of his generation in giving an active role to women in his novels. He represents women positively and he vigorously attacks patriarchal powers that lord it over Senegalese women. As David Murphy asserts, Ousmane's representations of African women, "manage at least to open the terrain and give voice to a wider range of concerns than was touched on by the preceding generation of African writers" (141). For instance, as Nigerian critic Martin Bestman observes, Ousmane depicts women's revolt against their parents as triggered by differences of opinion regarding marital,

religious and political ideology. Many of Ousmane's female characters who live in the shadows and are defined solely by their relationships to their husbands, emerge from their confined spaces to affirm their existence as individuals by rebelling against men's domination. The metamorphoses of Ousmane's women testify to the author's dream for the progress he wants for Senegalese women in particular, and for African women as a whole. As the Dutch Africanist critic Mineke Schipper notes:

> Sembène Ousmane, se chargeant de la défense des faibles dans tous ses romans, plaide aussi pour le progrès de la femme africaine et l'égalité des sexes. Souvent il peint l'état de soumission qui caractérise la plupart des femmes sous-développées, tout en indiquant les moyens et les possibilités pour en sortir. (88)

The militant tone of Ousmane's novels is an indication of his determination to change society drastically by bringing a Marxist perspective to issues such as politics, economics, culture and gender. Ousmane's revolutionary writing does not exclude women because the author adapts his Marxist posture to the idea that men and women are equally engaged in the class struggle. Pioneer Marxists tend to look at the problems of oppressed people from a male perspective. Antonio Gramsci and Georg Lukacs were mainly interested in analyzing the means by which the bourgeoisie sought to establish its hegemony over the rest of society. Ousmane's Marxism is focused not only on leveling society by fighting for the oppressed men of the proletariat; he also directs his attack on institutions such as polygamy that are used as a weapon by men to oppress women.

Ousmane integrates women into his vision of a Marxist revolution as part of the collectivity that must rise up together to confront their oppressors. To Ousmane, the whole community suffers from oppression: the workers, the students, men, women and children of the social strata. The only ones exempt from the suffering are the privileged few of the ruling class, the employers who run the system. It is not surprising, therefore, that the strike action is the affair of the masses, all of the subalterns who have been exploited in one way or another by the authority of the railways. Adebayo in *Critical Essays on the Novel in Francophone Africa*, analyzes this class struggle in Ousmane's novel:

> In the spirit of Marxist ideology, it is by massing together that the working class can achieve victory over the bourgeoisie. Industrialization, in this case the railway, provides the necessary conditions for this massing together of workers in *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*. This is why the bourgeois class has been described as its own grave-digger since it uses its capital to create the favorable condition for the germination of a working class consciousness. (90)

Bakayoko, the male leader and organizer of the revolution, is not presented as the novel's hero. As Ousmane shows, working-class men and women alike stood together in the struggle against the colonizers and their African collaborators. The chapter of the novel entitled "La marche des femmes" gives kudos to these women warriors. The long march from Thiès to Dakar demonstrated that the strike was also their concern, and they were ready to participate fully with whatever means were at their disposal to support their men. Thus they walked the fifty kilometres between the two cities. Ousmane makes the women collectively "heroic." As Minyono-Nkodo observes:

> Ces cinquante kilomètres à pied de Thiès à Dakar sont l'aventure héroïque accomplie par les femmes de Thiès, malgré une multitude d'obstacles, de lourdes fatigues et des privations de toutes sortes. Liées entre elles par une franche solidarité, elles s'entraident durant ce long parcours. L'accueil que leur reservent les habitants de Sébikoutane ranime celles qui sont sur le point d'abandonner. (51)

Ousmane's image of African women reveals the capacities of women in the society. Indeed, *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* reflects Ousmane's belief that Africa can only be liberated if women are included in the national struggle. Women play a significant role in this novel because the author is of the firm belief that gender equality can be achieved only if women are fully involved in the class struggle. To this author, a free Africa is the Africa that strives to reject Western capitalism, feudalism, and patriarchal domination and enslavement.

Metamorphosis in the Roles of Women during the Strike

In *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, women who were at first docile and submissive to their husbands metamorphose and rise above their traditional status to fight along with men. Dieynaba becomes a doctor who treats victims of police brutality during the strike. Likewise Ramatoulaye, who was a quiet and traditional woman before the strike, becomes a butcher of sheep. In traditional African societies of the sub-Sahara, in accordance with cultural prescription, men are the butchers of sheep. During the strike, Ramatoulaye's potential for playing a larger role in society emerged as she struggled with the sheep named

Vendredi, which she finally overpowered and slaughtered. The narrator describes the scene as follows:

> Vendredi gratta le sol de ses sabots, puis, tête baissée, il fonça et l'on eût dit qu'il rentrerait dans Ramatoulaye [...] Par trois fois, elle enfonça la lame dans le cou de l'animal; le sang gicla à nouveau [...] Ramatoulaye essuya son arme en la passant sur l'épaisse toison, puis elle se redressa. (LBBD 114-115)

In this violent, bloody scene, Ramatoulaye is not playing the traditional "feminine" role. With the practical necessities brought on by the strike, men had to turn over some of their responsibilities to women. In addition to slaughtering the sheep, Ramatoulaye plays a significant and active role in the strike itself, helping to defeat the policemen.

> Ramatoulaye avança encore d'un pas [...] Autour d'elle, on commençait à brandir des bouteilles, des taparquats, des pilons, des morceaux de bois ramassés ça et là. Les policiers se virent rapidement encerclés. L'auxiliaire voulut dire quelque chose. Ramatoulaye lui coupa la parole: "Toi, je n'ai plus rien à te dire. Si tu es encore debout, c'est grâce à ce toubab!" (LBBD 124-125)

Mame Sofi on her part turns into a fighter and displays the courage that had lain dormant in her for several years living under her husband's roof. She threatens him: " Si tu reprends le travail avant les autres, je te coupe ce qui fait de toi un homme" (LBBD 87). When the police come, she chases them away.

> Mame Sofi qui avait répéré près de la cabane un policier de petite taille l'assomma d'un seul coup de ses bouteilles de sable, puis, comme une furie, elle se rua sur l'auxiliaire et lui envoya la seconde bouteille en plein visage. (LBBD 125)

Georg Lukacs remarks that the working class movement "in plucking men from the unconscious dullness of their lives and turning them into conscious fighters for the emancipation of mankind transforms them into harmonious, contented happy beings in spite of the hard fate which they have to bear as individuals" (237). In Gramsci's and Lukacs' writings the subaltern person is always male, but in the context of Ousmane's novel she is a woman. Ramatoulaye plays a significant role in the revolution. In addition to the collective heroism noted in the novel, there is a depiction of how an individual develops ideologically. As Lukacs asserts, people grow more human via the social process of the struggle for freedom. It is not a surprise that, when the strike becomes unbearable, Ramatoulaye is radically transformed from a gossipy housewife into a fearless and dynamic woman. Her leadership qualities are manifested in her firmness, resourcefulness and sense of responsibility for others. Ramatoulaye affirms her leadership role:

> Quand on sait que la vie et le courage des autres dépendent de votre vie et de votre courage, on n'a plus le droit d'avoir peur ... Même si on a très peur! Ah! Nous vivons des instants cruels, nous sommes obligés de nous forger une dureté, de nous raidir. (LBBD 117)

Ousmane's 'prise de position' is a positive march toward the evolution of the subaltern African female subject in male fiction. For the social, economic and political condition of African women to change for the better, African men have to recognize the essential roles played by women in transforming the society. The strike which is the central theme of *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* serves as a

catalyst, prompting women to realize their potential to free themselves from domination. Nouréini Tidjani-Serpos asserts:

> Le hic, c'est que lorsque les femmes, que ce soient celles qui, comme Assitan, subissent le joug strict des anciennes lois africaines, ou que ce soit celles qui, comme N'Deye Touti, subissent l'attraction éblouissante des valeurs coloniales, décident d'être elles-mêmes et de prendre en mains leur destin, elles retrouvent automatiquement contre elles l'effort conjugué de la colère des féodaux et des colons qui sentent leurs intérêts menacés. (126)

N'Deye Touti's transformation is perhaps particularly significant in this regard. Although she is a learned person, unlike Ramatoulaye and most of the other women, she does not know much about her own society; the Western education she received focused mainly on Europe. Nevertheless, she learns from her hard experiences and eventually changes her worldview. As Edward Said (1994) notes in "Identity, Authority and Freedom," the curriculum designed for colonized countries was a mirror of that used in the colonizers' society. It was not an education that took into account the cultural values of the colonized people and it did not teach subjects that were relevant to them. It is not surprising, therefore, that Ndeye Touti knows a great deal about Europe and nothing about her own society. As Simon Gikandi points out, she has a lot to learn from the strike. She had totally yielded to the hegemonic colonial culture, at first disapproving of the strike and the other women's actions against the colonial machine. But when she is humiliated by the colonial masters who consider her just as savage as the rest, she undergoes a transformation. After being abused by the system she believed in so much, she comes out of her shell and joins in the strike action. As

the truth dawns on her and she faces the reality of her subaltern status, she, too, decides to confront the system which she had initially defended.

Thus, it is clear that *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* not only exposes the institutions of polygamy and patriarchy, but also projects sub-Saharan African women beyond the confines of subordination. Ousmane depicts the society as he perceives it, but he also points to the way he believes it should be. In telling the story of how subordinate women act to escape their inferior position, he imagines a different future for sub-Saharan African women. As Gikandi notes: "the greatest transmutation in the strikers' community is in the status of women" (122).

Among the many women who changed their traditionally accepted roles during the strike, it is perhaps Penda the prostitute who most eloquently testifies to the positive transformation of the African woman in Ousmane's fiction. Penda does not live according to accepted Senegalese ways of life.

Penda is an independent woman, a prostitute rejected by her society, a libertine who does not care about what the society says about the life she has chosen to live. To the people she incarnates a "devil" because Islam considers prostitutes as agents of Satan. On the walls of her room, one finds photos of movie stars and singers such as Clark Gable, Tino Rossi, Fernandel, as well as of half-naked white women. This is an indication that she has distanced herself from her community to live in a world of film stars and pop singers. Yet Penda also embodies the new African woman, for she is both articulate and increasingly politically conscious with the advent of the strike. Penda reveals herself to be a

fearless individual ready to participate courageously in public and social life. Even though no one wants to recognize her at first, her eventual role in the strike dignifies her and elevates her to glory. Penda's coming into the strike revolutionizes many things. She intimidates everyone she encounters, especially the men. She motivates men, women and children to fight. Finding an all-engaging role in the strike, she becomes a formidable force. She sees the strike as a catalyst for change so that men, women and children may have good living conditions. She says: "Pour nous, cette grève, c'est la possibilité d'une vie meilleure [...] Nous nous devons de garder la tête haute et ne pas céder" (LBBD 10). Among women in *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, Penda's courage is exceptional. Lahbib, one of the strike leaders who had hired her, recognizes Penda's leadership qualities:

> Par la suite, Lahbib se félicita souvent d'avoir embauché Penda. Elle tenait tête aux femmes et se faisait respecter des hommes. Un jour qu'au syndicat où elle venait assez souvent et se rendait utile, un ouvrier lui avait maladroitement touché les fesses, elle le gifla publiquement ce qui ne s'était jamais vu dans le pays. (LBBD 224)

The respect she later commanded came from the courage she displayed in the strike. Indeed, Penda is an adept organizer and an effective strategist throughout the strike. In the midst of men, Penda gives a speech signaling the beginning of a rupture from traditions and the celebration of a radical new role for women. Even after her death, she is considered a martyr and her name is constantly evoked. Her memory serves as a motivating force to those still fighting.

Minyono-Nkodo notes that:

> Penda apparaît fréquemment, dans le roman, d'une part parce qu'elle intervient directement en de nombreuses circonstances et d'autre part parce qu'on évoque volontiers son souvenir lorsqu'elle est absente ou que la mort l'a fauchée. (52)

Penda dies serving the cause of her people. According to Adebayo, her courage, like that of Ramatoulaye,

> serves as a leaven to the spirit of other rail-workers' wives who abandon the hearth-place and march on the railway masters who are exploiting and oppressing their husbands. Their march to Thiès leads to the subsequent surrender of the employers who accede to the workers' demand, thus putting an end to a long, crippling rail strike. (183-184)

If the strike succeeded, it was mainly because women decided actively to support the actions taken by their men. Men agitated for change but women's actions were keys to realizing the social, economic and political reforms that occurred at the end of the strike.

In much of his work, Ousmane portrays women transforming their societies. In a passage in his short story "La mère," the narrator praises the heroism of women universally and lauds the courage of wives, mothers, widows and girls.

> Gloire à ceux et à celles qui ont eu le courage de braver les calomnies.
> Soyez louées femmes sources intarissables;
> vous qui êtes plus fortes que la mort...
> Gloire à vous, coolies de la vieille
> Chine, tagalacoye du plateau du Niger!
> Gloire à vous, femmes de marins, dans
> L'éternel deuil! Gloire à toi, petite,
> Petite enfant, mais jouant déjà à la mère.
> L'immensité des océans n'est rien à côté de
> l'immensité de la tendresse d'une mère. (*Voltaique* 42)

Such passages might be describing the strength and courage of the women in *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, Niakoro, Penda, Ramatoulaye, Mame Sofi, Ad'jibid'ji as well all the women and mothers who died in the strike. But, as the citation from "La mère" reveals, Ousmane's feminism is universal: he lauds not only the courage of Senegalese or African women but also the efforts of women worldwide.

It is perhaps telling that the critic Minyono-Nkodo, whose brilliant analysis of Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* points out women's important roles in the book, nevertheless attacks the author's feminism:

> Mais que penser du féminisme de Sembène Ousmane? Le romancier n'est-il pas un peu abusif, complaisant, en peignant l'homme comme le "suiveur" de la femme dans la marche évolutrice de l'histoire? (53)

Writing in 1979, almost two decades after the novel's publication, Minyono-Nkodo nevertheless failed to embrace Ousmane's progressive vision, clinging instead to the patriarchal status quo.

The Lessons from the Strike

The strike brought about noticeable changes in the way women perceived life after the strike. Similarly, a reversal of gender roles occurred as men began to engage in certain activities which before the strike had been exclusively reserved for women. Old traditions and customs were gradually changing as, for example, one saw fathers and husbands in *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* going to fetch water. The narrator notes:

> Alioune avait réussi à persuader un bon nombre d'hommes que les vieilles coutumes féodales n'étaient plus de mise. On voyait maintenant des maris, des fils, des pères même, partir à la corvée d'eau et revenir le soir dans les concessions poussant des barriques ou portant des bouteilles. (LBBD 317-318)

It is obvious that the strike brought about a radical transformation, according women an important place in the society and suppressing some of the old customs that had formerly restrained them. Women's successful participation in the strike action led progressively to their emancipation. Niakoro-la-vieille's words at the beginning of the strike had anticipated these new developments: "Demain, femmes et hommes seront tous pareils" (LBBD 36). And indeed, after the strike, the appearance of women in public places was no longer taboo. As a result of their successful participation in the strike, women were invited to witness a man's trial. That is, when Diara was tried for betraying his colleagues by going back to work and violating women's rights, various women were invited to testify against him. That was the first time women were permitted to attend the trial of a man.

> Lorsqu'on jugea Diara au siège du syndicat, la salle de réunion était archicomble et avait perdu son apparence coutumière. On remarquait des présences féminines, ce qui était du nouveauté. (LBBD 131)

This is a new development in Senegalese society (and in African society in general where women tend to be excluded from men's gatherings). Women had never before been present at men's trials and had never been given audience. The narrator notes that:

> C'était la première fois que [Hadia Dia] prenait la parole dans une assemblée d'hommes. Une autre femme, plus âgée celle-là, monta à son tour sur l'estrade, elle parlait vite et d'un ton rassuré. On l'appelait la Sira. [...] Il y eut encore deux femmes qui vinrent raconter des histoires assez semblables à celles des premières, après quoi il se fit un long silence, chacun était troublé en lui-même de cette nouveauté: des femmes qui venaient de prendre la parole au milieu des hommes. Les regards allaient du président à Diara puis à Sadio toujours prostrés. [...] [Diara], tu mouchardes nos femmes, celles qui, nous le disons sans honte, nous nourrissent. (LBBD 151-152)

In line with the changes taking place, women also began taking on other roles traditionally played by men, such as that of provider. It had always been man's duty to feed their wives but after the strike everything was different:

> Un matin, une femme se leva, elle serra fortement son pagne autour de sa taille et dit: Aujourd'hui, je vous apporterai à manger. Et les hommes comprirent que ce temps, s'il enfantait d'autres hommes, enfantait aussi d'autres femmes. (LBBD 65)

This woman's statement is a warning to men that what men can do women can do even better.

The author further suggests that women will now have greater economic independence, some of them henceforth managing their husbands' money. Politically, Senegalese women have greater access to public speech, since Penda, by defying men and speaking out in public, has opened this door that has been locked for so long. Mame Sofi, optimistic about all these changes, says that men will consult women next time there is another strike: "[À] la prochaine grève, les hommes nous consulteront. Avant ils étaient tout fiers de nous nourrir, maintenant c'est nous les femmes qui les nourrissons" (LBBD 87).

The Bourgeois African Man and Polygamy in *Xala*

The main theme in *Xala* is the attitude of the new African leaders who, after ascending to power, forget the promises they made to the masses and start living a flamboyant life after emptying the coffers of their country. El-Hadji Abdou Kader Beye, the protagonist of *Xala*, is representative of this class. To display his wealth and to show that he is successful, he marries more than one wife, as is the custom in many African societies. As the narrator puts it: "cette troisième union le hissait au rang de la nobilité traditionnelle" (8). In *Xala*, his condemnation of the betrayal of the masses includes his depiction of women as victims of the institution of polygamy.

As we have already noted, Ousmane presents a strong critique of the damaging effects of polygamy on Senegalese society and he calls for liberating women from this oppressive system. Depicting the contentious issues surrounding polygamy, *Xala* plots the protagonist's failure. During a meeting of businessmen, Beye, the president of the chamber of commerce, announces that he will marry N'Gone. The news of his third marriage is received with applause from his business colleagues and other Senegalese people, except for Laye who questions this marriage: "Re-remarié, combien de fois?" (*Xala* 6). This third marriage, however, rocks the boat of polygamy.

The protagonist's failure can be summarized as follows: first, he is unable to share his love equally among his wives as Islam, which sanctions polygamy,

requires from a Muslim; second, he has no time for his wives and children; third, he ruins the business empire with which he is entrusted because of his third marriage and particularly the extravagant spending in which he engages. He keeps his wives in separate houses which means giving to each woman the money she needs for food and all her other needs. *Xala* depicts the Senegalese bourgeoisie after independence. In this novel, Ousmane criticizes the new African leaders who live in opulence while the majority of the people are wallowing in poverty. Ousmane invites the ruling class to become conscious, because if the struggle for independence is to bring hope to the people, the ruling class must show leadership. It is through Beye's saga that Ousmane plots the failure of polygamy, making this protagonist's ordeal symbolize the failure of Senegalese society. It is ironic that the same people who approved of Beye's third marriage recommended his expulsion from his job after his expensive marriage brought the company to bankrupcy. Unlike Dieng in *Le mandat*, who lives under the same roof with his two wives, Beye provided a separate apartment for each of his wives. This polygamous arrangement plants the seeds of unhappiness in Beye's household; more specifically, his wives suffer from solitude and abandonment. One cannot ignore the rivalry and jealousy among the wives. Oumi shows her hatred for Adja and distances herself, only to move close to Adja again when she realizes that Beye is preparing to take another wife. Both women manifest hostility to N'Gone, the third wife, on the day of her marriage to their husband Beye.

David Murphy observes that "the main prism through which Sembène looks at the status of women within African society is that of the institution of polygamy" (141). Polygamy reduces the African woman to the status of a 'second class citizen,' an inferior person in the household of her husband and someone whom the husband sees as an object that he can toy with. For instance, Adja Awa, Beye's first wife, suffers when her husband takes Oumi as his second wife. She decides to stay, however, because of her children. This is what she tells them: "Si je quittais votre père [...] et si je trouvais un mari, je serais la troisième ou quatrième. Et vous, qu'est-ce que vous deviendriez?" (*Xala* 38). Likewise, Oumi who was happy to be the second wife in a polygamous marriage opposes her husband's third marriage, fearing that she will now suffer from abandonment as Adja did. It is clear that women are treated as replaceable and that they feel they have no choices. Ousmane reveals that some men in African societies opt for polygamy to retain their 'privileged position' as the boss of the house and that they use the institution to exploit and control women. By fighting Islamic and traditional rites that encourage polygamy, Ousmane hopes to free his Senegalese sisters from the weight of Islamic religious practices that place women in the shadows. Minyono-Nkodo shows how this is an integral part of Ousmane's Marxist agenda:

> Quand on se rappelle que Sembène Ousmane est marxiste, on ne s'étonne pas d'entendre proclamer que la religion est considérée ici comme néfaste. Comment accepter une religion qui ne traduit que le pouvoir de domination d'une classe ou d'un peuple? (46).

The author empowers some of his female characters to expose dramatically the institution of polygamy in *Xala* and plot its failure. Ousmane uses N'gone to depict Beye's downfall for it is after his third marriage that everything goes awry economically in his household and in the company he manages. Furthermore, it is on the evening of his third marriage to N'Gone that Beye suddenly has "xala," a Senegalese word for impotence. The impotent Beye, alas, will not be able to satisfy his new wife sexually, much less the two other wives as well. His fear of impotence is increased by the fact that the husband in a polygamous society is expected to sexually satisfy his wives equally as dictated by Islamic law, and to spend three days with each of them in turn.

In not being able to meet his conjugal obligations, Beye symbolizes the failure of polygamy. Furthermore, the author uses this example as a way to translate the failure of the bourgeoisie. Wealth is the tool used by many African men and particularly Senegalese men to acquire many wives but here wealth has failed. In sub-Saharan Africa, men typically display their wealth by acquiring numerous wives, as does the protagonist of *Xala*. But El-Hadji Kader Beye amassed his wealth by acquiring people's lands fraudulently and to avenge themselves, the exploited people cursed Beye by giving him *xala*.

The radicalism which characterizes the female characters in Ousmane's other novels is evident in this novel as well. Rama, who is portrayed as emancipated and revolutionary, defies her father in these terms: "Je suis contre ce mariage, un polygame n'est pas un homme franc" (*Xala* 19). She is very firm

and does not even hide her opposition to polygamy from her fiancé, when she tells him frankly: "Sache que je suis contre la polygamie" (*Xala* 77). She becomes the liberator of women, for she understands the difference between traditionalism and modernism. She never fails to voice what she thinks: "Je suis contre la polygamie [...] mais les personnes que j'ai rencontrées l'approuvaient" (*Xala* 18). Ousmane's works often focus on radical young women such as Ad'jibid'ji in *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, Tioumbe in *L'Harmattan* and Rama in *Xala*. Rama is a university student, a modern young woman who becomes conscious of the condition of women and decides to fight those forces that oppress them. She is the author's spokesperson in his denunciation of polygamy; she blames her father's downfall on polygamy and at the same time criticizes her mother for accepting to live under the roof of a polygamous husband. Both Rama and Ad'jibid'ji are courageous and militant young women. They have other things in common as well. Rama rides a motorcycle while Ad'jibid'ji dreams of taking after her father and driving a train.

Ousmane seems to use these young women in his novels to testify to his vision of a bright future for the African woman. As David Murphy notes, "rather than representations of some idealized form of African femininity, Sembène's young women represent the possibilities open to
African women in the future." (137)

It is, however, sad to note that N'Gone, who is also well-educated and who is the same age as Rama, fails to share Rama's opposition to polygamy.

Even though the third marriage was arranged by N'Gone's mother because of her own hidden agenda, N'Gone could have rejected Beye. One might expect that N'Gone as a modern woman would recognize the dangers inherent in polygamy. But she does not because she allows herself to fall prey to her avaricious mother Yay Bineta (La Badiene), who pushes her on El-Hadji Beye for her own selfish ends. Beye is rich and Yay Bineta wants her share of his wealth. As the narrator says: "[Yay Bineta est une] termite qui ravage sa victime [...] El-Hadji est mur, La Badiene allait le cueillir" (15).

In Ousmane's novels the quest for freedom, equality and emancipation on the part of oppressed women is remarkable. As we have noted, the author particularly denounces polygamy, criticizing the Senegalese interpretation of Islam, which gives more rights to men than to women. Ousmane's perspective is that Islam is a barrier to the political and economic emancipation of women. By exposing the problems of polygamy in his novels, Ousmane takes a position unlike that of many of his contemporaries. Female characters in his novels triumph, no matter how small the victory is. The author's realistic and positive portrayal of African women and his criticism of polygamy and other religious and traditional practices that enslave African women in his novels, made an immense contribution to the struggle that was later carried on by African women writers. Ousmane's unquestionable feminism served as an inspiration to African women writers and critics of later generations.

CHAPTER FOUR

OUT OF THE SHADOW: THE FEMALE WRITER AND THE BREAKING OF SILENCE BY FEMALE PERSONAE IN FICTION

> African written literature has traditionally been the preserve of male writers and critics. Today, however, accompanying an ever-growing corpus of literature by African women writers, a new generation of critics, most of them women, is impacting on this male-dominated area.
>
> Carole Boyce Davies (1986: 1)

African Women Writers and the Utilitarian Function of their Art

The late coming into writing of Francophone African women received applause in academic circles. Their entrance into the African literary scene marks the beginning of a new era for African women whose main goal in their writings is to denounce the oppression of women. As Pierrette Herzberger affirms: "Le but principal de toutes les femmes-écrivaines est d'abord de prendre la parole soit pour dénoncer une situation oppressive, soit pour s'élever contre les formes patriarcales qui régissent la plupart des communautés africaines" (24). Francophone African women have greatly succeeded in making their words heard by finding male and female audiences within their worlds and beyond to sympathize with and champion their cause. Western education has given them

the key to selfhood. To borrow Antonio Gramsci's phrase, the education they received "raised their consciousness, and thus they acquired the necessary weapon for confronting the enemy effectively" (20). Their ability to write allowed them to emerge from the shadow, to grab the pen and to tell their ordeals. Thérèse Kuoh Moukoury's *Rencontres essentielles* (1969) was one of the first Francophone African women's novels. P. Pézres remarks that:

> La publication en 1969 de *Rencontres essentielles*, fut un acte d'exception dans l'histoire de la littérature romanesque de l'Afrique noire francophone où seuls les hommes avaient su s'illustrer. A la liste de romanciers tels que Ferdinand Oyono, Mongo Beti, Sembène Ousmane, Bernard Dadié, Belly Quénum, Badiane Kouyaté, Francis Bebey, Yambo Ouologuem, etc., venait s'ajouter un nom de femme: Thérèse Kuoh Moukoury. L'ouvrage qui n'avait rien de magistral, reçut cependant un accueil favorable sans pour autant accéder à un grand public. (5)

This novel, contrary to the expectations of some African male authors and critics, did not deal with problems of colonialism or post-independence Africa, but instead recounted the sorrow of a young Cameroonian woman. *Rencontres essentielles* tells the story of Flo, the female protagonist, who marries Joel whom she considers the man of her life. Unfortunately Joel later abandons Flo because she fails to have children for him and takes up with Doris, Flo's bosom friend. Even though Flo is omnipresent in the novel as a woman conscious of her situation, she lacks the courage to take her destiny in her own hands. She fails to reject the husband who humiliated her by marrying her close friend. Here is what Flo, the protagonist of the novel says:

> Mais comment puis-je divorcer, que vont dire mes amis, ma famille, la société toute entière. Chez qui vais-je entrer, démunie? Une vie à

> reconstituer, des amis, des relations à refaire! Suis-je réellement capable de tout cela. (84)

From Flo's remark, one begins to understand how many women remain and suffer in their matrimonial homes because they fear the judgment that will be passed on them by their entourage should they abandon their husband. Like Flo in *Rencontres essentielles*, Mama Ida in Philomene Bassek's *La tâche de sang* and Rokhaya and Rabiatou in Aminata Ka Maiga's *La voie du salut* keep their sorrows to themselves and suffer silently. In *La voie du salut*, Rokhaya and Rabiatou are both betrayed by their dishonest husbands. If Rokhaya, the mother, is a woman who lives by tradition, her daughter Rabiatou is a modern woman who rejects tradition. The irony is that they share the same fate. Female protagonists in *Rencontres essentielles*, *La tâche de sang* and *La voie du salut* lack the courage to challenge masculine ethos and to come out of their subaltern condition. They all endure oppression in their matrimonial homes and sacrifice their lives for their husbands. These women view submissiveness to their husbands as something admirable.

Long kept in silence, African women of the late 60s rediscovered their voices and decided to transmit their experiences directly to the public in the form of autobiographies and autobiographical fictions. This is the case in *Rencontres essentielles* and many other novels written by Francophone sub-Saharan African women writers. Even if these women authors cannot in their writings envision protagonists who have the courage to break away from their oppressive

situations, nevertheless their autobiographical writings represent a first step towards liberation. Madeleine Borgomano, in her *Voix et visages de femmes*, remarks that:

> Ainsi pourrait-on penser que quand une femme écrit son autobigraphie, elle se livre, ou paraît se livrer, directement au lecteur; elle semble au moins prendre la parole sans intermédiaire et pour parler d'elle-même. (5)

Kuoh Moukoury's *Rencontres essentielles* is an important foundational novel. Although it narrated the struggles of a helpless female protagonist who made no attempt to fight the traditional masculine institutions that oppressed her, it nevertheless prepared the ground for a later generation of African women writers. The women novelists who followed Kuoh Moukoury created tougher female protagonists and wrote stories that carried their struggles farther. In a more radical way than their predecessors, they defied the "taboos" and challenged masculine powers and traditional rites that impede women's progress. African women of this later generation were using writing as a medium to liberate and to champion the cause of African women and a new society. Their aim was to eliminate the injustices imposed on them and to fight systems that oppressed them.

Women writers' arrival on the African literary scene brought about a positive transformation of the subaltern female subject in fiction. Previously silenced in the majority of African texts, the African female subject now rejects her mute status. She emerges from the shadows to defy patriarchy by breaking her silence and by taking active control of her own condition. Benoîte Groult

poses the question very well and also gives the answer at the same time to how women can free themselves from subordination: "Comment agir? Eh bien, par l'information précisément. Mais c'est des femmes elles-mêmes qu'elle doit venir. C'est à elles de rompre cette malédiction du silence" (6). Thus African women authors reject silence and begin effectively using their writings to tell the stories of African women. Much more than African men writers, they tap into the utilitarian function of their art.

In this period, the Senegalese writer Mariama Bâ and her Gabonese sister in writing Angèle Rawiri tear the veil of patriarchy and challenge sub-Saharan African traditions. In their novels these two authors introduce a new dimension by presenting female protagonists who are very conscious of their condition and who resolve to break their silence. These protagonists refuse to lament or to swallow painfully, alone in their rooms, the attitudes and traditional behaviors of their husbands who subjugate women by not giving them any say in matters affecting them. Bâ and Rawiri present a new world view of women and educate readers about the changes occurring in the position of women. In her short novel, Bâ presents Ramatoulaye, the main character who reviews the story of her life and that of her friend Aissatou. Rawiri imitates Bâ in her more voluminous novel, presenting Emilienne's ordeals in her matrimonial house. These two protagonists have many things in common: they are victims of cultural practices that impede women's emancipation; they have been deceived by their husbands; and they

are products of Western education. Both women dream of effecting changes in the societies in which they live through an application of the education they received.

> [Elles étaient] de véritables soeurs destinées à la mission émancipatrice. [Se] sortir de l'enlisement des traditions, superstitions et moeurs; [se] faire apprécier de multiples civilisations sans reniement de [la] leur; élever [leur] vision du monde, cultiver [leur] personnalité, renforcer [leurs] qualités, mater [leurs] défauts; faire fructifier en [elles] les valeurs de la morale universelle. (*Lettre* 27-28)

With the goals they set for themselves while attending Western schools, Ramatoulaye and Emilienne were not ready to tolerate any nonsense. Even though they fought the powers that oppressed them, however, they still found themselves frustrated by traditional rites deeply rooted in their different milieux. They were sometimes subject to humiliation and confrontation by the patriarchal structures that surrounded them.

Bâ and Rawiri, like other women writers who followed them, demonstrate their bitterness vis-à-vis the traditions that oppress women. The words of an anonymous male character to his friend in Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes* touch on some of these traditional attitudes that ravage African women like a plague:

> Sais-tu que mes soeurs et mes cousines trouvent ma concubine arrogante? Et tu sais pourquoi? Tout simplement parce qu'elle dirige de main de maître notre maison, mes petits frères y compris. Ces messieurs, qui se considèrent comme des gens précieux, ne veulent pas s'abaisser à accomplir les tâches ménagères. Comme le veut la coutume, ils considèrent ma femme comme la leur et exigent d'être servis comme des maris. (63-64)

It is common in a majority of sub-Saharan African societies that every member of the husband's family wants to be treated with the same deference the wife shows her husband. Family members of the husband consider anything that falls short of this treatment to be rude. Francophone African women writers of the generation of Bâ and Rawiri begin attacking such attitudes and behaviors in their texts. Not surprisingly their protagonists wage serious battles against patriarchal hegemony — and in particular against the traditional and religious rites that enslave women. Bâ's *Une si longue letter* and *Un chant écarlate*, and Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes* have generally been considered among the most important feminist texts to expose the conditions of Senegalese and Gabonese women. These novels also reveal the pattern of patriarchal indoctrination that characterizes a number of African societies, whereby elders pass on the rules that govern ways of life in a society where men take decisions while women and children are simply taught to obey. Mina, the protagonist of Cameroonian author Evelyne Ngolle Mpoudi's *Sous la cendre le feu* says it well:

> Toute l'éducation d'un enfant chez nous est construite sur la base qui fait l'homme le maître, et de la femme l'être créé pour servir celui-ci. Ce fait n'est pas particulier au Cameroun, me dira-t-on. [...] Mes parents ont fait de moi une petite fille obéissante et reservée, qui ne doit élever le ton devant les garçons- fussent-ils plus jeunes que moi. (8)

Mina's remark might as easily apply generally to certain traditions in Senegal, Ivory Coast and Gabon. Indeed, a close examination of *Une si longue lettre* and *Fureurs et cris de femmes* reveals that these novels are not only about the subaltern condition of women in Senegal or Gabon, but more broadly also the

critique of traditions. These novels cry out against the general condition of African women even as they launch their particular attacks against conditions in a predominently Islamic society like Senegal or a traditional male-oriented society like Gabon. Similarly, Madeleine Borgomano argues that even though Mireille in *Un chant* is French, one should see Mireille's condition as that of an African woman because Mireille faces the same problems:

> Les problèmes de Mireille sont donc ceux soulevés par les mariages mixtes. Mais Mireille est devenue sinon africaine du moins sénégalaise par son mariage et les questions qui se posent à travers elle n'ont rien à voir avec la couleur de la peau ou la nationalité française. [...] Ainsi estimons-nous tout à fait d'englober le cas de Mireille dans celui des femmes africaines. (91-92)

The three novels all show how the protagonists confront the traditional rites and patriarchal powers that subdue them. Patriarchal traditions and Islamic religious codes constitute the socio-cultural fabric of these narratives. For the first time in African women's writings, one witnesses a severe criticism of the attitudes of the elders, masculine powers and traditions.

Female Protagonists in Fiction by African Women

The advent of African women writers on the African literary scene introduced a change in the roles played by female characters in novels. With the notable exception of Sembène Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de dieu*, in a majority of texts by African men writers, women were not seen as protagonists. They were presented as secondary characters, defined only in connection to

their husbands. Most often in men's writings, women were given traditional roles, such as caring for homes, rearing children, working on the farm, or doing light trades. Never were their voices heard and their stories were only recounted from the point of view of the male protagonists. Similarly, while lauding Arlette Chemain-Degrange's study of *Emancipation féminine et roman africain*, Madeleine Borgomano did not fail to point out that in written texts by African men, the voices of women were neutralized. She says: "Cette étude thématique est très intéressante, mais aucune voix féminine ne s'y fait entendre puisqu'elle ne traite que des personnages féminins produits par des écrivains masculins" (6).

In written texts by African women during the last two and a half decades, not only have female characters emerged as protagonists but women are often first-person narrators. Another remarkable thing in texts by African women is that women protagonists whether narrating their own stories or presented by other narrators tend to be educated women. For the most part, these protagonists work in government establishments or live in cities where they earn good salaries. Ramatoulaye, Aïssatou and Jacqueline (*Lettre*), for instance, live in Dakar and work as teachers. Emilienne (*Fureurs*) lives in Libreville, the capital of Gabon, and is a top government officer. These women also lead modern lives with all the technological advantages, including television, washing machines and ovens. Sometimes they even have cooks who help them at home with their domestic work.

While Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* and *Un chant écarlate* appeared in 1979 and 1981 respectively, it took more than a decade after Bâ's first novel before Angèle Rawiri's *Cris et fureurs de femme* (1989) arrived on the African literary scene. Their different dates of publication notwithstanding, these novels explore common themes. All three novels not only offer depictions of women, but more importantly they present female protagonists fighting courageously to liberate themselves from the chains of patriarchal traditions. Similarly these novels develop themes of the struggle, anguish and frustration of women in sub-Saharan African marriages. In all of these novels we witness emancipated protagonists frustrated by traditions, women who, in the words of Femi Ojo-Ade, are "tracing their life in a society caught between the established order of the past and the exigencies of the present" (73). Their objective in attending a Western school is to free themselves from the weight of traditions. They reject the traditional pedagogy designed to prepare women to live successfully with their husbands and in-laws, such as those lessons given to Emilienne by her sister prior to her marriage:

> Quelles que soient tes raisons, n'essaie jamais d'affronter ta belle-famille. Même si ton époux se range de ton côté. Très rapidement, tu te trouveras isolée si celle-ci est assez aimable pour ne pas provoquer ton divorce. Tu ferais mieux crois-moi, de te débarrasser de tes principes de femme émancipée. (39)

The modern women in these novels are no longer willing to conform to the demands of the traditional patriarchal system. Their education has taught them the principle of monogamous marriage and their eyes have been opened to the

dangers of polygamy. Having been passive and mute observers for so long, they confront the system that subjects them and defy it through breaking the silence. The lessons they learned from the experiences of women like Flo, Rokheya, Rabiatou and Mama Ida have made them realize that silence will not solve their problems; the sacrifices women made to retain their husbands only served to keep them enslaved.

The modern women in Bâ's and Rawiri's novels are economically independent and do not rely on their husbands for their survival or to provide them with basic necessities. This characteristic differentiates them from the traditional women depicted by some African male writers in whose novels the husbands are the breadwinners of the family and therefore the alpha and the omega in their wives' lives. Complete economic power in the hands of the husband empowers him to relegate his wife to the bottom of the ladder. Frederic Engels noted that when a man has economic power over his wife, he is in a position to become an oppressor. In societies where cultural norms establish the husband as the provider, if a woman hopes to receive financial help or support from him, she has to obey and serve him. Engels's assertation may be true but it does not tell the whole story. The female protagonists in these novels are self-reliant and economically independent and need no financial assistance from their husbands, but they are still oppressed. Financial status may contribute to women's oppression but even financially independent women may find themselves in a subaltern position. One can deduce from this argument that

patriarchal ethos and certain traditional or religious rites are primarily responsible for the subjugation of women.

Breaking of Silence: The Subaltern Can Talk

Francophone African women writers challenge the modalities through which masculine power is lorded over women in their writings. The breaking of silence by protagonists of their novels occurred as a result of many factors, chief among which was the disloyalty of their husbands.

In Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*, Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou are childhood friends and sisters in the African sense. Both of them are Senegalese Muslim women married to Senegalese Muslim men and their marital lives have become nightmares after their treacherous husbands take younger women as second wives. Another important figure in the novel is Jacqueline, an Ivoirian Christian woman also married to a Senegalese Muslim man. Jacqueline had disobeyed her parents and decided on her own to marry Samba Diak in Abidjan and go back with him to Dakar, his homeland. Jacqueline, as a foreigner in Dakar and a Christian in a Muslim world, becomes disoriented and confused. When the truth dawns on her that she is not accepted there, she becomes frustrated by the hostility of the Senegalese Muslim environment. In addition to the hostility with which Jacqueline is confronted, she is also deceived by her unfaithful husband, "qui passait ses loisirs à pourchasser les Sénégalaises 'fines' et ne prenait pas la peine de cacher ses aventures" (*Lettre* 64).

In Bâ's *Un chant écarlate*, Mireille is a white French woman who grew up in Senegal with her parents and eventually married a Senegalese Muslim man. The opposition to this marriage by both sets of parents on racial grounds did not stop the couple. Bâ presents the problems inherent in interracial marriage in this novel. It is also an avenue for Bâ to testify to the fact that even interracial marriage does not stop polygamy in a Senegalese Muslim society. Ousmane, Mireille's husband, marries another woman and thus joins the polygamous company of Modou, Ramatoulaye's husband, and Mawdo, Aissatou's husband.

Bâ's novels portray polygamous husbands as unfaithful womanizers. She describes these men in very negative terms and presents their attitudes and behaviors in ways that clearly justify the rebellions of female protagonists. Modou Fall in *Une si longue lettre* is a happily married man for twenty-five years, but his appetite for a younger woman pushes him to Binetou, a teenage girl of the same age as his daughter, Daba. He deceives his wife of many years by secretly taking up with Binetou, and eventually abandons the original matrimonial home after marrying her. His friend, Mawdo Bâ, follows in his footsteps and marries young Nabou after a long and successful marriage with Aissatou. Samba Diak, on his return to Dakar with his Christian Ivoirian wife, also runs after young Senegalese girls.

The story in Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes* is not different; Emilienne, the protagonist of the novel, is a Gabonese woman married to a Gabonese man, Joseph, who comes from a different village. Like the husbands of Ramatoulaye,

Aïssatou and Mireille, Emilienne's husband secretly married another wife, Dominique. Ironically, Dominique is Emilienne's office secretary, and she succeeds in hiding what is going on with her boss's husband from this woman she considers as a friend. With the complicity of Eyang, Joseph's mother, Dominique quietly snatches Emilienne's husband from her. Dominique even goes to the extent of giving malicious advice to Emilienne when Emilienne tells Dominique naively about the difficulties she is going through with Joseph and his mother in her home. By marrying Joseph, Dominique satisfies the societal expectations of women and by having children for him, she fulfills the other side of the marriage as expected of women in African societies. Dominique, however, later engages Emilienne in a lesbian relationship as a way of sympathysing with her boss who suffers in her marriage.

The female protagonists of these novels initially were happily married to loving and understanding husbands. Their marriages were not prearranged like those of Niam's wife in *Mission terminée*, Salimata (her first marriage) in *Les soleils des indépendances*, Mariama in *Toiles d'araignée* or Rokheya in *La voie du salut*. Ramatoulaye, Mireille and Emilienne had modern marriages in the sense that they had made their own free choices. Unfortunately, these protagonists live in a highly patriarchal society, a society that sees nothing wrong with polygamy. Sons succumb easily to their mothers' encouragements or to their personal lusts. The sons, now husbands, reject the marital vows that they made with their first wives.

These female protagonists and wives are, alas, confronted with ruthless mothers-in-law who cause trouble in their marriages. These dangerous mothers-in-law always see themselves in competition with their sons' chosen wives. Even though the wives fight back against their mothers-in-law who desire other women for their sons, these wives suffer for their actions. It is assumed in rigidly traditional milieux such as Senegal and Gabon that wives cannot change the order of things, but these women despite all odds challenge traditional norms. Their painful experiences symbolize the anguish of women who find themselves caught in a quagmire of domination and oppression. The modern female characters of *Lettre*, *Chant* and *Fureurs* emerge from the shadows after years of silence to defy authority. If these women kept silent about everything that had previously been done to them, the arrival of another woman in their matrimonial life breaks their passivity. Their patience is exhausted and they decide to reject their subaltern condition. They take their destiny into their own hands. Faced with this final humiliation, Ramatoulaye, Aissatou, Mireille, and Emilienne show their unfaithful husbands that enough is enough. Emilienne in *Fureurs et cris de femmes* states:

> J'ai avalé toutes les couleuvres que tu as voulu brandir devant moi. C'en est assez. Je te demande de choisir à cet instant précis entre ta maîtresse, tes enfants et moi. Retiens qu'il est hors de question que tes rejetons viennent habiter cette maison. (157)

Emilienne's passivity is over; her transmutation from passive acceptance of her subaltern condition to rejecting it is necessary if her freedom is to be achieved.

Ramatoulaye's revolt comes when she is told that she is to marry Tamsir at a time when she is still mourning her late husband. Only a few days after her husband's death, Tamsir made this declaration. In accordance with Islamic rite, the wife is to be inherited by the brother of the departed. In her letter to Aïssatou, the narrator gives us more details on this event:

> Après les actes de piété, Tamsir est venu s'asseoir dans ma chambre dans le fauteuil bleu où tu te plaisais. En penchant sa tête au dehors, il a fait signe à Mawdo; il a aussi fait signe à l'Imam de la mosquée de son quartier. [...] Tamsir parle cette fois plein d'assurance [...] "Après ta sortie (Sous-entendu du deuil), je t'épouse. Tu me conviens comme femme et puis, tu continueras à habiter ici comme si Modou n'était pas mort." (84)

Boiling with anger after digesting Tamsir's words, Ramatoulaye renounces her long silence by blasting Tamsir in the presence of the elders assembled to support him in his proposition.

> Je regarde Mawdo. Je regarde l'Imam. Je serre mon châle noir. J'égrenne mon chapelet. Cette fois, je parlerai. Ma voix connaît trente années de silence, trente années de brimades. Elle éclate, violente, tantôt sarcastique, tantôt méprisante. "As-tu jamais eu de l'affection pour ton frère? Tu veux déjà construire un foyer neuf sur un cadavre chaud. Alors que l'on prie pour Modou, tu penses à de futures noces." (85)

Ramatoulaye's breaking of silence here is a complete rejection of her passivity.

In Ramatoulaye's long letter to Aïssatou, who now lives in New York after leaving her husband, Ramatoulaye informs her friend of what she is going through. Ramatoulaye's letter is a river of revelation on the travails of womanhood and the ugliness of manhood. It is through Ramatoulaye, the narrator, that we know of all the events taking place in the novel. It is through her that we come to know the other characters. Some of the women are, like her,

victims of unfaithful husbands and are going through ordeals in their matrimonial homes. Aïssatou, frustrated by her husband's second marriage, had decided to abandon him and broke her silence in a letter to him. Aïssatou forwards a copy of this letter to Ramatoulaye, and here is what part of the letter to her husband says:

> Si tu peux procréer sans aimer, rien que pour assouvir l'orgueil d'une mère déclinante, je te trouve vil. Dès lors tu dégringoles de l'échélon supérieur, de la responsibilité où je t'ai toujours hissé. [...] Mawdo, l'homme est un: grandeur et animalité confondues. Aucun geste de sa part n'est de pur idéal. Aucun geste de sa part n'est de pure bestialité. Je me dépouille de ton amour, de ton nom. Vêtue d'un seul habit valable de la dignité, je poursuis ma route. (50)

Aïssatou informs her husband in her letter that she has abandoned him for her own good and rejects her marital name and status in order to pursue her own life. The consciousness of their victimization leads these women courageously to defy their oppressors. By letting out their sorrows or pains in words these protagonists find some relief. As Borgomano notes:

> La parole, ici, sert de consolidation et de thérapeutique. Elle aide l'éveil et la naissance d'une personne existant à part entière, selon l'exemple jadis donné par Aissatou. Refusant de se voir réduite au rang de toutes ces femmes "méprisées, reléguées ou échangées, dont on se sépare comme un boubou usé ou déchiré," Ramatoulaye, malgré son âge, ses trentes années de mariage et ses douze enfants, refuse d'être un "non-être." Elle prend la parole. [...] Cette transgression du rôle de muette que lui assigne le système social lui donne de l'assurance et lui permet de revivre. [...] Il est beau de voir émerger ainsi peu à peu la voix des femmes et de se lézarder la règle du silence. (104)

This "prise de position" of the women protagonists described by Borgomano constitutes an important step toward their liberation from terms of oppression. To

borrow a phrase from Gramsci "to know oneself means to be oneself, to be master of oneself, to distinguish oneself, to free oneself from a state of chaos" (95). African women writers, through their texts, disrupt the traditional binary opposition of male-oppressor versus female-oppressed.

Rawiri's Emilienne, as a woman who believes in the complementary roles of men and women, dreams of a peaceful coexistence with her husband and his relatives, but she finally rises up and rebels after being frustrated despite all her efforts and sacrifices to keep her marriage going. Her reaction to frustration is to show the world that the time has come for women not to accept nonsense from either their husbands or their relatives. Emilienne summons her courage and asks both her husband and his mother to leave her home, completely and dramatically breaking her silence after tolerating their attitudes for many years:

> J'ai suivi avec grand intérêt une bonne partie de votre conversation [...] j'ignore quelle décision aurait pris ton fils à la suite de tes menaces et de toute façon cela n'a plus d'importance. Je te demande de l'emmener avec toi où tu voudras dès ce soir [...] Je veux trouver la maison vide quand je reviendrai, c'est à dire dans une heure. (174)

Emilienne, like Ramatoulaye, Aissatou and Mireille, finally speaks out about her family situation; she comes out of the shadows and discloses that the house belongs to her.

The breaking of silence by the protagonists is a means through which Bâ and Rawiri not only criticize polygamy but advocate the pursuit of happiness in marriage. Furthermore, these writers advocate women's right to live their lives the way they want and not the way the society wants them to live.

Motherhood

Some Western feminist critics advocate the rejection of motherhood as a societal role that oppresses and exhausts women. In African society, however, motherhood plays a different role. The embrace of motherhood while still struggling against oppression is one example of African feminism that strives to preserve certain traditions while critiquing others. The importance of motherhood in an African society cannot go unexamined. Motherhood is considered sacred and rituals are often performed in order to appease the gods so that women may be fertile and conceive. In Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes*, the writer sheds light on the importance of pregnancy by showing how Eva took her sister Emilienne to a witch doctor to perform fertility rituals. Emilienne later drops the idea of visiting the witch doctor but still sees a gynecologist in order to attempt to cure her sterility. Before finding herself in her current situation, Emilienne had a female child (Rékia) who was murdered. Even though her visits to the gynecologist do not result in pregnancy she struggles for a long time to conceive before finally giving up hope.

In many African societies, motherhood is crucial to a woman's status. Motherhood is considered central to women's life and there is intense pressure to become mothers. Women who do not have children are defined as defective. Eva confronts her sister Emilienne with the following words:

> Tu dois savoir que tu ne seras jamais une femme à part entière tant que tu n'auras pas des enfants que tu éleveras et que ton entourage verra grandir. Je vais te blesser sans doute en disant que ton enfant qui est mort ne compte plus, et dans quelques années on aura oublié que tu as

> été mère comme toutes les femmes normales. Rassure-toi, ce que je dis là ne s'applique pas à nous, ta famille. Je veux parler de ta belle-mère et de la société entière. (89)

The absence of children in marriage will have a negative effect on the peaceful coexistence of the couple. Filomina Steady observes:

> The most important factor with regard to the woman in traditional society is her role as mother and the centrality of this role as a whole. Even in strict patrilineal societies, women are important as wives and mothers since their reproductive capacity is crucial to the maintenance of the husband's lineage, and it is because of women that men can have a patrilineage at all. The importance of motherhood, and the evaluation of the childbearing capacity by African women, is probably the most fundamental difference between African woman and her Western counterpart. (29)

Steady, as an African, recognizes the importance of motherhood in African societies as do the women writers of fiction who constantly address this issue in their novels. Mariama Bâ is well aware of the importance of motherhood and informs the reader about Ramatoulaye's childbearing capacity. The protagonist has twelve children from her marriage with Modou. The writer thus reveals the importance that Senegalese society accords to children. In a majority of traditional African societies having numerous children is considered synonymous with wealth because children's labor boosts the economic capability and status of the family. This assumption, however, needs to be reexamined because there are cases in which parents are unable to meet the basic needs of their children or send them to school. Sending female children especially to school can empower women by giving the next generation different choices and different ways of boosting the family's economy. Furthermore, having fewer children can

be beneficial to women's health and can give them time to do other things outside their homes to boost the economic status of the family.

Certainly the absence of children can have a devastating effect on a marriage, as evidenced in some African male novels. African women writers similarly show how childlessness may affect a marriage. In Angèle Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes*, one notes the sadism of Eyang, Emilienne's mother-in-law, who openly ridicules the sterility of her daughter-in-law: "Cette femme est devenue inutile" (48). A number of African novels describe the ordeals of barren women and as Carole Boyce Davies notes:

> [The] preoccupation with motherhood is evident in almost all modern African fiction. At the same point, almost every novel dramatizes a woman's struggle to conceive: her fear of being replaced, the consequent happiness at conception and delivery or agony at the denial of motherhood, various attempts to appease the Gods and hasten pregnancy, followed by the joys and/or pains of motherhood. (243)

In many African quarters the desire to have children eclipses everything else in African marriages. The South African critic Lauretta Ngcobo recognizes this desire, noting that in Africa, people preserve a special place of honor for motherhood. On a similar note, Pius Adesanmi asserts that: "Motherism is an African variant of feminism that predicates the emancipation of African women on the valorization of their metaphysical essence as mothers and rejects the anti-mother posture of Western feminism, which sees motherhood as a burden" (218).

Western critics of motherhood like Jeffner Allen, Simone de Beauvoir and Shulamith Firestone who believe that motherhood wears women out and thus

contributes to their oppression, might need to make an extra effort to convince African women that living without children in their matrimonial homes need not threaten their marriage. Emilienne poses the question very well: "Est-ce ma stérilité qui le fait fuir? Pourquoi ne peut-il pas m'aimer sans enfants?" (81). Emilienne's view of motherhood does not work in Africa; her husband cannot love her unless she gives him children. The truth of the matter is that most African men do not want to live with women who cannot have children for them. If they do, it is because they have someone outside the marriage, frequently unknown to their wives, who fulfills that missing part of life for them. This is especially true of couples where it is beyond doubt that the woman is the one suffering from sterility. Thus Joseph, Emilienne's husband, secretly marries Dominique and has children with her without his wife knowing of it for many years.

It is clear that the presence of children is a blessing and an empowerment to the sub-Saharan African woman. Ramatoulaye might be devastated by the attitude of her husband, Modou, who left her for Binetou, but she took pride in her children with whom she decided to stay when Modou went to live with his new wife. In *Fureurs et cris de femmes*, Eyang's ridicule of Emilienne's sterility clearly underlines the importance of having children in Africa:

> Au lieu de faire des enfants comme toutes les femmes, tu élèves des chiens et des chats [...] Tu ferais mieux d'utiliser tout cet argent pour soigner ton ventre malade. Il existe des médecins pour des femmes anormales comme toi, au cas où tu l'aurais oublié! (59)

A number of African feminists, who appreciate the importance of childbearing in many marriages in African regions, condemn the attacks launched on maternity by certain Western feminists. The Cameroonian writer and feminist critic Julianah Nfah-Abbenyi affirms that: "the critique of motherhood [...] can be problematic to most African women simply because motherhood and family have historically represented different experiences to Western and African women" (24). Also one major difference between Western and African women is that Western women pursue birth control much more vigorously than African women do.

Family Ties

In most African societies, a man, his wife and children do not constitute a family. The family is defined as an extended family: grandparents, fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters, in-laws and even family friends work as a collective. Family ties define roles in the society. This notion of African family leaves practically no room for a married woman to operate as an individual entity. African women writers and feminists are not arguing for women's autonomy but rather for their equality within the family structure. As Laurie Edson states in her article on "Mariama Bâ and the Politics of the Family," "what Bâ [and Rawiri] do criticize, is the fact that the wife has lower status than members of the husband's family and must cater to them" (24).

Emilienne's philosophy that "Je compte me marier à un homme et non avec une famille" (18) does not fit in the sub-Saharan African context. The

nuclear family as understood in Western societies is unknown and/or unaccepted in many African societies. Extended family ties play crucial roles in people's day-to-day activities and especially in the life of married women, who sometimes find themselves frustrated by the attitudes of their husbands' families.

Both perfidious and sympathetic roles are played out within the family entourage. While some characters support female protagonists, many others militate against their struggles. One striking aspect recorded in *Une lettre*, *Un chant* and *Fureurs et cris de femmes* is that a majority of women work against the protagonists. Indeed, some of the most devastating attitudes are those of some of the other women in the family — mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, co-wives, or concubines — who work against their fellow women by undermining their marriages. Reflecting on this issue, Médoune Gueye posits that: "Que des femmes oeuvrent si activement contre l'intérêt d'autres femmes est assurément une question fondamentale que M. Bâ pose dans son roman" (312).

Lauretta Ngcobo, in her article "African Motherhood---Myth and Reality," notes that the arrival of the daughter-in-law introduces an added strain and a triangular relationship between the mother, the son and his wife and even some of the husband's relatives. In Evelyne Ngollé Mpoudi's *Sous la cendre le feu*, Djibril reminds Mina, his wife, that she needs to respect his female relatives:

> Mina, mais à l'avenir j'aimerais que tu choisisses tes mots en parlant de Hadja. Elle ne m'a pas mise au monde, mais c'est tout comme. [...] J'ai tété le sein de Hadja en même temps que son fils qui n'a vécu que quelques mois. Sans elle, je ne serais pas là, tu n'aurais pas Djibril comme mari, alors s'il te plaît mesure tes mots quand il s'agit d'elle. (121)

Emilienne, in *Fureurs et cris de femmes*, wonders: "A quoi ma disponibilité vis-à-vis de ma belle-famille m'a-t-elle servie?" (39). Pierre Fandio, in his article "Mariama Bâ et Angèle Rawiri: une autre vérité de la femme," suggests an answer to Emilienne's question regarding the function of these established family ties:

> L'incompétente secretaire [Dominique] s'y prend bien plus bassement pour "arracher l'époux" de sa patronne. Longtemps maîtresse de Joseph à l'insu d'Emilienne, la prétendue "cousine" se rapproche perfidement de la femme cocue dont elle tire des confidences qu'elle utilise plus tard pour obliger son amant à quitter sa compagne légitime. Elle sera tout comme Ouleymatou [*Un chant*], servie par les manoeuvres de sa belle-mère qui subordonne toute pérénité du mariage de son fils avec Emilienne à la naissance d'un garçon dans le foyer. (172)

The Nigerian feminist writer Molara Ogundipe argues that African women are more than wives. She asserts that to understand their multifaceted identities beyond wifehood, one must look for their roles and status in sites other than marriage. By this, Ogundipe seems to be deploring the pressure exerted on women to make them into "good wives." She questions women's efforts to accommodate, accept, and treat with deference and submission every member of their husband's family. There are many examples in literature of these "good wives." In *Une si longue lettre*, Ramatoulaye's fathers-in-law confirm her proper behavior: " Tu nous a vénérés. Tu sais que nous sommes le sang de Modou" (*Lettre* 57). In *Fureurs*, Joseph, in talking to his wife Emilienne, says: "Tu as fini par te plier à ma manière de vivre. Par ailleurs, tu as des qualités que je n'ai retrouvées chez aucune femme. Tiens, par exemple, ta manière d'élever mes neveux" (156).

Bâ and Rawiri in addition to denouncing certain masculine behaviors in their novels, also examine critically the roles of the extended family in a couple's life, revealing comportment that contributes to victimizing the wife. Médoune Guèye notes that:

> En traitant de la polygamie, Bâ montre aussi l'hypocrisie sociale et la perfidie de certaines femmes, qu'elles soient coépouses ou belles-mères. [...] En effet, de la même manière que Mariama Bâ a su créer des personnages égoistes, Modou, Mawdo ou Ousmane, et en faire des types incarnant l'instinct polygame, elle a aussi réussi à camper les personnages féminins égoistes, qui sont à leur tour des types incarnant l'exploitation de la femme par la femme. Alors que chez les hommes, il s'agit du mari, chez les femmes, il s'agit souvent de la mère du mari, de la coépouse elle-même, ou de sa propre mère, voire encore d'une parente proche de ces dernières. (309)

In *Une si longue lettre*, Aunt Nabou makes great sacrifices to educate her young niece Nabou in order to give the niece in marriage to her son Mawdo, who is already Aïssatou's husband. Unable to control the westernized wife, Aissatou, Aunt Nabou thinks that the docile young Nabou, molded in the traditional way, will be more tractable and that with this innocent young lady at Mawdo's side, Aunt Nabou's interests will be better protected. She wants a passive and submissive daughter-in-law who will venerate her and treat her like a queen. In this way, Aunt Nabou will have the upper hand in the matrimonial home of her son. Aunt Nabou is presented as a woman who works against another woman to achieve her selfish interests. Her words say it all: "Je vieillis. Je ferai cette enfant une autre moi-même. La maison est vide depuis que les miens se sont mariés" (45-46). Femi Ojo-Ade observes that:

> Mawdo falls prey to his mother's jealousy and vengeful sentiments. [...] The vengeance came in the form of a girl, the niece of aunt Nabou, Mawdo's mother. She goes to her brother and brings back the young girl to live with Mawdo. Duty towards mother calls for devotion. Devotion to duty is concretely expressed in desire of the flesh. (74-75)

In a similar way, Dame Belle-mère plays the role of husband-snatcher, by pushing her daughter Binetou to marry Modou, Ramatoulaye's husband, solely for her own personal gains. Binetou, like the young Nabou, is merely a victim of her selfish mother. The narrator explains it: "Binetou est un agneau immolé comme beaucoup d'autres sur l'autel du matériel" (60). These traditional mothers act in the name of family ties to destroy other mothers whom they consider too sophisticated for their liking, and in the process, they end up ruining their sons' or daughters' matrimonial homes. Another concrete example can be drawn from *Un chant écarlate* where Yaye Khady reminds us of Aunt Nabou and Dame Belle-mère. She is not happy with her son's marriage to Mireille because in her opinion, this foreigner will not be able to satisfy her wishes: "Une Négresse connaît et accepte les droits de la belle mère" (110-111). Yaye Khady therefore plots to secure Ouleymatou for her son Ousmane.

In Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes*, one again witnesses a situation in which the family entourage of the couple plays a mostly negative role. Eyang, Joseph's mother, acts only in her own interest by preferring a woman of her choice for her son: "Je veux que ton frère épouse sa maîtresse actuelle que je connais bien" (53). She does not hide her rejection of Emilienne: "Tu n'épousera pas une fille de cette ethnie tant que je vivrai" (14). Family relations, and

especially mothers-in-law, clearly cause trouble for African wives. Ramatoulaye in *Une lettre si longue lettre* describes her mother-in-law's behavior in the following words:

> Sa mère [la mère de Modou] passait et repassait, au gré de ses courses, toujours flanquée d'amies différentes pour leur montrer la réussite sociale de son fils et surtout, leur faire toucher du doigt sa suprémacie dans cette belle maison qu'elle n'habitait pas. Je la recevais avec tous les égards dus à une reine. (33)

In most sub-Saharan African societies, if women have means they contribute to buying the houses that they share with their husbands. Some who are richer than their husbands may buy the house but often live under the pretense that the house was bought by the husband. This is done to protect the marriage for if family members or outsiders were to learn that the house belongs to the wife it might ruin the relationship. The husband could feel humiliated in public and might be regarded as a failure for not meeting his marital obligations. In most sub-Saharan African societies the husband is presumed to be the provider of food, shelter and other amenities necessary for the running of the household. Even if the wife provides most of the belongings, it is always assumed that the husband has procured them because it is very shameful for a man if people know that he is housed and fed by his wife. Little does Eyang in *Fureurs et cris de femmes* know that the house does not belong to her son Joseph. She had no idea that Emilienne paid for almost everything in the house, and that she was even the one who footed the medical bills of her mother-in-law, Eyang. Jean-Marie Volet remarks that:

> Emilienne est arrivée au faîte de sa carrière professionnelle. Elle fait partie de l'intelligentsia de son pays de plein droit. Sa nomination au poste de directrice de la Société Nationale d'Entretien des Bâtiments Administratifs a été signée de la main même du Président. [...] Si l'on considère le pouvoir d'Emilienne en termes d'espèces sonnantes et trébuchantes, de voitures, de résidence de service, de cuisinier et de gens de maison, elle n'a rien à envier à ses confrères masculins. (132-133)

Most African mothers-in-law live ignorantly in the dream that everything in the matrimonial houses of their sons belongs to those sons. This is how things used to be when the mothers were young. It is only when things fall apart as a result of the negative roles some mothers-in-law play in the marital life of their sons that wives emerge from the passive acceptance of their subaltern condition to defy the oppressors. Some sisters-in-law also take part in the power struggle. Ramatoulaye says: "Mes belles-soeurs, limitées dans leurs réflexions, enviaient mon confort et mon pouvoir d'achat. [...] Elles oubliaient la source de cette aisance" (34). Despite the fact that Ramatoulaye purchased many of the properties in the house her family-in-law ransacks her home after her husband dies.

It is interesting to note that while relatives of the husband and especially female relations may act to destroy his matrimonial home, other women sympathize and stand by the wife to protect her psychologically from this trauma. In *Une si longue lettre*, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou support each other psychologically through their correspondence. In addition, Daba, Ramatoulaye's daughter, offers her mother crucial support, including asking her to leave her father: "Romps, Maman! Chasse cet homme. Il ne nous a pas respectées, ni toi,

ni moi. Fais comme Tata Aïssatou, romps. Dis-moi que tu rompras. Je ne te vois pas te disputant un homme avec une fille de mon âge" (60). Similarly, Daba condemns the negative role played by Dame Belle-mère: "Pendant cinq ans, tu as privé une mère et ses douze enfants de leur soutient. Souviens-toi, ma mère a tellement souffert. Comment une femme peut-elle saper le bonheur d'une autre femme?" (103).

In *Un chant écarlate*, Mireille enjoys the comraderie of Rosalie, her Senegalese friend and Soukeyna, her husband's sister, both of whom help her understand Senegalese society and culture. Rosalie initiates her into Senegalese ways of life, helping this stranger understand the responsibilities of wives toward their husband's relatives in Africa:

> Rosalie est une véritable femme. Et Rosalie, en véritable femme, initiait Mireille au savoir-vivre sénégalais. Elle éclairait pour elle les rapports belle-famille et épouse. (148)

In *Fureurs et cris de femmes*, Antoinette and Eva support Emilienne both morally and psychologically when she is oppressed by her mother-in-law. Eva takes her sister Emilienne to the traditional doctor because she wants to help her overcome the problem of her sterility. Antoinette, the sister-in-law, comes to try to persuade her mother Eyang to shelve her plan to eject Emilienne from her son's "house." As one celebrates the friendship between Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, one also appreciates the support given to Emilienne by Antoinette and Eva and to Mireille by Rosaline.

By addressing questions of motherhood and family ties in their novels, both Mariama Bâ and Angèle Rawiri reflect on key issues in the lives of sub-Saharan African women. Their works, in addition to criticizing patriarchy and denouncing polygamy, also aim at removing the weight of tradition from women's backs including the ways in which women have been programmed to undermine other women. Their literary mission is to engage and support women's struggle for better conditions by influencing it through writing. Their goal is to attempt to eradicate some of the most intractable sub-Saharan African customs and attitudes that subordinate women.

A Critique of Patriarchal Traditions

Bâ places her struggle and her critique within the Islamic context and this is not surprising since 98% of Senegalese are Muslims. The characters of her novels around whom the plot centers are all Muslims (Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou) or became Muslims through conversion (Jacqueline and Mireille). Bâ's works condemn the conditions under which Senegalese women live in a Muslim Senegalese society. Rawiri places her struggle within the context of traditional African mores. The common denominator in Bâ's and Rawiri's novels is that at the zenith of Ramatoulaye's, Aissatou's, Mireille's or Emilienne's troubles with their husbands all these women have to take some decisions and act.

Ramatoulaye decides to stay with her co-wife as many sub-Saharan African women would choose to do, especially for the sake of their children

whom they think might be treated poorly by their co-wife in their absence. Ramatoulaye's decision to resign herself to the role of co-wife by staying perpetuates polygamy. One might, however, want to define Ramatoulaye's action as feminist with a small "f"—based on a belief in the importance of reasonable compromise between men and women as preached by Buchi Emecheta. Aïssatou leaves her husband and moves to New York. Her attitude is not typically African but one might see Aïssatou as a new woman. Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou thus portray different brands of feminism. The characters of Ramatoulaye and Emilienne represent the kind of African feminism that Bâ preaches. Aïssatou's feminism might be regarded as a feminism which spells itself with a capital 'F,' that is to say, a Western brand of feminism.

It seems evident that in their works Bâ and Rawiri primarily believe in complementary roles between women and men. These writers do not fail, however, to reflect on how some traditions act as obstacles to the emancipation of women. As part of these writers' mission to liberate African women, they create women in their novels who are very different from those so negatively portrayed in most of the male fiction. This re-creation of the subaltern subject motivates these women writers in their "prise d'écriture." Bâ and Rawiri provide a truthful assessment of the realities of African women's lives and they demonstrate the specific choices that women have to make. But they are also clear about the fact that it is only in opposing the patriarchal system that the freedom of African women may be achieved. The dignity and courage of these

protagonists emphasize the fact that times are changing: rigid African traditions are collapsing and men are no longer in sole and total control.

By launching a bold attack on tradition, Bâ and Rawiri mark a new era in African literature. The protagonists in *Une si longue lettre, Un chant écarlate* and *Fureurs et cris de femmes* go through difficulties but at the same time refuse to be dominated. Their resistance to oppression shows that they have what it takes to fight masculine attitudes. The manner in which these novelists present their protagonists reveals their belief that women have to carry on their struggle in an aggressive way if their dream of an egalitarian society for both men and women is to be achieved in Africa. The African female in these novels no longer dwells in silence. However, despite all their dreams and efforts to transform society by daring to break the silence, these protagonists still fail to achieve Gramsci's "permanent victory." Their significant accomplishment lies at the level of consciousness and awareness. Bâ and Rawiri initiate the fight by speaking out against the oppression of women, through the breaking of silence—their own and that of their female protagonists. But it will take a later generation of women writers to carry on that fight.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FEMALE WRITER AND THE EMERGENCE OF POSITIVE FEMALE HEROINES IN FICTION

> In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform.
>
> Paulo Freire (1970: 34)

Oppressed and Oppressors

The oppressed are those who suffer domination at the hands of oppressors. There is no record in history that the oppressors have willingly yielded freedom to the oppressed. For the oppressed to gain complete freedom, as Paulo Freire opines, there must necessarily be first a will to free themselves, and second, a mindfulness of a way out. Since a majority of women in most sub-Saharan African societies are oppressed by traditional rites and patriarchal attitudes, the coming together of women as a group is critical. By having a common agenda, women can successfully carry out their struggle to destabilize completely the system that oppresses them. By coming together the oppressed can successfully destroy the tools of domination used by the oppressors.

In African societies, religious, cultural and patriarchal ethos are used to subjugate women. It is only if these institutions are redefined that women in Africa can dream of an egalitarian position with men.

In my analysis of African women's texts in the previous chapter, I showed how Ramatoulaye, Mireille and Emilienne willingly challenged patriarchal power and fought to eradicate archaic African customs. Even though these women failed to transform completely their societies, they exposed the world of oppression and confronted their oppressors boldly. The total transformation of the society, however, can only be achieved if women continue to take part actively in an unrelenting struggle for their own freedom by fighting to destroy forms of power that enslave them. Paulo Freire asserts: "freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly" (31). Although an individual's fight can sometimes guarantee the freedom of a single subaltern woman, as is the case with Affiba in Regina Yaou's *Le prix de la révolte* (1997), the group's fight can more effectively sustain the results achieved, particularly if the group struggles together to fight common enemies. The yearning for freedom can be transformed into reality only when the same yearning is aroused in the oppressed as a group. Malimouna, the protagonist of Fatou Kéita's *Rebelle* (1998), demonstrates this attitude by fighting for freedom from cultural and patriarchal oppression along with her colleagues. Malimouna is a good example of the principle of collective action as she mobilizes women to struggle alongside her to achieve what Freire refers to as "a permanent liberation

through the expulsion of the myths created and developed in the older order"(40). Malimouna understands that only the destruction of the old structures designed to maintain a power imbalance and subjugate women can guarantee women everlasting freedom. Malimouna realizes that seeking compromise has failed to resolve issues.

Kéita's *Rebelle* and Yaou's *Le prix de la révolte* are recent works in which the authors portray the determination of female protagonists in refusing to negotiate their subaltern status with men. Instead, the protagonists prefer to fight to the end to eliminate the subordination of women and free themselves from masculine powers and traditional domination. The protagonists of the novels engage in social transformation through the demolition of established institutions that negate women's progress economically, politically and culturally. Their struggle is to recover their lost humanity; they do not hesitate to oppose injustice, exploitation, oppression and the violence of the oppressors. Malimouna and Affiba, hence, continue the struggle initiated by Ramatoulaye (*Une si longue lettre*), and Emilienne (*Fureurs et cris de femmes*) and carry their struggle to victory. Kéita and Yaou are well aware of the successes and failures recorded by their colleagues who first broke through the silence. Thus they arm their protagonists with experiences so as not to fail. Gramsci's idea of "permanent victory" can only be attained in a dual process involving the re-creation of the oppressed subject and the transformation of the socio-cultural context in which the oppressed (in this context the oppressed woman) finds herself. Affiba and

Malimouna persevere in their struggle and carry the struggle far enough to destroy some of the patriarchal structures used to subordinate African women.

The Subaltern Woman Can Act

The subaltern person, generally speaking, when fighting to overthrow the system that oppresses him or her, functions within a group with which he/she is affiliated. It is generally assumed that it is after the subaltern becomes conscious of his or her condition that he or she seeks a change of situation by attacking the oppressors.

In *Le prix de la révolte*, Affiba stands alone to confront the oppressors, but she admits that women's struggle should be fought all by women together. In *Rebelle*, Malimouna starts her struggle alone by opposing the rule of traditions imposed on her and other women through female genital mutilation and forced marriage but later realizes that women have to fight together to achieve victory. As a result, she launches her campaign with other women against all forms of women's oppression. The success of this novel lies in Kéita's transformation of Malimouna's struggle into a collective one.

Rebelle recounts the story of Malimouna, an Ivoirian woman, who at a young age escaped female circumcision but has kept this secret to herself because it would be an abomination for people of her village to know that she was not circumcised. She was also forced into an arranged marriage with an old man (Sando) in her village but eventually runs away. She then settles down in a

town called Salouma where she works as a maid for a white couple before eventually moving to Paris with them. While in Paris, she faces a difficult life, but she has made up her mind to succeed at all costs. She befriends Fanta, a Malian woman just landed in Paris, and learns about Fanta's multiple childbirths and the life she lives under the roof of Barou, her Malian husband:

> Fanta passait le plus clair de son temps entre les couches, les tétées, la vaisselle, la cuisine et la lessive... La nuit, elle était constamment réveillée par les pleurs des bébés. Fanta avait les yeux cernés et maigrissait à vue d'oeil. Elle avait besoin d'aide. (93)

After Malimouna watches Fanta closely, she realizes how much this woman needs help and she decides to assist her. Without Barou's knowledge Malimouna introduces Fanta to the world of contraceptives to prevent her from having other children:

> Prétextant qu'elles allaient faire des courses, les deux amies se rendirent un après-midi chez un gynécologue. Fanta portait le bébé sur son dos et poussait les jumeaux dans leur double poussette, tandis que Malimouna tenait Noura par la main. Malimouna avait accepté de garder les pilules et, tous les jours, Fanta venait frapper à sa porte pour recevoir son comprimé. (94)

Fanta's condition is an eye-opener to Malimouna. From that time on she resolves to follow a course that will allow her to help women to confront their problems. Malimouna's aim is to return to Africa and to struggle to destroy patriarchal and traditional practices that subordinate women to men's domination, practices such as female circumcision and forced marriage.

Le prix de la révolte, on the other hand, narrates the ordeals of Affiba, another Ivoirian woman. Affiba loses her husband and must then fight with her parents-in-law to prevent them from inheriting all of her husband's property. Affiba and her husband Koffi had together worked hard to buy a house and other properties before he died. After the death of Koffi, Affiba's parents-in-law demand to take over the house and other properties in the house, as is their traditional right. However, since they show no concern for the fate and the well-being of the children and the wife left behind by their deceased son, Affiba decides to resist her parents-in-law's demand and fights to the end to keep the possessions for her children despite all odds. She confronts the most ruthless patriarchal fight of her life but in the end she emerges victorious in her struggle.

In *Le prix de la révolte* and *Rebelle* patriarchal authority collapses. Before this time, fathers and husbands were the ones who always decided and had the final say in the home. We see this situation in many of the works discussed earlier such as *Toiles d'araignée*, *Sous l'orage*, *Rencontres essentielles* and *La voie du salut*. With the radical behavior and transformational spirit of Malimouna and Affiba in their attacks on traditional masculine privilege, it is obvious that the sun is rising over a new Africa. As Affiba's father notes:

> J'ai donné à Affiba l'éducation que reçoivent presque toutes les filles des temps modernes. Elle m'a obéi; mais l'obéissance des enfants d'aujourd'hui n'est plus cette soumission totale aux décisions des parents comme c'était autrefois. (25)

Malimouna and Affiba work hard to correct old prejudices against African women in order to raise the status of women beyond the traditional confines of silence and domination that were practiced in earlier times. Malimouna and Affiba attack social institutions and thus blur the boundaries between the sexes in a radical way. Their resistance addresses a number of different cultural practices as my analysis will show.

a.) Forced Marriage

In forced marriage, a young woman is given in marriage to a man without her consent. By running away from the husband chosen for her, Malimouna rejects the expectation of blind devotion of daughter to father. She has come to believe that obeying parents in order to satisfy their personal goals frequently results in unhappy marriages. Forced marriage is often catastrophic because of the difficulties that young women go through in those situations including beatings by their parents to force them to accede to their fathers' demand and difficulties during childbirth. The age of young girls who are victims of forced marriage ranges between 14 and 16 years; they are usually emotionally and physically immature and not ready biologically to produce and care for a family. Besides, the marriage which is not built on love often collapses and ends in divorce. As Awa Thiam in her *La parole aux négresses* observes:

> Le mariage forcé est considéré comme "catastrophique" par les femmes interviewées. Subi très tôt par les femmes peu instruites, imposé parfois aussi à des lycéennes, il débouche sur le divorce ou sur des situations désastreuses pour les femmes. (38)

Most disturbing is the age at which young girls are forcibly married. Parents often do not send daughters to school, or even when they do they do not hesitate to withdraw them from school in order to marry them off. Fathers often negotiate this marriage, as we see in *Rebelle*. The fourteen-year-old Malimouna frowns at the conditions that pave the way for men to buy women away from their families and effectively render them captives. Kéita advocates that a woman should instead marry a man she loves and not the man imposed on her. Acting to reject her arranged marriage, Malimouna radically challenges the matchmaking of fathers. Malimouna proves to her parents, and in particular her father, that she is not a possession. She is an independent being capable of loving and marrying a husband of her choice. Women seeking control of their lives as Malimouna does question the traditional organization, and establish a new place of dignity for women in the family and in society.

Ly's *Toiles d'araignée*, Badian's *Sous l'orage* and Maiga's *La voie du salut* also treat the thorny issue of forced marriage. In these works, however, the female victims suffer in their quest to liberate themselves. A ruthless father in each of these three novels offers his daughter to an elderly man for some material gain. These coerced marriages leave the daughter in a helpless situation. When grooms pay for them or parents receive a bride price, this indemnity strips wives of their rights to the properties of their new families. Young women who object to marrying men their parents chose for them are severely

punished. They are considered by society as not having received a good moral education. In addition, they are viewed as being disrespectful to their parents and to their community at large.

In some cases, young women are well aware of the consequences if they defy their fathers so they decide to go through the marriage ceremonies only to run away later from their husbands' homes often in order to live far from their original communities. In *Rebelle*, Malimouna leaves Sando's house to study in France and only after finishing her studies is she strong enough to launch a fight against her forced marriage. In a situation where a woman forced into marriage decides to run away from her husband, the family of her husband usually goes after her. Beti points this out in *Mission terminée* where Medza was sent to Kala to bring back his cousin's wife who ran away from his home. A wife who leaves her husband is almost always pursued and brought back home. If attempts to locate her fail, her own parents automatically disown her; in that circumstance, she must fend for herself and nobody in her family or community will sympathize with her.

Malimouna radically opposes her forced marriage and looks for a man of her choice with whom she hopes to coexist more equitably so that she can achieve her dream which is to combat women's oppression. She challenges not only the traditional practices of female mutilation and forced marriage, but also works against the patriarchal cultural system that firmly established gender subordination. In this novel, the author pleads eloquently for the right for women

to choose their own husbands and she militates strongly against forced marriage as dehumanizing to women. Kéita rejects its acceptability through the act of her protagonist who fights back. "[Malimouna] bondit sur [le vieux Sando], la statuette au poing. Elle frappa une seule fois de toutes ses forces. Il s'écroula sans un cris" (39-40). Malimouna's humiliation of Sando is in sharp contrast to society's will. The author's political action is her writing, her imagining of a character like Malimouna who breaks the bonds of forced marriage.

b.) Female Genital Mutilation

Female genital mutilation is practiced in many sub-Saharan African countries including Ivory Coast, Mali, Burkina Faso, Togo and Nigeria. The exact origin of female genital mutilation is unclear; some hold that it has been in existence in traditional African societies for a very long time while others hold that it was introduced during the incursions into the region by Arab missionaries. By and large, most people who practice female genital mutilation inherited it as an established tradition and simply perpetuate it. It is considered part of one's cultural heritage and celebrated as a festival. Young women who successfully make it through are applauded for their courage. In *Les soleils des indépendances*, for instance, young women who by sheer luck were not as traumatized as Salimata after the female circumcision rite were applauded for being courageous women.

The female circumcision rites actually consist of cutting out the clitoris with blades, knives, scissors or pieces of glass. Female circumcision involves anything from the removal of the clitoris, to the removal of outer labia, to sewing the vagina closed only leaving a small opening for urine and menstrual blood. Beyond the pain of the operation, complications include genital malformation, damage of the birth canal and sexual frigidity. Consequences also often include infections that are sometimes fatal.

Different societies and traditions in sub-Saharan Africa have various reasons for the practice of female circumcision. Some say that a woman who is not circumcised is "unclean" and therefore cannot find a husband or have children. Others simply see this as an ancestral practice that must be respected. Even the ritual practitioners are largely ignorant of the risks involved and are often motivated to do the procedure simply because of the financial rewards. One traditional belief is that female genital mutilation prevents young women from being "loose" (sexually immoral) and keeps them faithful to their husbands. Traditional belief also holds that it increases women's fecundity. Benoîte Groult in her preface to *La parole aux négresses* corroborates this view:

> [o]n leur présente [cette mutilation] comme indispensable pour "parfaire leur féminité en supprimant un reliquant inutile du phallus," et leur permettre de devenir ainsi des épouses plus dociles et des mères plus fécondes. (3)

This potentially dangerous and painful rite is still practiced in some African villages which is why Kéita makes circumcision a central issue in her novel.

Having herself escaped from female circumcision, Malimouna firmly opposes the rite and works to eradicate it. She forms "l'Association d'Aide à la Femme en Difficulté" (AAFD) and is very active in it because she believes that there is no justification for women's mutilation and that the practice is a violation of women's rights. She realizes that the most effective way to end this practice is through mass mobilization and the formation of an association that will enlighten women about its dangers. As the narrator remarks:

> Le dernier défi que Malimouna s'était lancé était de mettre sur pied un programme d'alphabétisation des ménagères [...] Le nom de Malimouna apparaissait dans les journaux, on la voyait à la télévision, martelant à tous vents qu'il fallait que cessent les violences faites aux femmes. Violences qui, disait-elle, partaient de l'excision, en passant par le mariage forcé de très jeunes filles, l'étouffement de celles-ci dans leur foyer et les brutalités domestiques qui s'ensuivaient souvent. (183-189)

As an educated woman after her training in social studies at the Institut Social de Paris, Malimouna understands quite well the dangers inherent in female circumcision; she enjoins women to work with her and her friend Laura to combat the practice of female circumcision. She also campaigns through her organization against all violence against women.

Malimouna understands that no individual, acting on her own, can succeed in dismantling the social structures that relegate women in general to subordinate status. She devotes her entire life to the association she creates to fight female circumcision in order to transform the society. She launches a massive campaign against "les dangers de l'excision" (194). Numerous women come out to support her cause and to reveal how they have lost their daughters

as a result of the female circumcision practice. For the first time Malimouna herself speaks out openly about how she escaped from being circumcised and was able to have children anyway, thus contradicting one of the major reasons advanced by some for the need for female circumcision.

> Témoigner de mon histoire, du viol dont j'ai été victime, du mariage forcé, du fait que je ne sois pas excisée, et que je me suis mariée et que j'ai eu des enfants. (198)

Malimouna sets out to educate her audience. She gathers groups of uneducated women and asks them to abandon the practice of female circumcision. She organizes public rallies and encourages women to think about the future of their daughters. Her personal testimony regarding this practice boosts her credibility and the morale of her audience.

Kéita in her novel strongly condemns the practice of female circumcision and advocates for its end because to her, this rite causes harm to women and has no reasonable justification to be carried out on them any longer.

c.) Widowhood and the Inheritance of Property

In most traditional African societies, women do not possess any property because they themselves are considered property in their husband's house. In most cases, upon the death of their husbands they automatically become part of the inheritance and therefore the property of the brothers or other male relatives of the deceased husband, who succeed the husband as the owners of his properties.

In *Les soleils des indépendances*, when Salimata's first husband died, his brother Tiémoko married her. Similarly, when Mariama's husband died, his cousin Fama inherited her. In the same way, in *Une si longue lettre* Tamsir wanted to inherit Ramatoulaye after the death of his brother. In Affiba's case (*Le prix de la révolte*), however, the protagonist faces another challenge — her parents-in-law do not propose to remarry her off within the family but they do want to inherit the properties of her deceased husband which Affiba believes are hers. Affiba resolves not to yield to her in-laws' demands. Ama, a radical university student, condemns her grandfather Mensa who is Affiba's father-in-law: "[V]ous avez traité Affiba de tous les noms, vous lui avez porté mille coups bas, elle a résisté" (189).

Although the avaricious relatives of Affiba's husband descend on her to deprive her of her inheritance, she stands up to them and refuses to hand over the key to the house. The narrator tells us how Mensah is only interested in the properties his son left. He wants only to "réclamer l'héritage de Koffi" (9). Affiba's behavior astonishes her parents-in-law who assert that: "Affiba détient arbitrairement les biens du défunt. Cela ne s'est jamais vu" (25). Affiba admits that tradition forbids her to inherit the property, but she says that times have changed and that she is not ready to relinquish her right to this inheritance:

> Conformément aux pratiques coutumières de chez moi, je devrais quitter cette maison et remettre à ma belle-famille, tout ce qui appartenait à mon mari. Or aujourd'hui, mes enfants et moi-même avons droit à ce qu' a laissé le défunt; d'abord parce que la loi m'y autorise, ensuite parce que tout ce qu'ils réclament a été acquis par notre travail commun! [...] Ou alors faut-il jeter dehors la veuve, qui autrefois, aida son mari à acquérir

> ces biens tant convoités? Faut-il nier aux enfants, pour qui leurs parents se privaient, tout droit de regard sur ce que laisse le défunt? Non plus. (183)

Affiba here throws some light on this disturbing issue of inheritance in Ivoirian society. Ivoirian tradition holds that the wife does not belong to the family of her husband, and not belonging to his family, she has no rights to the goods of her deceased husband. Iman Ngondo in his "Marriage Law in Sub-Saharan Africa," corroborates this:

> [T]he fate of a woman after the death of her partner with respect to remarriage and rights to the husband's property constitutes a vital element of family law. [...] Concerning inheritance, the wife is regarded as having had no other property such as furniture, and buildings are presumed to have belonged to the husband. (124-125)

Yaou's novel thus offers an accurate depiction of laws of succession in Ivory Coast whereby when a woman loses her husband, the deceased's parents may come to claim all of the deceased's properties. At times nobody seems to care about the wife left behind, but only about the deceased's properties. As Affiba says: "[V]ous n'avez que faire de mes enfants, seul l'héritage vous intéresse? Quelle erreur! Vous n'aurez rien, rien" (53). Affiba's message might be considered rude in the African context, but she audaciously opposes old habits for she is very concerned with transforming the social rights of women.

Mensah's family has a serious concern because Affiba is a modern woman who does not yield to the pressure mounted against her. Affiba's western lifestyle poses a difficult problem to her family-in-law. She does not see

herself as the family's wife but only Koffi's. Yaou's creation of a modern heroine in her novel testifies to the changes taking place in Ivory Coast and portrays the courage of modern women in defying patriarchal authority.

Heroism and Social Transformation

Malimouna and Affiba contribute to a redefinition of Ivoirian culture by opening the doors of their societies to the world in an appreciation of other traditions. Their acts show that the improvement of women's status is fundamental to national development. These protagonists successfully re-create themselves, subverting male dominance, insisting on dignity and equality for both sexes. Kéita and Yaou use these heroines to denounce the tyranny against women promoted by the patriarchal cultural system and certain traditional values. The successes of the heroines of their novels suggest the possibilities of redefining societal hierarchies and structures.

Malimouna goes beyond simply breaking the silence, that first step taken by the protagonists of the novels that I examined in Chapter Four. She has successfully moved beyond cultural boundaries, not just defying the patriarchy but beginning to effect real change. Malimouna's actions reveal a positive transformation of the subaltern subject in her march toward freedom. Kéita's novel gives a vivid account of today's modern African woman. Malimouna's struggle is to free her African sisters from oppressive cultural norms: "Lutter pour aider [mes] soeurs" (95). To achieve her dream she has to embark on a long and

difficult journey to become educated and to learn to think for herself. When she lives with the Calmard family she is exposed to writing and reading by children. The education she receives from the Calmard family lays the foundation for what later becomes her career in France and the actualization of her dream to study social studies at the Institut d'Etudes Sociales. Her return to her homeland after her years in France is marked with a sincerity of purpose as she embarks on a life devoted to fighting destructive traditions and winning the support of her African sisters in her crusade. Having willingly abandoned her interracial marriage with Philip, the French director of her institute in France, after she got back to her home country, she settles down with Karim, an Ivoirian man whom she loves. This marriage, however, allows the author to expose the ills of polygamy. It offers the author an opportunity to show that African society, although resentful about changes, can be positively transformed. Malimouna is a strong-willed woman whose husband Karim has an inferiority complex. When he realizes that his colleagues call him "Mr. Malimouna" he becomes irrational and opts for taking another wife: "Tu penses que tu as tous les droits [...] Bon et bien moi, j'en ai marre de m'entendre appeler Monsieur Malimouna." (187-198) An initially loving, understanding and supportive husband thus falls prey to his friends' mockery and to societal pressure and becomes an intolerable and violent husband. As a staunch advocate of non-violence towards women, and fed up with Karim's insecure behavior and acts of violence, Malimouna abandons him with these words: "Je ne reviendrai pas à la maison [...]

je ne retournerai pas! C'est fini!" (209).

Kéita's novel is challenging the norms set out by ancestors and passed down from one generation to the other, exposing the customs that make it difficult to attain a free and egalitarian society. After leaving Karim, Malimouna devotes her time to women's causes and launches a massive campaign against all forms of violence, especially those against women. This campaign rocks the established order as many women turn out to support Malimouna.

In Malimouna, Kéita portrays a new and strong woman who acts like a man in the African context. Thus she demythologizes the superiority of man over woman. Malimouna's strong personality fetches her the nickname of "femme-garçon" (222) among many people of her society. It is a common practice in African societies to call a woman who does not submit to men's domination by such a name. Women with such attributes are respected by some in the society whereas others consider them bad women. Gramsci notes that if the subaltern fails to achieve a "permanent victory" in his struggle, he will continue to suffer oppression at the hands of the oppressors. The re-creation of the subaltern woman as a powerful and assertive woman is essential for her to achieve such a "permanent victory."

Yaou, the author of *Le prix de la révolte*, is inspired by the Gramscian idea of permanent victory in her work as well. Affiba, her female protagonist, fights a successful war to break the chains of traditions that halt the progress of the African woman. For a woman to fight a successful war against patriarchy in

African society she has to be reborn, rejecting her submissive female identity and putting on the male cloak of authority. Like Malimouna, her comrade in the struggle for the transformation of the society Affiba is given the attribute of "femme-garçon." Manza, Affiba's father, says this in a proud way: "Affiba est tout simplement ce qu'on appelle communement chez nous une "femme-garçon" et ça on n'aime pas beaucoup. Affiba est comme un fils premier-né pour moi" (121). Affiba confronts and combats all the problems her family-in-law gives her after the death of her husband and wins successfully the war she wages to liberate herself permanently.

Both protagonists re-create themselves, and this marks an important step in the ongoing struggle of the subaltern female subject in sub-Saharan African Francophone fiction. The subordinated female subject has moved from being a voiceless victim to breaking her silence and finally to achieving permanent liberation.

At times disturbing issues can be resolved through dialogue, but when dialogues fail, people resort to rebellious acts. Malimouna first engaged in dialogue to bring the relatives of Sando and the elders to reason. She engaged in heated argument and struggled not only for herself but also for the muted, exploited, and subordinated females in her society. The author retains the reader's attention with the following conversation between Malimouna and the village's elders, which reveals the protagonist's ability to move from words to action:

> *Le conseil du village*: Avant de te marier à ton mari actuel, tu étais d'abord la femme de Sando. Donc, ta famille est ici avant tout.
>
> *Malimouna*: A l'époque j'étais une enfant! On m'a obligée à me marier et la loi condamne ce genre de pratiques!
>
> *Le conseil de village*: La loi? Quelle loi? Insolente! Est-ce que le gouvernement ne connaît pas nos coutumes? Jamais personne n'a été puni pour cela! C'est notre vie, c'est nous que ça regarde!
>
> *Malimouna*: Vous irez tous en prison si vous me touchez! (228)

Kéita uses this heated debate between Malimouna and the village's elders to show the failure of certain African traditional practices. It is the tradition that when a woman is brought to answer charges against her, she is to remain silent throughout the proceedings and simply obey. This is not the case with Malimouna; besides breaking her silence like Ramatoulaye and Emilienne in *Une si longue Lettre* and *Fureurs et cris de femmes*, she threatens to send the elders to jail if they dare touch her. Typically, whenever the council of elders makes a decision, it is binding because of the power vested in the council as the highest decision-making body in the community. Most of the conflicts in the society are settled by the council of elders. Malimouna is well aware of this practice, but she boldly rejects the decision of the council and criticizes its authority as incompetent and irrelevant.

Malimouna's victory symbolizes victory for Ivorian women in particular, and for African women in general. Malimouna overrides the council of elders' ruling and eventually calls the police, who arrest all the elders. Succinctly, her victory is celebrated thus:

> Après avoir pris quelques renseignements auprès de Malimouna, le commissaire décida d'embarquer les deux frères du vieux Sando pour le commissariat le plus proche. Malimouna monta dans la voiture de Laura sous l'oeil vigilant de ses amies, après quoi, celles-ci regagnèrent leur car. Le convoi s'ébranla. Alors, les femmes laissèrent éclater leur joie. Des commentaires ponctués de rires allèrent bon train. (231-232)

Modernity brings awareness that leads people to know their rights and to pursue them vigorously to achieve their dreams. Malimouna asserts her right and knows where to take her struggle to achieve her goal. In modern society, if issues cannot be resolved within the family or by traditional means, they may be resolved in a police station or a court of law. That is why Malimouna carries the matter to the police to seek redress for the situation.

In *Le prix de la révolte*, Yaou, like Kéita, lends her voice to the radical transformation of the African woman. The novel gives a critical account of the tyranny of parents-in-law and the threats parents-in-law often pose in the marital lives of couples in Africa. We encountered such contentious problems in the works by Bâ and Rawiri as discussed in the previous chapter. However, protagonists of those novels paid a huge price for their rebellion. In contrast, Affiba, the protagonist of *Le prix de la révolte*, successfully wins the battle. Affiba vows to her mother not to acquiesce to traditions that give away her property to a deceased's husband's parents instead of to his wife and her children: "Je n'ai pas l'intention de céder à leurs pressions" (10). Her determination not to give up the fight and to confront the betrayers of the well-being of her children and herself pays off in the end.

Affiba appeals to all women to join hands to fight because she believes women's victory over patriarchy and other forms of oppression can only be achieved if women come together. "Qui donc soutiendrait les femmes dans une lutte pour les femmes, si les femmes elles-mêmes n'étaient plus solidaires les unes les autres?" (14). Yaou is conscious of the fact that sometimes women themselves play negative roles in the matrimonial life of a couple or enforce ancestral traditions to impede women's struggle toward freedom. For example, Yaou points out how Effoua, Koffi's sister, teams up with her father, Mensah, to verbally attack Affiba in the following terms:

> L'école dénature nos filles: elles deviennent effrontées, peu soucieuses des parents, parlent d'égale à égal avec leur mari, se permettant de limiter le nombre de leurs enfants comme si elles en avaient le droit. C'est terrible! (20)

Both men and women who are reluctant to change and adapt to modernity often think that educated women are a threat to the society. This is one of the challenges faced by women seeking broad changes in the society.

For African societies to develop and adapt to the modern world people need to accept that certain regressive attitudes about women must change.

In Yaou's novel, Effoua's remark does not pass without consequence, for Affiba reacts instantly by slapping her sister-in-law:

> La main d'Affiba partit. La belle soeur reçoit quatre gifles magistrales. Lorsque Effoua voulut riposter, Affiba la plaqua contre le mur et lui mit les deux mains sur la gorge (52).

In sub-Saharan African societies, it is considered highly disrespectful for a married woman to dare raise her hand to any member of her husband's family, irrespective of what is done or said to her. The protagonist's mother feels very uncomfortable with her daughter's act and notes: "Affiba nous entraîne dans la boue" (55). Affiba's act is nevertheless necessary if she is to be liberated. Her act translates both her courage and the failure of some abusive traditions. Affiba is confronted by her father-in-law, who is surrounded by almost all the members of his family. Mensah, the patriarch, gracefully thanks his relatives for supporting him and following him to resolve the issue of the inheritance, very dear to all of them:

> Mes frères, ma soeur unique, mes enfants, je suis content que vous soyez venus pour m'accompagner sur la tombe de mon fils hier et m'aider à resoudre ce problème d'héritage qui vous touche tous. (16)

Yaou, however, shows her protagonist's courage and zeal to eliminate the culture of inheritance that cedes property to the family of a deceased's husband. Affiba engages Mensah in a fierce verbal battle and triumphs. Affiba's victory symbolizes the failure of the pernicious African tradition when it is confronted with modern thinking.

> Mensah, un père et chef de famille, un chef de lignage, ridiculisé, baffoué, dans son droit par une petite fille comme Affiba! C'était presque un crime de lèse-majesté à leurs yeux. (15)

Affiba is a modern African woman, ready to give up her life for her liberation and that of her Ivoirian sisters. She is determined to fight to the end and is not

deterred by the pressure her parents-in-law are putting on her. The dialogue between Affiba and Gnamkè, her mother, shows Affiba's uncompromising stand and readiness to carry her struggle to the end:

> Gnamkè: Pourquoi alors aller demander des comptes à ta belle-soeur?
>
> Affiba: Manza t'a bien raconté l'histoire, non? Tu aurais voulu que je passe sous silence la violence exercée par Effoua sur mon enfant? [...] Qu'est-ce que tu espères, maman? Que je vais baisser les bras et réduire à néant tout ce que j'ai fait jusqu'à présent? J'espère que non?
>
> Gnamkè: Tôt ou tard, il te faudra t'y résoudre ou y laisser ta vie. Tu ne pourras pas triompher de tous ces gens!
>
> Affiba: Alors, j'y laisserai ma vie! (56)

Affiba successfully extinguishes the fire of patriarchy this time when she finally encounters Mensah. She explicitly lectures the old man on his ignorance by telling him that times have changed and that one should live within his times. It is an opportunity for Affiba to express herself frankly and bitterly:

> Bien sûr, dit Affiba les yeux flamboyants, nous les femmes, nous serons toujours celles qui travaillent dans l'anonymat et pour rien. Que la femme sue sang et eau pour aider l'homme à réaliser ce qu'il veut, jamais elle n'en sera remerciée comme il se doit. Les femmes de ce pays ont marché sur Bassam pour que leurs maris soient libérés des chaînes du colonisateur, mais combien d'années se sont écoulées avant que d'autres femmes participent à la vie politique du pays en tant que ministres, députés ou maires? (159)

Affiba believes there is a need to remind men that women indeed helped to liberate the African continent. She reminds men to look back and appreciate women's efforts and judge them as partners in progress. Yaou's work shows how

much African society is changing. The protagonist's victory represents the freedom of African women. Victory is expressed in tears of joy by Affiba in the following terms: "Oui, je pleure encore. Et alors ne vois-tu pas que c'est parce que je suis heureuse?" (239). Yaou ends her novel with these lines to testify to that victory: "Affiba, enfin libérée, leva les bras vers le ciel étoilé; pour en recevoir un prix, le prix de la révolte qui faillit lui coûter la vie" (239).

Both Yaou and Kéita show the capability of their protagonists to change the world. The permanent victory achieved by Affiba and Malimouna is laudable. When the discourse of persuasion and compromise is tried and fails, Affiba and Malimouna reject negotiation as a tool to realize their dreams. They realize that although the Ivoirian women have always been key actors in the country's struggle for development, they are neglected and besieged by poverty, malnutrition, and illness. They occupy the lowest place in the society. Kéita's and Yaou's texts proclaim women as dynamic individuals capable of action. Despite the enormous social problems that Kéita's and Yaou's protagonists encounter, they strive to offer a working model for African women. Their protagonists demonstrate that through women's awareness and with the support of fellow women, resistance to subordination can be sustained.

The struggles of African women and the arrival of Francophone African women writers on the African literary scene led to the upsetting of the unilateral portrayal of women in literature. Bâ, Rawiri, Kéita and Yaou propose a realistic assessment of African women who move from passivity and subordination—traits

noticeable in a number of earlier African writings— to agency and action. In particular, Kéita's and Yaou's works take women beyond the boundaries of confinement and move them as strong women into the modern world. These writers' works could be rightly viewed as displaying the continuous dynamics taking place among African women socially, culturally, economically and politically on the continent. Their texts can well qualify as narratives of women's struggle for permanent liberation.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM MUST CONTINUE

My study reveals that a majority of African writers in French inherited the domesticated and subordinated image of African women from their colonial masters and the Négritude poets. Representative works of literature of the last three decades have, however, revealed a lot about changing representations of the roles of women (moving from subaltern status to autonomy and agency). I have followed the story of the emergence of female protagonists in literature who have broken the silence to speak out for themselves and for women's equality and rights. These representations accurately reflect the world that is changing as men and women have struggled and continue to struggle to change women's subordinate roles. These literary representations serve two purposes, for not only do they chronicle and reveal what is happening in the world, they also act upon the world.

It must be borne in mind that the disadvantaged position in which African women found themselves pushed them to rebel against centuries of patriarchal, cultural, traditional, colonial and religious oppression. African women's writing is hence fire and we have seen how this fire is burning throughout the African

literary space. These authors have contributed to changing the world by virtue of inventing heroines who can serve as models, women who radically challenge patriarchal hegemony and traditional patterns and structures. These authors have invented stories that also model changes that they might want to see in their societies. Their challenge to the unquestioning acceptance of traditional prescriptions prepared the ground for their struggle. By breaking women's silence themselves through their writing (in which they evoke female characters who also break their silences)—they are part of a general movement of women who are speaking out—knowing that this is a necessary first step in women taking responsibility for their own lives.

Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* marked a decisive moment in the struggle for women's liberation as her female characters rejected silence and attacked the system that oppressed them. Similarly, Rawiri and Evelyne Ngollé Mpoudi's texts offered a strong critique of male behaviors and sought to redefine certain cultural norms such as the traditional expectation of women's complete obedience. Finally, recent works by Kéita and Yaou demonstrate a more radical approach to the struggle. The protagonists of their novels clearly reject the discourse of persuasion and negotiation, and embark on a mission to destroy completely the patriarchal and cultural structures and institutions that enslave women. These women fight unyieldingly to eradicate male dominance in their societies. In Kéita and Yaou's novels, the African feminism based on compromise that informs the writings of Bâ, Emecheta and Nnaemeka, gives way to a more radical brand of

feminism. Their heroines, realizing their frustrations in negotiating, decide to opt for a more radical change. Malimouna and Affiba's actions are those of a new generation of African women who set out to transform their societies. The success of their actions reveals that for women to make progress in African societies, they have to work in solidarity with one another, waging a progressive struggle against social backwardness and fighting for women's emancipation. The struggle of African women should be a collective one rather than an individual effort. Educated women should work with uneducated ones in order for their fight to have meaningful social impact in terms of changing men's perceptions of women.

In the continuing quest for women's freedom and women's rights to choose, there is also depicted an emergence of a lesbian relationship in *Fureurs et cris de femmes*. This is an entirely new discourse in Africa and in African literature by women. Some of Calixthe Beyala's works also come to mind here. Perhaps the culture is gradually moving towards greater tolerance to lesbianism.

My study also revealed that one issue that pits African critics against their Western counterparts is that of reductive theorizing. African writings, I agree, can best be read within African socio-cultural contexts. I would argue that one can also approach them productively by also drawing on insights from other colonized lands' theories. The application of subaltern theories drawn from the writings of Subaltern Studies hence contributed enormously to my analysis of African writings. African nations share an historical past similar to those of other

colonized Third World countries. The history of oppression is not a new concept in Africa anymore than it is in other colonized lands. As the history of colonialism links most of the people of the Third World, it is only natural that any study of African literature draws insights from Subaltern Studies. Such theoretical articulations may be capable of transforming societies in order to establish equal rights for men and women. Listening to the voices of the oppressed can immensely help in identifying the problems of subalterns in Africa. In particular, one can use the concept of subalternity to recognize and decode the voices of African women that have been neutralized over the years by the interplay of colonialism, religion and traditions.

My study equally revealed that one cannot ignore the impact of Western influence on the African continent in redefining certain African patriarchal mores. The Western influence on African women's texts particularly contributed to the fire-spitting nature of their works, which were able to incinerate centuries of oppression. Worldwide campaigns against the oppression of women and the influence of Western feminism in the writings of African men and women have both played a major role in questioning some traditional African practices.

African feminists have realized to some extent the contributions of Western feminist ideologies, and have incorporated them into their own thought without entirely rejecting African cultural values. African women writers and critics are today launching successful campaigns against women's oppression. Prominent issues referred to and condemned in their writings include the practice

of genital mutilation, forced marriage and masculine attitudes. The struggles of these women writers have contributed largely to openly addressing issues affecting women. Of particular relevance is their literary critique of women's servitude in marriages, sexual arrangements, and domestic and agrarian works.

In contemporary African societies, subaltern women are beginning to realize that they must defeat not only colonialism, but also the patriarchal cultural system that establishes and supports gender subordination. By and large they succeed in rejecting their subaltern status by becoming women politicians, ministers, directors, lawyers, engineers, university teachers and writers. It is often said that when one educates a man, one educates a family, but when one educates a woman, one educates the whole society. Contemporary African women have contributed socially, politically, economically, culturally and intellectually to the development of the continent. Furthermore, alongside men, they continue to champion the cause for a free and equal society.

Some decades ago, writings by women were generally ignored and one could hardly find a single African female author's name in the critical anthologies. Today, not only do their names abound in anthologies but women's texts are read and appreciated in academic circles and they play a critical role in modern-day academic discourses. Both literary writings and social and political campaigns have had a decisive impact on people's lives and it is fair to say that African women have achieved unprecedented visibility. African women militate against all forms of women's oppression in society. Women in many African

nations are now organized in support of efforts to educate and enlighten women on different issues. Indeed, African women today are among the most audible voices in social, political and economic spheres.

Fighting for the cause of women is no longer women's concern alone. Men have begun to show more interest in women's contributions and to consider them important players in the development of the nation. Some African men are now joining hands with their sisters in fighting male oppression and men and women's efforts to transform the society for the benefit of both sexes and all social classes are significant. Many women realize that it is only by inviting men into the struggle that women may hope to achieve the total eradication of the social rites that subordinate them. It is my firm belief that globalization and resulting changes on the grassroots level will lead Africa to a new understanding of how certain practices in African societies impede women's progress, emancipation, and the realization of their dreams and potential.

While the majority of the texts I worked on portrayed men in the role of oppressors, many recent African men's works portray women who are no longer subjected to men. Sony Labou Tansi, for instance, shows the strength of African women in the way he portrays Yealdara in his novel *L'anté-peuple* (1989). Yealdara is one of the ringleaders of the revolution that brought an end to the dictatorial rule in Congo. Similarly, Mongo Beti's *Trop de soleil tue l'amour* (1999) and *Branle-bas en noir et blanc* (2000) portray Elizabeth, a central female

character, as a strong woman who brings the most influential men in Cameroonian society to their knees.

In a somewhat radical and fanciful gesture, Bolya Baenga's *La polyandre* (1998) gives us a female protagonist, Oulématou, who is in fact portrayed as the oppressor of the men around her by virtue of her cultural heritage. As a princess, the Congolese tradition accords her the right to choose her husbands. Oulématou chooses her husbands by herself and decides who does what and with whom she goes to bed. Baenga gives us another assessment of African women who use the power of polyandry to supersede the patriarchy that once subordinated women.

A great deal of literary criticism in Africa today accords importance to women writers. Abibatou Traore and Nathalie Etoke belong to a new generation of African women writers born in the 1970s and who continue the struggle for women's freedom. In the spirit of continuance, I must state that it is my hope that this work will contribute to an important ongoing dialogue and open up ways for other researchers to continue where it leaves off.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Texts

Bâ, Mariama. *Une si longue lettre*. Dakar: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1979.

_____. *Un chant écarlate.* Dakar: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1981.

Beti, Mongo. *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba.* Paris: Présence Africaine, 1976.

_____. *Mission terminée.* Paris: Présence Africaine, 1957.

Keita, Fatou. *Rebelle*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1998.

Kourouma, Amadou. *Les Soleils des indépendances*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970.

Ousmane, Sembène. *Xala*. Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1974.

_____. *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*. Paris: Le Livre Contemporain, 1960.

Rawiri, Angèle. *Fureurs et cris de femmes.* Paris: L'Harmattan, 1989.

Yaou, Régina. *Le prix de la révolte*. Abidjan: Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes, 1997.

Secondary Texts

Abastado, Claude. *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu de Sembène Ousmane*. Abidjan: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1984.

Adebayo, Aduke. *Feminism and Black Women's Creative Writing. Theory. Practice. Criticism.* Ibadan: AMD Publishers, 1996.

_____.*Critical Essays on the Novel in Francophone Africa*. Volume 1. Ibadan: AMD Publishers, 1995.

Ade-Ojo, Sam and Olusola Oke. *Introduction to Francophone African Literature.* Spectrum Books Limited, Ibadan, 2000.

Adesanmi, Pius. "Can the Subaltern Speak?: "Deux heroïnes de Calixthe Beyala en perspective." *Revue Nigériane d'Études Française* 1.6 (1998): 117-127.

_____. "Constructions of Subalternity in African Women's writing in French," Ph.D dissertation, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 2002.

_____. *Themes in African Literature in French. A Collection of Essays*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2000.

Aidoo, Ama Ata. "To Be an African Woman Writer--- an Overview and a Detail." In *Criticism and Ideology*, edited by Christen Petersen, 155-172.

_____. "The African Woman Today." In *Sisterhood, Feminism and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora*, edited by Obioma Nnaemeka, 39-49.

Akintunde, Dorcas Olu. *African Culture and the Quest for Women's Rights*. Ibadan: Sefer Books Ltd, 2001.

Alcoff, Linda. "The Problem of Speaking for Others." *Cultural Critique* 20 (1991-92): 5-32.

Amadiume, Ify. *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in African Society.* London: Zed Books, 1987.

_____.*Daughters of the Goddess, Daughters of Imperialism: African women struggle for culture, power and democracy.* London. New York: Zed Books, 2000.

Amka. An Occasional Newsletter of the Biennial institute of African Women in Religion and Culture. Issue No. 5, 2000.

Angela Miles. "North American Feminism / Global Feminism--- Contracdictory or Complementary?" In *Sisterhood, Feminism and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora*, edited by Obioma Nnaemeka, 163-182.

Appiah, Anthony. *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. London: Methuen, 1992.

Ardener, Edwin. "Belief and the Problem of Women." In *Perceiving women* edited by Shirley Ardner, 1-17.

Aschcroft, Bill. *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.

Badejo, Diedre. "African Feminism: Mythical and Social Power of Women of African Descent." *Research in African Literatures* 29. 2 (1998): 94-111.

Badian, Seydou. *Sous l'orage (Kany)*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1963.

Bassek, Philomène. *Tâche de sang*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1990.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *Le Deuxième Sexe*. Paris: Gallimard, 1949.

Bestman, Martin. "L'esthétique romanesque de Sembène Ousmane." *Etudes littéraires*. 7-1 (1974): 395-403.

Beverly, John. *Subalternity and Representation*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1999.

Beyala, Calixthe. *Lettre d'une Africaine à ses soeurs occidentales*. Paris: Spengler, 1995.

_____. *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*. Paris: Editions Stock, 1988.

_____. *C'est le soleil qui m'a brulée*. Paris: Flammarion, 1997.

Bhadra, Gautam. "The Mentality of Subalternity: Kantanama or Rajdharma." In *A Subaltern Studies Reader 1986-1995* edited by Ranajit Guha, 63-99.

Bishop, Rand. *African Literature, African Critics. The Forming of Critical Standards, 1947-1966*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988.

Bledsoe, Caroline and Pison, Gilles. *Nuptiality in Sub-Saharan Africa. Contemporary Anthropological and Demographic Perspectives*. Oxford: Claredon Press, 1994.

Borgomano, Madeleine. *Voix et images de femmes dans les livres par les femmes en Afrique francophone*. Abidjan: CEDA, 1989.

Brown, Lloyd. *Women Writers in Black Africa*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981.

Caplan, Pat. , ed. *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality.* London; New York: Tavistock Publications, 1987.

Carl, Nelson, and Lawrence Grossberg. " Imperialism and Sexual Difference." *Oxford Literary Review* 8. 1-2 (1986): 225-240.

Cazenave, Odile. *Femmes rebelles: Naissance d'un nouveau roman africain au féminin.* Paris: l'Harmattan, 1996.

Césaire, Aimé. *Discourse on Colonialism.* Trans. Joan Pinkham. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "Minority Histories, Subaltern Post." *Postcolonial Studies* 1.1(1998): 15-29.

Chemain-Degrange, Arlette. *Emancipation féminine et roman africain.* Dakar: Nouvelles Editions africaines, 1980.

Cheryl, A. Wall. *Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Women.* New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1989.

Chinweizu, O. Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike. *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature. Volume 1 African Fiction and Poetry and their Critics.*Washington: Howard University, 1983.

Cixous, Hélène and Cathérine Clement. *La jeune née.* Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 1975.

Clarke, Lorenne and Lynda Lange, eds. *The Sexism of Social and Political Theory*. Toronto: Toronto UP, 1979.

Collins, Patricia. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment.* Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990.

Comaroff, J. , and J. Comaroff, *Modernity and its Malcontents, Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa.* Chicago: Chicago UP, 1993.

Cornaton, Michel. *Pouvoir et sexualité dans le roman africain.* Paris: l'Harmattan, 1990.

Cousins, Mark. "Men and Women as Polarity." *Oxford Literary Press Review* 8.1-2 (1986): 164-169.

Curtin, Philip D. *Precolonial African History*. Washington: American Historical Association, 1964, 1974.

d'Almeida, Irène A. *Francophone African Women Writers: Destroying the Emptiness of Silence*. Gainesville, Fl: UP of Florida, 1994.

_____. "The Concept of Choice in Mariama Bâ's Fiction." In *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature.* Eds: Carole Boyce Davies, and Anne Adams Grave, 167-171.

_____. "La prise d'écriture des femmes francophones d'Afrique noire." In *Moving Beyond Boundaries Volume 2 Black Women's Diaspora*, edited by Carole Boyce Davies, 136-153.

Davies, Carole Boyce. *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migration of the Subject.* London: Routledge, 1994.

_____. *Moving Beyond Boundaries Volume 2 Black Women Diaspora*. New York: New York UP, 1995.

Davies, Carole Boyce and Molara Ogundipe-Leslie. *Moving Beyond Boundaries Volume 1 International Dimensions of Black Women's Writing.* New York: New York UP, 1995.

Davies, Carole Boyce, and Anne Adams Graves. *Ngambika. Studies of Women in African Literature.* Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1986.

Davis, Angela. *Women, Race and Class*. New York: Vintage, 1983.

de Rosny, E. *L'Afrique des guérisons*. Paris: Karthala, 1992.

Denniston, George and Marilyn Fayre Milos. *Sexual Mutilations. A Human Tragedy*. New York: Plenum Press, 1997.

Diop, Cheikh Anta. *The African Origin of Civilization. Myth or Reality*. Trans. Mercer Cook. New York. Westport: Lawrence Hill and Co. 1974.

Diop, David. *Coups de pilon*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1973.

Djebar, Assia. *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*. Paris: Editions des femmes, 1980.

Djoleto, Amu and Thomas Kwami. "Mongo Beti Mission to Kala." in *West African Prose*. Ibadan: Heinmann Educational Books, 1972. 99-110.

Dolphyne, Florence A. *The Emancipation of Women: An African Perspective.* Accra: Ghana UP, 1991.

Drury, Nevill. *The Shaman and the Magician. Journeys between the worlds.* London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1982.

Duberman, Lucile. *Gender and Sex in Society.* New York: Praeger 1975.

Edson, Laurie. "Mariama Bâ and the Politics of the Family" *Studies in Twentieth-Century Literature* 17:1 (1993): 13-25.

Emecheta, Buchi. "Feminism with a small 'f'!" In *Criticism and Ideology* edited by Petersen Christen, 173-185.

Engels, Friedrich. *The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State.* New York: International Publishers, 1972.

Fall, Aminata Sow. *La grève des Battú.* Dakar: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1979.

Favret, Saada, J. *Les mots, la mort, les sors- la sorcellerie dans le Bocage.* Paris: Gallimard, 1977.

Ferguson, Ann et al. "Forum: The Feminist Sexuality Debates." *Signs* 10.1(1984): 106-135.

Ferguson, Russel et al. Eds. *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures.* New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and MIT P, 1990.

Fields, K. *Revival and Rebellion in Central Africa.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1985.

Firestone, Shulamith. *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution. New York: Bantam Books, 1971.*

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York: Continuum, 1970.

Gates, Henry Louis. *"Race", Writing and Difference.* Chicago: Chicago UP, 1986.

Georges, Decote and Françoise Rachmichl. *Une oeuvre. L'enfant noir. Un thème. Visages de l'Afrique noire.* Paris: Hatier, 1992.

Guha, Ranajit. *Introduction to Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997.

_____. "The Small Voice of History." *Subaltern Studies* 9 (1996): 1-8.

Gunew, Sneja. "Framing Marginality, Distinguishing the Textual Politics of the Marginal Voice." *Southern Review* 18 (1985): 143-155.

Hartsock, Nancy. " Rethinking Modernism: Minority vs Majority Theories." *Cultural Critique* 7 (1987): 187-206.

hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory from Margin to Centre*. Boston: South End Press, 1984.

Hosken, Fran P. The Hosken Report. *Genital and Sexual Mutilation of Females*. Lexington: Women's International Network News, 1982.

Jaggar, Alison & Susan Bordo. *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstitution of Being and Knowing*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1989.

James, Adeola. *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*. London: James Currey, 1990.

Jameson, Fredric. "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65-88.

Jeffner Allen. "Motherhood: The Annihilation of Women." In *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory* edited by Joyce Trebilcot, 315-330.

Kalu, Anthonia C. "Those Left Out in the Rain: African Literary theory and the Re-invention of the African Woman." *African Studies Review* 37. 2 (1994): 77-95.

Kauffman, Linda. Ed. *Gender and Theory*. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989.

Kembe, Milolo. *Image de la femme chez les romancières de l'Afrique noire francophone*. Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1986.

Kesteloot, Lilyan. *Anthologie Négro-Africaine de 1918 à 1981*. Verviers: Les Nouvelles Editions Marabout, 1981.

_____.*Les écrivains noirs de langue francaise: naissance d'une littérature*. Bruxelles: ULB, 1983.

King, Adele. "The Personal and the Political in the Work of Mariama Bâ." *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature* 18.2 (1994), 177-88.

Lambert, Fernando. "L'ironie et l'humour de Mongo Beti dans *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*." *Etudes littéraires* 7-1 (1974): 381-393.

Laye, Camara. *L'enfant noir.* Paris: Librairie Plon, 1953.

Leacock, Eleanor B. *Myths of Male Dominance: Collected Articles on Women Cross-Culturally.* New York & London: Monthly Review Press, 1981.

Lightfoot-Klein, Hanny. *Prisoners of Rituals. An Odyssey into Female Genital Circumcision in Africa.* New York & London: The Haworth Press, 1989.

Lionnet, Françoise. *Postcolonial Representation: Women, Literature, Identity.* Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1995.

Little, Kenneth. *The Sociology of Urban Women's Image in African Literature.* London: Macmillan, 1980.
_____. *African Women in Towns: An aspect of Africa's Social Revolution.* London: Cambridge UP, 1973.

Lloyd, G.E.R. *Polarity and Analogy: Two Types of Argumentation in Early Greek Thought.* Cmbridge: Cambridge UP, 1966, 1971.

_____. *Science, Folklore and Ideology: Studies in Ancient Greece.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983.

Ly, Ibrahima. *Toiles d'araignée.* Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985.

Maillefer, Laurence and Loredana Marechetti. *Littérature et femmes-auteures d'Afrique francophone.* Lausanne: Helvetas, 1988.

Makward, Christine and Odile Cazenave. " The Others' Others: Francophone Women's Writing" *Yale French Studies* 75(1988): 190-207.

Mallon, Florence E. "The Promise & Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History." *American Historical Review* 99.5 (1994): 1491-1515.

Melone, Thomas. *Mongo Beti. L'homme et le destin.* Paris: Présence Africaine, 1971.

Mernissi, Fatima. *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*. London: Al Saqi Books, 1975.

Mill, John Stuart. *The Subjection of Women*. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

Millet, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970.

Minyono-Nkodo, M-F. *Comprendre Les bouts de bois de Dieu de Sembène Ousmane*. Paris: Editions Saint Paul, 1979.

Mohanty, Chandra. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." In *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, edited by Mohanty, Chandra. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991.

Moi, Toril. *Sexual / Textual Politics*. New York: Methuen, 1985.

Moore, Gerald. *Seven African Writers*. London: Oxford University Press, 1962.

Moore-Gilbert, Bart. *Postcolonial Theory. Contexts, Practices, Politics*. London. New York: Verso, 1997.

Mpoudi, Evelyne Ngolle. *Sous la cendre le feu*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1990.

Moukoury Kuoh, Thérèse. *Rencontres essentielles*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1969.

Nantet, Jacques. *Panorama de la littérature noire d'expression francaise*. Paris: Editions Fayard, 1972.

Ndongo, Jacques Fame. *L'esthétique romanesque de Mongo Beti*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1985.

Nfah-Abbenyi, Juliana. *Gender in African Women's Creative Writing*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1997.

Newell, Stephanie. Ed. *Writing African Women: Gender, Popular Culture and Literature in West Africa*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1997.

Ngcobo, Lauretta. "African Motherhood---Myth and Reality" In *Criticism and Ideology* edited by Christen Petersen, 141-154.

Nkashama, Ngandu Pius. *Littératures et écritures en langues africaines*. Paris: l'Harmattan, 1992.

Nnaemeka, Obioma. *Sisterhood, Feminism and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora.* Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998.

_____. *The Politics of Mothering. Womanhood, Identity, and Resistance in African Literature.* London: Routledge, 1997.

_____. "Feminism, Rebellious Women and Cultural Boundaries: Rereading Flora Nwapa and her Compatriots," *Research in African Literature* 26.2 (1985): 80-113

Nwezeh, E. C. *Africa in French and German Fiction (1911-1933).* Ile-Ife: Ile-Ife UP, 1978.

Obbo, Christine. *African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence.* London: Zed Press, 1980.

Ojo-Ade, Femi. "Still a Victim? Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*." *African Literature Today* 12 (1982): 71-87.

_____. "Female Writers, Male Critics." *African Literature Today* 13 (1983): 158-79.

_____. *On Black Culture.* Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 1989.

_____. René Maran. *The Black Frenchman. A Bio-Critical Study.* Washington: Three Continental Press, 1984.

Ogini, Elizabeth. "Feminism and Womanism: A Historical Perspective," in Aduke Adebayo (Ed) *Feminism and Black Women's Creative Writing.* Op cit. 11-20.

Ogundipe-Leslie, Molara. *Recreating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformation.* Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1994.

_____. "The Female Writer and her Commitment." *African Literature Today* 15 (1987): 5-13.

Ormerod, Beverly and Jean-Marie Volet. *Romancières africaines d'expression française: Le sud du Sahara.* Paris: l'Harmattan, 1994.

Petersen, Christen. *Criticism and Ideology.* Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1988.

Peters, Jonathan. "Sembène Ousmane as Griot: The Money-Order with White Genesis." *African Literature* 12 (1982): 88-103.

Pfaff, Francoise. *Entretiens avec Maryse Condé (suivi d'une bibliographie complète)*. Paris: Editions Karthala, 1993.

Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: Norton, 1986.
Said, Edward. *Identity, Authority and Freedom: The Potentate and the Traveller.* Cape Town: University of Cape Town UP, 1994.

San Juan, E. *Beyond Postcolonial Theory*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.

Schipper, Mineke. "Mother Africa on a Pedestal: The Male Heritage in African Literature and Criticism," African Literature Today 15 (1987) 35-54.

Senghor, Léopold Sédar. *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache.* Paris: PUF, 1948.

Showalter, Elaine. ed. *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory.* London: Virago,1986.

Sofola, Zulu. "Feminism and African Womanhood," In *Sisterhood Feminism and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora* edited by Obioma Nnaemeka, 51-64.

Spivak, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Eds. Carl Nelson, and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana and Chicago: Illinois UP, 1988. 271-313.

Steady, Filomena. ed. *The Black Woman Cross-culturally*. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing, 1981.

Suleri, Sara. "Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Post-colonial Condition" *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1992): 756-69.

Taiwo, Oladele. *Female Novelists in Modern Africa*. New York: St. Martins Press, 1984.

Terborg-Penn, Rosalyn. ed. *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora.* Washington, DC: Howard UP, 1987.

Tidjani-Serpos, Nouréini. "Roman et société: la femme africaine comme personnage des *Bouts de bois de Dieu* de Sembène Ousmane." *Présence Africaine; Cultural Review of the Negro World 108* (1978): 122-37.

Thiam, Awa. *La parole aux Négresses*. Paris:Denoel/Gontier, 1978.

Traoré, Abibatou. *Sidagamie*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998.

Volet, Jean- Marie. *La Parole aux Africains ou l'idée du pouvoir chez les romancières d'expression française de l'Afrique sub-Saharienne*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993.

_____. "Romancières francophones d'Afrique noire: Vingt ans d'activité littéraire à découvrir." *French Review* 65.5 (1992): 765-73.

Wall, Cheryl A. *Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory and Writing by Black Women.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1989.

Wallace, Karen S. "Women and Identity: A Black Francophone female Perspective" *Sage* 2.1 (1985): 19-23.

_____. "A Search for Identity: The Alienated Female Persona in Some Francophone African Novels." *Rendez-vous: Journal of Arts and Letters*, 22.2 (1986): 32-38.

Werbner, Richard, and Terence Ranger, *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1996.

Yoder, Carroll. *White Shadows: A Dialectical View of the French African Novel.* Washington, DC: Three Continent Press, 1991.