THROUGH A FEMALE LENS:
ASPECTS OF MASCU LINITY IN FRAN COPHONE AFRICAN
WOMEN’S WRITING

By
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DEDICATION

TO THE MEMORY OF MY PARENTS
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This study was motivated by the realization that the subject of masculinity in African women’s writing has not yet been explored. Little attention has been given to the analysis of women’s writing with the tools that theories of masculinities provide. This study, therefore, sets to analyze the different masculinities in African women’s fiction.


To carry out my investigation I use Robert Connell’s (2005) perspective on masculinity. Connell recognizes that masculinity is a social construct rather than a biological state. He also argues that there is a variety of masculinities and that masculinity exists only in relation to femininity.
The dissertation is divided into five parts. Part One provides the tools necessary for my literary analysis. These include the purpose, significance, and scope of the study, the conceptual and theoretical framework, which comprises definitions and approaches to masculinity in general and in specific African contexts. This part ends with the discussion of selected authors and texts.

Part Two discusses the emergence of African Francophone women writers. It examines the reasons for African women’s late entry into the literary world and how they represent their experiences. Parts Three and Four constitute the core of my study. It explores how a specific form of masculinity, known as hegemonic masculinity, is enacted in African women’s literary texts. Part Four centers on male characters who reject the hegemonic forms of masculinity and seek a more egalitarian relationship with women. Part Five, which is essentially the conclusion to this work, summarizes the findings of my study. My analysis makes visible three categories of masculinity enacted by the different male characters that I examined. They include hegemonic masculinities, ambiguous masculinities and alternative masculinities.
PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. Purpose and Significance of the Study

Since the 1970s, gender has been a central concern of literary studies in Africa, as feminist theory precipitated a critical debate around the representation of African women in literature which until then had been dominated by men. Since then, the representation of men has served as a backdrop against which to analyze African women’s experiences. It is not surprising therefore, that African scholars have now begun to include the concepts of masculinity in gender studies in order to understand how they play out in gender relations (Lindsay & Miescher 2003:1-3). In other words, there has been more interest in examining the ways in which men behave, particularly in relation to women.

Although we have seen in recent years some important works on masculinity in African societies, which include Robert Morrell’s Changing Men in Southern Africa (2001), Lisa Lindsay and Stephen Miescher’s Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa (2003), and Lahoucine Ouzgane and Robert Morrell’s African Masculinities: Men in Africa from the
Late Nineteenth Century to the Present (2005), the field is still narrow. In addition, research on the representations of masculinity in literary texts, with particular attention to the works of African women, is still a very new area of investigation. My inquiry, therefore, concerns the representation of masculinities in literary narratives by female writers from sub-Saharan Francophone Africa. I will explore novels of selected Francophone African women from Senegal and Cameroon. In examining how these women portray male protagonists in their prose fiction, it will be possible to determine how they process masculinities through their male characters and what their reactions toward these masculinities are. The selected women writers offer a wide array of male characters that are viewed through the eyes of female protagonists. Analyzing the male characters in a variety of roles – husbands, fathers, single men, and political figures – will enable us to better understand the selected writers’ views.

2. Scope of the Study

To the best of my knowledge, the subject of masculinity in African women’s writing has hardly been explored to date. The study of gender has mainly consisted
of feminist/womanist critiques of literature and society with a view to showing the plight of women. Little attention has been given to the analysis of women's writing with the tools that theories of masculinity provide. This study therefore contributes to a more balanced field of critical gender writing in Africa. Through the analysis of selected male characters, my study seeks to offer a better understanding of the African woman’s attitude toward her male counterpart in fictional works.

These women’s perspectives offer a different vision of men; one not seen anywhere else in African fiction, which until recently was dominated by male writers. It is a vision of female writers who are interested in, and concerned with, relationships between men and women in contemporary African societies. This study, therefore, is intended to provide a new analytical window into the perspective of the African woman writer on this subject.

It must be noted that many women writers have claimed that male authors have created stereotypical female characters.¹ This accusation raises a number of questions. For instance, it is interesting to explore whether female writers similarly create male stereotypes. A second
question is whether the images presented in their fictions are realistic portraits of men in African societies or mere figments of the authors’ literary imaginations. Most importantly, what literary tools, devices and strategies do particular writers use in their portrayals of male characters, and how do these techniques and devices shape their representations of masculinity? Other questions raised here are: why do men behave the way they do in order to identify or to be seen and respected as masculine, and what aspect of cultures of masculinity need to be challenged or deconstructed in order to make positive changes in male-female relationships in Africa?

Concerning the scope of the study, the parameters that guided my investigation of male characters in African women’s fiction are genre, region, and authors. I have selected the genre of the novel on the assumption that it is the microcosm of society, that there is a link between the novel and human experience; the novel can offer an encounter with life in all its diverse aspects. Lucien Goldmann sees the novel form as the literary transposition of everyday life within a specific social context in which it occurs.² According to Michel Zeraffa, the novel functions
as an oracle, which "confronts us openly with the issue of the meaning and value of our ineluctable historical and social condition" (Zeraffa 1976:11). For Simon Gikandi, the African novel is "an instrument of understanding on the individual and social-cultural level" (Gikandi 1987:x). In the same vein, Shatto Arthur Gakwandi views the novel as the main vehicle for analyzing and commenting on contemporary life in African societies. According to him:

More than any other forms, the novel can evoke the whole way of life of a people at any given time. Through this, or through a selection of interrelated aspects of life, it can analyze the basic social structure of a given society and show how the total life of the individual is affected by the conditions in which he lives. The reader is then able to evaluate these conditions of life by the way they affect individuals. This capacity which the novel alone possesses, has been seized upon by African artists and been used to raise issues which go even beyond private conduct into problems of morality in public affairs. Social realism has been the principal tool by which this has been done. (Gakwandi 1980: 128-129)

The reality that African artists strive to describe in their fictional works is not, however, what one might term objective reality. It is, like all novels, rather a representation of reality because it is mediated by the imaginary, constructed by writers who use literature not
only as an art form but also for the purpose of calling attention to important issues in their societies.

Given the growing number of women writers from Francophone Africa, it was imperative to make a number of choices. That is why this study will consider the prose fiction of only six women authors from Senegal and Cameroon and focus on eight of their novels. This limited corpus will allow a close analysis of the selected texts as well as an in-depth look at male characters in these works. As a result, this study is by no means an attempt to compare male characters in the novels of both men and women writers from Francophone Africa. However, that could be an interesting topic, which I believe will open up opportunities for further research.

One aspect of the originality of this study lies in its interdisciplinary methodology. While many researchers have dealt with masculinities in a specific discipline, my project is characterized by the use of not only critical literary works but also recent contributions to masculinity studies from sociology and anthropology; this is a novelty to the study of masculinity in African novels.

Finally, that I limit my study to a few works is in no way a denial of the remarkable overall contribution that
female literary artists have made to African literature. In fact, despite their late emergence into the literary world, due mostly to the patriarchal and colonial systems of education which favored men, African Francophone women have made a considerable impact on the African literary scene in recent decades. Indeed, since they broke their literary silence, African women have re-defined womanhood, corrected the absurd female images in African literature and culture. In addition, African women have produced a variety of writing rich in quantity, quality and craftsmanship. Their works have shown remarkable stylistic innovations, as well as thematic expansions and incursions into subjects hitherto perceived by society as taboo for women to write about; these include all subjects that deal with the body, with sexuality, and therefore are private.

3. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

i) Defining masculinity

The concept of masculinity is complex and several definitions can be found in literature, as we will discuss at length later.

One of the most difficult questions faced by the study of masculinity is defining this object of analysis. What is masculinity? Peter Middleton poses the question directly:
"Is it a discourse, power structure, an ideology, an identity, a behavior, a value system or all these?" (Middleton 1992:152).

In the 2005 edition of his study on masculinity, the Australian sociologist, Robert W. Connell discusses various researches done in this field since the appearance of his groundbreaking work, *Masculinities*, in 1995. His starting point in 2005 is the recognition that there are a variety of masculinities and femininities, and that "masculinities are configurations of practice structured by gender relations," which means that masculinity exists only in relation to femininity. He also argues that masculinity is not a mere character type or behavioral norm, but part of "the process of relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives" (Connell 2005:71). He concludes that, "masculinity, to the extent that the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality, and culture" (Connell 2005:71).

Another concept articulated by Connell will be useful to my analysis. It has to do with what he calls "hegemonic
masculinity," which he defines as "the configuration of
gender practice which embodies the currently accepted
answer to the problem of legitimacy, which guarantees (or
is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the
subordination of women" (Connell 2005:77). In essence,
hegemonic masculinity refers to that view of masculinity
which has established dominance in society; it creates
cultural images of what it means to be a "real man." In
addition, this form of masculinity is mostly supported by
social institutions such as school, religion, and law, to
cite only a few.

We can see that one important aspect of masculinity
is that it is relational, meaning that masculinity exists
only in relation to femininity. This aspect is important to
my study because, though it is not comparative, it is by
necessity relational. How then will the concept of
masculinity be used in this study?

Adapting Connell’s (2005) perspective on masculinity,
my study will establish that, unlike maleness, which is a
biological state, masculinity is a gender identity category
constructed socially and interpreted from a cultural
perspective. In addition, masculinity has multiple and
ambiguous meanings according to context and changes over
time. And, what Connell means by a "configuration of practice" is, things men do in certain ways, and if they fail to do them it implies they are not masculine. Notions of masculinity vary among cultures and belief systems, educational backgrounds, age and gender groups. Furthermore, as the following analyses by scholars will show, masculinity is about power and issues surrounding the use of power. Power is hierarchical and masculinities are woven around hierarchies that depict men as being above and women below. In addition, there is no one form of masculinity.

However, as this study will establish, among the various masculinities uncovered in the novels under examination, hegemonic masculinity appears more often than other forms.

The objective of this study is twofold. On the one hand, my analysis makes visible masculinity as a cultural construct that is based on hierarchical structures of power relations, and on the other, it explores alternative and more communicative and cooperative models of masculinity.

At this point I would like to introduce a brief personal note, as it is important to show the position of the critical subject. I have brought to this study my own experience as a man and as a Western-educated Zambian from Lunda ethnic background. No doubt my African experience, my
gender position, and my cultural milieu will bear on my analyses.

ii) Approaches to masculinity

In order to carry out my analysis of aspects of masculinities in selected literary texts produced by African women from Cameroon and Senegal, I will use a socio-cultural study approach to masculinity. Before explaining the raison d'être of such a choice, it will be useful to discuss further what masculinity means. Different schools of thought have defined masculinity in a variety of ways. An “état des lieux” of this question will point out problems that these diverse definitions pose for the scholar of literature.

Since the early 1990s, there have been various approaches to the study of masculinity in Europe, Australia and North America, and more recently in Africa. In Europe and North America in particular, researchers have examined masculinity from diverse theoretical perspectives: biological, anthropological, psychological and sociological. Although each of these perspectives adds to the understanding of the meaning of masculinity, each is
limited in explaining how gender operates in specific cultures.

a. Biological perspective

Biological theorists have linked different gender behaviors to genetic factors. They argue that the innate biological differences between males and females program different social behaviors. One such view is expressed by Steven Goldberg who advances the idea that women’s subordinate position is due, for the most part, to innate differences between males and females. In *The Inevitability of Patriarchy*, Goldberg claims that the subordination of women is the inevitable outcome of hormonal effects on males, which produce male aggression and lead to dominance. This view assumes that masculinity is, to borrow John Beynon phrase, “a standardized container, fixed by biology, into which all men can be placed, something natural that can even be measured in terms of physical attributes” (Beynon 2002:2). In short, according to the biological theory, men are born with masculinity as part of their genetic make-up.

This argument has been challenged by many scholars. In *Men’s Lives*, Michael Kimmel and Michael Messner reject the
genetic perspective, arguing that although biological differences between men and women seem to have their influences, they do not determine our behavior as men and women: “psychological and social differences are more the result of the way cultures interpret, shape, and modify these biological inheritances” (Kimmel and Messner 1992:4-5).

b. Anthropological perspective

Anthropologists adopt different positions. Some have suggested that the universality of gender differences comes from specific adaptations to the environment, while others describe the cultural variations of gender role, seeking to demonstrate the fluidity of gender and the primacy of cultural organization. For example, David Gilmore (1990) argues that the universality of gender differences is as a result of cultural adaptations to the environment; on the other hand, Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox advance the idea that the sexual division of labor is universal because of the different nature of bonding for males and females. They argue that, “Nature intended mother and child to be together because the mother is the source of emotional security and food; hence, cultures have prescribed various
behaviors for women that emphasize nurturance and emotional connection” (Tiger and Fox 1971:64-65).

This particular anthropological school of thought has been challenged by many scholars. Perhaps the best known challenge is the work of the “founding mother” of American anthropology, Margaret Mead. In her cross-cultural study, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*, Mead suggested that there were no absolute personality differences between men and women. Among the Arapesh of New Guinea, for example, it is not just the women but the men too, who are gentle and non-aggressive, while among the Mundugamor, also of New Guinea, both sexes are aggressive. In yet another New Guinea society, the Tchambuli, the stereotypes are reversed; it is the men who decorate themselves, are vain, and are interested in art, theater, and petty gossip, whereas the women are unadorned, brisk, and efficient in such practical tasks as raising children and fishing. Mead concluded that such data threw great doubt on the biological or anthropological basis of gender behavior and strongly supported the thesis that sex-linked behavioral characteristics and activities are the result of social conditions (Mead 1963:310-322).
The same sentiment is echoed by Barbara Chasin, who believes that genes cannot determine human behavior and its complexities. In “Sociobiology: A Sexist Synthesis,” Chasin dismisses earlier claims that men are innately more aggressive than women, stating that such an argument is dishonest and sexist. She observes, for instance, that “in pygmy society, it is hard to find examples of males being more aggressive than females” (Chasin 1977:29).

Similarly, Patricia Draper contends that there are societies where there is little division of labor. In such societies, men and women may engage in different tasks but women are not confined to doing domestic chores. In her study on the !Kung Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert, she reveals that the women provide from 60 to 80 percent of the daily food supply. Their gathering requires them to go quite a distance from their camps. Women as well as men are likely to be absent from the camp. The women are skilled in understanding the meaning of animal tracks and provide invaluable information for the male hunters. The women also have the “ability to discriminate among hundreds of edible and inedible species of plants at various stages in their life cycle” (Draper 1975:83).
In yet another study, Julian Steward (1972) found, among the Indians of the Great Plains of North America, numerous cases of women who gained fame as hunters and warriors, both regarded as men's activities.

It is therefore fair to say that biological differences between men and women do not result in different behavioral characteristics; theories of biological determinism are just another kind of weapon used to preserve inequalities.

c. Psychological perspective

Psychological models have also made contributions to the discussion of gender roles and not only among so called “primitive societies.” In the United States, for example, psychological studies on gender have described sequences of development specifically for men and women. Earlier theorists observed psychological distancing from the mother as the precondition for independence and autonomy, or suggested a sequence that placed the capacity for abstract reason as the developmental stage beyond relational reasoning. Since, according to these scholars, it is naturally normal for males to exhibit independence and the
capacity for abstract reason, they have argued that males are more successful at negotiating these psychological stages and implied that women somehow lagged behind men in developmental success.

But this psychological model has been contested by feminist theorists who do not believe that male children have higher capacity for abstract reason. Instead, they have placed gender differences squarely in a social context. For instance, Nancy Chodorow explains why females grow up to be primary caretakers of children and why they are able to develop stronger affective ties with children than males do. She suggests that identification is more difficult for boys since they must psychologically separate from their mothers and model themselves after a parent who is mostly absent from home, the father. As a result, boys become more emotionally detached and repressed than girls. Conversely, girls do not experience this psychological separation. Instead, mothers and daughters maintain an intense, ongoing relationship with one another. Hence, daughters acquire the psychological capability for mothering, and “feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people more than masculine personality does” (Chodorow 1978:44). In essence, Chodorow rejects the
biological construct of male superiority; she rather insists that “essential” differences between the sexes are socially constructed and, therefore, subject to be criticized and changed (Chodorow 1978:15-16).

Freda Salzman also takes issue with the psychological model and argues against Freud’s theories based on biological determinism. She rejects the idea that “Anatomy is Destiny” which has been used to explain women’s subordinate role in society. Salzman argues that Freud’s theories are flawed and speculative and that socially significant traits cannot be explained only genetically (Salzman 1977:31).

d. Sociological perspective

Despite the above contributions to masculinity studies, many sociological models are still based on the theory of sex roles, an aspect of functionalist theory, which posits that people learn from their society’s established institutions, such as family, schools, and religious organizations. As a result, they behave in ways that are socially acceptable and appropriate to their sex.

Sex role theorists also maintain that women’s reproductive role has dictated that their gender role be a
domestic one. Considering that they bear and nurse children, it is justifiable that they remain at home to rear them. Conversely, men’s biology better suits them for the role of economic provider and family protector. As the American functionalist theorist, T. Parsons, puts it:

The fundamental explanation for the allocation of the roles between the biological sexes lies in the fact that the bearing and early nursing of children establishes a strong and presumptive primacy of the relation of the mother to the small child and this in turn establishes a presumption that the man who is exempted from these biological functions should specialize in alternative directions. (Parsons 1955:23)

However, sex-role-based gender concepts have also proven problematic. Different schools of thought have questioned this theory, as it does not address the fact that masculine traits are valued more than those thought of as feminine, and assume that gender forms the core of one’s identity. The strongest challenge, as we have seen, has come from feminist scholars. Indeed, they have altered fundamentally the way scholars and critics think about masculinity by contesting traditional notions that sex-roles are biological or pre-existing norms. Instead, they argue that masculinity is a socially and culturally constructed ideology. Feminists view gender as a set of expectations that is generated within the context of a
particular social and economic structure and is reproduced and transmitted through a process of social learning. In this way, the expectations become fundamental components of our personalities.

Following the feminist arguments, many sociologists in North America, Europe, and Australia, have come to agree that masculinity is not a biological category. Rather it is a social construct, having multiple representations and being subject to change and revision. They posit that masculinity is constantly shifting and defined in relation to femininity. These sociologists also argue that masculinity is a site of interconnection and tension with other sources of social differentiation, including age and class.

iii). Masculinities in Africa

For the purpose of this investigation into the representations of masculinities in selected Francophone African female-authored novels, the theoretical framework will be underpinned by Connell, as well as Linsay and Miescher’s perspectives. Their approaches recognize that there is no universally valid definition of masculinity,
that male identities are the result of social processes of gender construction.

This brings us to the discussion of masculinity in the African context. In this section, I will briefly explore some major trends in existing scholarship and use a few examples from my own African experience to highlight key points.

Like anywhere in the world, there is no one form of masculinity in Africa. Rather, there are multiple and sometimes ambiguous meanings of African masculinities; they are fluid, and they change over time and in different settings.

According to Lisa Lindsay and Stephan Miescher, in Africa there is no typical man and there is no one version of masculinity; instead, there are various ways of being a man. In other words, various African communities have different ideas about masculinity and the ways it should be expressed. They offer the following definition: “we use the term masculinity to refer to a cluster of norms, values and behavioral patterns expressing explicit and implicit expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others.” (Lindsay and Miescher 2003:4).
Indeed, in my experience, and also as expressed by Robert Morrell in his study of masculinity in South Africa, there are versions of masculinity associated with war, and others associated with farming or cattle herding. There are indigenous definitions and versions of masculinity defined by tribal ethnic practices, as well as newer versions shaped by outside influences like Islam, Christianity, Western cultures, and even global media, including television, films, magazines, and the internet.

In many societies in Africa, cultural groups have developed and continue to carry out initiation practices such as circumcision, which provides male children with a passage from boyhood to manhood. During such initiation practices, not only do boys formally attain manhood status, but they also receive lessons in things men need to do in order to be considered masculine. It should be added that initiation changes society’s expectations of a male child, thought it may not change who he is inside as profoundly.

Gretchen Dihoff has studied the Haussa-Fulani in regard to masculinity. The Haussa-Fulani are an ethnic group found in both Senegal and Cameroon, as are the female writers discussed in this study. Among the Haussa-Fulani, masculinity is considered as something boys must achieve
through strenuous effort. To mark his transition from puberty to adulthood, the adolescent male is beaten at a ceremony to prove his bravery. If he stoically endures, he qualifies to marry one of the most beautiful girls in his community (Dihoff 1970:31-33). This also demonstrates how this concept of masculinity affects women. Indeed, the most beautiful girl’s opinion is not considered, but she may well have been taught that bravery and stoicism are the most desirable qualities of a husband.

The attributes of masculinity found in Senegal and Cameroon also exist in many other parts of Africa. In the Lunda culture found in Zambia, for instance, the rite of circumcision involves, first, seclusion of boys from their entire families as well as from women and girls, keeping them in the bush at a specific site known as mukanda where they are circumcised. Second, at this site of traditional learning, each newly circumcised boy or kandanji is assigned an adult male tutor called chilombola. These older men pass on information and skills that are considered necessary for an adult male in their society. They include—but are not restricted to—ethnic history and customs, hunting, fishing and house building, sexuality and how to treat women. As James Pritchet also observes, “lessons are
sometimes punctuated by beatings for responding too slowly to an instruction or command from a ritual official or even for a defiant or disrespectful demeanor" (Pritchett 2001:145). Following a successful learning process at the mukanda, boys are removed from their individual mothers, who have raised them to this time, and brought under the collective control of the men of their village. This implies that, once they come out of the mukanda, boys must spend more time with the men in the chota, the men’s court and forum, where they learn their male responsibilities in society.

Rites of passage such as circumcision play a large role in defining masculinity in Africa. In an article titled “Young Males and Masculinity in Sub-Sahara Africa,” Gary Baker notes that in Uganda, boys become men when they are circumcised in public, and “are not considered men if they are circumcised under anesthesia. Similarly, shouting out in pain during a public circumcision can prevent boys from being accepted as men” (Baker 2006).

Research in Africa has revealed that there is a linkage between notions of masculinity and sexuality. For example, N. Price and K. Hawkins⁷ reported that young men in
Zambia talked about sexual relationships as central to their self-esteem and social status. Similarly, in a Xhosa township in South Africa, the number of girlfriends a boy has defines what it means to be a man.\footnote{8}

This observation from the South African context is also true for Namibian youth. In his study, “I Am the Man,” Heike Becker finds that sexuality and gender relations play a big role in the construction of masculine identities among urban youth in Owambo. Sexually assertive male behavior was a salient factor in ‘proper maleness’ (Becker 2005:32).

Fearlessness is another attribute of masculinity. Catherine Campbell’s study among mine workers in South Africa shows that men believe being a man means being fearless and strong. Campbell observes that, “male identities serve as a key coping mechanism for dealing with high risk working conditions, through encouraging men to be brave and fearless in the interest of supporting their families” (Campbell 2001:276).

In an article titled “Gender and Embodiment: Expectations of Maleness in a Zambian Village,” Paul Dover explores how virility is the catalyst for masculinity among
the Goba people. The Goba believe that a real man is one with a “strong back,” who is implicitly a potent man. As Dover points out, such a man is referred to as murume akasimba [a man of power] and his power is manifested in his capacity to bear children. Once he gets married, he expects his wife to have as many children as she can, for the more children a man has, the more virile he is considered by the community. But if his wife fails to bear any children, the man will marry a second wife; this is one of the reasons that polygamy occurs among the Goba people. It is interesting to note that in this community, when a couple experiences infertility, the blame is put squarely on the woman.

In addition to virility, a man of power is expected to be self-reliant, hardworking, and successful. He is able to provide for his family’s needs and to help his kin. He is fearless, always calm and decisive, slow to anger but ready to defend his honor and that of his family. He does not show pain, nor does he complain when facing difficulties. A man of power is also expected to be generous, a person one can depend on for advice.
Exploring historical constructions of masculinity, Lisa Lindsay describes the linkage between wage labor, money, and gender among railway workers in southwestern Nigeria from the 1930s to the mid-1960s. She identifies three types of adult masculinities, connected to sex, age, and status; these include adult masculinity, senior or elder masculinity, and the concept of what Africans call the "Big Man," that is, a wealthy man who has acquired a social promotion. The ability of men to be breadwinners is important to their masculine identity. Men attain seniority status by educating their children, assisting extended family members, investing in community projects, and building a house. Wealth, followers, and political power give "big men" their "hyper-masculine status." 

In her study of Nigerian youths, Egodi Uchendu observes that in general, young Nigerians associate masculinity with a number of physical and moral attributes: strength and firmness, fearlessness and decisiveness. A man must also learn how to conceal emotions and refrain from smiling. Masculinity is also tested through the ability to take risks, provide leadership, control and conquer. In order to enjoy a higher status, a masculine man must be
able to protect the weak and generally be principled 
(Uchendu 2007:283). We can see once again the complexity of masculinity which prescribes seemingly contradictory values. To be a man, one has to be at once both strong and compassionate, but in practice, compassion is less respected than strength; only the man who is truly secure in his masculinity can afford to display compassion, which can be misconstrued as weakness. In addition, it should be stressed that in some cases wealth can symbolize strength; this is something that if not achieved in a right fashion, it can be done through illegal or corrupt practices, as exemplified by some African leaders who have built their fame through embezzlement of public funds.

Morrell is right to point out that masculinity in Africa must also be studied within the context of social and economic changes, urbanization, and political transformations. South Africa’s political and economic systems have been changing since the early 1990s. Similarly, there have been changes in gender relations, notably in the perceptions and performances of masculinity (Morrell 2001:32).

Pushed by the rise of women into professional positions, which has made it difficult for the traditional
sexual division of labor to be maintained, some young male professionals - especially in South Africa - are embracing new kinds of masculinity. These men are illustrations of the “New Men”; they “do not subscribe to the stereotype that all women are nags, that women should look nice and say little” (Morrell 2001:4). New men accept changing gender roles and strive to be “non-sexist, non-autocratic, more involved in domestic responsibilities, emotionally more responsive and more willing to criticize their own position and practices” (Morrell 2001:164). New men are also supportive of their partners’ educational and professional goals. They participate - sometimes without coercion and despite societal criticism - in housework, such as looking after the children, doing the dishes or running domestic errands.

I subscribe to Connell’s as well as Lindsay and Miescher’s conclusions that there are multiple forms of masculinity in Africa. It is this plurality of forms that my study explores through the selected novels of Senegalese and Cameroonian women. I discuss the representation of men and masculinity in these novels and attempt to unravel the assumptions behind these imaginative representations. I also speculate on the possibility of creating a new image
of masculinity by identifying what African women’s literature has to say about changing these social roles.

It should be noted that although the six women writers examined here are all Africans, their cultural, religious, and personal experiences are different. On the one hand, the two Senegalese novelists, Mariama Bâ and Aminata Sow Fall, are from the Wolof ethnic group in an Islamic-influenced society where some aspects of the Koran have merged with local traditions. For instance, polygamy is an accepted form of marriage in most African traditional societies; Islam also accepts polygamy but introduces a legislation which limits to four the number of wives a man can have. On the other hand, Delphine Zanga Tsogo and Calixthe Beyala are from the Beti ethnic group in Cameroon, while Evelyne Mpoudi Ngolle is Douala, and Philomène Bassek is Bassa. Consequently, these novelists each have different world views. One should therefore be prepared for an array of male characters who display masculinities that reflect the novelists’ various visions.

iv) **Selected Authors and Texts**

The primary texts selected for my investigation of aspects of masculinity include three novels by Senegalese

With this selection, I have tried to overcome the tendency in most criticism of Francophone women’s writing to concentrate on canonical writers at the expense of lesser known ones.

This corpus comprises writers who produced their works between the late 1970s and 1990s. Although primarily selected for their creativity, vision, and innovative literary approach, collectively the works also provide a repertoire of novels from which to assess their authors’ representations of men’s social behaviors in their interactions with women.
v) **Organization of Chapters**

The organization of this research follows a straightforward plan. In Part One, I provide the tools necessary for my literary analyses. These include the purpose, significance, and scope of the study, the conceptual and theoretical framework, which comprises definitions and approaches to masculinity in general and in specific African contexts. This first part ends with the discussion of selected authors and texts.

In Part Two, I discuss the emergence of African Francophone women writers. This part examines the reasons for the long absence of African women from the literary world, their emergence onto the literary scene, and how they represent their experiences.

Parts Three and Four constitute the core of my study. The third part explores how a specific form of masculinity, known as hegemonic masculinity, is enacted in African women’s literary texts. Part Four centers on male characters who reject the hegemonic forms of masculinity and seek a more egalitarian relationship with women. Part Five, which is essentially the conclusion to this work, summarizes the findings of my study.
Notes

1 For instance, in an article entitled “The Female Writer and her Commitment,” the feminist critic Molara Ogundipe posits that men’s portrayal of women in African literature is generally misconstrued and does not give the genuine woman’s point of view.


3 Steven Goldberg, 1974:103-107.

4 One should note that Africans do not use the term “pygmy,” which has been coined by Western anthropologists to describe a conglomeration of ethnic groups such as, for example, the Baka, the Mbuti, the Efe and the Aka found in Central Africa.

5 Sigmund Freud, 1950:74-78.


9 Paul Dover, 2005:178.


11 See Philippe Antoine and Jeanne Nanitelamio 1996:133.
PART TWO

FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN WOMEN’S WRITING: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

4. Absence of Women Writers

Before making a sustained analysis of aspects of masculinity in the representation of men in Francophone African women’s literature, it is appropriate to review the literature on the reasons why African women began writing later than their male counterparts. This section, therefore, traces the emergence of African women’s written literature, with a focus on French-speaking Africa.

In the preface of Simone Kaya’s work Les Danseuses d’Impe-Eya (1976), Cheikh Hamidou Kane deplored the relative absence of African women writers on the literary scene; he observed that “parmi ces enfants de l’Afrique qui se sont livrés à l’entreprise d’écriture, les filles de l’Afrique ont, jusqu’à présent, figuré en très petit nombre”¹ [among these children of Africa who have been engaged in writing, the daughters of Africa have, thus far, been small in number]. A similar view was expressed by Arlette Chemain-Degrange in her work published in 1980; she highlighted the female condition in francophone African novels and then concluded that, “il n’existe pas de femme,
à l’heure actuelle, qui ait pensé sa propre condition et donné à sa réflexion la forme d’une fiction romanesque,” (Chemail-Degrange 1980:23) [At the present time, there is no woman who has thought about her own condition and put it a novelistic form.] The Senegalese feminist critic, Awa Thiam, urged her African sisters not to be spoken for but to speak out for themselves.²

Several studies have shown that African Francophone women’s literature is relatively young. Although women began to write as early as 1958, their literary production was sporadic until the 1970s, when the formation of a female literary corpus took shape.³ The logical question to be asked, then, is: why did these women appear so late on the literary landscape?

The tardiness of female literary creation dates back to the colonial era, when European colonialists privileged the schooling of males. They gave them the training they needed in order to carry out their colonial administrative policies. In the meantime, girls were provided with home-oriented education which prepared them to become wives and mothers. In essence, colonial education policies reinforced gender differences that were already in place.
As a result, African women were prevented from attaining the same educational level as men, and therefore could not produce literary works. Maryse Condé writes, for example, that, “Comme dans un premier temps, [l’]école [européenne] était réservée aux garçons, elle a introduit plus qu’un fossé entre “lettrés” et “illettrées,” une division radicale entre les deux sexes” (Condé, 1979:3) [Because, from the beginning, the (European) school was reserved for boys, it introduced more than a gap between literates men and illiterates women - a radical division between the sexes].

Even when colonial schools became available for girls, traditional norms prevented them from acquiring Western education, thus giving boys more access to Western schooling than girls. In addition, parents gave the boy-child more time for study while burdening the girl-child with domestic chores. Juggling between the home, the farm, the books and the market-place, the girl had no time to study and eventually abandoned her education altogether. The reason behind such discrimination was that boys were supposed to be breadwinners while girls would be taken care of by their husbands. As a result, girls were deprived of opportunity for social, economic, political, and literary
advancement for several decades. Tambudzai – Tambu for short, the female protagonist of Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*, describes her situation as a girl in Zimbabwean rural context. In her compound, there were “twenty-four stomachs to fill three times a day. Twenty-four bodies to which water had to be fetched from Nyamora daily. Twenty-four people’s laundry to wash as often as possible . . . Now, this was women’s work.” (Dangarembga, 1988:133). In the meantime, her brother, Nhamo, is sent to a mission school.

Generally, parents were reluctant to send their daughters to school because the types of employment formal education could provide were mainly reserved for men. Even the little education women received was faced with resistance from families on grounds that they would refuse to marry or, once married, would resist submission to men as required by patriarchy.

5. Male Writers’ Representations of Women

Within nationalist pre-independence African literature, two main models of African womanhood were proposed: woman as mother and woman as beauty. The literature of Negritude, a movement that attempted, among other things, to recapture
Africa’s glorious past, has countless examples of those two figures. I will focus on works by Leopold Sédar Senghor, one of the founders of the Negritude movement, and Camara Laye, who belongs to the generation that came after the Negritude poets, but who was greatly influenced by the values of that movement.

In his poem “Black Woman,” Senghor celebrates the African woman and the landscape she represents:

Nude woman, black woman,
Clothed in your color which is life, in your form this is beauty,
I have grown in your shadow while the sweetness of your hands cradled my eyes,
And high on the fiery pass, I find you, Earth’s promise, in the heart of summer and noon,
And your beauty blasts me full-heart like the flash of an eagle in the sun. . .
(In Selected Poems /Poésies Choisies, 1976:33)

The rest of the poem describes the African woman in a series of natural images, including “savanna of pure horizon” and “ripe fruit of firm flesh.” She is a simple, natural beauty, proud of her identity, far from the “savage” and “barbaric” vision of the colonizer.

Senghor’s idealized representation of the African woman is echoed by Camara Laye in his poem “To My Mother,” that introduces his novel The African Child, and which Aduke Adebayo describes as “the maternal epic par
excellence” (Adebayo, 1996:179). In this nostalgic poem, Laye reveals the cultural relevance of the African woman as a nurturer. Laye hails his mother’s resignation and patience:

Black woman, woman of Africa, O my mother, I am thinking of you . . .
O Daman. O my mother, you who bore me Upon your back, you who gave me suck, you who Watched over my first faltering steps, you who were the first to open my eyes to the wonders of the earth, I am thinking of you . . .
Woman of the fields, woman of the rivers, woman of the great river-banks, O you my mother, I am thinking of you . . .
Woman of great simplicity, woman of great Resignation,
O my mother I am thinking of you.
(Camara Laye, “To My Mother”)

In this dedicative poem, the mother becomes the generic black African woman. Therefore, her persona can be read as referring both to Laye’s real mother, Daman, and to “Mother Africa.” Those two mothers (biological and metaphorical) nurtured him, taught him the ways of the world, cared for him and loved him. Now that the young boy has grown up and is living in Paris, he longs to be back home with his two loving mothers. Trapped in the modern, urbanized world of Paris, he longs for the traditional ways of his homeland. Here, the woman is judged on her role as a mother who must possess the following qualities: patience,
resignation and self-denial. Although male writers consider these qualities and their representations as positive, they are perceived by women as problematic. According to Irène Assiba d’Almeida and Florence Stratton, these male-authored images where the African mother is given the proportions of the whole continent, are far removed from the reality of women’s daily experience.  

Feminist critics such as Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana and d’Almeida have critiqued the idealization of the African woman. In *Littérature Féminine*, Herzberger-Fofana states that,


> [Among the various images glorified by the Negritude poets and those of the same literary movement, the mother image carries the greatest weight. Whether mythical or imaginary, the mother becomes the symbol of childhood kingdom and a lost paradise. In times of distress or bitterness, she is the one who wipes away the suffering and restores the exile’s hope. Such idealization and
mystification of the African woman characterize both the poets and novelists of the Negritude era.

In “Tyranies: Les cordes du langage’ et les mots de la Mère” d’Almeida makes the following remark:

La métaphore de la “Mère Afrique”, on le sait, fut très récurrente dans la poésie de la négritude. Elle représentait un concept pan-nationaliste dont le but était essentiellement politique. L’équation est bien connue: la femme = la mère = la terre = l’Afrique = “La Mère Afrique”. Ce modèle établi par les chantres de la Négritude et inlassablement repris par leurs épigones a nourri pendant longtemps la représentation de la femme dans la littérature africaine. . . . Ce modèle de représentation [est] pour le moins mythique. . . . C’est pour cette raison que, une fois venues à l’écriture, les femmes africaines qui ont hérité de ce modèle en font une critique sévère et tentent d’en modifier la teneur. (D’Almeida 2002:26)

[It is a well known fact: the metaphor of “Mother Africa” was very recurrent in negritude poetry. It represented a pan-Nationanist concept, the aim of which was essentially political. The equation is well known: woman = earth = Africa = “Mother Africa.” This model established by the Negritude poets and tirelessly repeated by their epigons has, for a long time, nurtured the representation of the woman in African literature. . . . This model of representation [is] at the least mythical. . . . That is the reason why, once they came to writing, African women who inherited this model criticize it strongly and attempt to change its tenor.]

Herberger-Fofana and d’Almeida argue that this glorification of African women as idealized mother conceals their social reality. However, as I discuss later, African
women writers debunk this myth by giving a more accurate and realistic representation of African women and their experiences in society.

The African novel is another literary genre which is filled with male-authored stereotypical representation of women. In their works, African male novelists tend to assign their female characters nothing but their traditional roles. In *L’Image de la femme dans le roman francophone de l’Afrique Occidentale*, Sonia Lee observes that in Camara Laye’s *The African Child*, the mother is both the symbol of fertility and of rich past tradition. The maternal image also symbolizes happiness in the family and a reassurance for children.\(^5\)

In Mongo Beti’s *Mission to Kala*, the main issue is bride price. The novel depicts Niam, a man who exercises patriarchal power over his wife. Niam believes that, because of the bride price he paid for his wife, he has the right to exploit, subordinate, and even make her his “property.” The female character around which the plot is centered is caught up in the web of domination and submission. She is portrayed in her domestic roles; she works as a housewife and takes care of her husband’s farm
and is more an economic asset, a piece of property, than a wife to him. After his wife leaves him, Niam realizes that his house is in shambles and that he cannot take care of either himself or his farm; he then decides to use his masculine power to bring his wife back because he believes, “I am the earth she rests on. By herself she is nothing but a dead leaf that has broken loose from the tree. For all her flutterings and gyrations, in the end she cannot prevent herself falling to the ground” (9). Ironically, what Niam describes is his own helplessness. Yet in his eyes, his wife is a piece of machinery at his service. This shows how patriarchy has socialized Niam into believing that men are superior to women who therefore should be subdued.

The other recurring image of women that appears in African men’s novels is that of the prostitute. In Poor Christ of Bomba, Mongo Beti satirically exposes some Catholic missionary practices in colonial Cameroon. He reveals the misery, exploitation and oppression of the young women kept in the Sixa. Father Drumont, the overseer of the Church, claims to have built this convent in order to prepare young women for their future roles as mothers
and wives. Instead, he and his African male agents mercilessly exploit the young women. They are forced to work in construction and to do domestic chores without pay. Gerald Moore describes their ordeal in the following terms: "Raphael, the catechist-doctor 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 catechist" (Moore 1966:79). Raphael also offers these young women as prostitutes to his friends. The women give in to avoid hard labor.

When Father Drumont leaves for a tour of other areas that fall under his jurisdiction, Raphael actually turns the Sixa into a brothel where he plays the role of the pimp. He collects fees and forces the "fiancées" (as he calls the young women) to have sex with "clients." When Father Drumont comes back from his tour of the villages and learns about the scandal at the Sixa, he conducts a medical examination and interrogates the girls who confess. Drumont fails to punish the male workers who turned these young women into sexual objects and instead blames the women (Beti 1971:170-205). Thus the women are not only innocent victims but also scapegoats who are held responsible for
the moral degradation in the Sixa. Indeed, in the patriarchal system, women are always blamed for what goes wrong in society.

It is obvious that whether in rural or urban setting, most African male writers represent their female characters only in relation to male characters. D’Almeida is correct in claiming that in male-authored novels, women are presented in a secondary role; in her view, “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 donc à l’arrière plan et ne se trouve définie que par rapport aux hommes”  

[The woman is rarely presented as the main character both in the narrative structure and thematic framework; she is assigned a secondary position in the background and is defined only in relation to men.] However, there are some exceptions to this trend. Some male writers have drawn well-rounded female characters, among them Sembène Ousmane and Ahmadou Kourouma.

Sembène Ousmane is regarded as one of the male writers who has championed women’s cause in Africa.  

He defies the stereotype that women cannot be leaders and do not have
organizational skills. He argues that no society can
develop effectively without the participation of women. In
an interview with Kembe Milolo in 1984, Ousmane stated:

Il m’est difficile de séparer l’homme et la femme
dans ma tête, dans ma vie, même privée. Je ne les
prends pas séparément. Je refuse de tomber dans
cette catégorisation où la femme est ici, 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.
(Milolo 1986:299)

[In my mind, in my life, and even in my private
life, it is difficult to separate men from women.
I don’t consider them as separate entities. I
refuse to fall into the categorization that
places men on one side and women on the other.
But for the movement in which we participated in
the 1940s to the 1960s, women played their part.
And when we honestly recount the history of that
movement, we have to give women the position they
deserve.]

Sembène Ousmane’s works feature an array of radical
young women. In God’s Bits of Woods (1962), he paints a
picture of revolutionary women who act outside the home in
order to change their society. Women play a major role in
the march from Thiès to Dakar, which is intended to secure
fair wages and fringe benefits from the colonial employers
and owners of the railways. One of these revolutionary
women is Penda. She mobilizes the womenfolk and acts as
spokesperson during the strike:
I speak in the name of all the women, but I am just the voice they have chosen to tell you what they have decided to do. Yesterday we all laughed together, men and women, and today we weep together, but for us women this strike still remains the possibility of a better life tomorrow. We owe it to ourselves to hold up our heads and not to give in now. So we have decided that tomorrow we will march together to Dakar. (187)

Penda successfully leads the women to Dakar, and when they reach the outskirts of the city, she encourages them to forge ahead, telling them that “The soldiers can’t eat us. They can’t even kill us. There are too many of us. Don’t be afraid, our friends are waiting for us in Dakar” (203). Although she is shot before the women enter the city, she is remembered as heroic, as “the warrior with a soldier’s cartridge belt around her waist” (240). Although the circumstances are different, her resolve anticipates that of Aïssatou, the female protagonist in Mariama Bâ So Long a Letter, who refuses to put up with a polygamous husband and defies the established societal norms to assert herself.

In the way Sembène Ousmane views the role of women in society, he is a revolutionary writer, a real feminist who favors women’s liberation, freedom of action for women and total rejection of all backward ideas and attitudes. His feminist perspective in God’s Bits of Wood is apparent as he shows the political force and potential of women, most
of whom are traditional and illiterate. In this novel, there is no single person who works individually; everybody feels that he or she belongs to the community and thus strives to work for the betterment of all the people. The strike is an eye-opening experience for both women and men; it raises the community’s level of consciousness as to women’s ability to lead and organize. However, compare to the reality on gender relations in most African societies, the scenario that Ousmane Sembène has painted in God’s Bits of Wood can be considered as idealistic.

The radicalism, inner strength, and sense of self-worth which characterize the female characters in God’s Bits of Wood is evident in Ousmane Sembène’s other novels as well; this is clearly the case with Rama in Xala (1976), and Tioumbé in L’Harmattan (1980). Rama, who is portrayed as emancipated and revolutionary, defies custom and tradition when she rejects a traditional polygamous marriage and openly tells her father, “I’m against this marriage, father. A polygamist is never frank” (13). She does not even conceal her opposition to polygamy from her fiancé, Pathé, when she tells him openly: “You know I’m against polygamy” (49). She is an agent of the liberation of women, rejecting polygamy because she believes it impedes women’s total
liberation from patriarchal subjugation. Rama, a university student, a modern young woman, is conscious of women’s condition in Senegalese patriarchal society and decides to fight the forces that oppress them. She seems to act as the author’s spokesperson in her denunciation of polygamy and her desire to work for what is best for women.

In *L’Harmattan*, Sembène offers a portrait of another emancipated young Senegalese woman who is courageous enough to defy the traditional family structure which she believes is no longer relevant in a modern society. Tioumbé Koeboghi is a schoolteacher and the regional secretary of a Marxist-oriented political party that advocates complete independence from France. Her father, Joseph Koeboghi, on the other hand, favors African independence but only within the “Communauté,” an association founded in 1958 under the initiative of General de Gaulle, and which comprised departments and Overseas territories, as well as various African countries that were previously under French administration. These differences result in a family feud. In the process, Tioumbé defies her father’s patriarchal authority, going so far as to confront him physically. This does not surprise Joseph Koeboghi as he has already sensed the new turn that the father-child relationship was taking.
Sembène uses young women’s voices to testify to his vision of a bright future for the African woman. He believes that the increased participation of women in decision-making is essential to change in Africa. As David Murphy puts it, his work acts as “a means of giving voice to the concerns of women, and as an attempt to imagine a new set of male-female relationships” (150).

Ahmadou Kourouma is also noted for his portrayals of strong female characters such as Salimata, the protagonist in *The Suns of Independence* (1981). She proves to be a woman who fully understands her existential situation and has the courage to make choices – even those that appear to be risky – in order to change her life. Salimata leaves the limitations of her native village for a more liberated life in the city. She shuns aggressive men who remind her of Tiékoura, the medicine-man who raped her. She refuses to have sexual relations with Baffi – her first husband from an arranged marriage – despite his repeated attempts, and she nearly kills him (26).

Like Ramatoulaye in Bâ’s *So Long a Letter*, Salimata defies traditional mores and her family’s threats when she refuses to marry her husband’s brother after she becomes a widow. She then meets Fama, whom she chooses to marry.
Despite warnings from the marabout that her husband is sterile, Salimata remains faithful to her determination not to have a child out of wedlock and rejects sexual advances from those who intend to take advantage of her situation. When her husband takes a second wife, Salimata initially welcomes her. As the co-habitation becomes unbearable, however, she walks out of the marriage and opts for a new life with yet another man. One may argue that Salimata lacks pride or integrity because she goes from one man to another. But I contend that her ability to choose what is best for her from the available alternatives is the most striking aspect of her character.

6. Subverting Male writers’ Representations of women

Contemporary female writers have made significant strides in attempting to redefine the role of women in African literature. In her insightful article La fonction politique des littératures africaines écrites, Mariama Bâ describes what she believes to be the function of an African woman writer:

La femme-écrivaine a une mission particulière. Elle doit, plus que ses pairs masculins, dresser un tableau de la condition de la femme africaine. Les injustices persistent, les ségrégations continuent malgré la décennie internationale dédiée à la femme par l’O.N.U., malgré les beaux
discours et les louables intentions. Dans la famille, dans les institutions, dans la rue, les lieux de travail, les assemblées politiques, les discriminations foisonnent. . . . C’est à nous femmes de prendre notre destin en main pour bouleverser l’ordre établi à notre détriment et ne point le subir. Nous devons user comme les hommes de cette arme, pacifique certes mais sure, qu’est l’écriture. Les chants nostalgiques dédiés à la mère africaine, confondus dans les angoisses d’hommes à la Mère Afrique ne nous suffisent plus.

[The woman writer has a special mission. She, more than her male counterparts, has to present the condition of the African woman in all its aspects. Injustices persist, segregations continue. . . Discriminations abound in the family, in institutions, in streets, work places, political assembles. We must, as women, take charge of our own destiny in order to overthrow the status quo which harms us and we must no longer submit to it. Like men, we must use the non-violent but effective weapon that is literature. We no longer accept the nostalgic praises to the African Mother who, in his anxiety, man confuses with Mother Africa.]

Bâ believes that it is incumbent upon women, in the words of the feminist critic Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, “to tell about being a woman and describe reality from a woman’s view, a woman’s perspective” (Ogundipe-Leslie 1987:5).

Herberger-Fofana seems to agree with Ogundipe-Leslie when she contends that,

Le but principal de toutes les femmes-écrivaines africaines 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. (Herzberger-Fofana 2000:24)
[What all African women writers aim at, is first, to speak out in order to denounce an oppressive situation, and to rise up against the forms of patriarchy that govern most African communities.]

Indeed, in speaking out, African women strive to deconstruct the distorted portrayal of women. However, their writing has included various themes ranging from social to political issues.

Female writers approach the gender equation in a variety of ways as they attempt to reverse aspects of female marginalization. Often they struggle to restore women to their rightful place either head-on or in a probing manner.

In her mock epistolary novel So Long a Letter, Mariama Bâ poses the problem of polygamy and its destructive impact on women. Using two intellectually sensitive women, Ramatoulaye and her friend Aïssatou, both facing polygamy, Bâ extols the need for women to revolutionize and change the status quo. In her article “The Concept of Choice in Mariama Bâ’s Fiction,” Irène Assiba d’Almeida notes that Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou “are strong [and] dignified women [who] have made different [but] vital choices.” Ramatoulaye defies tradition and marries Modou Fall against the will of
her parents and without demanding the traditional dowry: “Our marriage was celebrated without dowry, without pomp, under the disappointed looks of my father, before the painful indignation of my mother” (16). Indeed, she does not put a premium on the traditional bride-wealth. What matters to her is to make an independent decision she deems good for her. Ramatoulaye’s choice is driven by love and sharing rather than wealth. She believes that marriage is “a close association between two equals, and the sharing of pains, joys, hopes, disappointments and success” (Makward 1986:273). In the case of Aïssatou, as soon as her medical-doctor husband, Mawdo, takes his cousin Nabou as a new wife, she opts out of her marriage. Many female critics hail Aïssatou as a true feminist. For example, Julie Agbasiere views Aïssatou as a woman of action “who is ruled by her head, who knows what she wants and goes out for it” (Agbasiere 1999:75). In a similar vein, Helen Chukwuma praises Aïssatou for her courage to “burst the fence of subjugation and nihilism and turn her back to its oppression” (Chukwuma 1991:32). She is free and can reorganize her own life without necessarily depending on a man.
As they strive to correct the erroneous image of women presented in the earlier male literature, some women writers have distinguished themselves by presenting new forms of writing; Calixthe Beyala is one such writer. She has brought innovative quality to the African novel “in her use of all language registers, in her daring exploration of all areas, especially sexuality, and in her direct attacks of patriarchy and society” (Cazenave 1996:297).

As “language is used by the powerful to oppress and silence their subordinates” (Cameron 1992:1), Beyala, in her first novel, *The Sun Hath Looked Upon Me*, uses feminist language to subvert the masculinist discourse of supremacy and deploys a female-centered ideology. Her discourse makes women visible as protagonists and narrators with strong female agency and visibility at the same time as it attempts to subvert the crude male hegemony, not by elevating women, but by illustrating how masculinist attitude of her male characters degrade the men themselves as surely as the men degrade women.

However, Beyala also delves into less elevated discussion of sexuality, a topic which in itself is considered taboo in African women’s creative arts. In her depiction of sexuality, Beyala includes vivid scenes of
rape and masturbation, to the extent of shocking some readers. While critics like Ambroise Kom (1996:67) assert that Beyala uses crude and even pornographic language and descriptions as a cheap sensational way of selling her books, Beyala herself contends that her diction reflects the street language that she has always known. In an interview with Emmanuel Matateyou, she defends her use of such a raw language, arguing that this language reflects the realities of the “little people”: “C’est parce que je fais partie des petites gens, c’est très important. J’ai grandi à New-Bell à Douala. . . . je suis du monde des petites gens et je crois profondément que c’est le monde qui, demain, pourra apporter quelque chose à l’Afrique” (Matateyou 1996:606). [It is because I belong to the class of little people, that is very important. I grew up in New-Bell in Douala. . . . I am from the world of little people and I deeply believe that world will contribute to the future of Africa.] The “raw” language she uses in her novels is that of the “Others,” the forgotten people, and Beyala seems to put women in that forgotten category.

In addition, the use of such a discourse is meant to remind the reader that, although written in French, her stories portray the reality of an African shanty town. For
Beyala, this is a way to remain authentic to herself, to the people and places that inspire her writing, particularly in her early novels.

Beyala is a resolute writer who does not mince words when it comes to denouncing the abuses that women have undergone in patriarchal societies. She believes that women cannot achieve total freedom unless they completely expose their subjugation by speaking openly and frankly, and by honestly embracing difficult subjects.

Moreover, as Chantal Zabus points out, Beyala chooses “to disregard, fail to comply with, act against the dictates or requirements of the European prose narrative” (Zabus 1991:122). One of these transgressions has to do with her use of linguistic violence. In *The Sun Hath Looked Upon Me*, for example, she uses a violent lexicon to describe life in the shanty town, as a world dominated by bodily fluids: sweat, filth, spit, semen, and vomit oozing out of the bodies of its inhabitants.

Beyala’s works also abound with erotic scenes in which the male and female reproductive organs are explicitly described. In *Your Name Shall Be Tanga*, for instance, Beyala graphically describes how the protagonist is sexually violated:
Hassan takes me in his arms. Step by step, without letting go of me, he pushes me towards the bed. He collapses on top of my belly. "Kiss me," he demands. His lips subjugate me. He grabs one of my legs, then the other, puts them over his shoulders. He penetrates me. His steps cut through me. (19)

Elsewhere in the same novel, Beyala gives a vivid description of the gang rape of a young woman named Kadjaba Dongo:

One day . . . Kadjaba lay down on a mat underneath a mango tree. . . . They came alone or in groups. They spoke, she didn’t answer. . . . They left. Then there was silence. She breathed deeply, ready to surrender herself to sleep when the last one came. . . . He approached her, shored up her pagne, and penetrated her roughly. (24)

In this section I have explained how the development of literature by African Francophone women was retarded by the prevailing socio-historical order in Africa, where education and subsequently literature have traditionally been viewed as a male prerogative. African Francophone women entered the literary scene because as women, they wanted to correct certain fallacies which had gained currency in a male-dominated literature. In other words, women writers were committed to re-imagining what Molara Ogundipe-Leslie calls "the reality of the African woman," which she argues is either distorted in, or deleted from,
African literature by men (Ogundipe-Leslie 1987:8). By taking up the pen, women writers began defining themselves in their own terms. They empowered female protagonists, moving them from the periphery to the center. This enabled the women portrayed in their fiction to express their own experiences and to deal with a variety of issues affecting them.

It should however be mentioned that, although African male poets and novelists gave women peripheral and marginalized treatment in their early works, some of those writers acknowledged the roles women play, even in traditional societies and began including more positive female voices in their works. Also in an attempt to fill the gender gap between male and female characterization, some women writers have ushered in innovations in themes and literary forms.
Notes

1 Cheikh Hamidou Kane. In Simon Kaya’s Les Danseuses d’Impe-Eya.

2 Awa Thiam discusses this point in her book Black Sisters Speak Out, Tran, Dorothy S. Blair, 1986:11.


6 “In every Catholic mission in Southern Cameroon, there is a building which houses all the young girls engaged to be married. This is the sixa. Every girl who wishes to be married in the Catholic way must stay in the sixa for two to four months, except in special cases, which are numerous. The defenders of this institution proclaim its usefulness and even its necessity. Doesn’t it after all prepare these girls to be mothers of Christian families? But this justification is disputed by others. All that is certain is that these inmates are compelled to do manual work for over ten hours every day.” (See footnote, in Mongo Beti’s Poor Christ of Bomba, 1971:5).


8 See Chioma Opara, in Helen Chikwuma 1994:84.
10 This kind of language abounds in Beyala’s *Tu T’appelleras Tanga*.
PART THREE

PATRIARCHY, SEXISM AND HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

Most studies of Francophone African women’s novels, particularly those examined in this study, have focused on female characters and feminist concerns. However, though these characters are central to the narrative and to the feminist ideology of most authors, they do not operate in isolation; their experiences develop within their social relationships with men, who do deserve our attention.

Part Three explores a range of masculinities represented by the male characters in the following fictional works: Mariama Bâ’s *So Long a Letter* and *Scarlet Song*, Philomène Bassek’s *La tache de sang*, Aminata Sow Fall’s *The Beggars’ Strike*, Delphine Zanga Tsogo’s *Vies de Femmes*, and Calixthe Beyala’s *The Sun Hath Looked Upon Me* and *Your Name Shall Be Tanga*.

7. “Don’t blame me, blame Destiny”: manipulating religion and tradition in *So Long a Letter* and *Scarlet Song* by Mariama Bâ

The works studied in this section explore how men manipulate religious and social traditions that have been set by patriarchy, a social institution characterized by a power structure that does not allow for equality in gender
relations as they relate to marriage for instance. Mariama Bâ’s *So Long a Letter* and *Scarlet Song* depict how men exploit religion to support polygamy.

As pointed out earlier, Mariama Bâ’s fictional world is informed by the culture of the Wolof, the major Senegalese ethnic group to which the novelist belongs. Since I would like to focus on masculinity in conjugal relationships, it is imperative to examine the Senegalese social organization as a means to help understand marriage practices in Senegal.

In *La société Wolof*, the Senegalese sociologist Abdoulaye Bara Diop observes that his society today is still influenced by the class hierarchies of the past even though its functions have changed. The Wolof, like other groups such as the Sereer and Toucouleur, are organized according to a caste system which is closely aligned with the division of labor and comprises: (1) the free-born, the royal lineages and great warrior families, (2) the artisans who live by their trades, including blacksmiths or metal workers, leather workers, wood workers, and weavers, (3) the griots who are the lowest of all the castes and are thus feared and despised though valued for their knowledge of family and lineage history, and lastly (4) the slaves.
Historically, these included people taken in wars and raids, as well as those born slaves. Diop notes that marriages between members of different castes do occur, particularly among the wealthy and those with political and religious power. But children from these unions are ostracized and called ṅeeño benn tàn (one foot in the caste system) (Diop 1981).

As many African writers do, Mariama Bâ’s writing is deeply rooted in Senegalese customs and traditional artistic devices. For instance, one successful aspect of her literary work is her blending of oral and written traditions. She uses standard French literary patterns and techniques in complementary association with the Wolof oral customs of her own cultural tradition, thus realizing an impressive cultural blend and original artistic forms in both novels. She has succeeded in making Wolof language and culture essential components of her work.

Bâ’s first novel, So Long a Letter, is often mistakenly referred to as an “epistolary novel.” In reality, it has a hybrid form. This “long letter” functions as a diary, in fact a sort of “letter-diary” which is never sent. Rather it serves as a therapeutic device in which the narrator, Ramatoulaye, can share her innermost thoughts and
feelings with her lifelong friend and confidante, Aïssatou.

Renée Larrier has this to say about the form of the novel:

A letter-diary, however, seems contradictory. A letter after all is meant to be read by someone else; a diary is not. One can say that for Ramatoulaye, writing to Aïssatou is like writing to herself. Consequently in the novel the narrator and the narratee can be considered one and the same. (Larrier 1991:748)

At the beginning of this novel, we learn that Ramatoulaye’s husband, Modou Fall, has died of a heart attack. A few years before his death, and after twenty-five years of marriage to Ramatoulaye, Modou Fall married Binetou, his daughter’s Daba friend. For a while, Ramatoulaye thought of walking out of her marriage but she decided to stay, accepting – albeit reluctantly – an equal sharing of Modou’s attention, as prescribed by Islamic precepts concerning polygamous marriages. However, Modou abandoned her and spent all his time with his younger wife Binetou in a beautiful villa which he friend bought for her. In addition, he spent all his savings on Binetou and her mother. Thus, at the time of his death, he had nothing to pass on to his children but debts and bankruptcy, as Ramatoulaye reveals: “Dead without a penny saved. Acknowledgement of debts? A pile of them: cloth and gold
traders, home-delivery grocers and butchers, car-purchase instalments” (9).

In Wolof culture, a man is referred to as jeker këer, literally, the husband of the house and by extension, the “first in the house,” a title which reflects a man’s prerogatives and responsibilities toward his family. By abandoning his wife and children, Modou stripped himself of this jeker këer attribute. This, according to Wolof traditional belief, is shameful behavior. In a 1985 interview with Don Burness, Aminata Sow Fall rightly says:

A sense of shame used to be something to avoid. We are afraid of shame. There is a Wolof proverb that affirms ‘It is better to die than to know shame.’ People have been known to commit suicide because of scandal that caused them shame. Today, because of material goods, because of money, people have lost their sense of shame or scandal.²

Traditionally, any responsible man would ensure that his family had a secure and financial stable future, but Modou, at the time of his death, had failed to fulfill his duties.

Another important aspect of Wolof culture influenced by Islam is the fatalistic belief that everyone’s destiny is fixed and impossible to avoid. Modou justifies his marriage to Binetou as something destined by God. As the
Imam confirms when he breaks the news to Ramatoulaye:

"Modou . . . says it is fate that decides men and things: God intended him to have a second wife; there is nothing he can do about it" (37). This statement reveals the manipulative nature of Modou, he uses religion to his own benefit.

Modou’s handy justification becomes a question of faith, a belief that his fate, ordained by God, has made it impossible for him to act otherwise. However, he does not follow the teachings of his Islamic religion, which "admonish[es] men, if polygamous, to treat their wives equally" (Ahmed 1992:88). The Qur’an tells these men that they are breaking the law if they do not equitably provide for each of their wives’ needs. Through her representation of Modou, who violates this rule, Bâ denounces men who exploit religious and patriarchal traditions for their own personal interests. As Cécile Accilien points out in Rethinking Marriage, “religion is an excuse and a weapon used for those with power, mostly males, to maintain the status quo and to do what pleases them” (Accilien 2008:75). The accuracy of Accilien’s observation is apparent in Modou’s behavior, such as sending the Imam to inform Ramatoulaye of his marriage to Binetou. In doing so, Bâ
shows how religious power is intertwined with patriarchal practices.

Patriarchy is a gender system in which men dominate women. In addition, this system of social stratification based on sex provides men with power and material advantages while depriving women of both those benefits. In Wolof, a husband is also called *borom Këer*, literally, “the one to whom the house belongs,” and by extension the “head of the family”. This term reflects the proprietary nature of a man’s relationship to his house as well as his standing within the family. Based on this traditional position of privilege, Modou is able to mortgage the house that he and Ramatoulaye bought and paid for together without having to inform her: “This house and its chic contents were acquired by a bank loan. . . . Although the title deeds of this house bear his name, it is nonetheless our common property, acquired by our joint savings” (10). Moreover, Modou’s marriage to Binetou takes Ramatoulaye by surprise. He not only disrespects her but also violates the rules of his Islamic faith in the way he goes about acquiring a second wife.
His behavior should not be read as illustrating a normal trend in Islamic or other African polygamous relationships; it is rather, as Obioma Nnaemeka points out, the foolish act of an irresponsible, wayward spouse and *sugar daddy* that has absolutely nothing to do with the institution of polygamy as inscribed both in Islamic laws and African culture. . . . The polygamous institution in traditional African society is not designed to spring such devastating, lunch-hour surprises. Usually, the first wife participates in marriage ceremonies performed on behalf of her co-wife” (Nnaemeka 1996:177-178).

The position that Modou finds himself in is contradictory. He is aware that though tradition allows man to marry more than one wife, it disapproves of him abandoning his wife and family. But Modou cannot reconcile these tensions in his life. Mariama Bâ explains her own understanding of what Islam has to say concerning marrying more than one wife: “A man must be like an evenly balanced scale. He must weigh out in equal measures his compliments and his reproaches. He must give equally of himself. He must study his gestures and behaviour and apportion everything fairly!” (Scarlet Song, 1986:7). But Modou chooses to re-interpret this religious teaching to suit himself. This selectivity is grounded in the idea of male
privilege, but Modou overlooks the responsibilities that come with privilege.

Just as Modou tries to manipulate religious dictates, his older brother, Tamsir Fall, uses his patriarchal power to manipulate tradition for his own selfish ends. After Modou’s death, Tamsir proposes marriage to Ramatoulaye in keeping with the custom of levirate marriage or “widow inheritance.” This becomes a defining moment, for Ramatoulaye recognizes that she has been silenced for twenty five years of marriage. Now she will talk. Now she will unmistakably make her voice heard. Now she will tell Tamsir off with these trenchant words:

You forget that I have a heart, a mind, that I am not an object to be passed on from hand to hand. You don’t know what marriage means to me: it is an act of faith and of love, a total surrender of oneself to the person one has chosen and who has chosen you (58).

In this passage Bâ shows that one cannot be silenced forever. When compelled to do so, women are as capable as men of speaking out about their needs and desires. Bâ also criticizes the notion that women are property, an assumption that may be seen as underlying levirate marriage. It is fair to say, however, that levirate marriage was initially intended as a support system to provide domestic,
economic, moral, and material support to women and to orphaned children who needed to be kept in the family and be well taken care of. However, the levirate marriage is widely abused nowadays, giving the impression that women are exchanged as goods to be inherited rather than as human beings. Customs are part of society, but when people misuse them for their own selfish ends, those customs become problematic.

For Tamsir to marry Ramatoulaye would be a perversion of the custom because his only goal is to exploit Ramatoulaye, thinking that, as a school teacher, she will be an economic asset. In his eyes, this is a golden opportunity, for he can hardly support the three wives and several children he already has. He is ready to reap the benefit of her income. For Modou, polygamy provided an excuse to run after girls as young as his daughter; for Tamsir it becomes a way to reap where he has never sowed. Tamsir is an opportunist who manipulates traditions and Ramatoulaye does not mince words when she rejects his proposal:

What about your wives, Tamsir? Your income can meet neither their needs nor those of your numerous children. To help you out with your financial obligations, one of your wives dyes, another sells fruits, the third untiringly turns
the handle of her sewing machine. You, the revered lord, you take it easy, obeyed at the crook of a finger. I shall never be the one to complete your collection. (58)

By challenging Tamsir’s misguided performance of masculinity that seeks to objectify a woman, Ramatoulaye asserts her own individuality and personal worth. She is able to see the consequences of polygamy which Tamsir, driven by his greed, does not see or does not want to see. She understands how polygamy can harm men, women, and society as a whole.

Tradition and customs also account for the trials faced by Ramatoulye’s friend, Aïssatou. Mawdo married Aïssatou against his mother’s wishes. When he decides to marry a second and younger wife, he appears to yield to his mother’s insistence that he honor tradition when what prompts him to agree to the marriage is really his purely male desire for a younger woman.

Mawdo’s mother, Tante Nabou, still holds to the tradition of castes which dates back to the pre-colonial period. She is obsessed with her privileged origins and believes firmly that “blood carrie[s] with it virtues and that humble birth would always show in a person’s bearing” (26). As heir to the glorious name of Sine Diouf, Tante
Nabou is a noble who has little regard for lesser members of the community, such as the goldsmith caste from which Aïssatou hails. Tante Nabou calls Aïssatou “a woman who burns everything in her path like a fire in a forge” (26). The assumption underlying Tante Nabou’s metaphor is based on the common belief that because of the nature of their work, blacksmiths have negative supernatural powers and are therefore feared in addition to being despised.

One can then understand why Tante Nabou cannot bear the idea of her son being married to a descendent of a blacksmith. After a short training, she “gives” her niece Nabou to her son Mawdo: “My brother Farba has given you young Nabou to be your wife, to thank me for the worthy way in which I have brought you up” (30), she warns him that refusal to carry out her will and marry his cousin could kill her: “I will never get over it if you don’t take her as your wife. Shame kills faster than disease” (30). Tante Nabou cannot see beyond the parameters set up by her society. Her world view rests on the ancient caste tradition. As a descendant of a long line of nobles, she believes herself to be superior to the members of the lower castes and perceives Mawdo’s marriage to Aïssatou as an affront to her nobility. Mbye Cham suggests that:
Tante Nabou’s démarche is cool and subtle, quite in consonance with the canons of comportment of her noble origin. Her relationship with Aïssatou is cold and antagonistic. She looks down a long ‘geer’ (noble) nose on this upstart ‘tegg’ (blacksmith) from whom it is her honorable mission to wrest her son whose caste sin she cannot bear to live with. (Cham 1987:94)

While Tante Nabou can certainly be blamed for using tradition and hierarchy as a way to veil her selfish intentions, the same can also be said of Mawdo. However, because of gender differences, he is also a beneficiary of the dividends that patriarchal traditions offer through the institution of polygamy. This of course is no excuse because if he was able to defy tradition when he married Aïssatou, he could also reject tradition when it came to accepting polygamy. The fact that he gets into polygamy of his own volition could be seen as a way to fulfill his lust that is disguised as masculinity. Aïssatou sees her husband’s act as despicable; she believes that by marrying the young Nabou, Mawdo has betrayed her. She is all the more disappointed as she considers polygamy to be a thing of the past; this system of marriage once institutionalized for its socio-economic benefits, is no longer viable. She will not share Mawdo with another woman: “I cannot accept what you are offering me today in place of the happiness we
once had. I say that there can be no union of bodies without the heart’s acceptance, however little that may be” (31). She will instead leave him and start a new life with her children abroad, in a distant country: “I am stripping myself of your love, your name. Clothed in my dignity, the only worthy garment, I go away” (32).

In Mariama Bâ’s second novel, Scarlet Song, two different worlds are brought together – the world of an African man, Ousmane, the son of a modest Senegalese Muslim family, and that of a white woman, Mireille, the daughter of a French diplomat. Their marriage symbolically represents the union of Africa and Europe.

Ousmane meets Mireille during his last days at high school. From their first encounter, the two students bond. However, Mireille’s father does not approve of his daughter’s relationship with a black man, so he sends her back to France. Later, Ousmane travels to Paris, where he and Mireille are married, believing that they can successfully overcome barriers of race, class and national origin. But after their return to Senegal, things fall apart, to use Chinua Achebe’s phrase. Ousmane begins to feel that his marriage to Mireille undermines his
patriarchal privileges as a Senegalese male and that he needs to uphold customs in relation to marriage.

As mentioned earlier, in most patriarchal societies, there are certain behavioral patterns expected of a man; these include, among other things, control of a woman, which ensures that she is not considered an equal partner in the relationship. Thus, Ousmane reverts to sex-roles within marriage which he had earlier rejected. For instance, he stops helping Mireille with household chores, telling her that the kitchen is considered the woman’s arena and taking care of household chores is her duty.

Ousmane also refuses to make his marriage somehow egalitarian and rejects any compromise with Mireille, claiming that as a man, it is “only his voice that counts” (86), and she must simply listen. When Mireille requests that Ousmane restrict the inconsiderate and sloppy habits of his cronies who drop by the house unannounced, stay over and help themselves to whatever food they find, Ousmane shouts, “When you marry a man, you also take on his life-style” (87). In addition, when Mireille complains about her privacy being invaded by Ousmane’s mother, Yaye Khady, Ousmane dismisses her complaints as meaningless saying: “In my country children don’t teach their parents how to
behave” (85). He adds: “If you can’t stand Yaye Khady’s presence here, then you can get out” (95). In Ousmane’s view, culture should not be challenged and Mireille is not allowed to question him about it. She has to accept the African way of life or leave.

Ousmane gradually slips into the role of a traditional husband who allots a subordinate role to his wife. Mireille who was once his equal partner, the ideal companion, the “flaming torch lighting up his path” (84), has now become a nagging, unaccommodating and uncompromising wife who should be put in her place.

One may wonder why Ousmane has no sympathy for, or is insensitive to, the feelings of a woman he once loved. The answer could probably be that Ousmane wishes to be accepted by his friends; he also wants to show his community that despite his Western education and his marriage to a white woman, he has not relinquished his patriarchal tradition.

In a relationship, patriarchy allows man’s opinion to prevail. Thus, Ousmane refuses to compromise with his wife on anything, arguing that, “any compromise was synonymous with surrender” (99). He believes that as a man, he should neither see nor even accept her point of view; only his opinion should be considered, no matter how wrong it is.
Viewed in this context, Ousmane and Mireille’s relationship was doomed.

At this point it is fair to say that Ousmane himself has changed. His attitude is reminiscent of the colonial argument that many African intellectuals put forward. This argument has to do with colonialism and its effects on Africans.

European conquest of Africa was based on the belief that Africans had no civilization and that they needed to be assimilated to Western values, through an assimilation process that made Africans despise their own culture. In this way, colonialism was an assault on African identity and by extension, on African masculinity. Colonialism created, to borrow Frantz Fanon words, “the death and burial” of African cultural values. Ousmane uses this line of thought as a justification for his marriage with Ouleyamatou.

When Ousmane and Mireille first married, colonialism was not an issue; now that he feels the need to exercise his masculinity; Ousmane wants to use colonialism as an excuse. He feels that his marriage to Mireille has called his credential as an African Muslim male into question.
Thus, in the name of adhering to tradition, he marries Ouleymatou, a Senegalese woman who had rejected him in his adolescence because he helped his mother with chores. His rejection had been announced by Ouleymatou’s brother, Ousseynou: “My sister doesn’t want a boy who sweeps the house, fetches buckets of water and smells of dried fish” (10). This is not what Ouleymatou expected of an ideal man. In her view, Ousmane was “effeminate” because he had not respected the traditional division of labor. That is why he was less than a man and she could not accept his advances. We can see here how tricky the double role of patriarchy is. On the one hand, it favors men and on the other, it makes women internalize its values. Ouleymatou has a vision of masculinity that does not help women.

To return to the question of polygamy, we can see that Ousmane’s interest in Ouleymatou is for self-gratification. He is not acting under the influence of some magic, as his friend Ali assumes; the pursuit of personal pleasure seems to be the reason for his behavior. As Obioma Nnaemeka points out, “Ousmane is not in the least confused, he knows what he is doing; he is only battling his demons” (Nnaemeka 1996:186). These demons, I believe, are the result of nothing other than his personal ego.
The fact that polygamy is institutionalized in Senegalese society does not necessarily mean that every man is polygamous. We are told from the very first chapter of *Scarlet Song* that Ousmane is grateful to his father, Djibril Gueye, for not only contributing to his success, but also for maintaining a close-knit monogamous family: “Above all, Ousmane was grateful to his father for having resisted the temptation to take more wives” (7). Djibril Gueye set an example that Ousmane fails to emulate. He lets himself be seduced by Ouleymatou because he wants a woman who is subservient and does not desire an egalitarian relationship. In fact, Ouleymatou has no expectation of being Ousmane’s partner. At her house, Ousmane enjoys the traditional Senegalese masculine privileges: “He was the lord and master. He undressed where he liked, sat where he liked, ate where he liked, dirtied anything he liked. Any damage was made good without a murmur. In this home, his slightest whims were anticipated” (148). Ousmane feels more at home with Ouleymatou than he does with Mireille. He consciously compares Ouleymatou, his submissive “symbol of Africa” (149), to Mireille, who, “As her husband’s equal, [. . .] would challenge his ideas and decisions when these did not suit her. She considered she was his partner in
marriage. She would discuss matters on an equal footing” (148). To remain married to Mireille challenges Ousmane’s confidence in his own masculinity. Marrying Ouleymatou restores his masculine privileges, including, among other things, the power to control his wife.

8. “A woman must be kept in check”: Patriarchy and control of female sexuality in *La tache de sang* by Philomène Bassek’s

Reiterating the unfairness of patriarchy, Irène Assiba d’Almeida states that this social organization provides males with privileges and power, while creating an inferior status for females. One example is the power to control the female mind and body. Same Hanack, the chief male protagonist in Philomène Bassek’s *La Tache de Sang*, is the prototype of such power.

Same Hanack contracts an arranged marriage with the young Mama Ida after she drops out of school in order to release her old mother from certain domestic chores. Traditionally, as John Mbaku points out in *Culture and Customs of Cameroon*, many Cameroonian communities have practiced arranged marriage, in which the daughter is married to a man chosen by her parents. But in recent years such marriages have become less common, particularly in
urban areas among families where parents are educated. In arranged marriage, the choice is primarily based on the quality of the potential husband’s family as well as personal traits exhibited by the man. Moreover, most parents wish their children to marry someone from their own ethnic group (Mbaku 2005:143-44). In Mama Ida’s case, her father and uncle choose Same Hanack because they know his family and he inspires trust and a sense of responsibility. In their opinion, Same is “un homme d’âge mur, simple, généreux et étroitement lié aux affaires de l’église; originaire de Mbakassi, à une trentaine de kilomètres de Song-Mbônji” (12) [a simple, mature, and generous man; who is deeply involved in church matters; he hails from Mbakassi, thirty kilometers away from Song-Mbônji]. Mama Ida’s input is not sought nor is her opinion considered. She cannot even refuse to marry Same who is polygamous and old enough to be her father, as doing so would be contemptuous to tradition. The lack of choice is one illustration of how hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy affect women.

Undoubtedly, this patriarchal practice of arranged marriage reinforces male supremacy while depriving Mama Ida of the power to choose and to control her body. The
involvement of family in the marriage process is consistent with the African belief that marriage is an alliance between families rather than between individuals, as is the case in the Western world. It is also true that arranged marriages often happen for valid reasons and can be construed as a way of protecting young people from making bad choices. For example, in Ghana, as reported by Baffour Takyi, it is the duty of the parents of each party to ensure that their potential in-laws do not come from a family with any known serious disease (including lunacy and leprosy), are not known criminals or witches, do not engage in quarreling, and are hardworking and respectful. The involvement of family also serves to insure that the future couples are compatible in values, expectations, and lifestyle. In other cultures, such as the Lozi of Zambia, one important responsibility of parents is to ascertain that their daughters and sons marry someone who belongs to their ethnic group; they do so to avoid intermarriage with people with whom they have had tribal feuds in the past.

From the outset, the marriage of Same and Mama Ida is based on a non-egalitarian relationship. Same believes in the power patriarchy has granted him as a man, and he uses
it to subdue his wife, either by persuasion or by physical force. In one instance, he invites his brothers to his house to share a snake he killed earlier in the day, without informing Mama Ida of the visit. In Bassa society, one of the major ways to cement social relationships and express the high value placed on human company is through the sharing of food. Moreover, the gourmet dish of viper steaks is served to honor guests, especially male relatives.

While waiting for the snake to cook, Mama Ida serves fish, which angers her husband. As Mama Ida tries to justify her action, Same, who feels that his masculine authority is being challenged, reminds his wife: “Ici, c’est moi qui commande et j’ai le droit de corriger qui je veux, quand je veux” (39) [Here, I am the one who gives orders, and I have the right to beat whomever and whenever I like]. A brutal beating ensues. This violence, as December Green observes, is “one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position” (Green 1999:2). Violence instills fear, which in turn makes women subservient to men.

Perhaps an appropriate question to ask at this juncture is why men have recourse to physical force, especially in their relationships with women. In his
anthropological study on male dominance entitled *Why Men Rule*, Steven Goldberg articulates the reasons for such violence on the part of men; he observes that men tend to use physical aggression as the means to an end; they resort to physical violence in the pursuit of dominance. Same epitomizes this behavior. In his relationship with Mama Ida, he often resorts to physical and verbal abuse in order not only to subdue his wife, but also to maintain his masculine identity, in front of his friends and for himself.

To further justify his male supremacy and his power over his wife, Same claims that, “une femme doit pouvoir taire ses instincts et éviter de s’emporter en présence de son mari” (40) [a woman should learn to keep her emotions to herself and avoid losing her temper in the presence of her husband]. Same assumes that a woman cannot do, think, or say anything important, and that man’s power, bestowed by patriarchy and expressed in his role as head of the family, has to be used to keep women in check because otherwise they will abuse their freedom. Consequently, he expects his wife to be submissive and remain silent whenever he talks to her. After all, he sees himself as the
supreme head of the household, and if his wife fails to comply, she must pay for her insubordination.

To expand his authority and control over his wife, Same isolates her from any external contact. He forbids Mama Ida to go to her own village or to visit her family, claiming that, having paid a bridewealth for her, she now belongs entirely to him: "Mets-toi dans la tête que j’ai payé la dot et que tu n’a plus rien à voir là-bas" (44) [Get it into your head that I paid bridewealth for you and that you don’t have anything to do there any more]. Here the writer underscores the tradition of bridewealth, which, according to Eustace Palmer, degrades women to the status of goods and chattel, while allowing husbands to dominate their wives and thus ensuring a system of perpetual subjugation of women.7

I take issue with Palmer’s assessment of the bridewealth, which I believe plays an important role in African customary and civil law marriages. Unfortunately, this practice has often been misconstrued by some Westerners and by some westernized Africans as the mere purchase of a wife.

In the past, bridewealth was offered to the bride’s parents by the groom’s family as a kind of contract that
sanctioned a union – not only between two individuals as is the case in the West – but also, and particularly, as an alliance between two extended families. Furthermore, bride-wealth served as compensation to the woman’s family for her labor. The bridewealth was also intended to acknowledge the wife’s family for giving away their daughter; in addition, it “placed the marriage on firm ground if questions later arose about the position of children within their father’s lineage, their rights to inheritance, and the rights to property on the part of the husband or wife if the marriage ended in divorce” (Denbow and Thebe 2006:136). In other words, bridewealth was a means of recognizing and legitimizing marriage in the eyes of the public. However, in recent years, due to the emergence of a monetary economy, the bridewealth has become more and more commercialized; for instance, the more educated the woman, the higher the cost of bridewealth. As a result, a man who pays an inflated bridewealth may have the impression that he has “purchased” his wife (Green 1999:37). These are the kinds of beliefs that make Same think Mama Ida is his property and should, therefore, submit to his will.

In most African societies, the main purpose of marriage is to have children and continue the bloodline. In
addition, having many children spin out the fear that not all children turn out to be successful and the hope that at least one out of many will. Furthermore, it is believed that the more children one has, the greater one’s chances of living comfortably later in life, because then, the roles will be reversed and the children will be able to take care of their parents. In Zambia, there is a common Lunda proverb that illustrates this traditional belief which is upheld by men and women alike: “elekaku mwana lelu kulonda kumbidi niyena akakweleki” [carry a child on your back today so s/he can carry you in your old age as well].

One model of masculinity stresses the ability to procreate, “something that every man must do in order to be respected as man” (Norma Fuller 2001:96). In other words, having many children does not only enhance a man’s self-confidence and social prestige, but it is also an indication of manliness. In this connection, Same desires to have as many children as he can in spite of his wife’s advanced age and poor health. Furthermore, despite his unsound financial position, Same believes that being able to father many children is vital to his male identity. This corroborates the claim by Connell that masculinity is
socially constructed because society expects one to behave like a man and not otherwise (Connell 2005).

This raises the question of how men view other men in this novel. They constantly scrutinize one another, watching and ranking other men before granting them acceptance within the realm of manhood. If his friend Oman’s remark is anything to go by, Same has proved his manhood: “Mes félicitations. . . Dieu est avec toi. [Ma femme] Johanna a eu beaucoup de problèmes. . . Je n’en ai que sept, moi” (70) [Congratulations, God is with you. (My wife) Johanna had many problems. . . . I only have seven (children)]. Oman’s statement underscores the importance he and Same attache to having many children, even when a man is not financially capable of sustaining a large family.

Same attempts to control not only his wife’s mind but her womb as well, the womb which Gayatri Spivak maintains is “a workshop,” a place that can be managed and controlled in terms of use value and surplus value. Hence, when he realizes that Mama Ida’s concern over giving birth at the age of 55 may cause her to reevaluate her pregnancy, Same is quick to allude to biblical characters in the same
situation, hoping that the analogy will convince his wife to carry her pregnancy to term. Exploiting Mama Ida’s profound Christian faith when he says:

Je connais des femmes qui ont fait quatorze, quinze enfants sans peine. As-tu véritablement eu des problèmes depuis que tu en fais toi? . . . Ida, l’enfant est et reste le signe de la bénédiction divine, il est la seule vraie richesse du monde. (65)

[I know women who have given birth to fourteen, fifteen children without difficulty. Have you really had any problem with childbearing? . . . Ida, a child is and will always be a divine blessing; it is the only real fortune in the world].

Thus, when Same discovers that his wife is pregnant with their eleventh child, he is excited about the prospect of being a father again.

To continue with religious analogies, Same reminds his wife of the biblical story of Abraham and Sarah:


[Remember that Abraham was a hundred years old and his wife Sara was ninety when she became pregnant. Praise to the everlasting God. And their son Isaac grew up and became rich].

Upon hearing such “paroles angéliques” (65) [angelic words], Mama Ida becomes so persuaded that she can do nothing but agree with her husband. Here again is an example of the
exploitation of religion by men for their personal interest. According to biblical teaching, God gave Abraham a child in his old age because he had none; but in Same’s case, he already has ten children and the multiple childbirths have compromised his wife’s health.

However, Same is somewhat concerned about his wife’s fragile health. He decides to send her to their eldest daughter Patricia, an educated and Westernized woman who lives in the city, where Mama Ida can receive pre-natal care. When Patricia learns that her mother is pregnant for the eleventh time despite her poor health, Patricia requests the help of her friend Modi, a female physician she met through her women’s group. Patricia hopes that as somebody who is outside the family, Modi will be able to warn her mother of the gravity of her situation. However, Mama Ida’s commitment to Same is very strong. As a woman used to putting herself last, Mama Ida can only reiterate her husband’s wishes to Modi: “mon mari adore les enfants” (130) [my husband adores children]. Mama Ida’s statement baffles Modi, who quickly responds: “Tu parles comme si tu n’existais pas” (130) [You are talking as if you do not exist]. Yet, Mama Ida’s response should not come as a surprise; after all, she has indisputably internalized her
social role so much that she is willing to please her husband while suffering silently. Everything Mama Ida does is to please and appease Same; she is not at all concerned about herself. She has internalized the traditional values of her upbringing. As an adolescent, she learned that women's value was in marriage and that as a woman, she should be a passive breeder under the jurisdiction of her husband.

When Patricia and other women call upon Mama Ida to take a stand against Same's abuses, she seems unconcerned. As a result of her internalization of patriarchal values, she declares: "Mais qu'y puis-je? N'est-il pas plus fort que moi? N'en a-t-il pas le droit?" (90) [But what can I do about it? Is he not stronger than I am? Doesn't he have that right?]. In other words, Mama Ida believes that, by virtue of being male, Same is entitled to power and privilege, including the privilege of abusing her.

At this point one may wonder why Mama Ida cannot leave her abusive and disrespectful husband. There are a number of theories that attempt to explain why women live with abuse. In a study on Ghanaian women, Ofei-Aboagye reveals that many women remain in abusive relationships due to
economic dependency. In another study on Zimbabwean women, Taylor Stewart reports that women stay with abusive men because they enjoy being dominated by men and believe that a happy family depends on women respecting men’s authority. While I agree with Ofei-Aboagye that some women stay in abusive relationships because of economic dependency, I dispute Taylor’s theory; I do not think that women stay with abusive partners because they enjoy being dominated by men; it is rather because of cultural beliefs. Women have been brought up to believe that being a wife and a mother is the only good thing and that divorce is wrong. As a result, they often feel that their family needs to stay together.

In Mama Ida’s case, it is the combination of social and economic factors that deter her from leaving her abusive husband. Mama Ida has been socialized to believe that marriage and family are the ultimate things a woman should vie for; she has learned to “veiller sur son mari et ses enfants au point de s’oublier” (12) [look after her husband and children to the point of forgetting herself]. She cannot for the sake of keeping her family together: “ses fils et se filles étaient sa raison d’être. Aussi
consentait-elle à tous les sacrifices pour pouvoir demeurer auprès d’eux et les élever droitement” (45) [Her sons and daughters were her reason for being. She therefore agreed to make every sacrifice so that she could stay close to them and raise them rightly]. Another reason is that Mama Ida is unable to sustain herself; she entirely depends on Same for economic support. We need to keep in mind that Mama Ida’s willingness to conform to patriarchy does not necessarily mean she ignores her alternatives; I would argue that it is rather as a result of fear of being rejected by Same, by society, and of being thrown into a world where she has no means to survive.

Patricia does not agree with Mama Ida’s world view. Having realized that her mother is incapable of making an independent decision concerning the pregnancy, she conspires with Modi to perform a drug-induced abortion without Mama Ida’s consent, without consulting Same, without even discussing the matter with their own husbands, with whom they both have successful marriages. To show her friendship and solidarity, Modi reassures Patricia: “Ne t’alarme pas, Patricia, ton drame et ton combat sont les miens” (131) [Don’t worry, Patricia, your tragedy and your
struggle are mine]. This is an indication of women’s solidarity.

One might think that Patricia’s decision to terminate her mother’s pregnancy is a victory because she is able to take responsibility and help her mother, whose health has considerably deteriorated as a result of a series of unplanned pregnancies. But in fact, the abortion does not liberate Mama Ida, since by failing to consult her, by exercising control over her body without her consent, Patricia and Modi — like Same — rob her of the right to exercise agency on her own behalf. They act upon her, treating her as an object whose voice and choices are less important than theirs. The abortion is, in that sense, a typical colonial move in that the educated, Westernized younger women fell justified in what they do because they have determined between themselves that it is in the best interest of the ignorant native woman, who clearly cannot be trusted to do what is good for her. And because Mama Ida has been so thoroughly conditioned by the patriarchal system she lives in to bow to male authority, Patricia and Modi are right in thinking this. But it is a hollow victory, achieved at great cost in terms of trust and family relationships.
9. "Abide by my rule": Masculinity and Sexual exploitation in *Vies de femmes* by Delphine Zanga Tsogo

Studies on gender and work in Africa have shown that prior to the systematic imposition of the European social and political orders, African women had a more important role in decision-making than they did under colonialism or than they have had since independence. There used to be women who exercised political and religious power. For instance, a female chief, Luweji, ruled over the Lunda Kingdom which spread from southwestern Congo, through the eastern part of Angola, to the northwestern province of Zambia. In West African societies, there were priestesses who presided over religious ceremonies. Bonnie Keller and Edna Bay, two Western scholars, note that “African women often had voices in kinship groups that made and enforced policy decisions. Within lineages in some societies, women sat on councils of elders. In some areas, they were free to participate in public debates" (Keller and Bay 1977:222). Women also exercised relatively high levels of economic independence and contributed substantially to household expenses, along with men. For example, as Molara Ogundipe-Leslie points out, in pre-colonial Nigeria, women were engaged in economic activities such as farming, fishing,
herding, trading, pottery-making, cloth-making, and craftwork alongside their husbands.11 These varied economic activities made women self-supporting and financially independent. But during the colonial era, women lost their economic power and they have not entirely regained it in contemporary Africa. As Keller and Bay rightly point out, “Rather than liberating women, as its proponents believed, the end result of colonial experience was a reduction in women’s abilities to effectively and independently contribute to the well-being of themselves, of family and society” (Keller and Bay 1977:223). Women have become more dependent on men, and therefore more vulnerable. In a fictional mode, Delphine Zanga Tsoga’s Vies de femmes exemplifies the situation.

The novel opens with the protagonist, Dang, recounting her own story in the first person narrative. A student at a local high school, Dang’s future is shattered when a school mate, Kazo, takes advantage of her naïveté, makes her pregnant, and then disappears. Dang pays the price: she is sent away from school while Kazo gets away with no consequences. The critic Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi rightly claims that society is to blame for such injustice,
since “men like Kazo are rarely held accountable, they are not apprehended and taken to court, be it a traditional court or otherwise. . . They can easily brush aside responsibility and put the blame squarely on women without any qualms” (Nfah-Abbenyi 1997:78).

During the time when this novel was written, as the Cameroonian critic Alice Tang points out, the school rules made a provision for pregnant girls. They were routinely expelled from the education system while boys responsible for pregnancies were not dismissed from school. Such biased rules, Tang adds, were a major source of gender differences in education attainment.¹² But, as John Mukum Mbaku explains, secondary school attendance by girls in Cameroon has significantly increased since the 1990s as girls are not only allowed but also encouraged to return to school after they give birth (Mbaku 2005:15-18).

In Vies de femmes, when Kazo reappears a few years later, he still denies his responsibilities and instead blames Dang for the pregnancy: “Je n’avais aucune intention délibérée de te mettre enceinte. La grossesse a été une surprise pour nous tous. Je ne vois pas pourquoi tu me reproches maintenant de t’avoir fait perdre tes études” (13)
[I did not deliberately intend to get you pregnant. The pregnancy was a surprise to both of us. I do not understand why you now blame me for interrupting your studies]. Kazo is portrayed as a coward; he is not man enough to acknowledge his culpability and declines his responsibility by abandoning the woman he supposedly loves.

In his study of masculinity among the Goba people of Zambia, Paul Dover explains that some of the expectations of manliness include lack of fear, being calm and decisive, and avoiding complaining. But none of these attributes fits Kazo.

Also central to the representation of masculinity in this novel is the character of Evoundi, a young man who claims to be the nephew of a government minister. Exploiting Dang's poverty and desperation, Evoundi promises to help her find a permanent position in government, but on condition that she become his lover. Trapped in the world of poverty and few employment opportunities for women, Dang reluctantly agrees to Evoundi’s demand:

Evoundi me fit constituer un dossier. Il se montra plein de sollicitude, mais très vite il vint à me parler de lui et de moi. J’hésitais, mais le besoin de travailler était plus fort. Le chômage me pesait terriblement. Je ne l’aimais pas. Mais devenir son amie afin de travailler, ne
constituait pas une épreuve au-dessus de mes forces. (19-20)

[Evoundi had me put together a file. He showed himself to be very concerned, but soon after, he got around to talking about him and me. I hesitated, but the need to work was very strong. Unemployment weighed terribly on me. I did not love him. But to befriend him in order to work was something I could handle.]

Unfortunately, Dang becomes pregnant again. Like Kazo, Evoundi shies away from his responsibility and abandons Dang. This, I believe, is hardly an attribute of manliness.

Why does Dang so easily give in to Evoundi’s demand? It is not because she is a young woman of loose morals; she is forced into this unfortunate situation due to socio-economic factors which, in part, are the results of an institutionalized gender order that privileges men over women. If Dang had been allowed back into school after she had her child, she could probably have completed her education, found a decent job, and become financially independent. But school rules made that impossible for her.

Later in the narrative, Edanga, another male character, also displays hegemonic behavior. He is the prototype of those African men who misuse their position of power in order to sexually abuse women who are under their authority. As chief of the small district of Abang, Edanga is treated
as one of the lords from the feudal era, whose will could not be refused or questioned. Wherever he is stationed to work, he takes a new woman: “C’était pour lui une façon de prouver sa puissance” (84) [That was one way of showing his power].

Here, Edanga exercises his power over Nnomo, a young woman with limited education, an orphan, and the oldest in a family of several siblings. Merit, competence or punctuality, are the qualities that matter to an employer; but in this case, they are not taken into consideration. In this patriarchal environment, a woman’s career depends mainly on her attitude toward her male supervisor; she cannot expect to be promoted unless she cooperates in every way.

Edanga has just hired Nnomo as his secretary for a trial period of three months, with the possibility of full-time employment. After the trial period, Edanga makes it clear that this will not happen without precondition, and he pounces on his prey when Nnomo presents him with her renewal dossier:

Lorsque j’entrais dans le bureau, il m’ignora pendant quelques instants. À la fin, il se leva, ferma calmement sa porte à clé . . . . s’avança vers moi et sans un mot, me prit par la taille.
Il me força à l’embrasser. J’étouffais et n’osais crier. (59-60)

[When I entered his office, he ignored me for a few moments. At last, he stood up and quietly locked the door. . . . moved toward me and, without a word, put his hand around my waist. He forced me to kiss him. I could hardly breathe and did not dare scream.]

As a boss, Edanga believes that every woman who works under his authority must respond positively to his sexual advances if she wants to keep her job or be promoted. By the same token, any woman who challenges his maleness by resisting his advances, as Nnomo does, must be punished:

En fin de compte, le chef de district, excédé, me menaça de renvoi. Il fit venir une autre fille qu’il recruta à ma place. Pourtant, cette fille n’avait aucune notion de secrétariat, mais elle fut engagée parce qu’elle avait été plus “compréhensive”. (60)

[In the end, the chief district officer threatened to fire me. He brought in another girl whom he recruited to take my place. Yet this girl did not have any notion of being a secretary; she was hired because she had been more “understanding.”]

Like other men in his position, Edanga is simply an oppressor who takes advantage of his position of power to control women. He punishes Nnomo whose only transgression is to turn down his sexual advances. Thus, by sexually harassing her, Edanga displays a total abuse of power.
At this point it is necessary to remember that one aspect of masculinity in post-independence Africa is the status of the “big man,” characterized, among other things, by the ability to have as many women as a man desires. So, Edanga intends to marry Nnomo in order to “update his collection of wives,” to borrow Cecile Accilien’s phrase.  

When Nnomo asks Edanga what his wives will think about him taking her as another wife, he proudly reassures her: “Je suis maître chez-moi, ne t’inquiète de rien” (62) [Do not worry, I am the master of my household], suggesting that Edanga is the decision maker and his opinion always prevails.

Faced with the reality of her situation, Nnomo moderates her position and decides not to object to Edanga’s demand of marriage. She desperately accepts polygamy as a way of supporting her mother and siblings: “Je ne sais comment m’en sortir maintenant. Parfois je voudrais m’enfuir, me rendre à la grande ville; mais je recule devant l’idée que ma mère, mes frères, et sœurs seraient sans soutien” (63) [I do not know how to get out of this. Sometimes I want to run away, to go to the big
city; but I give up when I realize that my mother, sisters and brothers would have no one to support them].

Edanga’s behavior suggests that he is a controlling and possessive individual who believes that a woman is a man’s property, born at his feet to serve him, and should therefore be subdued and objectified. This is an illustration of hegemonic masculinity, a socially constructed concept that holds an authoritative positioning over women and less powerful men. The male characters studied in *Vies de femmes* use their masculine power to sexually harass and abuse women with impunity. Calixthe Beyala’s novels, which I discuss in the next part of the study, abound with such male characters.

10. “Give them hell”: Hegemonic Masculinity and Sexual Violence in *The Sun Hath Looked Upon Me* and *Your Name Shall Be Tanga* by Calixthe Beyala

In *The Sun Hath Looked upon Me*, Beyala’s first novel, the author tells the story of Ateba Leocadie, a nineteen year old woman, daughter of a prostitute mother and an unknown father. When her mother abandons her, Ateba is raised by her aunt Ada, who mistreats her. We are informed that Ateba lives in a world where the future for women is
bleak because they have less opportunity than men. Hence, Ateba and her friends have to make a living by selling their bodies. We are further informed that in this environment, both emotional and physical violence against women are the norm for Ateba and all the women around her including Betty, Ateba’s mother, Ada, her aunt, and Irene, her friend.

The story is primarily narrated by an omniscient narrator, which René Riva calls narrateur anonyme,\textsuperscript{16} and which Todorov symbolizes by the formula Narrator > Character (Todorov 1967:79). This narrator knows practically everything about the situations and events recounted. As Gérard Genette puts it, such a narrator “says more than any of the characters knows” (Genette 1980:189). The narrator is peculiar in that she is a spirit, the spirit of Ateba, who has witnessed all the oppressions the protagonist has suffered. In this sense, the narrator functions as Ateba’s double. In addition, she shares her inner thoughts, feelings, and reactions about the events she is witnessing. However, at times during the narrative, some key characters also act as narrators, hence bringing several narrative voices in the text. This is an important
aspect of Beyala’s writing as it shows her originality and innovative use of literary devices.

In *The Sun Hath Looked Upon Me*, Beyala gives particular attention to men who seek to dominate and force themselves on women. A clear example is the character of Jean Zepp, who would like to think he is “the superman.” However, he does not believe in seduction or in the mutual consensus that partners should have before engaging in sexual intercourse. In one instance, when Ateba comes to Jean Zepp’s room with a message from a neighbor, he thinks she has come to spy on him. As a punishment for invading his privacy, he “grabs her by her hair. He forces her down low, forces her to crouch, with her head pushed into his manly smells, her mouth against his penis” (24). This scene reveals Jean Zepp as a man whose intention is to inflict pain on Ateba and humiliate her through forceful sex.

His assault on Ateba shows that Jean Zepp has no clue as to how the seduction process and subsequent sexual intercourse with a particular woman works nor does he care. Jean Zepp views women as mere objects to be conquered and the penis as the ultimate weapon with which to dominate and subdue them. Endowing the penis with the same power as a weapon, Jean Zepp uses it to assert his masculine power and
superiority. From his perspective, a woman has no other value than to provide sexual pleasure to a man. Hence, once his lust has been satisfied, women have no value to him:

Two years ago, when one of his mistresses tried to kiss him before getting dressed, he had pushed her away brutally and got up, [then told her]: a woman was good only in the evening melting into the dark. No, the daytime was absolutely not made for her. . . . Who had said that woman was beautiful? The guys must have two black holes instead of eyes! (43)

Jean Zepp is like the other men in the novel, whose society expect to exert power, control, and authority over women; they are cruel, hungry for power and blood (71). During one scene of a police raid of the Quartier Général, commonly referred to as QG or "Headquarters," a neighborhood where Ateba lives, an officer forces Ateba to follow him into an abandoned shed, where he sexually molestes her (70-71). In another instance, the anonymous rich client Ateba picks up in a bar after her friend Irene’s funeral claims ownership of her body: “Your body belongs to me until dawn. Another day I might have been able to let you go. But tonight I need an imprint of a woman in my bed” (118). When Ateba tries to leave his apartment, he grabs her wrists and hair, forcing her to kneel and perform oral sex. This display of physical power
complements his claim that, "God has sculpted woman on her knees at the feet of man" (118). This rich fat man believes that his power is God-given. In addition, he uses his monetary power to exercise his masculinity over a vulnerable woman.

At this point it is important to examine how wealth partially fortifies this ideology of masculinity. In her socio-anthropological study of Railway workers in colonial Nigeria, Lisa Lindsay probes the way in which access to wage labor altered men’s gendered identities within their communities:

For men, money helped facilitate the transition between ‘small boy’ and ‘big man’ status. It was used to marry, educate children, build houses, and participate in ceremonies and gift-giving. The more money a man was able to spend, the greater his status within the community, the ‘bigger a man’ he was. (Lindsay 2005:141)

By the same token, a 'big man' could use his money to lure any woman he liked. This can be applied to Ateba’s rich man mentioned earlier. He uses the masculine status and power money has provided him to get non consensual sex from the vulnerable Ateba.

For such men, money is not the only factor in the subjugation of women. Jean Zepp proudly proclaims: "Since time began, woman has prostrated herself before man. It’s
no accident that God created her from the rib of man” (84), implying that the subordinate destiny of women has been pre-ordained; they simply have to live with this ordinance. Nicki Hitchcott frames this view in the following observation: “Patriarchy declares that women’s routes are mapped for them in advance” (Hitchcott 2000:221). It is exactly this conception - that the course of women’s lives has been already mapped out - that Beyala attacks in most of her writing. She exhorts women to renounce fatalism and take their destinies into their own hands. In other words, Beyala wants women to be agents of their own individual fate.

By justifying the oppression they have inflicted upon women in religious terms, the men portrayed in this novel see their power over women as a gift of God and, therefore, believe that it has been divinely ordained that women should satisfy men’s sexual desires. Women, then, become a kind of currency that help men display their sexual prowess, thus improving their ranking on the scale of masculinity. But in her novel, Beyala subverts these assumptions by exposing the sexual exploitation of women which frequently occurs at a place “where stands the Sainte (Virgin Mary) statue), arched underneath the golden clarity where young
girls below the permissible age, but predestined to be in the sex trade subserviently offer their smooth behinds to licentious caresses" (115). Beyala deliberately attempts to satirize and desecrate this place which, under the gaze of the Virgin Mary, should invite meditation and prayer. On the contrary, it is used by men to abuse their victims.

Beyala might be seen as anti-religious. In reality she uses this device to expose the way men manipulate religion to suit their needs. She also uses this device to contest and scoff at the false pretenses of male supremacy. For example, she deconstructs the aura that surrounds male circumcision. Contrary to Camara Laye who makes circumcision one of the center-pieces of his novel The African Child and extols it as a meaningful rite of passage, Beyala derides it with these words:

I embark upon the song of the man who wants his worth to be recognized by the length of his sex organ and his quality by the absence of his foreskin. I’m singing and deep inside me I imagine a landscape made of still-quivering foreskins, pinned artistically on top of a cork board like butterflies. I am singing at the top of my voice. (21)

The man described in this scene is about to be initiated into manhood so he can become a “real man,” that is, a man who can demonstrate the very masculine quality of virility.
But Beyala satirically counters the circumcision ritual by making it narrowly measure the value of a man merely in physical terms.

Beyala does not mince words when depicting oppressive men. She uses a brutal language that I find obscene. In *The Sun Hath Looked Upon Me*, Ateba’s best friend, Irene, describes a scene in which she is violated by a white man:

> Monsieur asks me to suck his thing. . . . Tiny and all red. He doesn’t insist. In short – he throws me on the bed, he jumps on me, he rubs himself, caresses my breasts, my belly, my clitoris. “I want to give you pleasure,” he says as he drools over me. And as for me, I look at him with eyes rolling as if I were already coming. (75)

Once again, man uses his ultimate weapon, the penis, to conquer and subdue a woman. Ironically, as revealed at the end of the novel, Ateba subverts this conquest as she overpowers and kills a man whom she has met at a bar. The narrator describes the scene as follows:

> I see the woman unfolding her wings, spitting the sperm at the man’s feet. Flinging a heavy copper ashtray at his skull. I see him reeling a few minutes at this repeated assault by the woman, then he crashed to the floor. . . . She had crouched down, grabbed the man’s head and with two hands she is beating it against the stone floor. The blood gushes out, splatters, sullies. She gives a beat to her blows, scanning ‘Irene, Irene’ and as she still notices signs of life under her hands, she picks up a knife and, overcome with joy, she begins to strike, to
strike with all her might. At last, the final spasm. Her kidneys give away, piss floods the corpse beneath her. With haggard eyes, she slums on top of him. (118-119)

Some critics have read this murder scene as an act of retribution on the part of women, and symbolically an act that would avenge women for the yoke of patriarchy they have been saddled with. For instance, Renée Larrier claims that Ateba’s act is “her way of revenge in the name of Irene and other women, since their arrival on earth” (Larrier 2000:93). In the same vein, Augustine Assah asserts that “the killing seeks to annihilate man, to make man a non-being. It also seeks to destroy the phallic symbol, source of oppression, violence.” (Assah 2003:532).

While I agree with both Larrier and Asaah, I should add that this apparent revenge-killing is also meant to debunk masculinist supremacy theory. Beyala shows that women can assert themselves by taking a supreme, if not extreme position that annihilates men’s so called superiority. Robert Connell reminds us that, “The authority of men is not spread in an even blanket across every department of social life. In some circumstances women have authority; in others the power of men is diffused, confused or contested” (Connell 2005:109). Also, to paraphrase Michael Kimmel, the
image of those men who hold power is subject to change or contestation (Kimmel 2001:271). This is true for Beyala who, through her protagonist Ateba, has challenged the myth of male supremacy on one hand and female inferiority on the other.

Beyala’s language may elicit charges of obscenity from some readers. However, as mentioned earlier, Beyala explains that this language reflects the reality of the world in which she grew up. It is therefore useful to show the different strategic uses Beyala makes of language – a tool to break the silence in shocking and provocative ways. For this reason, she does not feel the need to conceal what could be seen as offensive. Her language is a form of protest against the sexual violence repeatedly perpetrated on women. In that sense, Beyala truly does use language as a weapon, which has prompted some critics to say that violence is a hallmark of her writing, not only in her choice of words but also in the various scenes she depicts. Beyala reiterates that what she portrays is the representation of reality as she knows it:

C’est une scène de la vie quotidienne. Je vois en quoi une scène politique est moins choquante qu’une scène érotique. Une femme vendue ou prostituée; un dictateur qui se rend dans la rue, rencontre un homme, et lui tire une balle
dans la tête. C’est exactement les même choses; il ne faut pas séparer les deux univers. L’être humain est touché dans le plus profond de son âme [. . .] il n’y a pas une règle spéciale pour l’homme et un non-respect pour la femme. Ateba n’est pas différente d’un prisonnier politique. (Beyala, in Matateyou 1996:609)

[It is a daily scene. I do not see why a political scene is less shocking than an erotic one. A woman sold or prostituted; a dictator who goes into the street, meets a man and shoots him in the head. It is exactly the same; one should not separate the two worlds, going into the depth of a human soul [. . .] there is no special rule for a man and non-respect for a woman. Ateba is no different from a political prisoner].

In the words of Jacques Chevrier, Beyala’s novel is a “déclaration de guerre à la société patriarcale” (Chevrier 2001:22) [declaration of war on patriarchal society]. In the same vein, Papa Samba Diop views Beyala’s writing as “un projectile lancé contre des cibles qui s’appellent la polygamie, la minorisation de la femme et de l’enfant” (Diop 2001:13) [A missile launched on such targets as polygamy, the minorization of women and children].

Beyala’s Your Name Shall Be Tanga also portrays violent and sexist characters. The story is set in a slum of Iningué, an imaginary city in West-Africa, where sex appears to be the only language men know and which they use as a weapon to subdue women. In a language as blunt as that of her first novel, Beyala gives the portrait of Tanga, a
young woman, who was constantly raped by her father at the age of twelve, resulting in her pregnancy and the death of the child: "And so it was that this man my father – who made me pregnant and poisoned the child, our child, his grandson – this man never noticed my suffering, and yet it lasted until the day he died" (30). It must be pointed out that, although sexual abuse of girl children does occur in African society and that such cases are carefully hidden since they are associated with strong feelings of guilt and shame, what Beyala describes here is an exaggeration. She uses those extreme situations to drive her point home. This approach can be termed as "an esthetic of the extreme."

Feminists argue that in the absence of economic opportunities, women turn to prostitution for material survival. A study by Paulette Songue has shown that in Cameroonian society, for example, "women, still subject to discrimination in education and employment opportunities, compete at a disadvantage in the job market. Consequently, many of them turn to the sale of their bodies, which becomes their employment" (Songue 1996:253). Tanga was eventually forced into prostitution by her mother so that she could support the family: "I the girlchild-woman, dutiful in the fulfillment of the rites of child-parent to
her parents, since it’s fitting that I sell my flesh to feed them always because of the breath of life they gave me” (18). Reduced to the sole function of providing pleasure to men, Tanga knows neither love nor protection. These men are sexual predators who consider women as prey to be hunted down and conquered. One such man is Hassan, Tanga’s boyfriend.

When Tanga first meets Hassan, he appears to be charming and loving; this gives her a brief opportunity to experience the love she has never known. She wants to get out of prostitution and have a decent life, that is, to live with the same man, “have children, the house, the dog, the magpie at the end of the meadow” (64). However, Tanga’s dream is quickly shattered when she realizes that Hassan is no different from other men in the novel; he views women simply as sex objects to satisfy male desire:

Hassan takes me in his arms. Step by step, without letting go of me, he pushes me towards the bed. He collapses on top of my belly. ‘Kiss me,’ he demands. His lips subjugate me. He grabs one of my legs, then the other, puts them over his shoulders. He penetrates me. His steps cut through me. (19)

These examples chosen from Beyala’s *The Sun Hath Looked upon Me* and *Your Name Shall Be Tanga* reveal that both novels depict male characters who exercise hegemonic
masculinity over women. These men are unable to love and make women experience mutual satisfaction. They inevitably reduce masculinity to virility, a distortion that Lahoucine Ouzgane considers to be “a fragile attribute sustained only through repeated acts of violence” (Ouzgane 1997:1). Consequently, it is possible to read the masculinities described in Beyala’s works as “distinctive practices emerging from men’s positioning within a social structure” (Ouzgane 1997:1). In other words, masculinities in Beyala’s fiction are best understood as constructs of relations shaped only by men’s social power.

11. “I am the big man”: masculinity and power in The Beggars’ Strike by Aminata Sow Fall

In Sub-Saharan Africa, some traditional societies were often based on the institutional authority of chiefs, whose status was inherited. But in the post-colonial era, some individual men have enhanced their power and reputation through wealth or connections to political power. According to Lisa Lindsay and Stephan Miescher, “The African ‘big man’ provides perhaps the most enduring image of Sub-Saharan African masculinity. Across the continent and for a long sweep of history, ambitious people (usually men) have worked to enlarge their households and use their ‘wealth on
people' for political and material advancement" (Lindsay and Miescher 2003:3). Jan Vansina documents similar trends in Cameroon where he observes that among the Djue, "rich men" also referred to as "big men", achieved fame by giving away their wealth; this earned them loyalty of individuals who become his followers (1990:73-74). Furthermore, the big man status was measured not only by material wealth but also by connections to political power (Miescher and Lindsay 2003:18).

In *The Beggars Strike*, Aminata Sow Fall presents the protagonist Mour Ndiaye who, after losing his job, got involved in politics, and when his party came into power, he was "appointed [Director of Public Health as] a form of recognition . . . for his past unconditional activity as a militant in the party" (3). This allowed him to attain his fame and 'big man' status, which is materialized by his physical appearance and the luxury he and his family enjoy:

Now that he has everything he can wish for: a house, two cars at his disposal, domestic staff paid for by the state. Sometimes he is worried by his corpulence, especially at official ceremonies when he has to be careful that the buttons of his dinner-jacket don’t burst. (19)

This position of power makes Mour Ndiaye arrogant and uncompassionate to the plight of the poor. Ironically, he
has forgotten the time "when he could scarcely make both ends meet. When he went about hollow-cheeked and anxious eyed. When he had only one shirt that he had to wash out overnight and put to dry on the stove" (19). Now that he is wealthy, Mour Ndiaye looks down upon the beggars, forgetting that "hunger and poverty compel some of them to beg, and so remind those who are better off that paupers too exist" (2).

Mour Ndiaye is obsessed with ambitions. He dreams of a nomination to the position of Vice-President of his country. To gain the favor of the President, he embarks on the evacuation of the street beggars from the city center to the outskirts of the city, alleging that they are "an oozing wound that is hurting] the booming tourist industry" (Azodo 2007:174), a real eyesore that inhibits the expansion of tourism. But without thinking through his plan, Mour Ndiaye ignores the boundaries of his power as well as the obligation of the rich toward the poor in his Islamic-influenced society.

Indeed, one of the Five Pillars of Islam is "Zakat", the giving of alms to the poor and the needy. According to the teachings of Islam, charity is an indispensable duty.
Those who generously give to the beggars do so hoping to receive God’s favor in return.

In order to be appointed Vice President, Mour Ndiaye’s marabou (holy priest) orders him to sacrifice a bull and distribute the meat to the beggars in the four corners of the city. But the city has been “cleansed” of the beggars, who, in turn, have decided to go on strike and refuse to take alms. Therefore, Mour Ndiaye is unable to execute the necessary sacrifice. The tables have turned completely as the rich and important Mour Ndiaye is compelled to visit the beggars in their hideout and persuade them to return to the city. But the beggars, conscious of their new power, remain totally indifferent: “No one has moved, nobody is interested in knowing the identity of the visitor” (80). Mour Ndiaye the “Big Man” is utterly ignored and his gift rejected despite his continued pleas. The beggars’ strike has caused disequilibrium in the social fabric. Mour Ndiaye’s failure to perform the prescribed sacrifice results in his ambition not being fulfilled; he is not promoted to the higher position as expected. Mour Ndiaye is simply a hypocrite. He professes to act in the interest of the general public - the type of sentiment one would expect from a public official - but like most corrupt politicians,
he only acts in the way that will provide the most benefit to him. Mour’s case is all too typical.

Mour Ndiaye’s obsession with authority is reflected not only in the public arena but also in his family relationships. As stated earlier, in much of postcolonial sub-Saharan Africa, the “big man” has become a most desirable mode of masculinity. To paraphrase Lisa Lindsay and Stephan Miescher, the success of a “big man” is also reflected in his ability to have multiple wives (Lindsay and Miescher 2003:18).

We should be reminded that, prior to becoming Director of Public Health, Mour Ndiaye had no job. In a sense, he was like the beggars he now despises, and his wife Lolli did everything to support the family: she sold almost all her best clothes and jewelries and sometimes she got help from her relatives. But now that Mour has a higher position and is wealthy, he decides to take Sine, who is as young as his daughter, as his second wife. Although both Lolli and her daughter Raabi oppose Mour’s decision, he does not stop pursuing his desire, claiming that as “head of the house” (jeker këer), he can do what he wants: “Just think; I am the one who feeds you and keeps you, aren’t I? And just tell me what contract I am tied by that prevents me from
taking a second wife, if I so desire?” (31). As Mour Ndiaye sees it, the power relation between him and his wife is based on economic factors. Knowing that he is the sole provider, on whom Lolli now depends, Mour Ndiaye feels he has the right to do whatever he wants and she cannot resist his will. Mour Ndiaye moves in with Sine and, like Modou in So Long a Letter, he buys her a luxurious villa and spends most of his money and time with her while neglecting his family. This is ironic because he claims to be head of the house and provider, yet abandons his family. Therefore, he is unable to fulfill his expected traditional roles. Given this situation, Mour Ndiaye does not deserve the status of the head of the house.

Unlike Lolli, Sine is more educated and highly sophisticated. She asserts her independence and right to continue to exhibit her pre-marital habits, such as smoking, wearing pants and make-up; she also rejects being given orders and prohibitions:

If you think I am prepared to be stuck here like a piece of furniture . . . then you’re making a mistake! . . . . I am a person and not a block of wood! . . . . I am your wife, so treat me like a wife. (95-96)

Sine challenges patriarchal tradition. As an enlightened woman, she refuses to submit to Mour’s control or to put up
with behavior which her co-wife accepts, as would the women of her mother’s generation.

Mour’s situation illustrates Robert Connell’s argument that in any power relation, once conditions that legitimate patriarchal power collapse, male behavior and the norms inscribed within masculinity change (Connell 2005:77). Mour Ndiaye cannot exercise his male dominance anymore; his patriarchal control has eroded in the presence of Sine who knows her rights and believes in an egalitarian relationship. While he is able to exercise his masculine power and privileges with his traditional and submissive first wife Lolli, he cannot do the same with Sine because she will not allow it.

Sine’s resistance to Mour’s control makes him realize that he should have negotiated the terms of their relationship, rather than resorting to dominance. He rationalizes the problem in terms of age difference not to lose face, he will be the elder and grant Sine her wishes: “their misunderstanding arose from the great difference in age between them, and because of this it was his duty, as the older, to make concession” (98).

Mour Ndiaye is so engulfed in, and blinded by, patriarchal norms and hegemonic masculinity that he
believes nothing or no one can challenge him. He hangs on to patriarchal tradition because it gives him power and control over both men and women, but he does not realize that some traditions are losing meaning in a changing society and that they no longer work.

As the above analysis suggests, masculinity is complex and encompasses many other concepts. Indeed, there is no one pattern of masculinity that is found in all places and times: “Different cultures, and different periods of history, construct masculinity differently” (Connell 1996: 208). In other words, masculinity means different things to different groups of people at different times. In a multicultural society like Africa, one would therefore expect to find numerous definitions of masculinity. It is possible, therefore, to find in African female-authors novels various aspects of masculinities such as patriarchy, manliness, virility, sexism, and the “big man” status. These concepts sometimes overlap, indicating how unstable and fluid they can be. The fictions I have studied also reaffirm the claim made by many researchers that hegemonic masculinity has to do with power. Hegemonic masculinity reinforces the continued existence of patriarchy and affects both men and women.
If African female novelists have shown negative male characters’ behavior, they have also depicted their positive sides. The next part of the study offers an array of men whose behavior is not hegemonic. They have a more balanced view of a fair and equal relationship that should exist between men and women.
Notes

1 The term literally means “the rule of the father.” Adrienne Rich specifically defines patriarchy as “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 the female is everywhere subdued under the male” (Of Woman Born, 57).


3 Frantz Fanon, 1967:18.


5 Baffour Takyi, 2003:79-94.

6 Steven Goldberg, 1993.


9 Rosemary Ofei-Aboagye, 1994:929


11 Molara Ogundipe, 19984:500.


14 Célile Accilien, 2008:74.


PART FOUR

ALTERNATIVE MASCULINITIES

The male characters studied in this section are different from those depicted in Part II in that they are characterized by ambiguity. They display behaviors which are less clear-cut and more complex as they juggle different conceptions of male conduct in their relationship with women. Their masculinity is “hybridized” as they find no contradiction in showing regard for women’s lives and feelings while still holding onto their own traditional patriarchal roles.

Additionally, African female novelists have portrayed models of men they would like to see in their societies; these are men I call “redeemers.” They are shaped by, and help shape, non-dominant visions of masculinity. In the eyes of their fellow men, “redeemers” may be considered “effeminate” because they view women more as equal partners than as subordinates. For this reason, they might be called “soft men,” a term I have borrowed from Elisabeth Badinter’s study *XY: On Masculine Identity*. According to Badinter, the “soft man” despises aggression, competition, and the desire for self-affirmation through sexual conquest, and instead
wants to be warmer, gentler, and more loving (Badinter 1995:143). In other words, the “soft man” is the opposite of the macho man. To a woman, he is an exemplary husband and a caring father; but to the patriarchal society, he is a danger to what masculinity stands for. The present section explores male characters who inhabit a space of ambiguity and those who are conscious that hegemonic masculinity needs to be rejected.

12. **Ambiguous Male Characters**

In Mariama Bâ’s *Scarlet Song*, we are introduced to an ambiguous male character, Djibril Gueye, a disabled World War II veteran who fought along side the French Army. Djibril is a pious, sincere man who lives peacefully with his wife, Yaye Khadi. As a responsible father, he encourages his son Ousmane to work hard and aim high, arguing that “work is the only path to self-advancement” (5). Unlike other men in his neighborhood, whose polygamous life style is a way to prove their masculinity, Djibril shows self-discipline in resisting the temptation to marry many wives and remaining committed to his first and only wife. As a devout Muslim, he is aware of the religious injunction that men provide equally for all their wives both emotionally and
materially. Djibril recognizes this would make polygamy
difficult for him given that his financial means are
"limited to his quarterly pension" (7). Being devoted to his
wife and living within his means, he has a better life than
most men, in whose families there is not enough for everyone.
Djibril sets an example that is regrettably not followed by
his son Ousmane.

Unlike his wife, Djibril is not prejudiced against
Mireille, Ousmane’s French wife, nor does he threaten to
disown his son because he has married a white woman; rather
he accepts the marriage because Mireille has converted to
Islam, an indication that she embraces her husband’s
religion and by implication his culture and way of life. He
advises his disappointed wife to forgive Ousmane and accept
Mireille into the family, but she will not hear of it.
Indeed, being extremely conservative, she still believes
that she has the right to choose her son’s wife. Djibril, on
the other hand, thinks parents should not interfere in their
children’s decisions, particularly when they involve
marriage: “the direction of [Ousmane’s] life is now his own
responsibility. He has the right to do what he pleases with
his own life” (66). Djibril also strongly believes that
“Marriage is the result of divine intervention” (66-67), and there is nothing human beings can do to alter God’s plan. This reminds us once again of the belief that an individual’s course of life is predestined. Furthermore, in contrast to Yaye Khadi, Djibril does not expect any compensation from Ousmane in return for all their years of parenting. He welcomes Gorgui, Ousmane and Mireille’s child, accepting him with thanks as a sacred gift: “This is one of God’s creatures; he is born of parents chosen by God and will become what God wishes” (124).

In spite of his many qualities: providing for his family, remaining faithful to his wife, and strictly yet gently guiding his son, Djibril Gueye nonetheless fails to protect Mireille as her relationship with Ousmane develops. It is unlikely that he is unaware of his son’s mistreatment of Mireille, yet he remains silent. Neither does he restrain his wife from intruding in their son’s marriage. Being the most elderly member of the Gueye family and as the head of the household, Djibril might have called both Ousmane and Mireille for counseling, but he elects to ignore this traditional responsibility.
A few months after Mireille’s son is born, when a delegation from Ousmane’s secret mistress, Ouleymatou, comes to announce that Ousmane has made their daughter pregnant, Djibril Gueye sends his own delegation to Ouleymatou’s parents to ask “her hand” for his son. He reasons that since Mireille has accepted Islam, she will also accept that Ousmane is entitled to four wives. Djibril’s argument expresses his own ambivalence and his inability to grapple with complicated issues and situations. Having a high sense of morality, Djibril encourages his son to accept responsibility for Ouleymatou’s pregnancy. This, however, means that his son will embrace the polygamous lifestyle that he has resisted himself.

What Djibril believes is contradicted by his actions or inaction. He knows what a man should do in Islamic society. On the one hand, he rejects some tenets of Islam that subjugate women; on the other hand, he encourages his son to accept those tenets. One can therefore describe Djibril’s masculine behavior as ambivalent.

Mariama Bâ’s *So Long a Letter*, features another ambiguous figure, Daouda Dieng, described as a man “on the threshold of old age” (59). He is the first suitor of
Ramatoulaye and a political officer at the national assembly. When they were both young, the rich and educated Daouda Dieng was the choice of Ramatoulaye’s parents and relations, but she rejected him to marry Modou.

Ramatoulaye describes Daouda Dieng as a good husband who “involved [his wife] in his political actions, his numerous travels, the various sponsorships for which he was canvassed and which increased his electoral constituency” (67). In addition, Daouda Dieng believes, as he explains to Ramatoulaye, that women are a fundamental component of the nation and that they should not limit their activities to caring for their husband and children, but should also be involved in public life (61-62). Thus, he encourages Ramatoulaye to get involved in politics and show interest in what is happening in the country. Because he favors equal opportunities for women in government and works towards changing the status quo, his colleagues at the National Assembly have called him “a feminist” (61). Meanwhile, however, he sees no contradiction between his progressive views and asking Ramatoulaye to be his second wife following her husband’s death. Daouda Dieng feels that any woman in
Ramatoulaye’s position needs a man to protect her; hence, he once again declares his enduring love for her:

I have the same feeling for you as I had before. Separation, your marriage, my own, none of these has been able to sap my love for you. Indeed, separation has made it keener; time has consolidated it; my advance in years has purified it. I love you dearly, but with my head. You are a widow with young children. I am head of a family. Each of us has the weight of the “past” to help us in understanding each other. I open my arms to you for new-found happiness; will you accept? (65)

Ramatoulaye is moved by Daouda’s expression of love, but she turns down his proposal and sends him a letter of regret, explaining that while she holds him in high esteem, her feelings are not strong enough to warrant marriage. More importantly, having experienced it herself, Ramatoulaye has a better knowledge of the problems inherent in polygamy. Daouda is already married, and Ramatoulaye cannot imagine causing misery to another woman. She does not want to be complicit in perpetuating polygamy. Ramatoulaye’s refusal is not only a way of challenging the ideology of dominant masculinity but also an indication of her solidarity with other women. She understands that, in patriarchal society, “a greater solidarity among women is needed to alleviate the
agon women go through in polygamous situations" (D’Almeida 1986:164).

One other illustration of ambiguous masculinity is seen in Djibril Mohamadou, the central male character of Mpoudi Ngolle’s *Sous la cendre le feu*. Set in Douala, in southern Cameroon, the novel is recounted by a homodiegetic narrator, Mina, who is the main protagonist and Djibril’s wife.

This novel, as Pius Adesani points out, “stands out in francophone African women’s writing as perhaps the only narrative informed by psychoanalysis” (Adesani 2002:129). The story opens *in medias res*. Mina is already in hospital recovering from amnesia and depression. Through the use of flashbacks, Mina undertakes an introspective journey to find out the causes of her illness. Her past reveals that her parents’ divorce was a result of her father’s infidelity. As a Christian high school girl, she became pregnant by Joel Edimo, a medical student, who refused to bear responsibility for the pregnancy, but later she met Djibril, a young Muslim and successful lawyer who married her despite the pregnancy. Djibril appeared to be a double savior; he redeemed Mina from desperation and spared her from shame:
Grâce à Djibril, mon enfant aurait un père, un foyer, et le droit à une vie harmonieuse. Sinon, quels moyens avais-je pour subvenir à ses besoins? Par ailleurs, la honte serait épargnée à mes parents, puisqu’ils croiraient que mon fiancé était l’auteur de la grossesse. (50)

[Thanks to Djibril, my child would have a father, a home, and the right to a harmonious life. If not, what means did I have to meet my child’s needs? Furthermore, my parents would be spared from shame, because they would believe that my fiancé was responsible for my pregnancy.]

Djibril Mohamadou turns out to be a good and devoted father. He cares for both Fanny, Mina’s first child whom he adopted, as well as his own daughter: “Djibril était un père merveilleux et très affectueux. Il adorait nos deux enfants, ceux-ci le lui rendaient bien” (100). [Djibril was a wonderful and loving father. He adored our two children, and they loved him in return.]

Up to this point, Djibril illustrates the emergence of what Robert Morrell refers to as the “New Man” in Africa. According to Morrell, this is a brand of “men who do not subscribe to stereotyped ideas such as that all women are nags, that women’s place is in the home, or that women should look nice but say little” (Morrell 2001:4). In other words, new men reject the notion of subordination of women, and are committed to, and passionate about, gender equality
in a relationship. They are also described as pro-feminists because they are in favor of women’s emancipation. For instance, they support women in their desires to pursue their education or advance their careers. In addition, unlike the men of their father’s generation, New Men are inclined to help out with household chores and child care.

Djibril epitomizes such men; he encourages his wife to return to school in order to complete the studies she discontinued after her first pregnancy. To give his wife enough time to concentrate on her school work, Djibril takes over all the domestic chores. Mina acknowledges that: “Le soir pour me permettre d’étudier tranquillement, Djibril s’occupait de Fanny. C’était un plaisir de le regarder bercer la petite, lui donner son biberon, jouer avec elle” (98) [In the evening, in order to allow me to study quietly, Djibril would take care of Fanny. It was a pleasure to see him cradle the little girl, to give her the feeding-bottle, to play with her]. Djibril’s attitude and behavior are unusual because even today, in most African communities, the roles of husband and wife are sharply defined, and one of women’s roles is to care for the children.
While Mina is pleased about Djibril's participation in domestic chores, her conservative mother, who comes to visit the couple, is appalled at this domestic arrangement. Mina's mother feels her daughter no longer lives according to traditional values. Having been raised in a patriarchal environment where masculine ideologies play the greatest role in determining what is valuable for a woman, Mina's mother is concerned that society will blame her because her daughter is not fulfilling society's expectations of how a woman should behave; hence, she chastises her:

Je sais, Mina, que vous ne voyez pas les choses comme nous. Mais il ne faut quand même pas exagérer. Suppose que des amis de ton mari vous trouvent comme ça: toi assise avec livres et cahiers, et lui nettoyant les fesses du bébé. Que penseront-ils? Que c'est ainsi que ta mère t'a éduquée? Que diront-ils? (98)

[Mina, I am aware that you do not see things the way we do. But you should not take it too far. Suppose your husband’s friends came and found you seated like that with your books and notebooks, while he is cleaning the baby’s behind. What would they think? That that’s the way your mother raised you? What would they say?]

Djibril faces difficult challenges in modern urbanized African society. While trying to be an exemplary husband and caring father, he also wants to prove to his community that
he is still the patriarch, the head of his household who commands authority. He does not want to give the impression that he is under the spell of a love potion or charm – the common explanation for any behavior said to be “emasculated” in traditional African culture. Hence, under pressure from his family and colleagues, Djibril begins to show less willingness to undertake domestic and childrearing tasks as he comes to feel the need to assert his hegemonic masculinity.

His change in behavior is first manifested the moment he returns from a visit to his village in Islamic-influenced Northern Cameroon. Mina observes that, “Depuis que mon mari était allé passer un mois de vacances chez lui l’année d’avant, il avait profondément changé” (97) [Since my husband came back from the village where he had gone for a vacation the previous year, he has significantly changed]. It appears that, during this visit, Djibril went through some kind of re-education in patriarchy, where a man is not expected to be “weak” in his relationship with a woman. Weakness is considered to be an embarrassment to the family, a disgrace in the eyes of one’s father, and a danger for other men who might fear that their power within the family would be undermined by his example. For men, being involved in child
care and household chores is construed as a loss of their hegemonic power over women, power they have enjoyed for so long and are not ready to relinquish. Thus, Djibril returns determined to restore, in his household, the traditional patriarchal rule which takes many forms.

For instance, Djibril and Mina had originally agreed to name their third child Thierry. But under the influence of his sister, Hadja, Djibril decides to name him Yaya, a traditional name, much to the surprise and displeasure of his wife. As representative of patriarchal authority, Hadja is allowed to not only influence her brother over the naming of the child but also literally runs Djibril’s household, telling Mina what to do and how to dress:

- Chez nous, une femme qui montre ses jambes ou sa tête nue est mal vue; et je te parle comme si tu étais ma propre fille. Quand tu viendras au village, tu devras t’habiller correctement.
- C’est-à-dire en pagne?
- Mais oui. Ton mari le sait, il devrait te l’avoir dit. Il ne fait pas bien son travail, cet enfant. (113-114)

[-In our village, a woman who displays her legs and does not cover her head is not well regarded; I am speaking to you as if you were my own daughter. When you come to the village, you should dress properly.
- You mean in a wrapper?]
-Of course. Your husband knows this and he should have told you. He is not doing his job properly, this child."

Hadja undoubtedly sees Djibril's cultural "hybridity" as incompatible with manliness; she is concerned that her brother has lost his patriarchal authority by allowing his wife to do what she pleases and dress as she wishes. Even his friends tease him for doing women's work; they want him to behave like a "real man." Thus, Hadja vows to restore propriety to her brother's marriage. Ironically, it is a woman who succeeds in changing Djibril's behavior after his male friends have failed. Under pressure from his traditionalist sister, Djibril gradually refuses to take care of his newly born son.

As the narrative unfolds, Djibril's transformation becomes more and more apparent. Because of the need to assert his masculinity, Djibril suddenly becomes involved with his "brothers" - a group of friends from his ethnic group and he allows his "brothers" to invade his home and stay there until late in the night, so the situation comes to resemble that of Ousmane and Mireille in Scarlet Song. Djibril spends more time with his "brothers" than he does with his family and does not even allow Mina to be present in the living room.
when he receives his visitors, except to serve them drinks and snacks. With the intrusion of Djibril’s newly found “brothers” into their household, Mina ceases to be his little flower; instead, she becomes an embarrassment. Djibril transforms the living room into an exclusively male space, relegating Mina to the kitchen, the traditionally prescribed female space. This reallocation of domestic space is one indication of how patriarchy has taken hold in their relationship.

As noted earlier, scholars of masculinity have shown that it is a social phenomenon which is neither autonomous nor static. It is a product of the social environment, which is complex and always changing and thus may enable shifts in male behavior. Indeed, on the advice of his “brothers,” Djibril awakens his masculine pride, as sanctioned by this society, and decides to run his household in a chauvinistic fashion. In a move to assert his masculine superiority, Djibril attempts to rape Essébé, Mina’s younger sister, who has come to spend her holidays with the couple. This is not only an abuse of power but a betrayal of trust.

Djibril’s most despicable behavior, however, occurs when he rapes his stepdaughter Fanny, in an attempt to make
his business more profitable. Indeed, one of his newly found "brothers" persuaded him to see a medicine man who told him that the condition for prosperity was to rape a virgin from within his family:

Un de ses frères, ces fameux « frères », a amené Djibril à consulter un féticheur dans le but de faire fructifier ses affaires, qui d’après lui ne marchaient pas encore aussi bien qu’il l’aurait souhaité. Ce féticheur a promis à Djibril qu’il deviendrait rapidement très riche s’il acceptait de se soumettre à ses exigences: Djibril dut lui donner 100 000 francs; en plus, il devait apporter un coq blanc et des plumes rouges de perroquet; ensuite il devrait coucher avec une petite impubère de sa famille. (202)

[One of his brothers, those famous "brothers", brought Djibril to consult a medicine man in order to make his law business prosper, since he thought it was not running as he would have liked it to. The medicine man promised Djibril that he would quickly become very rich if he accepted and adhered to his demands: Djibril had to give him 100,000 francs; in addition, he had to bring a white rooster and red parrot’s feathers; furthermore, he had to sleep with a pubescent girl of his family.]

This passage reveals an important aspect of African cultural and religious beliefs. Africans generally hold the belief that every event of fortune or misfortune that happens to an individual or a community is not a matter of chance. Illness, financial insecurity, or the death of a loved one,
need an explanation, a cure or solution often provided by the medicine man. This explains why Djibril consults the medicine man in the same way that Mour Ndiaye, the protagonist in Aminata Sow Fall’s *The Beggars’ Strike*, went to see a medicine man or marabout in the Islamic tradition, vested with spiritual power to help him get appointed to a higher position. Unfortunately, in the case of Djibril, the medicine man’s instructions lead to a tragically incestuous act.

Shockingly, Djibril refuses to acknowledge any responsibility for his action and instead blames Joël, Fanny’s biological father. He explains that he would never have followed through with the medicine man’s instructions if Joël had not come to him and threatened to take his wife and daughter away. It was this visit that “a ouvert dans sa tête la brèche par laquelle l’idée démoniaque s’est infiltrée ensuite” (204) [opened his mind to the evil idea which then took hold of him].

The analysis of Djibril as a character shows that he has shifted from a loving husband and caring father to one who is more and more entrenched in patriarchal patterns of dominance over his wife. This shift represents the ambiguous space in which he exercises his masculinity. However, this
attitude can be contrasted with new patterns of behavior among some men that point to relationships of greater equality with their female partners and children.

13. A Look at the “soft man”: exemplary husbands, caring fathers

If the analysis of African women’s texts reveals what masculinity should not be, they also present new, alternative models of masculinity. In this section, I wish to consider men who adopt non-hegemonic life style. These men, who can be classified in the category of “new men,” consider women as partners, see themselves as allies in their fight against male domination, and resist societal pressure to conform to the status quo. One such man is Abou, a character in Mariama Bâ’s first novel, So Long a Letter.

Abou is married to Ramatoulaye’s daughter Daba and believes in equality between spouses. His relationship with Daba is based on respect, love, and complementarity; they grant each other equal rights and duties, which is unusual in the Wolof society, even among the younger generations. He very clearly expresses his view that his wife Daba is not his possession when he tells his mother-in-law: “Daba is my wife. She is not my slave, nor my servant” (73), a statement that
delights Ramatoulaye who expresses her happiness about her
daughter’s marriage: “I sense the tenderness growing between
this young couple, an ideal couple, just as I have always
imagined. They identify with each other and discuss
everything so as to find a compromise” (73-74). It is clear
that Bâ’s understanding of complementarity challenges the
assumption that men and women’s work should be assigned along
gender lines.

Through Ramatoulaye, Bâ advocates the kind of
relationship that Charles Nnolim theorizes “In
accommodation,” a concept that paves the way for a more equal
relationship between men and women, thus enhancing the
possibility of realizing a more equitable social order.
According to Nnolim, “In accommodation, [man and woman] pool
together resources. There is no question of the male’s
authority and hegemony in the family under loving, mutually
respectful relationship” (Nnolim 1994:252).

Accommodation is also observed by Lamine, a character
in Bâ’s Scarlet Song. Lamine, Ousmane’s cousin, is married to
Pierrette, a European woman. Unlike his cousin, Lamine “did
not go about with one ear cocked for what ‘his own people’
had to say” (98). He does not equate his masculinity with
cultural patterns that debase women. Instead, he strikes a balance among his multiple values. He keeps a distinct separation between his extended family and his immediate family, which is more Western, but he does not abandon his African identity; he merely recognizes cultural differences and embraces them. His family considers him "a lost soul" (98), but he is not concerned that in their eyes, he has been totally "assimilated" into his wife’s culture, that he lives the life of a white man in apparent rejection of his own culture. In fact, Lamine is happy to abandon some of the social conventions which have no real meaning for him. He argues:

How can it change a person to sit at the table and eat steak instead of rice? What harm does it do to me to spend my salary on my family instead of subsidizing a lot of idle parasites? And if to respect my wife and let her live happily in the way she chooses means that I’ve been colonized, well then, I’ve been colonized, and I admit it. I want peace. That doesn’t mean I am a traitor to myself. (100)

Moreover, when it becomes apparent that Ousmane has troubles in his marriage, Lamine urges his cousin to be humane, accommodating, and more tolerant, to make concessions himself while demanding concessions from Mireille. Lamine’s primary desire is to have a peaceful and harmonious
relationship with his wife. For this reason, he is ready to accommodate her views in matters that concern their household. In contrast with Ousmane and most men in his society, Lamine is prepared to treat his wife as an equal partner rather than as a subordinate; he believes that without mutual concessions a marriage will fall apart. Lamine is a kind of “new man” that Elisabeth Badinter positively describes as the “soft man” who is “warmer, gentler, more loving, and despises aggressivity” (Badinter 1995:143). Lamine does not see his attitude as being “effeminate,” rather he is a torchbearer for a new, more equal coexistence between men and women. This is also what defines Mbeck, a character in Philomène Bassek’s La tache de sang.

Through a third-person description, we learn that Mbeck, Mama Ida’s uncle, embodies a new model of fatherhood. Lindsay Clowes introduces the concept of the “new dad,” a father who does not believe in gender roles and considers women as equals (Clowes 2006:108). Contrary to Mama Ida’s father who believes in a strict division of labor within the family, Mbeck supports equality between men and women. In his household, he insists that male and female members have meals together at the same table, instead of the women eating
separately, as is traditionally done in the village. Mama Ida is impressed with this arrangement: “[Elle] fut séduite par cette manière de faire qui devait renforcer inéluctablement le sentiment familial” (11) [She was seduced by that way of doing things which would ineluctably reinforce family ties]. However, Mbeck’s decision is resented in the village and almost makes him an outcast among the village patriarchs who believe in women’s inferiority: “Cette innovation de l’oncle faillit lui valoir d’être exclu de l’assemblée des chefs de famille” (11) [Because of this innovation, my uncle was almost barred from the assembly of family heads]. In the eyes of his male counterparts, Mbeck, by not upholding the patriarchal concept of male superiority, is a liability and a threat to the entire community. By promoting equality between men and women, he challenges what patriarchy stands for, and must be stopped before his ideology becomes entrenched in the community.

Abou, Lamine, and Mbeck are supporting characters who play only a minor role in the works under study. However, my analyses show that African women writers’ characterization of men is not simply a critique of hegemonic conceptions of masculinity. Men are not only oppressors who attempt to
alleviate their frustrations through aggressive actions against women, using them as a safety valve. Despite the dominant expressions of masculinity which make life so difficult for women, some men reject the role of oppressor and adopt different forms of behavior within the context of family life. These are the "new men" who demonstrate what new forms of masculinities can be. They display responsibility, tenderness, openness and a willingness to communicate. Moving in the path of history, they realize that their dominant masculine attitudes should no longer hold in contemporary society. They are respectful in their relationships with women and oppose exploitative and oppressive gender relations. This commitment to change in relationships between men and women is a necessary first step to the social transformation of the African society.
This Islamic tradition is often misinterpreted and misused. In conformity with the guidelines of the Qur'ân, a Muslim male is permitted to marry up to four women only if he has adequate financial resources to support all his wives, and is able to allot an equal amount of time for each wife. (For more details refer to Surah an-Nisa (IV):129-130), The Noble Qur'ân.

In Masculine Domination, Pierre Bourdieu defines a “real man” as “someone who feels the need to rise to the challenge of the opportunities available to him to increase his honor by pursuing glory and distinction in the public sphere” (Bourdieu 2001:51).
PART FIVE

CONCLUSION

As enunciated in the opening pages, the purpose of this study was to explore the representation of men and masculinities in selected novels by contemporary African Francophone women writers, including Mariama Bâ, Aminata Sow Fall, Delphine Zanga Tsogo, Calixthe Beyala, Philomène Bassek, and Evelyne Mpoudi Ngolle. This study has examined aspects of masculinities through thematic readings and analyzing the development of characters that look at each story on its own terms. As I come to the end of my study, it is appropriate that, in light of what the concept of masculinities helped me to uncover, I attempt to provide answers to the questions raised in my introduction (p. 4).

The first question concerned the nature of men’s image in Francophone African women’s novels. My analyses of men in the eight novels studied indicate that men are known primarily through their relationships with women. In addition, the study reveals that African female novelists represent their male characters mostly in a negative light. But they also show what is noble and admirable in men.

The negative male characters display hegemonic behaviors that represent various concepts of masculinities
which sometimes overlap including patriarchy, manliness, sexism, and the “big man” status. As fictional characters, they have been cast as manipulative liars, shameless philanderers, unrepentant cheaters and, therefore, the source of their wives and families’ unhappiness. In Mariama Bâ novels, Modou Fall, Mawdo and Ousmane manipulate tradition and religion to justify polygamy and even abandon their families. In Aminata Sow Fall’s *The Beggars’ Strike*, Mour Ndiaye does not acknowledge the hard work his wife Lolli had to put into their marriage; instead, he repays her by taking in a second wife with the excuse that he has been given another wife (29). Other men are depicted as abusive or oppressive of women. These men regard women as property or sexual objects, hence depriving them of their dignity. This is what one sees, for instance, in *The Sun Hath Looked Upon Me*, *Your Name Shall be Tanga*, and *Vies de femmes* respectively, were men like Jean Zepp, Hassan, Kazo, Evoundi, and Edanga, believe that women are fit for nothing else than to be bed partners.

The second type of male characters represented in women’s novels is that of men whose masculine behaviors shift from non-hegemonic to that of dominance over women. Like a pendulum, these men sway their masculine behavior to
suit the moment. On the one hand, they show regard for women, while on the other they cannot relinquish their patriarchal male privileges. Djibril Mohamadou, the male character in Mpoudi Ngolle’s *Sous la cendre le feu* is one such example; he moves from being a loving husband and caring father to patriarchal patterns of dominance over his wife. For such men, their shift in behavior reflects the ambiguous nature of the environment in which they enact their masculinity.

African women writers have also depicted, though in much small numbers, reliable fathers as well as caring and responsible husbands. Abou, Lamine and Mbeck in *So Long a Letter, Scarlet Song* and *Tache de sang* are illustrative of such men. Here a new image of masculinity is introduced: the “new man,” a characterization that should not be viewed as a feminization of the masculine but rather as an ideal to emulate.

This raises the question of whether or not the images in female writers’ fictions are realistic portraits of men in African societies or mere fabrications drawn from the authors’ literary imaginations or ideologies. I believe that writers draw from a reservoir of experience to create their characters. For example, the Nigerian writer Buchi
Emecheta confirms that women write about what they know best, that is, their own lives and the lives of those who surround them: "I write about the little happenings of everyday life," she says (quoted in Nfah-Abbenyi 1997:7). The male portraiture by the six writers stems from their observations of men in their respective milieus and at the same time expresses the authors' opinions about certain male individuals. The women writers whose novels have been analyzed have chosen to write about the way some men behave in their relationships with women in African society. It is necessary to mention that stereotypical characters in these women's works illustrate how women's perspective as they write about men "can supply . . . an outsider's vision of a culture" (Miller 1986:3), revealing the implications of the cultural norm of male superiority for the women who are most damaged by it.

The third question I raised inquired into the literary tools, devices, and strategies particular writers use in their portrayals of male characters. The most notable strategies and devices employed by these women in their portrayals of masculine behavior include *inter alia*, flashbacks, first-person narrative, omniscient narrators, African cultural traditions, and several linguistic
innovations. Other literary devices peculiar to each writers are: the “letter-diary,” as in Mariama Bâ’s *So Long a Letter*; third-person narrative in which the narrator is not a character, which is illustrated in Zanga Tsogo’s work; and the use of multiple voices, as in Calixthe Beyala’s *The Sun Hath Looked upon Me*. Beyala also employs direct and even brutal language to drive her points home.

This leads to the last questions: why do men behave the way they do in order to be identified, seen, and respected as masculine? And what aspects of the cultures of masculinity need to be challenged in order for positive changes to occur in male-female relationships in Africa? Evidence in the study indicates that the behavior of men is the result of socialization, which determines who qualifies as a man in a particular context. For example, in *La tache de sang*, Same knows that the only way he can be validated as a ‘real man’ is by fathering as many children as he can; hence, despite his wife’s poor health and his poor financial situation, he wants her to bear more children.

Another motivating factor contributing to men’s hegemonic behavior is that some men feel compelled to prove themselves and show their masculinity to other men. For instance, in Mpoudi Ngolle’s *Sous la cendre le feu*, Djibril
Mouhamadou initially rejects the ideals of hegemonic masculinity in his marriage; he is an example of the “new man.” But because of pressure from his friends, he returns to the mainstream hegemonic patterns of masculinity. Rather than be ridiculed as being less than a man, Djibril Mouhamadou goes along with his male friends’ ideas. He resorts to exercising his male dominance over his wife and even sexually molests his stepdaughter.

It is important to note that, although the women writers studied in this dissertation frequently depict men’s behavior negatively, they also recognize that men are themselves victims who need to be liberated from patriarchal expectations within their societies. This means that both men and women need to work together as suggested by Richard Bjornson, who points out that: “Men as well as women need to realize that . . . prevailing social institutions must be changed if Africans are ever to enjoy the fullness of their humanity” (Bjornson 1991:389-390).

Although this study is limited in scope to answering the above questions about masculinities in the African novel, it provides insights into the representation of the male characters in women novelists’ texts. This work is a starting point for a study I plan to undertake in the near
future, which will compare the depictions of masculinity by African women writers with those of their male counterparts, particularly in the novels published since 2000. Such a study would help to identify similarities and differences between views held by authors of both genders.

Finally, from this study of the novels by contemporary Francophone African women writers, one conclusion is inescapable: men and women both have a lot to learn from being seen through the lens of the other.
APPENDIX A

NOTES ON NOVELISTS

My expectation is that anyone reading this dissertation would have been familiar with the writers selected. However, it is necessary to provide background information about the authors under consideration so that the reader may appreciate the context in which the male characters are discussed.


A renowned female novelist, Mariama Bâ was born in 1929 in Dakar, Senegal, and raised by her maternal grandparents in a strictly traditional Muslim environment. She went to school in Dakar and then in Rufisque, where she obtained her teaching diploma in 1947. After graduating from the Ecole Normale in Rufisque, Bâ taught for twelve years and later held the position of Regional School Inspector.

For the better part of her life, Bâ was active in women’s organizations and politics as she was conscious of the need for change in the sociopolitical life of her country. She advocated the improvement of the position of women and openly spoke against polygamy and genital
infibulations. She views these forms of customs as oppressive and an impediment to women’s emancipation and participation in societal development.

In 1979, Mariama Bâ, a mother, wife, educator and writer, published what is said to be the first “truly feminist African novel” (Ojo-Ade 1982:73), *Une si longue lettre* [So Long a Letter (1982)], which won the Noma Award in 1980 for an outstanding literary work published in Africa. The feminist critic Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka shares Ojo-Ade’s view when she states that, “with her first novel, *So Long a Letter*, Mariama Bâ achieved a reputation as a writer who adds a strong, unique, and culturally relevant feminist voice” to African literature (Ajayi-Soyinka 2003:153). Indeed, as one might see in her novel, Mariama Bâ is able to create female characters who have the ability to express themselves with a free mind and a sufficient sense of personal identity. The two major female characters in *So Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou, make individual and significant choices when confronted with inherent gender-based inequalities in their culture, particularly the marriage institution. In 1984, Bâ’s second novel, *Un chant écarlate* [Scarlet Song (1986)] was published posthumously.
2. Aminata Sow Fall (1941- )

Born in Saint Louis in Northern Senegal, Aminata Sow Fall is one of the earliest and best known Francophone African women writers. She was educated both in Dakar and Paris, where she specialized in French literature at the University of Paris-Sorbonne. On her return to Senegal in 1969, Sow Fall became a high school teacher. Later, she was appointed to the Commission Nationale de Réforme de L’Enseignement du Français, a body charged with adapting the content of the teaching of French to African realities.

In 1988, she resigned her position to devote her time to writing. It should be noted that Sow Fall’s passion for writing began in her school days in the 1960s when she wrote poems and plays. Commenting on how she began writing novels, So Fall states in a 1994 interview with Mwamba Cabakulu:

Lorsque je suis rentrée au Sénégal après mes études à Paris, et que j’ai pris la décision d’écrire une œuvre, je me suis lancée dans le roman. Je me suis dit que c’est peut-être plus confortable pour quelqu’un qui voulait, à cette époque-là, toucher un plus large public. Pour le théâtre, il fallait être joué et ce n’était pas facile. Alors je me suis lancée dans le roman. (Cabakulu 2002:15)

[When I returned to Senegal after my studies in Paris, and decided to write literature, I launched into the novel. I thought that this was...


perhaps more comfortable for someone who wanted, at that time, to reach a larger audience. For theater, it would have to be staged, and that was not easy. So, I went into the novel.

In 1989, Aminata Sow Fall founded the Centre Africain d’Animation et d’Echange Culturel (CAEC) in Dakar, of which she is the director. This is a non-profit organization that seeks to foster intellectual, literary and cultural debates. The center also serves as a headquarters for the National Union of Senegalese Writers. Furthermore, the center comprises a special section for young people from rural and urban areas. This youth department offers special curricula of all subjects, teaching materials and facilities to high school and undergraduate students.

To date, Sow Fall has written nine novels including Le revenant (1976) [The Ghost], La Grève des Bâttu (1979) [The Beggars’ Strike], L’Appel des arènes (1982) [The Call of the Wrestling Arenas], L’Ex-Père de la nation (1987) [The Nation’s former Father-Figure], Le Jujubier du patriarche (1993) [The Patriarch’s Jujubier], Les Douceurs du bercaill (1998) [Home Sweet Home], Sur le flanc gauche du Belem (2002) [On the River bank of Belem], Un grain de vie et d’espérance (2002) [Food for thought and tomorrow’s life],
Festins de détresse (2005) [Feasts of Distress]. Sow Fall’s writing is simple and accessible to any average reader.

Like Mariama Bâ, Aminata Sow Fall has a keen interest in the social condition of women in Senegal. But unlike her colleague who was a confirmed advocate of women’s emancipation, Aminata Sow Fall claims that she writes as a sensitive citizen who wants to talk about what she observes around her and not specifically as a woman. In an interview with Lucien Houendanou, for the magazine Afrique Nouvelle, Aminata Sow Fall states:

Je ne suis militante d’aucune idéologie. Même pas du féminisme. Je suis contre l’idée que la femme a toujours été asservie. Moi, je n’écris pas du point de vue de la femme, mais plutôt du point de vue de la citoyenne. L’écrivain-femme n’a pas à choisir que des thèmes féminins. Je ne prétends pas parler au nom de toutes les femmes écrivains, mais personnellement, je ne crois pas qu’il existe une “écriture féminine.” (Sow Fall, in Houendanou, 1982:20-22)

[I am not a militant of any ideology. Not even of feminism. I am against the idea that women have always been enslaved. I do not write from the point of view of a woman, but rather from that of a citizen. A woman writer should not choose only feminist themes. I do not pretend to speak for all women writers, but personally, I do not believe that there exists a unique “female writing.”]

This preoccupation with general social issues is clearly reflected in her writing. Susan Stringer compares
Aminata Sow Fall to her compatriot Sembène Ousmane, “whose work deals with the plight of ordinary men and women in modern, capitalist, urban [African] society” (Stringer 1996:77).

3. Delphine Zanga Tsogo (1935–)

The Cameroonian politician and novelist, Delphine Zanga Tsogo, was born in 1935 in Lomie, Cameroon. She went to Douala girls’ secondary school and then to Toulouse in France, where she trained as a nurse and obtained a State Nursing Diploma. In 1960, she returned to Cameroon where she worked in various hospitals. Besides her professional activities, Zanga Tsongo held various political portfolios. From 1965 to 1972, Zanga Tsogo served as a Member of Parliament, and as Deputy Minister for Health and Public Welfare from 1970 to 1975. Unlike most male politicians, Zango-Tsogo used her political position to the benefit of women; she helped to bring to light the problems of women in her country. Juliana Nfa-Abbenyi explains in *Gender in African Women’s Writing* how Zanga-Tsogo used her privileged position to give voice to other women:

As a woman, a writer, and a powerful political figure, Zanga Tsogo had to lend her ears to “women affairs,” to stories of women’s lives told by women and about women. As the Minister of
Social Affairs, she was in a unique position to learn more about polygamy, prostitution, conjugal violence, infidelity, rural exodus, and illiteracy [. . .] and how these issues directly affected the lives of women. Her position also gave her relatively easy access to publication in Yaounde. Zanga-Tsogo could therefore integrate the lives and experiences of other women into her own and rewrite these stories in fictional ways, thus unburying buried lives. (Nfa-Abbenyi 1997:74-75)

Zanga Tsogo came onto the literary landscape late in life with the publication of Vies de femmes [Women’s lives] in 1983. In this work, which has an autobiographical flavor, Zanga Tsogo creates a society where women are marginalized. She narrates how economically powerful men sexually and emotionally abuse women. Government officials and affluent men utilize their opulence and social status as a tool to sexually exploit women. A year later, in 1984, Zanga Tsogo published her second novel, L’oiseau en cage [A caged bird], where she denounces parents who deny their daughters an education by withdrawing them from school and marry them off to wealthy men. These are the only novels Zanga Tsogo has published to date.


Born in 1961 in Douala, Cameroon, Calixthe Beyala spent the early years of her life with her mother and her
stepfather in Bangui, Republic of Central Africa. She was separated from her mother at the age of five and was then raised by her elder sister who sent her to school despite the extreme poverty in which she was living.

Beyala attended her primary school in Douala and her secondary education in Bangui and Douala. She left for Paris at the age of seventeen where she wrote her baccalaureate examination. She then went to Spain where she studied management. She later returned to France where she earned her B.A. in letters. She has been leaving in France ever since.

Tunde Fatunde, in his article “Calixthe Beyala Rebels Against Female Oppression” observes that “Calixthe Beyala is prominent among the emerging francophone African female writers. She publishes a novel almost every year” (Fatunde 2004: 69). These include C’est le soleil qui m’a brûlée (1987) [The Sun hath looked upon Me 1996], Tu t’appelleras Tanga (1988) [Your Name shall be Tanga 1996], Seul le diable le savait (1990) [Only the Devil Knew], Le petit prince de Belleville (1992) [Loukoum: the little prince of Belleville 1995], Maman a un amant (1993) [Mother has a lover], Assèze l’Africaine (1994) [Assèze The African Woman], Lettre d’une Africaine à ses sœurs occidentales
Beyala stands out for her preoccupations with women’s development and emancipation. There are a number of reasons for her preoccupation with female oppression in her writings. In an interview for the magazine Amina in 1992, Beyala justifies her literary commitment towards the defense of women; without mincing her words she says: “La femme africaine a trois types de combat. D’abord elle doit se battre en tant que femme. Ensuite elle doit s’imposer en tant que femme noire. Enfin, elle doit se battre pour son intégration sociale. C’est sans doute l’être humain au
monde qui a le plus de problèmes; mais en même temps, elle a beaucoup de poids” (Kombi II, In Amina 1992:10-11) [The African woman has three types of combat. First, she has to fight as a woman. Secondly, she has to establish herself as a black woman. Finally, she has to fight for her social integration. She is doubtlessly the human being who has most problems in the world; but, at the same time, she has a lot of weight]. In the same vein, the male critic Aduke Adebayo argues that,

Whether she lives in the bush or in the city, however, the African woman was and is still doubly oppressed. First, she is oppressed by colonialism and neo-colonialism like her male counterpart and, secondly, she is oppressed by the patriarchal arrangement whereby the women and the children belong to the minority group in the sense that they are denied some privileges and freedom, which society normally allows for the dominant group. In this case, the dominant group is the male. It is this destiny of the subaltern, of the minority group, which becomes the focus of many francophone women’s writings]. (Adebayo 2000:281)

In order to expose the wrongs committed against women in patriarchal society, Beyala uses a narrative which is rough and provocative. Clearly, Beyala’s discourse is sometimes shocking to some Africans, but her targets, she claims, are oppressive men and unscrupulous politicians. These men view women only in terms of the sexual pleasure
they derive from them; they have also mismanaged the African continent, making it a laughing stock to the West. The writing of Beyala does not abide by the rules conventional in the literary world; she rebels against all linguistic conformity because she believes that to respect language rules means one has accepted to adhere to the rule of silence.

5. Philomène Bassek (1957– )

Calixthe Beyala is not the only Cameroonian woman writer to address feminist issues; her compatriot Philomène Bassek has also been concerned with women’s issues, such as sexual abuse and oppression, although in a less radical fashion.

Philomène Isabelle Mandeng, whose married name is Bassek, was born in 1957 in Dschang, in the Western part of Cameroon. She studied Philosophy at the University of Yaoundé. She currently teaches Philosophy at the Lycée Général-Leclerc in Yaoundé. Her only work written thus far is *La tache de sang*, published in 1990. Her writing is not autobiographical, though, like most African writers, she is inspired by her own life experience.
6. Evelyne Mpoudi Ngolle (1953–)

Evelyne Mpoudi Ngolle was born in 1953 in Yaoundé, Cameroon. After graduating from the Lycée New-Bell in 1972, she attended the University of Yaoundé where she majored in literature. She had to interrupt her studies in 1973 in order to follow her husband to Bordeaux, France. She took advantage of her stay in France to complete her University Studies.

Shortly after she and her husband returned to Cameroon in 1988, Evelyne Mpoudi Ngolle found a teaching job at the Lycée Général Leclerc in Yaoundé. A year later, she was promoted to Regional Inspector of French. In 1992, she was appointed Principal of the Lycée Elig-Esson in Yaoundé, a position she held until 1999. She is currently General Inspector of French at the Ministry of National Education. To date, she has written one novel, Sous la cendre, le feu, published in 1990, which has since been included in the school French curriculum. Using a flashback structure of exploration, the novel is a quest for self-discovery; a woman is trying to discover herself by recounting her own story. The narrative evolves in a circle because the subject of the quest is also the object: Hermine Mohammadou, also known as Mina, is a completely mentally destabilized
woman in search of herself. The need to understand what happens makes her undertake a psychological journey into her inner mind.

The author has a number of works in the making. According to Marcelline Nnomo and Richard Omgba, Evelyne Mpoudi Ngolle is writing a second novel which will probably be entitled Enfant de la rue, and a third novel, also to be published soon, will probably be based on the AIDS pandemic.
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