

**REPRODUCTIVE AND DEPRESSIVE
CHALLENGES IN SELECTED FRANCOPHONE
AFRICAN WOMEN'S NOVELS**

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ABSTRACT

Reproductive challenges, like infertility, and depression constitute some of the thematic concerns in African literature. Existing studies in Francophone African literature have examined various social problems like oppression, child abuse and women victimisation with less attention paid to issues of reproduction and depression among women. This study was, therefore, designed to examine reproductive and depressive challenges in selected Francophone African women's novels, with a view to establishing their causes and the characters' coping strategies.

Alice Walker's Womanism and Cognitive Behavioural Theory served as framework. The interpretive design was adopted. Eight francophone African women's novels were purposively selected based on their treatment of women's reproductive and depressive challenges. They were Evelyne Mpoudi Ngolle's *Sous la cendre le feu* (Sous), Thérèse Kuoh-Moukoury's *Rencontres essentielles* (Rencontres), Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* (Lettre), Fatou Keita's *Rebelle*, Adelaide Fassinou's *Modukpé, Le rêve brisé* (Modukpé), Angèle Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes* (Fureurs), Azaratou Baboni's *Vie de femme, vie de sang* (Vie), and Philomène Bassek's *La tache de sang* (Tache). The texts were subjected to textual analysis.

The female protagonists suffer emotional and traumatic experiences as a result of family dysfunction. Infertility, miscarriage, polygamy, violence, gender inequality, incest and child marriage are depicted as the causes of reproductive and depressive challenges. In *Fureurs* and *Rencontres*, infertility results into Emillienne's and Flo's marital crises. In *Lettre* and *Sous*, Jacqueline and Mina experience mental disorder, while Ramatoulaye suffers solitude and persistent sadness, respectively, due to their husbands' infidelity. Fatou and Emillienne are depressed by their husband's infidelity in *Vie* and *Fureurs*. Fanta, Malimouna, Mama Ida, and Modukpé, endure physical violation, miscarriages and depression in *Rebelle*, *Tache* and *Modukpé*. While Malimouna contend with exile and its destructive dynamics, Fanta suffers imprisonment which leads to the death of her daughter, in *Rebelle*. Fatou and Ramatoulaye undergo economic violence and deprivation, while Assiatou, in *Lettre* is forced to leave her marriage when her husband takes a second wife. Many of the female characters are able to overcome their challenges through several coping strategies. Mina, Ramatoulaye and Malimouna deploy narration, letter writing and social works in *Sous*, *Lettre* and *Rebelle*, respectively, to manage their traumatic experiences. Mina, Modukpé, Jacqueline and Malimouna address mental disorders by recollecting their past encounters in order to make future projections in *Sous*, *Modukpé*, *Lettre* and *Rebelle*. In *Vie* and *Lettre*, Ramatoulaye and Fatou deploy modelling, reading, going to the cinema and watching plays to treat and heal depression. Malimouna and Emillienne use education to challenge female subjugation and forced marriage in *Rebelle* and *Fureurs*. Fatou and Mama Ida, in *Vie* and *Tache*, employ family planning and contraceptive, respectively to promote birth control, while child adoption is employed in *Rencontres* by Flo and in *Sous* by Djbril.

Family dysfunction causes reproductive challenges, which often result in depression. Female characters draw on education, dialogue and artistic therapy to resist reproductive and depressive experiences. Therefore, reproductive challenges could be healed through the characters' coping strategies deployed in the selected novels.

Keywords: Reproductive challenges in novels, Francophone African Literature, Depression in women's novel, Womanism

Word count: 491

CERTIFICATION

We certify that this thesis was researched and written by Toluwa Funmilayo AYELERU under our supervision, in the Department of European Studies, University of Ibadan.



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DEDICATION

This research work is dedicated to Almighty ALLAH, my creator for showing me mercies and abundance of love for making my dreams to be a reality.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Une si longue lettre :</i>	<i>Lettre</i>
<i>Sous la cendre le feu :</i>	<i>Sous</i>
<i>Modukpè, le rêve brisé :</i>	<i>Modukpe</i>
<i>Fureurs et cris de femmes :</i>	<i>Fureurs</i>
<i>La tache de femme :</i>	<i>Tache</i>
<i>Rebelle:</i>	<i>Rebelle</i>
<i>Vie de femme, vie de sang :</i>	<i>Vie</i>
<i>Rencontres Essentielles :</i>	<i>Rencontres</i>
CBT:	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
SACAP:	South African College of Applied Psychology
TADS:	Treatment for Adolescents with Depression Study
SMD:	Severe Mental Disorder
PCPDE:	Institute for War and Peace Reporting Çongolese'
FMG:	Female Genital Mutilation
UNGEL:	United Girls Education Initiative
AAFD :	L'Association d'Aide a Femme en Difficult
UNGEL:	United Nation's Girls Education Initiative

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the study

Francophone African literature has been dominated and characterised by texts written by male African writers from the pre-colonial period. In the accounts of the literary history of these periods, the francophone female voices had been silent. The emergence of male francophone writings paved way for the emergence of female francophone literary writings in the middle of the post-colonial literature. Ojo-Ade (1983) bares his mind on the unequal opportunity which the female counterpart had suffered in the past when there was unequal access to Western education to the girl-child, while the boy-child was given access to Western education. On the other hand, the girl-child was marginalized and relegated to the background for several decades in the Patriarchal African Society by the African culture and some religious practices. Even from politics to academics, from religion to ethnic positioning of the women, even her roles from family life to societal expectations, their voices were unidentified. In fact, as far back as the 1920s, African women could not publish a literary work. An example is the French novelist by name, Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin who took to her pen-name (man) George Sand, while she was to publish her works such as *Voyage en Auvergne* (1827), *Indiana* (1832) and lots more. In the pre-colonial periods, women are portrayed as subaltern, thus objectified. The emergence of the precolonial literature in Africa started in 1920s with works of Bakary Diallo and Almadou Mapâte Diagne. An exemple of Diallo's work is *Les trois volontes de Malic* (1920) which deals with the traditional social values and the opposition between two forms of education, which also narrates the ordeals of a boy named Malic, a wolof, involving in a struggle between muslim tradition and western influence. He goes to a French school instead of going to Koranic school as his parents wanted, he later becomes a Blacksmith. Diagne also published: *Le pays de pilleurs d'epaves: Gandiole* in 1920.

The works of Negritude writers like Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Camara Layé, David Diop and Léon Damas decry the ills of colonialism and foreground the need to reclaim the lost glory of Africa. Their works are seen as a literature of lamentation, which is a weeping literary genre that depicts all acts of injustice of the colonial period. They affirm their black identities as superior and cling to their African identities. During these periods, only men could participate in the civilising mission to expose the coloniser's misdeeds in the Francophone countries and African continent as a whole. This is because, they affirmed that the imperial mission destroyed many African traditions and disrupted the once peaceful continent as demonstrated in David Diop's *Celui qui à tout perdu* which gives a nostalgic description of the original, an untainted African, where peace and harmony reigned supreme. Then suddenly, there was silence and the civilisers came to destroy the peaceful existence and cultured values of Africa with violence, torture and immorality (p.11-19).

In their literary works women are portrayed as subaltern, objectified and also in a subtle way they are glorified. For instance in Léopold Sédar Senghor's poem "*Femme Noire*" depicts Africa as a woman and mother who has the responsibility of rearing and nurturing her children. The woman's beauty in Senghor's "*Femme Noire*" is glorified and yet objectified, keeping her in a subaltern position (Sanusi 2015). Also, in David Diop's poem, *Afrique*, Africa is depicted as a mother who has been humiliated and subjected to colonial domination. More francophone male writers emerged during the colonial era; they are Ferdinand Oyono, Sembène Ousmane, Ahmadou Kourouma, and Mongo Beti. All of them oppose the "civilization mission" of the colonialists, who depict women with docile attributes and see them as second-class citizens.

At the early era of the post-colonial literature, writers like Sembène Ousmane, Mongo Béti, Ahmadou Kourouma, Oyono Mbia and many others were distinguished in their literary and artistic forms. But their writings, this time, revolved around the criticism of indigenous African leaders who assumed the throne shortly after the colonial masters left. They are works of sociopolitical disillusionment in Africa. These writers describe African societies in their literary works as being characterised by many follies and vices which prevent Africans from developing. They depict the post-independence period as a time of dashed and shattered hopes of the majority; decorum and social order are

displaced and replaced with social injustice, corruption, misplacement of priorities and mystery. Women at this period were also relegated and spoken for in male-authored novels. They are seen in their texts as secondary characters, while their contributions are silent and unacknowledged in the plots. Females, both in fiction and in the real African societies, were treated as inferior to men; they have always been treated as inferior. Even when they are deified and venerated as seen in fiction and real African societies, they still do not have autonomy and are not given any recognition as rational individuals (Oganwu, 1996).

The male Francophone African writing opened up with the first generation works like *L'Enfant* (1953), *Le Fils du pauvre* (1950), *La Terre et le Sang* 1954, and *les Chemins qui montent* (1957). In the late sixties, the female francophone African writing came into existence with the work of Thérèse Kouh Moukoury titled *Recontres essentielles* (1969). This is the first francophone African female literary work. African woman's novel that broke the silence of women's culture as a foundation of women's publications started coming in from female writers such as Aona Keita who published *La vie d'Acna Keita par elle-même* (1975), Aminatou Sow Fall's *Le Revenant* (1976), Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* (1979), Calixthe Bayala's *Tu t'appelera* (1997), Angèle Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes* (1989), Regina Yaou's *Le prix de la revolte* (1997) and so on.

The afore-mentioned female texts and others denounce the portrayal of women as subordinate. They equally depict customs and traditions in their societies that are responsible for female subjugation; they also establish men's anti-women attitudes. Their literary vision is to show that women had glory. It is to reject and interpret the gender-biased images of women who are only seen as instruments of sexual satisfaction, laundry personnel, wood fetchers and child rearers in the African societies. All these issues are growing problems in Africa that affect the progress of women continentally and need to be corrected through the (fictional) works of women.

Apart from female writers, feminist advocates like Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) and Sarah Grimké (1833) had voiced out issues affecting their folks, especially issues militating against the progress of black women in African societies. Female writers and critics in Africa address issues like women's violation, oppression, pain, misery, humiliation, as well as child abuse and child trafficking, which are seen as contemporary

problems in Africa. A closer examination of problems associated with women who are reproductively challenged in the society would show that these are critical issues that need urgent attention as it can impede the progress of women generally in Africa. Thus, the focus of this study is on the issues of reproduction and depression among women in selected francophone African women's novels. This is with a view to examining its causes, effects and the coping strategies of affected women.

Reproductive challenges are known as problems of infertility (barrenness), child spacing (too many children), choice of child sex (male/female), especially as a woman without a male child still poses a problem in the society. Reproductive challenges, therefore, are seen as a global problem that equally affects the social, economic and psychological well-being of couples in Africa. According to Reproductive Health Outlook (R.H.O., 2003), infertility is a global problem affecting about 8-10% of couples worldwide.

Women without children are pitied, hated, neglected, humiliated and ostracised. In spite of the established findings that infertility is a problem among couples, most Africans still view it as a female problem, a phenomenon that is largely rooted in African culture. Childlessness and superstition which comes with African cultural beliefs elicits violence against women. In most part of francophone society, the average woman is always the culprit when pregnancies does not occur after few months or years of marriage as a result, the woman is the one who is suspected, abused, bullied or vilified. In most communities, it is evident that reproductive challenge is of immense cultural significance largely because it is linked to the survival of the group.

In the literary world, so many writers have associated the problems of reproductive challenge as a societal problem that dehumanises the state of women. For example, Buchi Emecheta from the Anglophone African female authors in *The Joys of Motherhood* represents challenges confronting African women who could not produce children in their marriages. The marriage of Nnu Ego comes to an end because she is unable to bear children. This reiterates the kind of importance attached to childbearing by the Anglophone society. In Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, the eponymous protagonist is seen by her neighbours as a woman who fails to bear children. Nwapa carefully reveals what her society perceives about a woman who is reproductively challenged. Thus, a woman who is

without a child is known as a male entity that has no reproductive organ to bear children. In Angèle Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris des femmes*, the importance of reproduction is highlighted through Eyang, the protagonist's mother-in-law, who ridicules Emilienne's state of sterility, viewing her as a completely useless woman, telling her that her dog is better than her because the dog has a reproductive feature to produce puppies.

Apart from the few literary artists mentioned, a good number of feminist and womanist advocates have protested against the dehumanisation of women in the society. They include influential feminist critics like Sarah Grimké, Aduke Adebayo, Femi Ojo-Ade, Alice Walker, Delcores Williams and a host of others, all of whom aim at emancipating women from men's domination and societal dehumanisation. In their arguments, they stress the pain, misery and humiliation of women in African societies. Aduke Adebayo (2006:295) claims that: "feminism is describing and documenting women's experiences and asserting their rights" which include freedom from violence, slavery, marginalisation, allowing women to be educated, and be free from forced labour.

1.1 **Statement of the problem**

The problem of women as an inferior personality is deeply rooted in history and religion, women are always given the second-class position, this is encouraged by various cultural and religious elements such as woman as the helper and man as the head of the house, the positioning can be found in the Quran, the Bible and even in the common law. Women's oppression has been in existence even before colonisation. As observed in the holy books, it is clear that women have been rendered to inferior subject, to be oppressed by the male-controlled powers of the biblical and quranic depictions of women.

Traditionally, women of African ancestry were disempowered from domestic to the public domains. A woman has no personality, she is known as a server of food, a putter-on of pants and a bed maker. In fact, she was known as somebody who could be called upon when one wanted something at home by her husband, her family, and her in-laws. She only serves as the keeper of both her husband and children. Cohut (2017) emphasizes that women/wives spend an average of 55 hours a week on domestic chores. Husbands control their wives, as mere chattels. Women were victims of numerous forms of violence and traditions in the African societies as they were dominated by men and were economically dependant on them. They have limited choices when it comes to

profession, academic pursuit and life endeavours. They were usually allowed to take up such jobs as teachers, nurse or secretary. All these aspects mentioned above are fundamental problems that have marginalised women globally from progressing in life; hence, subjecting them to problems that may have to do with reproduction and depression.

Francophone African women's writings have attracted the attention of researchers in literary scholarship as they engage in exploring the texts from different angles. In the study entitled "The Image of the Woman in Francophone African Fiction: Dignity or Subjugation?", Godwin Okebaram Uwah (1993) challenges the submission of some feminist critics that male francophone African writers routinely portray their female characters in the stereotype of an oppressed and subjugated wife who has little if any say in shaping her destiny or in changing the system that deprives and oppresses her. This study particularly establishes that, despite undeniable inherent cultural injustices, the African woman does possess authority and makes her own choices on how to live her life, overcome cultural limitations, and identify and possibly exploit men's vulnerabilities as well as loopholes in the culture. In other words, the African woman is represented to be independent, resourceful and dynamic.

Examining "Constructions of subalternity in African women's writing in French", Pius Adesanmi (2002) posits that the awareness of a historically constructed, culturally sanctioned condition of subalternity is at the heart of the fictional works of francophone African women writers. Sampling different francophone African women's novels, the study observes that African women's writing is burning fire as the writers fall within the typology of "dissatisfied" beings in view of their fundamental dissatisfaction with their socio-cultural polity which puts them in a location of permanent rebellion against the vagaries and exigencies of patriarchal pedagogy and hegemony. Similarly, in her study titled "Voices of Silence in Francophone Women's Literature: Comparisons of Algerian and Mauritian Novels", Kathryn Mary Schlosser (2018) critically investigates the deployment of silence in African Francophone women's literature. The work examines the ways in which silence is used to write autobiographical texts, to journey through the unknown in order to discover personal truths, and to recognize and memorialize the suffering and bravery of lost heroes.

Furthermore, another salient thematic thrust of francophone women writers is the issue of domestic violence. Literary scholars have been able to address this representation. For instance, Mary Orijeji Mba (2013) interrogates responses and reactions to domestic violence with special emphasis on madness in three major sub-Saharan francophone novels from West and Central Africa. The purposively selected narratives, Mariama Bâ's *Un Chant écarlate*, Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane* and Sony Labou Tansi's *Les yeux du volcan*, vividly portray madness as a myth and a cultural construction, as well as how women, to serve their own ends, can appropriate madness and inflict violence on others. However, apart from exploring the representation of violence done to women by men, it equally examines all forms of domestic violence, including those done by women to men, by parents to their children, by in-laws and extended family members to wives of the family, and among co-wives as well as the role of the community as perpetrator of domestic violence.

Claire H. Griffiths (2011) explores the space between politics and literature occupied by feminist writers in Francophone Africa. It is concluded that francophone African feminist writers have been able to establish an arena in which to engage in the politics of gender, modernity and change in Francophone sub-saharan Africa and articulate a culturally-located discourse of development. The reception of this literary genre in its locality helps reposition the discourse of gender and development within the region, offering a culturally-embedded voice in the gender and development debate that has been marginalised in the framing of the international development agenda for Africa over the past half century.

Ramonu Abiodun Sanusi's (2004) study titled "Representations of Sub-Saharan African Women in Colonial and Post-Colonial" tries to strike a balance in the critique of francophone African novels by selecting relevant texts by both male and female writers in order to examine how women are portrayed in those texts. Sanusi (2002) maintains that critics have tended to examine the portrayals of women in African literature either by focusing mainly on works by men or by emphasising only women's texts. Nevertheless, his study focuses attention on both men and women authors, tracing the representations of women in African writings from the earliest literary endeavors of Francophone African writers to contemporary times. Considering at least two authors of each generation of men

and women writers, he examines the interplay of colonialism, religion, patriarchy and traditional practices and their contribution to the subordination of African women.

As it can be clearly observed from the foregoing, there is a paucity of studies on the motif of reproductive and depressive challenges in francophone African women's fictional works which forms the subject matter of this study. In other words, availability of an avalanche of francophone African women's novels on reproductive and depressive challenges and dearth of critical discourse on them informs and justifies the choice of this research area.

It is against this backdrop, therefore, that the study investigates reproductive and depressive challenges of women in francophone African society as represented in Francophone African women's narratives. Francophone African novels have over the years examined thematic concerns such as polygamy, oppression, women abuse and subjugation. Scant attention has therefore been paid to societal attitudes towards reproductive and depressive challenges, and mental disorders in women as represented in our select texts. This work tends to expose the causes of reproductive and depressive challenges among women. Thereby, underscoring the causes and coping strategies adopted by women in our examined novels.

1.2 **Aim and objectives of the study**

The aim of this study is to bring to light the need to consider the reproductive and depressive challenges of women when discussing the plight of women in Africa.

The objectives of the study are to:

- a. examine the causes of reproductive and depressive challenges in the selected texts;
- b. explore the emotional effects in reproductive and depressive challenges in the selected texts;
- c. assess and examine the lived experiences of women who are reproductively challenged in the selected texts using the womanist theory;
- d. investigate coping strategies women employ to address depressive problems in the selected texts.

1.3 **Research questions**

This study answers the following questions:

- a. What are the causes of reproductive and depressive challenges in the selected texts?
- b. What are the effects of reproductive and depressive challenges in the selected texts?
- c. What are the lived experiences of reproductively-challenged women in the selected texts?
- d. What are the coping strategies used to curb women's depressive challenges in the selected texts?

1.4 **Theoretical approach to the study**

This work adopts the American womanist theory by Alice Walker (1983) and the cognitive behavioural theory by Beck (1970) as an explanatory model. Womanism is one of the offshoots of feminism, while Stiwanism and motherism are other African variants of feminism. Feminism is a social movement that advocates equality for both sexes. Feminism seeks to correct all acts of injustice meted out to women. Generally, feminism is very much in favour of Western women who only experience inequality and deprivation of sound education, job and property; whereas their African counterparts face all sorts of problems in their patriarchal society.

Alice Walker (1985) propounded the womanist theory. She views the needs of black women and realities surrounding their existence as dissimilar to those of white women. In her books, she asserts that womanism is not separatism. As a concept, it allows women to reclaim their roots in black history, religion and culture. She describes womanism as Black feminism, which loves both men and women equally.

James Hal Cone, Jacquelyn Grant, and Delcores Williams are of the womanist theory. Cone (1999) describes blacks as oppressed subjects in his book *A Black Theology of Liberation*. He stresses that God identifies with the oppressed blacks, while Grant (1989) also maintains that black women are more oppressed than men in her book titled *Womanist Theology and White Women 's Christ Black Women 's Jesus*.

Stiwanism (Social Transformation in Africa Including Women) as a literary concept was carved out of Feminism. It was propounded by a Nigerian feminist activist Omolara Leslie Ogunديpe in 1994. She describes black women from different cultural backgrounds as “people facing six mountainous problems: colonialism, neocolonialism, traditional structure, men, backwardness, their color and themselves” (Ogunديpe, 1987:5). In her book *Re-creating ourselves* where she first introduced the term, she argues that the only way to improve the social and political institutions in Nigeria is to re-address the issues of women by rediscovering their roles.

In this work, the womanist theoretical approach is adopted to analyse the selected texts. Womanism is considered as the ideology that best defines the experiences of women, family relationship and motherhood in the chosen texts. The theory also emphasises completeness, unity among men-folk and equality of the races in the world. It creates awareness for all women to love themselves and avoid self-destruction and establishes a positive quality of life in economic and educational spheres.

Aaron Beck’s Cognitive Behavioural Theory is employed to explain the theme of depression in the lived experiences of reproductively-challenged women in the selected texts. According to Beck (1971), his Cognitive Triad Theory explains that negative thoughts are about the self, the world, and the future. In a study carried out by Brown *et al.* (1995), they focus on college students receiving examination scores. Brown et al report that the results suggested that a specific construct measured by Dysfunctional Attitude Scale (DAS) interacted with a congruent stressor poorer than expected performance on a college examination, to predict measures in depressive symptoms. In this study of Brown et al, the students have negative thought about their future, because they may not pass the class.

In this work, both womanist and the cognitive behavioural theories are used to analyse the selected texts. Both theories are relevant in this study because they are grounded in social change in the treatment of depression and reproductively challenged women. The idea of working together, and supporting one another, fits well with both theories emphasizing on building strengths and supports. Both theories, believe that women’s emotional, psychological, economic, and mental problems could be linked to their environment and also women are still liberated within their environment thus relating

women's health to mind. Both believe that women's mental healing is an ethic of personal responsibility. Both theories believe in the use of dialogue in assessing claims to knowledge and healing. The use of Art helps in both theories to address cultural wounds, grief management, exploring feelings, reconciling emotional conflicts, foster self-awareness, manage behavior and addictions, develop social skills and increase self-esteem. This is because, when the aforementioned persist in women, cultural wounds such as slavery, oppression, women's subjugation, violence, poverty can cause physical illness to the individuals who endure this kind of suffering. If unresolved, these wounds also have a deep psychological impact that can be passed down through belief systems, memory and even genetics. Thus, role playing, and relaxation techniques are adequate for healing of women's mental health and depressive mood in reproductively challenged women. They both record the occurrence of depressive matters by the use of flash-back and repeated stories. If not, stories in all the novels will never have materialized or would not exist.

Womanism is the ideology that best defines the experiences of women, reproductive challenge and motherhood in the selected novels, while cognitive behavioural theory is employed to investigate the social context of reproductive challenges alongside with the consequences of women revealing their state of depression and stress in the society.

1.5 Significance of the study

The study is significant as it raises awareness on reproductive and depressive challenges of women and on how societal attitudes and practices affect reproductively-challenged women emotionally, psychologically and sociologically thereby demonstrating how they are represented or treated in Francophone African literature written by women. The examination of the perceived causes and effects of reproductive and depressive challenges are significant in order to make a redress. Thus, the intention here, therefore, is to further promote the cause of women, enhance their identity, improve on their welfare, ensure equity in their relationship with men, alleviate their poverty and uplift their general politico-economic development. Ultimately, this study is targeted at denouncing and rejecting negative societal attitudes toward infertile women.

This study also seeks to reject the traditional male-biased and male-dominated theories, as well as re-interpret gender-biased images of women who are seen only as child

bearers and domestic laundry personnel. Through this study, women's sensibilities and realities would be more exposed in African society and African fiction.

1.6 **Justification of the study**

The choice of francophone African women's novels on the subject of reproductive and depressive challenges as textual sources for this research is informed by the availability of novels on the subject and inadequacy of critical studies on those texts. In spite of demonstrable literary achievements and versatility of francophone African women novelists in the fictionalisation of the problems of reproduction and depression, reproductive and depressive challenges remain inadequately explored by researchers especially in literary scholarship. It is against this backdrop, therefore, that this research work investigates the literary representations of reproductive and depressive challenges in francophone African women's novels. The study becomes pertinent as it subjects the selected novels to in-depth critical analysis and investigation in order to show the dialectics and complexities of reproductive and depressive challenges by drawing evidences from the selected texts.

1.7 **Scope of the study**

The study is limited to eight selected Francophone African female novels. The selection is made from five francophone countries namely: Cameroun, Senegal, Benin Republic, Gabon, and Côte d'Ivoire. The texts are from the first and third generation of the Francophone female writings. All the texts are grounded in a common bound to depict the problems of women especially reproductive and depressive matters in the contemporary society. Three of these novels (*Modukpé*, *Le rêve brisé* by Adelaïde Fassinou, *Vie de femme, vie de sang* by Azaratou Baboni, and *Rencontres essentielles* by Thérèse Kouh-Moukoury) demonstrate the stages of reproduction in a woman's life while in all other novels, the issue of reproductive health, based on societal context is represented. The following issues: family planning, miscarriage, domestic violence, female mutilation, polygamy, divorce, girl-child, illness, mental disorder, distress and depression militating against the health of women in the matrimonial homes are investigated.

In five novels (*Modupké, Le rêve brisé, Rencontres essentielles, Sous la cendre le feu, Vie de femme, vie de sang*, and *Une si longue lettre*), the theme of motherhood is examined, while societal views on marriage are depicted in all the novels. Similarly, five novels (*Rebelle, La tâche de sang, Une si longue lettre, Modupké le rêve brisé and Vie de femme, vie de sang*) revolve around exile and separation of women from their matrimonial homes due to one problem or the other.

1.8 **Organisation of the study**

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One of the study deals with introduction, background to the study, statement of the problem, objectives, research questions and the scope of the study, while Chapter Two presents a review of previous works on the definition of societal context, reproductive challenge, reproductive health challenge, motherhood, childbearing, marriage in Africa, and lives and works of the eight authors. This chapter also presents the theoretical framework which examines detailed explanation of the two adopted theories. Chapter Three examines the negative and positive aspects of reproductive and depressive challenges as revealed in the selected narratives. On the other hand, Chapter Four examines depression and cognitive behavioural healing therapy on reproductively-challenged women in the selected novels, while Chapter Five, presents findings of the work, recommendations and conclusion to the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Literature review on previous studies

In this chapter two, review of related literature, theoretical framework and methodology are discussed. This chapter also has to do with cogent issues related to reproductive challenge, societal context, reproductive health challenges, depression, motherhood, childbearing and marriage in Africa.

This study is undertaken on the premise that this research has not been accessible through the cognitive behavioural and womanisme theories of literary works authored by male and female writers across the globe, especially in the Francophone African literature. Attention has been paid greatly to African literary critics through the feminist and the womanist theoretical frameworks in various areas like child abuse, polygamy, women's victimisation, issues on African tradition, religion, various forms of women's oppression and violation, with less attention paid to issues of reproductive and depressive challenges among women. As far back as the 1920s, Francophone African female writings in the literary domain is not felt, not until 1969 when Thérèse Kouh-Moukoury's autobiographical novel entitled *Rencontre essentielles* came to limelight, followed by Mariama Ba's *Une si longue lettre*. Criticisms on these works by African women suggests that these works are mostly informed by the life experiences of the authors. The writing of fiction has given the writers more opportunities to talk about themselves in fictions, shedding more light on their problems. Problems such as abandonnement, infertility, victimization and solitude. As Irène d'Almeida affirms "there is no doubt that for the last two decades female voices have sprang up to revive the role women have traditionally played as producers of orature, but that these voices now tell their 'modern stories' through the medium of the written world p.7. However, afore novels are write-ups which access the representation of women. Studies on African women have been a preoccupation

of African scholars such as Catherine Acholonu with *Motherism and Fecundity* by Calixthe Beyala, these feminists took it upon themselves the task of fighting women's oppression in Africa, while Acholonu is more on the soft side, Calixthe tends to be on the radical side.

Klaw (2000), asserts that many studies focus on the division between oppressor and oppressed, to conclude that *Une si longue lettre* simply discusses the mistreatment of Senegalese women by their men and society in her work entitled 'Subverting a mythology of sex-based oppression'. While, Gresillon (2000), states that the principal theme of *Une si longue lettre* is the indictment of men who, in order to fulfill their own desires, victimize women. Various critics have ventured criticizing the sufferings and maltreatment received by the female characters in the novels used in their thesis, without making reference and going deep into the psychological traumas such as depression and mental health imbalances received by these female characters in the novels, which this current study has researched into with the analytical approach of the cognitive behavioural healing therapy, in proffering solutions to their mental health problems and reproductive challenges.

In Ngolli's *Sous la cendre le feu*, Olayinka (2007) asserts that repression of negative and unpleasant experiences lived within patriarchal limitations by women, makes them a victim of anxiety disorder which may occur in the form of depression, schizophrenia, obsessive disorders, derealisation among others. The above asserts that women's problems such as madness and depression, emanate from the patriarchal society and the environment which women find themselves. In her study, the psychoanalytical approach is used to access the psyche of the female character, Mina, who is suffering from depression and mental disorder. The fact that this novel is a third-generation novel of the francophone female writing which deals with female mental health challenges, there is no much critic on the issue of depression and mental health on this novel. This work has carefully broken the usual trend of looking at women's oppression in the patriarchal setup by looking into the mental states of women and how they can overcome their mental health problems, by consulting a therapist and going through several coping strategies.

Oyewole (2010), airs her views on a womanist approach to the study of Adelaide Fassinou's *Modukpè le rêve brisé*, she views all forms of oppression in her work,

oppressions such as verbal, mental, psychological, physical and cultural using the analytical approach of the womanist theory. She advocates a clean break of female characters in the novel, encouraging a subtler solution with their husbands because they felt they still needed them, because womanism supports man and woman complimenting each other in the bid to eradicate oppression of women in a patriarchal African society. While, Ishaya (2017), suggests that transgression in Adelaide's *Modukpè le rêve brisé* is the demystification of certain traditional beliefs. Thus, the transgression of the female characters led to bitter and traumatic experiences. However, this study has filled the gap by identifying the extent at which these female characters were traumatized and by using the artistic therapy such as role playing, dialogue and relaxation techniques to heal the characters' cultural wounds like violence, poverty, depression, anxiety disorders and women's subjugation. Davies (1986), emphasizes on Rawiri's *Fureure et cris de femmes* as a novel that predominantly tear the veil of patriarchy and challenge sub-Saharan African traditions that encourages the oppression of women. Rawiri's novel like Ba's *Une si longue lettre* renumerates their female protagonists as victims of cultural practices that impede women's emancipation. They have been deceived by their husbands, thus making them to suffer in solitude and persistent sadness. However, this research has not only studied factors such as the effects and causes of reproductive and depressive challenges in a patriarchal African society but also what triggers the characters psychological and mental problems. These challenges are apparent in various cultural practices against women in the Gabonese and Senegalese Francophone societies, this is revealed by their authors. The authors use education in the life of their characters to challenge the various problems encountered by subjugated women.

Critics have worked on Keita's *Rebelle* by denouncing the problems of female genital mutilation and forced marriage. An example is Freire's (2015) work on "The female writer and the emergence of positive female heroines in fiction"; 111, where he describes how Malimouna the female protagonist rejects the societal expectations of a daughter's blind devotion to her father. At age 14, she is expected to undergo mutilation and get married to her father's friend, Sando, by force. Here, she fights as a leader for her freedom from cultural and patriarchal oppression along with her colleagues. Studies have gone beyond the popular theme of women oppression and victimization but has gone

extramiles to explore the grief management and depressive mood of the female protagonist in the novel in order to heal the characters' mental disorder caused by these cultural practices, since womanism and cognitive behavioural theories, both stress the ethic of care and personal responsibility for one's healing.

Marzia (2009) discusses women's involvement in determining what happens to them in the society, using the Cameroonian demography as a case of study. She uses *La tache de sang* by Philomène Bassek to emphasize the need for society's adoption of a matriarchal system where the woman is not only seen as a victim but also an agent of traditional modifications. Marzia also stresses the fact that women are mostly described from the lens of western feminism that seems inadequate to describe African phenomena. *La tache de sang* tackles the strict policies against abortion in the Cameroonian society, its emphasis on the liberation of women by encouraging individual freedom of what happens to their body. This study will look at abortion from a different lens, where the benefits of abortion are emphasized as a strong medium for the improvement of reproductive health.

Ofem (2021) illustrates the various themes found in *Vie de femme, Vie de sang* by Azaratou Baboni, this novel is recently published, resulting in a few critics available on subjects found in the novel. Ofem states themes such as maternity, which is womanhood that is linked to child bearing. Also in *Vie de femme, Vie de sang* there are various types of violence experienced by the main character, from emotional to economic violence, from physical to psychological violence. The novel describes oppression and subjugation experienced by the female character. In this thesis, we discussed the reproductive and depressive challenges of the character, taking a broader look at the psychological and mental effect on the character and those around her. Fatou in the novel was able to overcome her challenges by deploying role playing such as modelling, going to the cinema and watching plays.

An overview of various criticisms have been discussed in this sub heading, the novels used in the thesis have been criticized one time or the other with very few of them looking at the reproductive and mental health challenges facing the female characters found in these novels. The position of the woman in contemporary African society has been highlighted by various critics, issues ranging from female genital mutilation to

victimization of the women, from forced marriages to abortion, just to mention a few, with few considerations given to the reproductive and depressive status of women. The cognitive behavioural theory is one which has emanated from the medical field used by therapists and psychiatrist to heal patterns of depression, marital problems, changing negative thoughts of mental and depressive patients, this has been adopted into humanities study, this work uses aspects of this theory to analyse and criticize the novels studied. In view of this work, there is an intertwine of womanism and cognitive behavioural theories because they both work on women's social changes in the society, they both care for the mental state of their characters.

2.1.1 The term 'social context'

In this work, social context is linked in literary works because literature reflects the value system and the expectations of the society from which it springs. In literature, the views of the society are interpreted. Social context is, therefore, seen as all that is co-habited in an environment or in a milieu where one lives. Social context is concerned with people. For instance, in an environment where people live, things happen on a daily basis, through interaction of people with one another. The society is full of interactions. People come face to face to discuss among themselves issues bothering them, comparing opinions, taking interest in some positive opinions, attitudes, values, norms, objectives, traditions, and customs of one another or reflecting some and also evaluating same. It is through all these that a society is constituted and their views about situations are the 'societal context'. Views of the society are transferred from generations to generations. This helps to shape the behavior and consciousness of people in the society. This means that individuals can easily be influenced in conformity with a particular behaviour and identity of people in the society. These views or ideas can be seen as unwritten social norms that pattern the way of people on how to behave in the society. There are accepted and non-accepted standards of behaviour in society, which are revealed through societal context, i.e. how people in a social group view things.

Societal context cannot be viewed without people's conformity to the environment. Societal context is how someone reacts to something depending on his or her immediate social and physical environment. Societal context encompasses norms and values in a given environment. Norms and values of each environment vary from culture to

culture depending on what each environment entails. Norms and values of an environment teach and provide one with an expected idea of how to behave in a particular social group or culture, which makes one to be in conformity with the ideas and norms of people in one's society. What is embedded in the society makes people to change because the society itself does change. The social change of a person is as a result of group pressure (Crutchfield 1995).

This study, therefore, explores the social context of reproductive and depressive challenges in the African Francophone settings. The term social context is very relevant to this work because the societies play an important causal role in creating and shaping the identities of women who are reproductively challenged. Thus, women's experience is an adaptation to and from a social context because the society influences the identities of women who are undergoing depression of all sorts. In order to unravel societal views of people and group about reproductive and depressive challenges in the francophone African women's novels and establish that societal pressures and expectations affect the lives of women generally in Africa. Such examples are like the pressure to get married, have children, health challenge, women's violation etc. Female literary works trace their lives through their characters in the society which has caught them between the established order of the past and the exigencies of the present. These exigencies make them to reveal their conditions. For instance, majority of women in developing nations, especially in the African francophone countries are exploited by male chauvinists. Women, as paid and unpaid workers are still missing from the debates on finance and development. Their objective is to acquire Western education to free themselves from the weight of societal pressures caused by traditions, norms and culture. For instance, Aoua Keïta's *Femmes d'Afrique: La vie d'Aoua Keïta Racontée par elle-même* (1975) remains the only one of its kind by an African woman. It tells the intense opposition of African men towards female political aspirants in a society where women and politics were and are still opposed because politics is power, and power is the traditional domain of the men (Adebayo, 2006 p. 277).

2.1.2 Reproductive challenge

Reproductive challenge has to do with infertility or inability to produce or bear a child. Reproductive challenge is a global issue. Couples are considered infertile if for over 12 months of unprotected intercourse, they are unable to conceive. According to the World Health Organisation (2004), reproductive challenge affects one in every 10 couples, or 80 million people internally (Clarke, Martin-Mathews, & Mathews 2006). Reproductive challenge varies from culture to culture.

In many cultures, a married man and woman are referred to as father and mother of so and so to indicate their proof of fertility (Ayeleru, 2015). In most parts of Africa, for example, a woman's fertility or infertility is announced by her own name. This aspect is fully demonstrated among the Francophone especially the beninees and also in the Anglophone of Nigeria with the igbos. A woman's fertile status is pronounced by her child's name, such as Mère Fatou, Maman Kodjo and Nne Ngozi. All these are just a reminder of her social status and her achievement in motherhood.

In Southern Africa for instance without children, some women have been denied of the rightful inheritance of their husband's properties. Infertile women receive negative identity from their husbands, in-laws, friends and the society they hail from. This is supported by William (1997) in an interview with infertile women reveal the negative identity which women are attributed to in the society, as a worthless woman and an outcast.

Reproductive challenges are associated with several social meanings. Social and biological factors are attached to infertility. Biologically, it could be caused by series of abortions during the period of adolescence, use of contraceptives, blocked tubes, STD and HIV (Gurevich, 2019).

Many infertility problems are also caused by various diseases and infections, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and sexually transmitted infections. All these infections and diseases can damage the fallopian tubes and make man's scrotum to become inflamed. Similarly, some peculiar diseases, like hepatitis, diabetes, high blood pressure, multiple sclerosis and thyroid trouble have been found to be capable of precipitating sexual dysfunctioning of both sexes (Nwoye, 1992).

Women are not left out. A poor-quality egg can cause infertility. When a woman, according to doctors, has blocked fallopian tubes, it could prevent the woman's egg and

sperm from the man from uniting, or the woman may not ovulate regularly leading to irregular menstrual cycle. And also, it is often said by doctors that when a woman is above 35 years, the chance of becoming pregnant becomes difficult. As women age, their fertility is affected by the quantity and quality of eggs they produce (Gurevich, 2019).

Couples feel ashamed to tell people that they are infertile even when they are being diagnosed by medical practitioners as infertile. In their desperation to achieve a desired social role and to denounce the pressures of the society by being humiliated, it is often being heard that some women feign being pregnant for months in support with their personal nurses and doctors, steal newly-born babies from hospitals. In Nigeria, so many cases have been reported on TV and newspapers about how babies are being bought and sold to couples who are reproductively-challenged (*Tribune*, May 10, 2009).

This is in line with Sundby's (1997) view, that in Gambia, infertility is seen as a stigma, that 43% of infertile couples have a foster child. In developing societies, having children is seen as the key success of a woman to achieve both adult and societal status which would make her to gain acceptance in the community.

In Cameroon, infertility could serve as a source of poverty for women (Savelsberg, 2002), which means that the number of children a man has also adds to the measure of his wealth. A Yorùbá adage says, "Omo ni iyò ayé", that is, "children are the salt of life." The existence of children in marriage among other things is happy life and continuity in lineage. Caldwell (1978) stresses the importance of fertility to the nation's population and development. A nation's development can only be enhanced when there is adequate increase in its population.

2.1.3 Reproductive health challenges

Social and economic factors affect the health of women and girls in various ways. The importance of socio-cultural factors has been recognised in literary works by many writers in order to combat health issues confronting women in Africa.

Reproductive health challenge is closely connected with people's cultural, political, economic and social circumstances in the society. The reason is that all health challenges emanate from the society. Majority of studies have identified themselves with the concern of how to promote the health challenges of girls and women generally (Sen, 1994).

There are so many problems emanating from the society that affect women's health and well-being which include: health problems on adolescents, ageing women, as well as the non-maternal, non-reproductive health needs of women during their reproductive years. The entire life cycle of women should be considered when addressing the causes and consequences of their poor health. At different stages of a female child, there is always a particular problem which at the later stage of her lifetime becomes cumulative effects and lifetime problems. Many females battle with different health challenges due to their poor conditions and also because of their unequal status in the society. When women are in a serious economic situation, they face all sorts of violation in the society.

Gender equality is the only key to achieving great success in the progress of women's reproductive health problems. This is because when a woman is entitled to live in dignity and in freedom from want and from fear, she will be able to contribute to the health and productivity of her family, community and also improve prospects for the next generation. Women need to be empowered educationally and socially as education is a powerful tool for social transformation. Special attention has to be paid on the education of women in order for them to attain social status in the society. Through education, women will be able to improve on their health status. This will reduce maternal mortality especially in the areas where they do not have good medical facilities. They will also improve on their nutritional needs at all stages of their life cycle and sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDs and infections. Communicable diseases like tuberculosis will be reduced.

In literary works by male and female authors, the thematic thrust of reproductive challenge is foregrounded. Example is Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, where Ekwefi is brutally battered by Okonkwo for not serving his food on time. Okonkwo also flogs his youngest wife, Ojugo. In Fatou Keita's *Rebelle* and Adelaide's Modukpé, *Le rêve brisé*, adolescent females face psychological abuse and rape.

Literary works by female authors project male dominance and plead the case of improving African women in their reproductive health challenges in the society. As Kolawole (1997) notes, by omission or commission, most male writers in the early phase of African literature encouraged the marginalisation of women. In most of their works,

barren women are stigmatised and considered as social misfits which invites the wrath of her family and society. Female and male role is distinguished in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* that portrays the subordinate role of a woman in the Igbo society in Nigeria. Also in Philomène Bassek's *La tache de sang* and Baboni's *Vie de femme, vie de sang*, the female heroines are brutally battered by their husbands. Invariably, these writers try to change norms of violence against women in the society.

2.1.4 **Depression**

To a layman, depression is feelings of severe despondency and rejection of oneself. WHO (2017) describes depression as a major societal problem that causes mental anguish and affects our ability to carry out everyday tasks, with sometimes devastating consequences for relationships with family and friends. When one suffers mental anguish, it affects the complete system of the body. If thinking straight is a problem, daily activities will be stagnated. Depression according to Pierson and Thomas, (2002) is a feeling of hopelessness, sadness, tearfulness, and intense anxiety. It is the most common of all psychiatric disorders, with a high reported incidence throughout the population, of between 10 and 15 percent. Depression affects people in different ways.

Some causes of depression have been attributed to socio-economic factors such as unsatisfactory or dysfunctional marriages, or confiding relationship; and psychological factors such as learned helplessness where certain individuals believe that they have no control over their environment and that any effort on their part is bound to be ineffective. This state of mind leads people to view problems in their lives as the product of long-standing personal inadequacies and not as the result of specific situations that can be resolved (Pierson and Thomas, 2002). Some other causes of depression are stressful traumatic events due to abuse, hormone changes in menstrual cycles, pregnancy, history of other disorders such as anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorders, the brain's physical structure or chemistry, history of depression in the family.

2.1.5 **Motherhood**

The institution of motherhood continues to receive various forms of interpretations from diverse writers and critics. The concept of motherhood, to a lay man, can be defined as a process or a successful transition of a girl to the stage of woman, that is, the stage of

being a woman. Motherhood is the ability to procreate or give life to a female or male being. For every woman to attain this stage, she is assumed to be filled with a deep sense of connection, nurture and support. As a woman, she should be empowered and be proud to be a female/woman. To become a woman, it takes a lot of energy, work and experience; this experience starts from the first day she assumes the stage of menstruation, which will make her to get to the position of a mother.

Motherhood, from the biblical point of view, is defined as strength. This is seen in the Holy Bible, the book of Proverbs, Chapter 31: 17. “She girdeth her loins with strength and strengtheneth her arms.” This means that for a woman to attain the position of motherhood, she has to be strong in body, intelligent in her emotions and also strong spiritually. The book of Proverbs 31:26, says, “She openeth her mouth with wisdom.” This means that the female that has reached the stage of womanhood should use and apply knowledge rightly with all her abilities. Her words should be filled with wisdom, her mind and heart with the word of God applying it to all situations she faces in life.

Women are kind in words and action generally. Their mind is filled with charity. The early works of Camara Laye and Senghor characterise motherhood as a symbol of love for Africa and depict motherhood as an epitome of sacrifice. Roscoe (1981) also echoes that motherhood is gold. Diop in his poem glorifies mothers, while Okigbo sees the qualities of mothers in his poem *Idoto*.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) emphasises on drawbacks and the menstruation capacity of women in defining motherhood. She stresses further that such pervasive socialisation shapes women’s desires to ‘choose’ motherhood. Women easily forget the ills and rigours involved in childbirth. They see motherhood as a sign of joy and a very great privilege when in the state of pregnancy, because during this stage, the woman is said to ‘glow and shine’ and receives special treatment, especially from her husband, and her mother-in-law. No matter the skills, the desires and the talents of a woman, her primary function is that of motherhood, at least in Africa (Akujobi, 2011).

In Africa, the primary function of a mother or a woman is that of motherhood. No matter how highly placed she is or whatever talents such a woman has, it is only motherhood that will give her respect in the society (Ayeleru, 2015). Motherhood is viewed by Edem (2006) as a normal part of a woman’s life cycle, not as a hindrance to her

regular activities. Besides, having children generally makes the woman think about the future and work towards a better and safer tomorrow for everyone, including her children.

Even though women are viewed to possess less muscles and strength than men; they are naturally designed or created to incubate the young ones. Despite their gentle, tender and intangible nature, the modern-day status of women has succeeded in producing working mothers who compete favourably with men in every area of endeavor. According to Shonibare (2001), when we are reflecting on women education today, we are celebrating achievement, which had taken time to be attained. So as a mother, the woman is seen as an administrator, a researcher, a teacher and a counselor.

In the literary world, motherhood is seen as a contemporary thematic thrust that establishes women's reproductive health and security in the African society. A contemporary example outside African setting is *Child of Fortune* by Yuko Tsushima (1983) which represents a woman struggling between the reality of motherhood and the expectations of society influenced by an idealised good mother paradigm.

In African literature, the novels of sexual awakening depict mothers as active agents rather than passive instruments of reproduction. In Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego never considers herself a woman until she gives birth to children, especially the male ones. In Nwapa's *Efuru*, the heroine is frustrated because of her childlessness. Both novels depict the problems of women in reproduction. There are different patterns of motherhood in African literature such as the stage of pregnancy, childbearing and child rearing.

2.1.6 **Childbearing**

Childbearing is a life-changing experience that is worth exploring in creative works. This is because it opens our eyes to domestic issues of conflict, struggle, pain, and joy, physical and emotional experiences in the lives of women. Childbearing is related to the process of conceiving, that is being pregnant and later giving birth to a child, which means, it is the act of producing or bringing forth children. It is also referred to as human reproduction in the medical science.

During the labour periods, a woman needs more supports from her husband and care givers, which give every woman a great joy, satisfaction and confidence within her. In

Africa, childbirth is an attribute of a mother who has gone through pains, frustration, patience and self-sacrifice in bringing forth a child. The arrival of a child in every family is a great occasion which is celebrated with merriment and funfair. In Nigeria, the naming ceremony of a new born is conducted with the extended family, friends and relatives of the parents. At this period, the mother of the child commands so much respect.

In African traditional culture, childbearing is very significant to all women and even the society at large. If a woman is unable to bring forth a child, the society believes such a woman has no life to live or no life in her. And that she is a worthless being. The importance attached to marriage by the society has made many women to have mixed feelings about childbirth. A woman without a child is not recognised and respected even with her education. Some women have, therefore, contracted marriage for complete womanhood and motherhood.

Ngocobo (1988) opines that childbearing encourages women to marry and get children in order to express their womanhood to the full. Pregnancy and childbirth are often reduced to an ellipsis, a gap between sections or even paragraphs. Fictions on the themes of pregnancy and childbirth are rarely worked upon by critics and scholars in literary scholarship. It is on this note that this study throws light on the societal contexts of childbearing.

The issue of reproduction in the post-colonial fiction is rarely depicted in francophone female novels. In colonial literatures, fertile women are associated with some qualities, such as an enduring mother that absorbs pains and sufferings. An example is seen in David Diop's "Afrique mon Afrique", where he eulogises Africa as a woman who is ravaged for years by colonial masters. Adejumo (2006) reveals the connection of the 'mother earth' and woman's fertility as strong ties.

2.1.7 Marriage in Africa

In Africa, marriage is a source of joy, bond and sacrilege because it solidifies both families together (new families). As African culture celebrates the arrival of the rains in the first harvest so is the birth of a child celebrated in a new marriage. Marriage ushers in new life. It is a valued and most celebrated rite of passage since the dawn of African civilisation (Mbiti 1970). Marriage is a privilege of everyone but it is not a must and so it is not a human right.

The first aim of marriage is for procreation which is most desired by Africans especially in African traditional marriages. It also cuts across the board of civil and church marriages of African continent. The other purposes of marriage are faithfulness, unitedness and indissolubility.

It can be deduced that even though man and woman may have connection with other people, their relationship as husband and wife should be a lasting one and as a bond even after the bringing forth of their offspring. The woman should not be used and dumped like a container for disposal after childbirth. It is observed that most African marriages end up in disarray or divorce, according to Burke (1998).

In Africa, apart from the normal forms of marriages, like polygamy, monogamy, and polyandry, there are other forms of marriage which are not well known or practiced in the African societies. Examples are levirate, sororate, endogamy, exogamy, ghost marriage and widow inheritance. In Africa, in Nigeria especially, the levirate form of marriage does occur. This is the marriage of a man with the widow of his dead brother. This means that the relationship created through the original marriage remains. The levirate is also found among the Nuer in the Sudan and the Bedouin in Arabia and North Africa. Under the levirate system of marriage, the children of the deceased remain as part of the family (Fortes, 1972).

Endogamy means that marriage is allowed or prescribed within a certain kin-group. That is, members of a social group are allowed to marry one another, but not one's sister or brother or close kinsman. An example is the caste and sub-caste groups of India. This is done to seek to maintain the purity of the group, conserve the group's property and keep its solidarity. On the other hand, exogamy is a marriage in which one must marry outside one's group of kinsmen. This group is defined in most societies as the clan or lineage. This helps to build various exogamous groups together through relationship when children are born.

African women have had a different experience when it comes to marriage. African feminism is in support of motherhood, female energies, and values from both sexes (Nnaemeka, 1995). The concept of marriage in Africa is quite different from the Western type of marriage because African attitudes towards love, sex, and marriage have torn so many homes apart due to patriarchal subjugation of women. It is to this view that

we have so many literary works depicting the ills and ordeals of women in marriage, such as women subjugation, suppression and oppression, physical violation and assault.

So many feminist writers' works have argued against the negation of motherhood, polygamy, female subordination and total enslavement in the marital institutions in Africa. Examples of these writers are Mariama Bâ, Flora Nwapa, and Philomène Bassek. For instance, Mariama Bâ affirms that "marriage is no chain". Aissatou, in *So Long a Letter* walks away from her marriage after having four sons for her husband, who decides to marry another wife after several years of a happy marriage. Also, the personality of Efurú in Nwapa's *Efurú* portrays her as an instrument of a changed woman even when her two marriages do not work fine for her. She never crumbles with the marriage but forges ahead to become a very prominent woman in the Igbo society.

2.2 Theoretical framework

In the society of today and in the past, women's experiences have been improved upon and had been viewed through the lens of gender, race, class and sexual orientation due to the works of various philosophers, critics and writers who have used series of terms and principles to combat the socio-cultural and political problems of women in the society. It is important to critically examine female-authored literary texts in relation to social realities.

This chapter, therefore, specifically discusses the approach and theoretical framework of the study. In this chapter, all the variants of feminist theory are examined because they are all interwoven and related. It also critiques the function of the coping theory, which has also been chosen for the work to critically analyse the depressive conditions of women in the selected texts.

2.2.1 Feminism

Feminism in the sociological and historical points of view means women's struggle to defend their right and privileges. It means, to a lay man, women's liberation and emancipation in the society. Various feminist writers and critics have come up with varied definitions of feminism, all of which are concerned with agitating for equal rights for women. Barrow and Millburn (1990) claim that "feminism is a label for a commitment

or movement to achieve equality for women”, while Maggie Humm (1992) states that the word feminism stands for a belief in sexual equality combined with a commitment to transforming society. In Toril Moi’s *Sexual Textual Politics* (1986), feminism is seen as “an egalitarian demand for women to obtain power in the present patriarchal system”. With all these definitions, one would say that feminism is a sum-total of women’s agitation for equal treatment as men and changing the conditions of women in the society. Amongst the equity feminist advocates are Jean Bethke Elshtain, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Alie Rossi.

Feminism is a theory that has its origin in Europe and America by women struggling for the rights of women. This was as a result of their becoming conscious of their oppressive conditions and sought a way to address these conditions. It was noted then, that in the labour market, men were given higher access than women. This now gave way for women’s feminist liberation movement in the seventeenth century. Historically, feminism is known in the US and Europe as a political movement, while intellectually, it is referred to as a belief that reveals the social injustices against women. Although as both political and intellectual terminology, it seeks to end sexism by all means. It is sued as covering all topics, such as: human rights, class and work, race and racism, the family, sexuality, human trafficking, disability, reproduction and globalisation. Feminism preaches equal rights for both men and women in all areas, among which are legal, economic, political and social affairs. It became pronounced in 1800 in Europe and America at a time when even in the laws of the land, women were regarded as inferior to men. Aptly put, feminist thinking is an enterprise that seeks to understand society in order to challenge and change it.

Many scholars like, Walker, Hook, Beauvoir; etc are of the opinion that feminism is a concept that is etymologically and culturally in favour of white women, because the agitation of black Afro-American women against racism is not the same as that of the middle-class English women. Betty Freidan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) is criticised because it is viewed as pioneering contemporary feminist movement, whereas it is written as if the black/lower class women do not exist. All these observations led to the emergence of diverse variants of feminism to suit black women’s experiences and conditions to defend their cause.

2.2.2 Womanism

Alice Walker, the proponent of this ideology, sought for other terminologies that could carry the weight of black experiences; hence, she coined the term womanism in her collection of essays titled *In Search of our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983) as a variant of feminism. Walker uses this term to describe the perspective and experiences of “Women of color”.

Layh Philips (2006) avers that Walker’s writing has really provided a well-grounded definition of the concept. She argues that womanism has broken the class barrier of feminism by creating a discourse that involves women of various classes. A need for the term arose from the early feminist movement which was led by middle-class white women advocating social change, such as women’s suffrage. The movement focused primarily on gender-based oppression, but ignored oppression based on racism and classism. To counter this trend, womanism points out that black women experience a different kind of apprehension. The term “womanism” is thus both an alternative to and an expansion of the term ‘feminism’.

Womanism originated from African American and Caribbean cultures (Davies and Fido, 1990). This could be right because of Alice Walker’s cultural background as an African American. According to Adeleke (1996), Alice Walker desired a suitable black feminism that is away from sexism, racism and classist oppressions. Hence, she expresses her intentions in this manner:

I am preoccupied with spiritual survival, the survival whole of my people. But beyond that, I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties and the triumphs of black women. For me the black women are the most fascinating creations in the world (Adeleke, 1996: 29).

This assertion proves Alice Walker as a true defender of her own people in all circumstances. She wanted to take them out of their bad societal and political conditions.

Beauboeuf-Lafantant (2006:437) describes womanism as a theoretical perspective that focuses on the experiences and knowledge bases of black women while recognising and interrogating the social realities of slavery, segregation, sexism, and economic exploitation which this group has experienced during its history in the United States. Furthermore, womanism examines social realities and black women’s responses without

viewing them as a variation in or deviation of black male or white female behaviour and social circumstances.

Beauboeuf-Lafontant claims that womanism is an ideology created by Alice Walker, as an avenue for black American women to express their exploited struggles and become culturally and politically recognised among white Americans. Alice Walker (1983) creates awareness for all black women to avoid self-destruction despite all odds from their spouses and preaches that womanism is not separatism but that women need to see their relationship with men as good complement to each other. She stresses that womanism is not sexism and racism. Womanism accommodates black men, black women and black children. The term 'womanism' is further elaborated by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (1985:63) who explains that:

Womanism is black centered, it is accomodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women, like feminism but unlike radical feminism it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and children and will see to it that men will change from their sexist stand. This ideological position explains why women writers do not end their plots with feminist victories.

Here, Ogunyemi (1985) distinguishes feminist writers from womanist writers since the latter focuses on the black female experiences, dealing with racial issues, classist issues and sexism. Womanists believe in partnership with their men folk. This characteristic feature of black womanism distinguishes womanism from feminism which is mainly a separatist ideology. Feminist novels end up with separatism, while womanist novels tolerate and gradually pull out of black men's domination. Ogunyemi (1985:72) avers that, "Black womanism is a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation."

Similarly, womanism provides equal and viable representation of black male struggles (Collins, 2004). Essentially, womanism encompasses black gendered struggles. Patricia Hill Collins (2000:11) appreciates the complementary roles of men and women, as enunciated by the womanist ideology. She aptly notes that:

Many black women view feminism as a movement that at best, is exclusively for women, at worst, dedicated to attacking or eliminating men... womanism seemingly supplies a way for black women to address gender-oppression without attacking black men.

Womanism developed out of a need for black women's issues to be valued, based on the ideologies of Jacquelyn Grant (1989), Delores Williams (1995) and Rufus Burrow, James Hal Cone (1999). Williams (1995:67) defines womanism as:

A prophetic voice concerned about the well-being of the entire African American Community, male and female, adults and children.

The theory attempts to help black women see, affirm and have confidence in the importance of the experience and faith for determining the character of the Christian religion in the African American community. Alice Walker (1985: xi-xii), in her book, attributes the word's origin to

the black folk expression of mother to female children, 'you are acting womanish', i.e. like a woman... usually referring to outrageous, audacious, or willful behaviour, wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one ... (a womanist is also) a woman who loves other women sexually and/or non sexually. That is, she appreciates and prefers women's culture and women's strength, committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist ... womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.

Although Walker states that a womanist is a black feminist or feminist of colour, she insists that adding black to feminism brings new demands and different perspectives to feminism and expands feminist horizons in theory and practice.

2.2.3 **Motherism**

Motherism is an Afrocentric alternative to feminism. This theory is a variant of feminism which was propounded in 1995 by Catherine Obianuju Acholonu who views the terminology as a multidimensional theory which involves the dynamics of ordering, reordering and rebuilding in cooperation with Mother Nature at all levels of human endeavour. It reveals the nurturing aspect of the nature of mothers, in recreating and moulding children to a perfect form and standard in society. A child has to undergo vigorous stages of developmental processes to become an achiever. Acholonu sees a good motherist as a person that should be able to protect the family from separation in order to achieve a good standard of living and a healthy environment. The child should also be prevented from bad influences, just as the society must also be prevented from riot

and war. All these aspects could be perfected by both male and female in their complementary roles to each other.

The works of a male writer and supporter of motherism should not be biased in favour of patriarchal, masculinist, dominatory perspectives. He must be universal and there should be mutual respect for the equation of life balance. A motherist should be truthful to defend family values, seek true knowledge and recognise all as one.

2.2.4 **Stiwanism**

Stiwanism (Social Transformation in Africa Including Women) is another variant of feminism which was propounded by Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie in 1994. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) describes black women from different cultural areas as people facing six mountainous problems: “colonialism and neocolonialism, traditional structure, men, backwardness, their colour and themselves”.

This study is based on the womanist ideological point of view which is generally referred to as womanism. This is because womanism has a broader horizon that focuses on women and men of all colours and from all parts of the world; it reflects on the same constant transformation. The selected texts identify the real experiences of African women and men in the family set-up. The exposition of the various positions on the women question enables one to make this choice. Though all the above four theories are all agitating for the socio-cultural, and political transformation of women, the womanist theory is most relevant to this work.

It is the only theory that captures the peculiar experiences of the blacks as blacks and as women. That is, it portrays the real African values of reproductive challenge and child rearing in bringing out their relevance and their authenticity as blacks. All these cannot be overlooked.

Since womanism is grounded in the social change theory, many things need to be put in place concerning the progress of men, women and children relationship in Africa, especially the francophone society. A drastic change has to occur to improve on the family setting on issues relating to reproductive challenge and child rearing. These are the principles emphasised by the womanist writers that can change the oppressive conditions of women and allow both sexes to accommodate each other no matter their conditions and differences.

It is the only viable theory that would not accommodate a confrontational act in resolving women's problems unlike the feminist concept which is confrontational and has elements of militancy. In womanism, it is believed that women's problems could be solved or looked into in a subtle and amicable way without breaking law and order or disturbing the peace of the society. For this reason, womanism is seen as a critical lens through which people, especially the womanist writers, can see to deeply capture the lived realities and to speak about injustices and social inequalities in the relationship of a man and a woman in the family setting and also the society as a whole.

It is a theory that embraces the ethics of maternal care, establishing the principles of behaviour for deciding what is wrong and right in man and woman relationships. Womanism is not separatist, it is communitarian. It seeks the collective well-being of all people in the society. It is not individualistic and selfish but universal as it seeks to promote the well-being of everybody. It rejects the common understanding of feminism which is liberating women from men. It sees women and men as good complements to each other.

Womanism allows women to express their exploited struggles and creates awareness for all women to avoid self-destruction. In the same vein, it believes in the freedom and independence of women to be self-reliant. All these principles are considered fit and useful for the critical interpretation of the selected texts especially when anchored on cognitive behavioral theory.

2.2.6 Cognitive Behavioral Theory

Cognitive behavioral theory is of the therapeutic approaches within a larger group of Cognitive Behavioural Therapies (CBT) as postulated by Aaron T. Beck (1967). This theory was first expounded by Beck in 1960s. Cognitive behavioral theory is a therapy based on the cognitive model, which states that "thought, feelings and behaviour are all connected, and that individual can move toward overcoming difficulties and meeting their goals by identifying and changing unhelpful or inaccurate thinking, problematic behaviour and distressing emotion responses" (Beck, 1971:47).

The womanist and the cognitive behavioural theories are employed as the theoretical framework for this work. The womanism theory, which is seen as a variant of

feminism is most relevant to this work, while cognitive behavioural theory is used as a combat against women's depression state in the selected novels.

2.2.7 Justification for the choice of the theories

The choice of the cognitive behavioural theory is informed by the fact that it is the only theory that is best designed for the treatment of depression among adolescent girls and women who have mental health disorders, such as anxiety, sexual dysfunction, bulimia, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, substance abuse and sexual abuse. It is used as a short-term therapy and a long-term treating model for adults, children, adolescent and groups.

It is a theory that posits that what one thinks influences how one feels, behaves, and reacts to one's environment, which will invariably help in highlighting the problems of depressed women who are facing health and reproductive challenges in the selected texts. It is suitable to use this theory because it deals with environmental problems of women, this is because emotional difficulties can be traced to the environments, where these problems emerged from.

The goals of the cognitive theory in the selected texts are to identify and alter the distorted and negative beliefs of the societal context of reproductively challenged women in order to improve their behaviour, conditions and lives. It aids in displaying the negative views of depressed women who are reproductively challenged in society. Similarly, Aaron Beck's Cognitive Behavioural Theory is also used to explain the motif of depression in the lived experiences of reproductively-challenged women in the selected texts.

This chapter has discussed the two theoretical theories adopted for the study and its tenets. We have also done panoramic survey of womanism and cognitive behavioural theory and the choice for the adopted theoretical framework has been justified. In the next chapter, the social context of reproductive challenge in selected texts is examined.

2.3 Methodology

This study adopts the interpretive design. Interpretive denotes an approach (method) to study social life with the assumption "that the meaning of human action is essential in that action" (Swhwandt, 2001:134). Researchers using an interpretive approach aim to expose meaning toward a better understanding of issues involved. Thus.

Interpreting a text is a form of social and literary analysis that focuses on the way people construe and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live.

In this study, the selected texts were subjected to critical observations, coded using techniques like content analysis, relying heavily on qualitative data, exploring hidden reasons behind complex. In the texts, the characters experiences were relatively understood in order to provide a thick description or a rich narrative story of the phenomenon of the interest that can communicate why characters acted the way they did. This method of literary criticism is based on detailed analysis of a text in order to reveal its structure and meaning.

The following texts namely: Evelyne Mpoudi Ngolle's *Sous la cendre le feu* (Sous), Thérèse Kuoh-Moukoury's *Rencontres essentielles* (Rencontres), Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* (Lettre), Fatou Keita's *Rebelle*, Adelaide Fassinou's *Modukpé, le rêve brisé* (Modukpe), Angèle Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes* (Fureurs), Azaratou Baboni's *Vie de femme, vie de sang* (Vie), and Philomène Bassek's *La tache de sang* (Tache) were purposively selected because issues of reproductive and depressive challenges were predominant in them.

In this work, excerpts and references from the texts are used to illustrate and highlight the meaning of the work and to bring out personal interpretations about the experiences of the characters and their situations in the texts. The interpretive method is used to analyse and describe the content, and functions of the messages that are contained in the eight selected texts in order to bring out the known and unknown values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of the female protagonists in the texts.

The interpretive design is very relevant in this study because it is analytical in nature, helping to select the types of texts to be studied. Also due to its nature, it would help to enumerate and analyse occurrences of specific messages as demonstrated by each female characters capturing the meaning of words in sentences, emphasis on the themes bringing out the messages, and to understand the organisation of how they are presented. Messages in texts need detailed interpretation because messages reflect, and, or, may challenge historical, political ethical contexts for which they exist. For this reason, a broader social structure that influences the messages present in the texts under

investigation are properly analysed. The language used in the selected texts is understood, which allow free flow of clear interpretations and judgment.

In this work, excerpts and references from the texts are used to illustrate and highlight the meaning of the work and to bring out personal interpretations about the experiences of the characters and their situations in the texts. This method is deployed together with both womanist and cognitive behavioural theories in order to unfold and analyse the meaning of the various themes treated in the texts. The two theories are very relevant in this work because they both emphasis on empowerment to help women build strengths, expand social support and skills to meet their goals. Also, the idea of working together and supporting one another fits in well with both theories. Both theories believe that women's problem are women's emotional difficulties that can be traced, so these problems stay dealt with. Women are liberated through role playing and relaxation techniques and are equally healed from their mental health in challenges. This method also allows the work to be fully understood and appreciated when a detailed examination of each part of the themes is clearly analysed. This finding after duly interpreted could be generalised to other settings for external validity in functionalistic research.

CHAPTER THREE

REPRODUCTION ISSUES IN THE SELECTED NOVELS

3.0 Introduction

This chapter analyses the works of eight francophone African female writers namely: Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*, Thérèse Kouh-Moukoury's *Rencontre essentielles*, Angèle Rawiri's *Fureurs et crise de femmes*, Philomène Bassek's *La tache de femme*, Adelaïde Fassinou's *Modukpè ,le rêve brisé*, Azaratou Baboni's *Vie de femme, vie de sang*, Evelyn Mpoudi Ngolle's *Sous la cendre le feu* and Fatou Kéïta's *Rebelle* by employing the womanist theory in interpreting the negative and positive effects of the reproductive challenges in the lives of women which are the contributing factors in women's state of depression, illness and instability. The chapter highlights the various negative forms of reproductive challenges and exposes the sociological and emotional states of women in marriages. In the first part of the analysis, six major themes are analysed as negative effects, while the other part of the chapter analyses the positive effects of reproductive challenges.

3.1 The negative forms of social context in reproductive challenge in the selected novels

Women's health and status have been the major concern of female writers, especially in the francophone African literature. The selected eight francophone female novels decry the institution of marriage that it is complicit in the mistreatment and subjugation of women across the world. In these novels, the writers reveal the most negative effects of reproductive challenges in the African society, which are marriage, motherhood, violence, polygamy, boy-child preference, and mental disorder in women. Negatively, women are at the receiving end in marriages, they are discriminated against and are subjected to violence; hence, their health suffers. At its most extreme, these challenges lead to violent, death or female infanticide. While there has been much progress in girls' access to educational, for example, there is still a male-female gap when

it comes to secondary education, access to employment and equal pay. Common concerns raised by the selected female writers is the focus on the health and general well-being of women, who, in some parts of African countries, have virtually no protection in law or in practice, against domestic violence within marriage. It is also rarely impossible for women in marriage to get out of an abusive relationship. In the eight novels under study, bad marriage is represented in the experiences of the characters. These negative forms of reproductive challenges are imbedded in the marriage institution and strengthened through socio-cultural patriarchal practices.

Six major themes are analysed representing various stages to capture the main issues of societal context in reproductive challenges in the francophone society. The themes are marriage, motherhood, girl child, violence against women, adoption and mental disorder in reproductive challenge. These themes are studied in succession as much as they occur in the selected narratives.

3.1.1 **Marriage**

Marriage is an institution that brings a man and a woman together to become one. Marriage is geared towards the procreation and promotion of life. Marriage in developing countries of Africa, most especially the francophone countries is characterised by traditional elements. In the contemporary society, the institution of marriage is faced with many taunting challenges that affect the lives of women and children.

The eight female francophone writers contend that marriage encourage violence against women. Due to the social, economic and cultural factors, the institution of marriage continues to dwindle as there are records of ills. So many ills have befallen marriage that it has dealt a devastating blow to the society. It has produced social problems, such as single parenthood, divorce, separations, rape, homosexuality, lesbianism, and prostitution. These cases are rapidly on the increase.

Ngolle's *Sous la cendre le feu* is set in southern Cameroon in Douala. The novel starts with the mental illness of the female protagonist, Mina, as the narrator. She regains her sanity through the form of talk therapy with the aid of a therapist named Dr. Lobé who helps her to acknowledge and recover her past events in order to shape her thinking and behaviours while in the hospital. Mina is married to Djibril while she is pregnant for another. Djibril demonstrates his strong love for her and they both agree not to tell anyone

about the pregnancy which is two weeks old. Within a month of meeting each other, they get married. Mina is a young secondary school girl, getting ready to finish her last examinations. Along the line, she becomes pregnant; Joël Edimo her boyfriend, who is a medical student, is responsible for that. He, unfortunately, rejects the pregnancy. Shortly after, Mina meets Djibril, a young Muslim lawyer from the Northern part of Cameroon, he agrees to marry her. He really comes to redeem Mina from humiliation and shame. Djibril turns out to be a man any woman would want as a husband due to his caring and devoted attitudes, but along the line, things change. The thematic preoccupation of the novel includes love, childbearing, depression, mental illness, incest, rape and emotional trauma.

Ngolle, as a womanist writer, sees her novel as a model to bring out the practicality of modern marriage which is based on love, understanding and accommodation of each other. Her idea of modern marriage displays that it is only love and mutual understanding that can make marriages work. The novel nullifies religious and ethnic background in making a choice in marriage and also throws off individual's conditions or circumstances in the aspect of choosing a wife or a husband. Mina is rest assured by Djibril that he would be responsible for the fatherhood of Mina's unborn child, only because he loves her.

Djibril appears as the author's pro-womanist character because he agrees to accommodate Mina despite her condition. By doing this, he saves Mina from humiliation and shame which could have made her to commit suicide. Djibril in this attitude brings laughter into the life of Mina. She expresses her happiness thus :

Mais 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 ? Pas ailleurs, la honte serait épargnée à mes parents, puisqu'ils croiraient que mon fiancé était l'auteur de ma grossesse. (Sous p.50).

Thanks to Djibril, my child would have a father, a home, and the right to a harmonious life. If not, what means had I 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. (Our Translation).

From the context of this quotation, it is believed that the society would not only condemn Mina, but also her parents; thus, the family would be seen as being bad.

Moreover, the society will point accusing fingers at her as not being properly brought up by defiling herself before the day of her marriage.

The author makes her reader to realise that the contemporary society is changing and thus creates awareness by denouncing the female concept of keeping virginity for the sake of marriage. And that even without virginity, when love stands for both spouses, marriage can work. The writer stresses marriage based on love and mutual agreement of both the man and the woman before the consent of the third party, which is represented as parents guidance. In effect, Mina's marriage with Djibril is detested by her parents, due to ethnic differences and so the parents leave all the marriage arrangements to her uncle and aunty.

The author also, through the womanist concept of interpersonal agreement, resolves the religious problem of marriage that could have created problems for both couple by putting on ground the neutral aspect of civil marriage, which does not belong to any religious faith. Anybody can go for it. Religious disputes are societal problems in marriages among families that can degenerate to so many other problems in the lives of married couples. Ngolle as a womanist, writer writes to create awareness that civil marriage should be opted for when both parties of the would-be couple are from different religious background.

After their marriage, Djibril Mohamadou is well comported with good manners and a devoted father. He takes good care of Fanny, his adopted child like all other children of his. Mina testifies to this:

Djibril était un père merveilleux et très affectueux. Il adorait nos deux enfants, ceux-ci le lui rendaient bien. (Sous p.100).

Djibril was a wonderful and loving father. He adores our two children, and they loved him in return. (Our translation).

The above excerpt shows Djibril as a good man that has respect for his wife and children. Ngolle portrays Djibril as a man who is quite different from all other men. He is portrayed as a different man when compared to his counterparts from Northern Cameroon. In his behaviour, he agrees with his wife, he is passionate about the progress of his wife. Ngolle depicts Djibril as a new man in the Francophone society who believes in women and supports them socially, educationally, and economically. Djibril is seen in this novel as a pro-womanist because he always acts in favour of his wife, Mina. Djibril supports

Mina practically in everything. He makes sure that Mina advances in her educational career to the level of her being a university graduate. He helps her in the kitchen and in taking care of her children. In his character as a man, when compared with the old generation set of men, Djibril stands out.

Djibril's caring attitude towards his wife and children is unusual in the traditional African society. The author, as a womanist, portrays Djibril as a good complementary role that should entail in the modern family milieu. The author introduces the womanist concept which is grounded in the social change to put many things in place concerning the progress of the man and woman in a family setting. She shows the good relationship of the husband towards the wife and his children. By this, the writer conscientises the people, that is to say that, taking care of children by men is not odd assignment. Though it is very rare for a man to take up the role of a wife in the African setting, we find such things happening in most educated homes in order to smoothen a good relationship in marriage. However, in the traditional African setting, this is frowned at as represented by Mina's mother who believes things are not done this way and she, therefore, cautions her daughter.

In other words, Ngolle condemns the traditional African disposition to childcare and elevates the social status of her female heroine, Mina. She, therefore, allows the pro-womanist character in Djibril to be enacted in marriage. Ngolle speaks out for women, in this category of women that are constantly disturbed by the interference of the extended families because they, at times, hinder the progress of women in marriage, thus destroying their relationship with their spouses. For instance, Hadja takes decision for Djibril when it comes to christening of their third child. Before Mina is able to come out of the caesarian operation, Hadja has named the child Yaya, which takes Mina by surprise. Here, decision is taken by Hadja for the naming of their third child. What right has a third party got to do in the naming of a couple's child?

Djibril and Mina have initially agreed to name their third child Thierry. But under the influence of his sister, Hadja, Djibril decides to name him Yaya, a traditional name. The consequences of societal context in marriage are revealed in the marital life of Mina and Djibril. Djibril changes and takes side with his brothers, sisters and friends. His changes become very glaring, especially when he comes back from his village. He allows

them to invade his marital life and this ruin his family. He relegates Mina to the kitchen; he does not even allow Mina to come near the sitting room when he is around. The only time he wants Mina around the sitting room is when he wants her to serve his friends drinks. This attitude of Djibril makes her depressed, lonely and unhappy.

Djibril, who stands and acts as the pro-womanist, the new man among all men, wants to prove to his community that he is in support of women's progress, becomes frustrated. The character demonstrated by Djibril's sister, friends and Mina's mother represents the society. The reactions of these characters against Djibril's comportment towards Mina are all due to the societal context which dictates his environment. All these revolve around the societal context in which one hails from. In essence, the new attitude of Djibril is socially constructed.

In Africa, the role of the extended family, neighbours and friends in marriage is not felt in nuclear family. The survival of this kind of family solely depends on the positive contribution of the extended family which comprises the father, mother, uncles, aunts, brothers, sister, in-laws and family friends. A married woman cannot operate individually. In this case, the character that represents the extended family members comes to ruin Mina's marriage and discourage Djibril from being caring. Women in African marriage are ranked low and are deprived of their rights and societal obligations. Wives are seen as domestic servants of their husbands and husbands' relatives. What is violated is unity but not indissolubility, at times when a child has been born, the marriage is indissoluble. Ngolle's thematic preoccupation with domestic challenges is slightly different from that of Kuoh-Moukoury.

Kuoh-Moukoury's *Rencontres essentielles* thematises lost love and the problem of infertility which occurs in marriages. Flo is the principal female character in the novel. Flo, in desperation to win back her lost love for Joel, devises strategies as a defense mechanism against the overwhelming problems in order to secure her marriage after she has tried very hard to get pregnant to no avail. She has a strong love for her husband and believes marriage is all about monogamy. She declares 'nothing is more beautiful than a couple'. Flo notes how her husband is so handsome during their wedding and appreciates their little home.

This marriage takes place in France, after two years of courtship with profound love and care for each other. The decision for this modern marriage is taken by both parties without an outsider deciding for them. Soon in a period of eight months after wedding, Flo has a miscarriage and they decide to relocate to Cameroon to start a new life. On getting to Cameroon, Flo finds it difficult to get pregnant again and their marriage is beset with problems. The society where a woman lives determines her future. It is realised that, when Flo is in France after the miscarriage, Jöel keeps promising Flo not to worry. He says the absence of a child does not have any meaning to him but rather does increase his affection for her.

The cultural meaning attached to infertility has really affected women and womandhood, especially in a patriarchal society like the francophone Africa. Women have witnessed so many experiences that have affected their lives negatively. Here, Flo's society is dominated by patriarchal values where a woman is defined in terms of her role as a mother and by her relationship to a man as his wife. Thus, one understands the origin of Flo's sentiments when she states that she would cease to be a woman if she loses her husband in addition to being infertile. Flo, on the other hand, seeks to look for answers within the womanist solidarity outside her own modern way of life. The dignity and self-esteem of women are closely related to their procreation in the family and in the society as a whole.

In an attempt to secure her marriage, she takes the rather unorthodox measure of creating a pseudopolygamous situation involving Jöel and her best friend, Doris. She says :

Je vais me servir de Doris, cette créature forte, irréductible, c'est ma décision. Dès cet instant, la maîtrise avec laquelle je vais mener les opérations m'étonne (Rencontres : p. 86).

I am going to use Doris, this strong creature, this is the decision, from this moment on, the skill with which I carry out my plan still astonishes me. (Essential Encounters: p. 41)

The tenet of womanism entrenched here is sisterhood which aims to enable her to maintain constant contact with her husband and bridge the communication gap that has been created. She seeks to keep her marriage. To also make her husband happy, she lures Jöel back to her by introducing her friend Doris to her family because she believes Doris

is an individual who does not wish to know true love. But along the way, her plans failed. Doris takes over her husband and she becomes pregnant for him.

In Africa, motherhood is essential to women's status; women without children in African society face a lot of pressure and tension from friends, in-laws and even the society. Flo's reaction is shown towards what her friends, her family and the society would say if she pulls out of the marriage without a child. Flo becomes worried and strongly desires to have, at least, a child.

Kouh-Moukoury, as a womanist, reveals in the character of Flo the effect of reproductive challenge in women as a life experience. From the foregoing, one can see that she has really developed complexes among her mates in the society. In the contemporary society, women of such case live without hope. Feldman-Savelsberg (1994) maintains that infertility is at the centre of ritual activities that involve both men and women and ultimately the king. However, when it fails, the woman assumes the bulk of the responsibility, as her womb 'fails' to bring forth a child.

In her marriage, Flo develops ill health due to reproductive challenges. She is unable to think straight because she has been abandoned by her husband. She stays at home in loneliness, helpless, feels unworthy to be called a woman and in absurdity all because she is not seen as a mother. When her sickness wears down, she has to visit her mother.

Often times, when women have health issues in their matrimonial homes, they are pushed to their families by their husbands, especially when there are issues. The writer frowns at this anti-female practice and uses the issues of one's immediate extended family as a backup source of healing for women. This is a means of securing solidarity from the extended family as a sort of curative measure for women. It is often said in the Yorùbáland, 'take her to her family for cure.'

Jöel and Flo are not in talking terms for quite some time and when Joel discovers that Flo does not feel well, all he could think of is to escort her to the motor park to take the next available bus to her parents' house for treatment. This arrangement is not too good as a husband. The marriage covenant says for "better for worst" and not for "worst to back out". In a way, the author denounces the sexist acts by men against women's health. This is seen as anti-womanist; hence, the representation of the acts aims at alleviating

women to their rightful position when it comes to health matters. Instead of seeking appropriate measure for the well-being of his wife, Joel quietly pushes her out from taking the responsibility of taking care of her. This portrays him as a selfish and individualistic person.

Again, Kuoh-Moukoury reveals the consequences of barrenness, using Doris to violate the divine design that marriage should be seen as eternal communion between just one man and one woman. The author thus, preaches against polygamy. The issue of polygamy varies from tribe to tribe. African marriage allows polygamy. It is to underline that the main factor behind polygamy is not sexual incontinence, but the overriding desire for procreation. Jöel looks for a way to separate from and divorce Flo but Flo continues to be what she is since the first day of their courtship and does not pray for any separation nor divorce from Jöel.

Jöel seeks divorce or separation because he believes he cannot maintain two wives. Moreover, he is influenced by the Western culture as he once lived with Flo in the West. On the other hand, Flo opts for polygamy because she wants to keep her husband but still does not want any woman to take him away from her. Polygamy is replaced by Western style of divorce and remarriage. Thus, Jöel represents the pro-feminist radical, while Flo represent the womanist, that is not separatist.

Jöel invariably falls into the hands of two wives trying to maintain two homes. He spends most of his time with Doris, goes clubbing, tripping all over with Doris. He shows love to Doris but rarely comes home to sleep in her home. Doris loves him and wants him to divorce Flo but Flo refuses. She is pleased to remain Mrs. Flo Paka. Flo feels lonely, deserted and emotionally depressed. She takes care of Jöel as she prepares his food, clothings but the sexual relations and communication are absent. Flo reveals that :

Jöel est tantôt heureux, tantôt tirillé. Peut-être le polygame authentique est-il un homme comblé, heureux. Parfois, je fais du chantage pour l'arracher à Doris. Elle en fait autant. Nous sommes l'une et l'autre, assez ingénieuses pour trouver la meilleure situation, l'idée convaincante, le met juste. Parfois, sans le valoir, sans être complices, nous le faisons tourner comme une toupie. Il ne sait que faire de nous un bien lourd fardeau ! Encore un peu et nous pourrions lui nuire, devenir exigeantes, le ruiner, le détruire ! (Rencontre: p. 117)

Jöel is sometimes happy, sometimes troubled. Perhaps a true polygamous man is overwhelmed with joy. Sometimes I use blackmail to steal him away from Doris. She does the same thing. We pray with him like a yo-yo. He doesn't know what to do with us. Such a heavy burden! We would need to go only a little further to push him over the edge completely, to control him, to destroy him! (Essential Encounters: p. 56)

Flo talks about the societal problems of polygamy whereby men are tossed here and there like a toy all because they do not really know what they want. In polygamy, the first wife is not rejected or put away; the marriage still exists, the bond is not broken, which is against the womanist view point. She prefers to air her views by voicing out to her friend. In this way, the systems of her depressed state could be reduced and healed. Before the constitution of marriage between two individuals, male and female, there should be element of love if the marriage is not a forced marriage or an arranged marriage. Like Kouh-Moukoury's text, *Une si longue lettre* deals with issues of polygamy and divorce.

Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*, is a short novel that employs the epistolary form to convey the thoughts and feelings of the experiences of her female characters in the constitution of marriage which has only brought them grief, depression and emotional torture despite their submissiveness and caring attitude towards their husbands. Ramatoulaye writes a letter to her friend, Aïssatou, who lives in the United States and explains all her experiences about her marital life and the lives of other women in their marriages who are closer to her. She also writes to remind Aïssatou about her own experiences before she opted for a divorce to travel to the United States. From the womanist point of view, the author writes to express her exploited struggles in her marital relationship with her husband, exposing the societal ills of marriage in the francophone African setting.

In *Une si longue lettre*, the author foregrounds the themes of love, marriage, tolerance, polygamy, child rearing, grief, abandonment, humiliation, divorce, mental illness, widowhood, unfaithfulness, death, loneliness and emotional trauma – all these are societal problems that beset a woman in the institution of marriage. These problems are what Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:34) identifies as six mountainous problems disturbing women from progressing.

In *Une si longue lettre*, Ramatoulaye's relationship with Modou is based on love. The novel reveals their mutual love and intimacy before procreation. She emphasises the thoughts, feelings, and the care they have together.

In the Senegalese society as expressed by Ramatoulaye's mother, it is believed that the love of a man should be stronger than that of a woman's love for the man. Because she feels through this notion, they keep and make marriage stronger in the future especially when she realises that the love Ramatoulaye has for Modou is stronger than hers. In the above quotation, the nostalgic thoughts of her love for Modou speak volumes, she has strong feelings for him.

At times, most marriages fall apart when there is no good guidance and counseling about choosing the right person. The society today is filled with divorced and separated couples because they are not properly guided before marriage. Some mothers-in-law, friends or relatives give the future wives and future husbands wrong counselling when they have ulterior motives, persuading them on the wrong partner. This aspect is anti-womanist and it is established in this novel. This is showcased in the character of Dame Belle Mère who forces her daughter to marry Modou, Ramatoulaye's husband, a man old enough to be her father. The exploitation of other women out of self-interest and greed is widespread among mothers-in-law. This is done in her selfish interest in order to acquire the titles of Hadja through Modou Fall and also because she is also promised a three-bedroom apartment behind his chic SICAP Villa and lots more. Binetou is as naive as Ramatoulaye's daughter.

The mother's idea turns out to be a reality because she is jilted by Modou. He abandons her with her children. She decries this sheer wickedness as she weeps bitterly.

In the contemporary marriage in African context, women tend to suffer a lot in the hands of their spouses. For instance, as soon as Aïssatou the new wife comes into Modou's life, she tosses him to get whatever she wants. Modou, in turn, makes the legitimate wife, Aïssatou and children to suffer. Aïssatou is abandoned to emotional and economic tortures and deprived from her basic needs and benefits. The consequence is that female victims as wives are prone to public violation, prostitution, while their children are reduced to dropouts, street hawkers and vagabonds. The ill-treatment of women in marriage is anti-womanist. The author employs her creative weaponry to challenge men to change from their oppressive and exploitative acts against women. In

other words, many African women writers, especially from the francophone countries see this work as a watershed and have prompted various feminist and womanist writers to criticise the problems of women emanating from marriage.

Bâ, as a womanist advocate, depicts the experiences of the black women in the African society. *Ramatoulaye*, therefore, epitomises the critical lens through which people, especially the womanist writers can see to deeply capture the ills of polygamy in the institution of marriage and also to speak about the injustice and social inequalities that are perpetrated in African marriages, especially in a polygamous home. *Ramatoulaye* expresses her views on the inequality Modou subjects her to; she feels sad that her children take public buses to school, while Dame Lady's mother-in-law stretches her legs at the back of Modou's car:

Je survivais. Je connus la rareté des moyens de transport en commun. Mes enfants faisaient en riant ce dur apprentissage. J'entends un jour Daba leur conseiller : « surtout, ne dites pas à maman qu'on étouffe dans les cars, aux hommes de pointe, je pleurais de joie et de tristesse. (Lettre: p. 100).

I survived. I experienced the inadequacy of public transport. My children laughed at themselves in making this harsh discovery. One day, I heard Daba advise them: Above all, don't let mum know that it is stifling in those buses during the rush hours. I shed tears and sadness together. (Letter: p. 53.).

It is also revealed that all marriages have their pros and cons. Like a great philosopher, *Ramatoulaye* ponders on what life and marriage are all about in the world and justifies her own marriage where she has gone wrong despite her humble and kingly character exhibited to Modou and his family; what she could only get back is evil. She then concludes that women, even when they give their all to their men and families, are mostly used, dumped and abandoned by most African men. They have no respect for women. Many men disrespect and disregard the emotions of women in the institution of marriage after taking away their dignity and also debaring them from their legal rights. All these acts are anti-womanist which the author repudiates in the male characters in the novel. She believes polygamy is hell on earth. Female writers maintain that polygamy impedes the development of the couple who truly loves each other. Though monogamous marriage is not a guarantee for happiness, women are still respected and happier because it is a mark of respect that they have their own man, who is a full-fledged partner in

marriage, not the one Kuoh-Moukoury refers to as having only the essential part of a man which has to be shared by two women.

Her friend, Aïssatou, bluffs out because she cannot bear the brunt of polygamous home. She prefers to stay out to fulfill her destiny. Womanism frowns at the act of opting out in marriage; it is not totally accepted because the African society frowns at the rearing of children outside wedlock. The input of the father in raising children is highly valued. Therefore, the fatherly care and responsibilities are lost. Though, instead of self-destruction and suicidal act by a woman, according to the womanist theory, separation is accepted to foster harmonious co-existence in the society.

In *Rebelle*, Keita reflects the problems of arranged and child marriages as hindrance to the progress of female children and women. In the novel, Louma is portrayed as a man that lives within the enactment of what it entails in the society. In other words, his behaviour metaphorises the ambiguous nature of the environment in which men enact their masculinity and sexist attitude. Women are seen as slaves in this society as they are dominated by men. They are damaged by societal cultural norms. In the novel, Malimouna fights for her rights with the womanist zeal to overcome her problems.

In some societies, mothers are put the dark. We can see that the father's decision about who the daughter is to marry is final, whether the mother likes it or not. Here, Matou and Malimouna are not happy about the father's decisions. The announcement of the wedding is so brief unlike the real traditional wedding where the bride's mother would have to be prepared. The mother, father and daughter's relationship is a confrontational act and not really complementary which is against the womanist tenet. The day of the wedding is like a funeral ceremony. It is noted that both the mother and the child are kept in a secluded place, denied of happiness, especially when the day should have been a joyous day for both parties. They are treated as objects and animals. Malimouna is not bold enough to disagree with her father due to her age but she makes some grumblings and cries. All these indicate her rejection of Sando as husband.

At last, Malimouna struggles with Sando during her nuptial night; she hits him on the face with a wooden statue, locking him in the room and running off from the village at night. It is revealed that Malimouna had been betrothed to her father's friend who is a rich trader because of his own selfish interest for money. The author decries the subjugation

and objectification of female adolescents in the society. In Africa, child abuse is still prominent due to poverty and gender discrimination. Thus, Malimouna's marriage is seen as mere transaction of currency to the father. In Africa, the monetary value of bride price or bride wealth is linked with marriage. As fate will have it, Malimouna's secret of not being circumcised is revealed on the night of her wedding to Sando when Sando wants to make her a woman, but unfortunately for him, the little girl of fourteen traps him down and overpowers him. Malimouna escapes from his house.

The author also reveals how traditional Africans trade their daughters in arranged marriage. This can also be called arranged marriages by far-away families who send a wife to their sons and young brides who are abused by tyrannical husbands who neither love nor respect them. Fanta, a young girl of 22, is sent to France by her father from Mali:

Le mariage avait donc été célébré en l'absence du mari. Celui-ci promettait chaque année à sa famille de venir chercher son épouse, mais il ne s'exécutait pas. Excédés, et de peur que Barou n'épouse une étrangère, ses parents l'envoyaient donc auprès de lui (Rebelle : p. 87).

The marriage had consequently been celebrated in the absence of the man. He had promised year in year out that he would come and get his wife, but he never did. Irritated and frightened that Barou should marry a foreigner, his parents decided to send him a wife. (Our Translation)

Arranged marriages involve emotional pressure. Marriage should be autonomous. Arranged marriages end in being cold and dysfunctional as well as abusive. Arranged marriages in African societies are sometimes used with picture. It could be the male sending his picture to Africa and the wedding is celebrated involving both families, the picture of the future husband representing the husband. It could be sending the future wife abroad to meet the future husband that she has never in life set her eyes on. This act is very very unfair for both the male and female adolescents. Such marriages at times do not last. It brings disharmony amongst couples. Arranged marriage is against human rights, particularly women's rights.

Fanta is regularly battered by her husband in France. She is subjugated and becomes exploited by her husband who makes her a baby machine. Fanta is conformed to the roles of housemaid. The young married woman cannot rest or sleep soundly with the noise of her many babies. She hardly has time for herself. She is left alone to take care of

her babies while Barou goes out early in the morning and comes back at night. Malimouna complains about the problem of her friend, Fanta :

Deux mois après son arrivée, elle était enceinte. Elle accoucha d'une magnifique petite fille. Noura souriait continuellement. Noura avait quatre mois lorsque Fanta se trouva enceinte de jumeaux. Après leur naissance, Fanta demandait souvent à Malimouna de garder Noura (Rebelle : p. 91)

Two months after her arrival, she was pregnant. She gave birth to a lovely little girl. Noura smiles continuously. Noura was four months when Fanta was found pregnant with a set of twins. After their birth, Fanta asked Malimouna to assist her with Noura. (Our translation.)

This poorly-spaced birth of children makes life unbearable for Fanta. Malimouna, based on the womanist ground which advocates the collective well-being of other people in the society, helps Fanta by taking care of Noura and also advises her on what to do. She introduces her to the use of contraceptives and tells her to get something that will earn her some money to sustain her. But her sexist husband does not allow this to work, while she gets pregnant for the fourth baby within few years of her marriage.

Furthermore, at the age of 34 Malimouna gets married to Karim whom she loves and believes is different from all other African men. After her relationship with Phillippe, the White man, who relocates to Africa with Malimouna, they are separated through the influence of Phillippe's sister who tells Phillippe that he cannot marry an African lady because they have different cultural values and background. On hearing this, Malimouna has a miscarriage and that ends the relationship. Malimouna seems to be happy again when Karim comes to ask her hand in marriage:

Malimouna avait pourtant connu l'amour avec Phillippe, mais avec Karim, c'était presque irréel. Elle aurait pu mourir pour lui, elle vivait pour et par lui. Ils décidèrent très vite qu'ils ne pouvaient se passer l'un de l'autre. Karim lui demanda de l'épouser. Malimouna était heureuse. (Rebelle : p. 153).

Malimouna had however known love with Phillippe, but with Karim, it was almost unreal. She could die for him; she lived for and by him. They decided very quickly that they be together. Karim asked her to marry him. Malimouna was happy. (Our translation.)

This extract shows us the type of marriage that occurs as a result of decisions made by both parties. Such decision is seen as the ideal in womanism, if both parties are not in pretence. This type of relationship is bonded by love, where marriage would be considered the final step to solidifying the relationship. In this relationship, both Malimouna and Karim have chosen to love each other. None is imposed on the other. This type of marriage is known as autonomous marriage. In their relationship, there is enough courtship getting to know each other. It is at this juncture that Malimouna opens up to Karim that she is forced into a marriage at the age of fourteen where she escapes from her village, Boritouni; she talks about her mother, her father and everything about herself, while Karim also tells her that he is from a polygamous family and he equally discusses everything about his other brothers, and mother. Karim acts so nice and loving to the extent that he goes in search of Malimouna's mother while he is on his way back from his trip. Malimouna is touched with his kind behaviour and she feels lucky to have such a man for a husband:

Malimouna avait tenu à se marier dans un magnifique boubou vert pâle. Pour lui faire plaisir, Karim avait troqué.
(Rebelle: p.159).

Malimouna had insisted on getting married in a magnificent pale green boubou. taken to marry in beautiful green white gown. To please him, Karim had swapped.
(Our translation)

Karim takes care of her, buys her a car, and supports her, at least for one and a half years before he now starts showing his true colour. Because Karim is accommodating and complements his wife, the society sees him as a weaker vessel – a woman-, while the wife is seen as the husband. He goes against his wife working but want her to stay at home to take care of the children. He takes a second wife and attempts to gang up with some people to run Malimouna down when she decides to speak openly against genital mutilation during a meeting of the women's association which she chairs. He organises Malimouna's kidnapping to Bontouni where her father and her first husband live. He does this just to cripple the progress of Malimouna. This act opposes the gender inequality and sexist act of women, which womanism preaches. Woman's oppression is equally narrated in *Modukpé, le rêve brisé*.

Adelaide's first novel, *Modukpè, le rêve brisé*, foregrounds grief, depression, childbearing, child rearing, sorrow, oppression, fear, isolation, unfaithfulness, polygamy and frustration. The novel shows the relationship between Modukpè and Mr. Robert, and also that of Modukpè's mother and Jean-Paul, her father. The author narrates the love story of a young girl from childhood to adulthood. Modukpè herself narrates her ordeals in her relationship with Mr. Robert, and also, that of her mother with her father. The ambition of Modukpè to become a very reputable person in life is shattered by her lecturer who impregnates her and abandons her. The story of Modukpè is not different from that of her mother who is deceived by Jean-Paul into becoming a second wife. Both daughter and mother resign themselves to fate to pick the bits and pieces of their remaining lives.

Mother and daughter are tricked and exploited by men. This exploitative manner of men to their female partners in the narrative negates womanist tenet. All the female characters face retardation in their problematic marriages. Their relationships with their spouses are not cordial and cooperative enough to complement each other. Modukpè, a Law student, is involved in a relationship with her lecturer in the same university. The first physical contact between Modukpè and Mr. Robert starts in a large class of so many students. Mr. Robert makes an eye contact to the protagonist, which she notices. The second physical contact which leads to a conversation is at the University library where Mr. Robert seeks Modukpè's friendship and promises to help her pass all her courses if she agrees to date him:

Je voudrais t'aider à réussir si nous pouvons nous rencontrer de temps en temps hors du campus, alors... (Modukpè: p.43)

I would like to help you pass your exams if we can be meeting from time to time outside the campus...
(Our translation)

So many girls of adolescent age have been sexually molested and harassed by men. They fall prey to these men because of empty promises, money and freedom which they need from them. Modukpè falls into the pranks of Robert not knowing he is a cheat and a deceiver. She believes she has found love. In her relationship with Robert, she spends most of her valuable time with him. She seems to be enjoying every bit of it foolishly

without realising that their love affair is based on mere lust and infatuation. She never thinks of the consequences. She describes the way she falls into the relationship thus:

J'étais tombée follement amoureuse de lui, il ne lui a fallu qu'allonger la main droite pour me cueillir, tel un fruit bien mûr. (Modukpè: p.44)

I fell stupidly in love with him like a very ripe fruit; he only had to stretch his right hand to pluck, like a very ripe fruit. (Our translation)

The phrase “like a very ripe fruit” signifies that Modukpè is still very young for any relationship with a man like Mr. Robert who is only interested in the illicit affairs between him and her. Even when he discovers that Modukpè is still a virgin, Mr. Robert fails to declare his true identity as a married man to her. Along the line, Modukpè becomes pregnant. The pronouncement of her pregnancy to Mr. Robert, which should have solidified their relationship, worsens the situation. She expects that her courtship would eventually lead to marriage and later they would start rearing their children. She never knows that her lover is not ready to build up a healthy relationship. He rejects the pregnancy and abandons her and tells her that he is happily married to a French lady with children:

- Mais chéri, je croyais que ça te ferait plaisir que je suis enceinte avant notre mariage !
- Quel mariage ? Mais, de quoi parles-tu ? (Modukpè: p.47-48)
- But darling, I thought you would be delighted that I am pregnant before our marriage.
- What marriage? But, what are you talking about? (Our translation)

Modukpè is bitter, shocked and emotionally troubled by the words uttered by Mr. Robert. By the representation of Mr. Robert's exploitation of her female student the writer intends to portray him as a cheat. It is also a way of interrogating the exploitation of manners of women by men which calls for a total change by the womanist writers. She condemns men like Mr Robert as killers of women's vision and progress, and killers of womanhood at the verge of happiness and progress.

The relationship of Modukpè's mother and Jean-Paul is worse; it leads to a failed marriage even after several children:

Tu t'imagines, Dukpè il ne m'avait pas dit qu'il était marié! S'il me l'avait avoué dès le départ, j'aurais mis beaucoup de distance entre nous, et jamais je n'aurais été sa seconde épouse. Lorsque j'appris la nouvelle, c'était trop tard: j'attendais déjà mon fils aîné. (Modukpè: p.13)

Imagine, Dukpè, he never told me that he was married! If he had confessed right from the beginning, I would have put a great distance between us, and never would I have been his second wife. When I got the information, it was too late; I was already expecting my first son. (Our translation)

It is obvious that many African men raise children out of wedlock. They raise children in two or more households out of selfish interest. This masterminds the entrapment of the woman. Women who fall victim to such men are forced to train their children alone. At times, they become too tired to start afresh and so they have no choice other than to accept their lots. Modukpè goes down and later she is able to pick up the pieces of her life and starts another family again with the help and consolation of her mother. Modukpè and her mother are subjugated by the men in their lives. Modukpè resigns herself to fate. The fate of traditional African women is shown in the lives of Modukpè and her mother.

Modukpè's relationship with Mr. Robert crumbles. She is saddled with the responsibility of rearing her son, Sedole, without the father. This reveals in her the womanist maternal ethics of child rearing. A woman is seen as the first pillar to embrace this ethics of childcare. As true biological parents, the responsibility of child rearing should be borne by both parents for healthy, physical, moral and proper upbringing of their children to be useful persons in life. It is after eight years that Mr. Robert comes back to reclaim his son, Sedole. Most times, when the situation is like this, it is the woman that loses and suffers. Men do not look back; they just forge ahead with their lives. The novel creates awareness for a corrective measure for all women folks and men to be of help to each other as a complement.

Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes* chronicles the societal context of reproductive challenges in modern marriage by depicting the issues of infertility, betrayal, lesbianism, death, female emancipation and polygamy. The author sees reproductive challenge as a very crucial issue in marriage. The novel reveals the relationship of Emilienne and Joseph at the commencement of their courtship as passionate and romantic.

This aspect is a demonstration of womanist complementary role of man and woman. The author describes Joseph's strong love for Emilienne's. Similarly, Joseph demonstrates his feelings for her in a powerful neurological condition like someone who is really hungry and thirsty for true love.

Furthermore, in *Fureurs et cris de femmes*, Angèle Rawiri discusses the importance of womanhood in the Francophone society. Reproductive challenge is a very crucial issue in the novel. It starts with the revelation and demonstration of the romantic relationship between Emilienne and Joseph. The author describes this romance erotically in this manner :

Une nuit, dans l'ascenseur d'un petit hôtel, Joseph, qui n'était alors que son amant, lui avait dans son empressement déchiré tous ses vêtements et l'avait transportée, pendant qu'il la couvrait de baisers brûlants, dans une chambre anonyme tout de blanc décoré. Il l'avait ensuite posée avec délicatesse sur la moquette avant de lui faire découvrir tous ses talents d'amant. (Fureurs: p.12)

One night, in the elevator of a small hotel, Joseph, who was at that time not more than a lover, his eagerness tore her clothes and carried her, while he gave her hot kisses, into an anonymously decorated room. He tactfully put her on the fitted carpet before making her discover all his talents as a lover. (Our Translation)

The excerpt above shows that both lovers are attracted to each other prior to their dating periods. They are both committed to each other. Emilienne is happy. She believes that the major purpose of living is love. Without love, one cannot survive as a couple. She appreciates their dating period because it makes her blossom and pleasant. When a woman is happy, people will be conscious of what makes her happy. The scene shows the complementary role of men and women in making each other in a heterosexual relationship; it foregrounds the automatic avenue for creating happiness in the lives of a couple. Even Emilienne's classmates are very conscious of her pleasant attitude and they complement her dazzling skin and sparkling looks. They want to know the secret of her beauty and vitality. She feels happy because they tell her that only a love affair can make a woman look as gay as she is.

The novel reveals that Emilienne's marriage is a problematic one. Her mother-in-law gives her lot of problems. Despite a long courtship in France, both lovers (Emilienne

and Joseph) encounter some challenges because their parents refuse their wish to get married for cultural differences. Emilienne's mother calls Joseph a stranger. The author presents this resentment in these words:

Ne me dis pas que tu veux te marier avec un étranger pour salir notre lignée. Aucun de tes aïeux n'ont épousé une femme de cette région. Et c'est toi, ma fille, qui a été dans les grandes écoles, qui veux mettre le poison dans notre sang pur ! (Fureurs : p.17)

Do not tell me that you are getting married to a stranger, to ridicule our lineage. None of your ancestors have married a woman from that region. And it is you, my daughter, that have gone to the university, who wants to put poison in our pure blood. (Our Translation)

Emilienne and Joseph denounce this barbaric idea and get married without the blessings of their parents. After several years, Emilienne is faced with reproductive challenges. It is this challenge that truncates the initial happiness of courtship and the blissful experience of early married life, thereby problematising heterosexual relationship or marriage in modern society.

Marriage is the toughest adventure one may come across when reproductive challenges set in. Marriage requires adjustments and sacrifices. In the African context, the consent of the parents and extended families is very important. With the effects of reproductive challenges in their marriage, their relationship gradually shows the signs of unhealthiness. Their problems begin when Eyang, Emilienne's mother-in-law, discovers that Emilienne cannot have more than a child whom she eventually loses. She tries very hard to get pregnant again by visiting a gynaecologist and even a witch-doctor but there is no positive result. She later gives up.

The issues of oppression and reproductive challenges are established in the life of Emilienne. Eyang hates Emilienne so badly for two reasons. One is that Emilienne is not from their place, and two, because she cannot bear children. The death of her only daughter makes her marriage more miserable, to the extent that she can no longer cope. Joseph gets a lot of pressure from his mother and starts dating Emilienne's secretary. Emilienne's mother-in-law ridicules the sterility of her daughter-in-law: "Cette femme est devenue inutile" (Fureurs: p.48). [This woman has become useless]. (Our Translation)

Even Eva confronts her sister Emilienne by telling her the fact:

Tu dois savoir que tu ne seras jamais une femme à part entière tant que tu n'auras pas des enfants que tu élèveras et que ton entourage verra grandir. (Fureurs: p. 89)

You must know that you will never be a complete woman unless you have children that you will raise and that people around you will watch growing up. (Our Translation)

Joseph goes out without the knowledge of Emilienne to visit his girlfriends. He no longer cares nor shows love to Emilienne who tries all she can to win back his love but to no avail. She also strives to appease the mother-in-law in cash and kind, but despite all these struggles, Eyang still hates her. Since Emilienne is well placed, she defies all attempts to be oppressed and subjugated by her mother-in-law. Nevertheless, their marriage crumbles.

In Baboni's *Vie de femme, vie de sang*, the Benines writes of deception, marriage and remarriage, violation and infidelity, using the experience of the heroine, Fatou, a young girl of 22 years to establish, the ubiquity of the issues. Baboni, in her very first novel, aims at changing the stereotypical image of the African women in the society. A womanist, she writes about the socio-cultural practices in the modern marriage institution. In the novel, she depicts Ambroise as a real useless man, that is incapable of making a woman happy for once and who makes the faithful and hard working Fatou a victim.

Fatou as a hardworking lady fails twice in her baccalaureate examinations (higher level) and attempted to commit suicide. The action is stopped through the intervention of her parents. As a young girl who adores watching films and dance, she visits the cinema almost all weekends during her long vacation. One day, as she visits the theatre hall, a young man just moves forward towards her to kiss and cuddle her just like that without knowing him. In that act, she gives this young man a slap. After some months later, as she strolls home from her regular film show, Ambroise drives towards her to give her a lift and introduces himself. She now realizes that it is the same man she slapped. From there, they become intimate friends : "Tout le monde parlait du couple Fatou-Ambroise. Notre complicité étonnait tout le monde. (Vie: p. 26)". Meaning: "Everybody talked of Fatou-Ambroise the couple." Our complicity surprised everybody. (Our translation)

Fatou falls in love with Ambroise without knowing that he is deceptive and a womaniser. Apart from these two negative qualities, he is also a liar and a great drinker. He makes Fatou drunk to the extent that she is unable to recognize herself that she is in the arms of Ambrose in his bedroom where they make love. It is this lovemaking that later makes her pregnant without a formal plan for marriage.

Viola comment je fis mon baptême à l'alcool. Ce soir-là, je bus deux bouteilles de bières qui eurent sur moi l'effet de tout un casier ... sur le chemin de retour, il me proposa de faire escale chez lui. Il m'avait embrassé avec une certaine ferveur. Je perdis l'équilibre et me retrouvai dans le divan. Nous flirtâmes un instant puis je retrouvai mes esprits. (Vie :p. 21).

This is how I got baptised into alcohol. That evening, I drank two bottles of beer which had effect on all my nerve... on our way back home, he suggested we should branch to his house. He kissed me with certain zeal. I lost control and found myself in the couch. We flirted for some minutes then I found my ingenuity. (Our translation)

The author reveals how adolescent girls and ladies are lured into sexual intercourse through the drinking of alcohol. Ambroise knows fully well that it is only through the means of alcohol that he can make Fatou have sexual intercourse with him. He makes Fatou drink and exploits her sexually. It is analogous to rape. This is a devaluation of black womanhood. Many women in the society that have undergone this type of experience have mental health issues affecting them emotionally and psychologically. This is an act that womanism preaches against. Though Fatou is destabilized, out of her love for Ambroise, the act pleases her:

J'étais amoureuse de lui et cela me rendait aveugle. Les filles défilaient, de tous les âges et de tous les couleurs. Il me disait que j'étais son amour et que les autres ne comptaient pas pour lui (Vie : p. 30).

I was in love with him and that made me blind. Girls, of all ages and of all colours paraded. He told me I was his love and that others did not count for him. (Our translation)

Many ladies marry for one reason or the other; some for money, some for handsomeness, speaking mannerism, and family background. Without considering whether there will be peace of mind or whether the marriage will somehow be harmonious. For Fatou, she simply loves him and is blindfolded by his love for no just

reason. She does not know that Ambroise is a womaniser and that he involves in alcoholism. Fatou is represented as a weaker sex and stereotyped with negative qualities; she is emotionally fragile and indecisive. These negative qualities do not go well with a womanist fighter or advocate. Her qualities are, however, in line with the position of de Beauvoir (1956:334) about the feminine captive that is weak, docile and futile.

The outcome of their sexual intimacy is marriage, thus, there is pregnancy before marriage. This is a marriage of circumstances and such marriages do not last. The woman suffers mostly because the male partner does not accord respect to her. Traditional rights are forgone in such marriages and the woman is, at times, relegated and maltreated by the husband. Even when Fatou is found pregnant by her parents, they are dumbfounded and tell Fatou that the only way out is if the man that impregnated her would marry her:

- Tu connais l'auteur au moins ?
- Oui, papa !
- Qui est-ce ? Je le connais ?
- C'est le jeune homme que je fréquente depuis quelques mois.
- A-t-il reconnu en être l'auteur ?
- Oui papa !
- Alors, tu viens le présenter officiellement à la famille. On verra après ce qu'il faudra faire.
- D'accord ! (Vie : p. 32-33)

- You know at least the person that is responsible?
- Yes papa!
- Who is he? Do I know him?
- It is the young man whom I move with these few months.
- Did he know he was responsible?
- Yes papa!
- Then, you are going to introduce him to the family officially. We will see what he will do afterwards.
- Okay. (Our translation)

In this type of marriage, the dignity of the woman is lost. At times, the female's relatives are ridiculed because the woman gets pregnant outside wedlock. But in Fatou's

case, the parents are lucky that Ambroise agrees that he is responsible for the pregnancy. After this, the parents are forced to organise a simple marriage ceremony: «Ambroise venait de faire son entrée dans ma famille. La cérémonie fut brève et très simple (VDFVDS: p. 33) ». Meaning: “Ambroise had just entered my famille. The ceremony was short and very simple”. (Our translation).

Due to the circumstances that surround such a marriage, it is made brief and simple without much noise so that people will not know that the bride is pregnant before marriage. Months later, Fatou gives birth to a baby boy named Sydney. Ambroise’s parents are responsible for the naming ceremony. Fatou and her son are left in care of Ambroise’s parents, while Ambroise lives in his own apartment without his wife and son: « Je vivais toujours dans la maison familiale avec mon fils mais j’étais régulier chez lui » (VDFVDS: p. 35). Meaning: “I was living in the family house with my son, but I went regularly to his house.” (Our translation).

When couple lives separately from each other, it gives room for so many vices between them. The intimacy, love and care between couple become absent. Ambroise even in his marriage with Fatou, goes out with all shades of women each day Fatou visits him. He is depicted as an irresponsible man who never cares about his family. He disregards and disrespects Fatou and her parents when he is corrected of his bad behaviours. He abandons his family and travels out of town to live far away from them. Fatou gets frustrated and also leaves for the city to meet her sister, Bali, who lives with her fiancé. Bali accepts to take care of Fatou’s son while she goes out to look for job to sustain her and her son.

In *La tâche de sang*, arranged marriage is seen as one of the challenges in marriage institution and is condemned by Bassek in the Cameroonian society. The narrative is preoccupied with such issues as oppression, suppression, child rearing, women’s domestication and abortion. Bassek portrays exhibition of masculine power over women. In the marriage between Same Hanack and Mama Ida, Same Hanack is seen as the Lord and Master, while Mama Ida is seen as a servant from the beginning of the novel to the end. Mama Ida is a school drop out. Her marriage to Same is an arranged one from both families. Even though it is an arranged marriage, it is solemnised in the church since Same is a Christian:

Les deux hommes bénirent le mariage de leurs enfants qui se déroula en grande pompe à l'église. (Tache: p. 12).

The two men solemnized the marriage of their children that took place in the pompe and pageantry at the church. (Our translation)

The author believes that arranged marriage in the Cameroonian communities kills the happiness of women. It also reduces them to slaves in their matrimonial homes, because the well-being of their wives is not taken into consideration and the complementary role of a husband and wife is not really met. When it comes to issue of an arranged marriage, it is like forcing someone against one's wishes. In recent years, such marriages have become less common, especially in the urban and civilised areas of many francophone countries but they still do exist in rural areas, where there are illiterates and uneducated parents.

In arranged marriages, the consent of couples is not taken into consideration by their parents, all they want is for their own selfish interest. Somehow, Mama Ida is not happy with the kind of man she has married. Still as a devoted Christian, Same smokes and drinks. He goes out very early before his wife and children wake up for school and he comes back late after the children have gone to bed. The fatherly care is lost. His comportment with his wife is not cordial; he treats himself like a demi-god. He believes that women are meant to be enslaved and should be saddled with all responsibilities, such as domestic chores, child and husband caretaking, sexual satisfaction, farming and so on. Mama Ida is shouted at whenever there is a conversation between both parties. She is treated like a piece of rag.

However, as a Christian, Mama Ida's father and uncle chose Same because they believe he is a simple and good person. In the past, women were betrothed or given out to their close relations, and families. Nuptial ties were used to cement interpersonal, intertribal and interfamilial relationships. This notion is very bad.

In the opinion of Mama Ida' father and uncle, they have the impression that Same is:

Un homme d'âge mûr, simple, généreux et étroitement lié aux affaires de l'église : originaire de Mbakassi, à une trentaine de kilomètres de Sang-Mbûnje. (Tache: p.12)

A simple, mature, and generous man, and is deeply involved in church matters, he hails from Mbakassi, thirty kilometers away from Sang-Mbunje. (Our translation)

Mama Ida's feelings are not considered. In her community, she has to accept whatever they impose on her. Through her thoughts, the writer demonstrates her state of emancipation. The womanist advocates women's freedom and independence of women's views and rights to end their oppressive state. In her statements, she confesses her state of sufferings "Des souffrances physiques et morales que lui infligeaient Same". (LTDS: p.13) [The physical and moral sufferings that Same was inflicting on her.] (Our translation)

She admits she would have loved to back out from her marriage if not for her age, Christianity and tradition. Patriarchal traditions are seen as the main problems of women; thus, they are antagonistic to womanist concepts. Arranged marriage destroys the essence of marriage. Their relationship is dominated by the husband, Same Hanack. Mama Ida is submissive and subjugated in her marriage from the very beginning of their relationship. Same beats her and treats her unfairly. Same uses his sexist power to subdue Mama Ida physically and abuse her verbally, while she trembles at his commands. Same, while talking to Mama Ida, shouts at her, while giving commands, and also having the right to lose their temper. « Une femme doit pouvoir faire ses instincts et éviter de s'empoter en présence de son mari » (Tache : p. 40). Meaning; "A woman should learn to keep her emotions to herself and avoid losing her temper in the presence of her husband." (Our translation)

The implication of the foregoing is that Same wants Mama Ida to be quiet whenever he is speaking to her. He believes silence is a sign of respect and authority. He believes shooting her down during their conversation on issues will be more appropriate to put her where she belongs as a woman. He does not want any freedom of expression from her or any sign of insubordination. If she dares talk, he beats her like a goat or a stubborn child. The writer condemns wife battery, the act of beating and harassing the female in a heterosexual relationship. As for the female protagonist, it is Same who afflicts her. These acts are unfair to women and they need a corrective measure. In a matrimonial union, there should be freedom of speech or expression. In their relationship as husband and

wife, there is communication gap. Whenever Same wishes to give his wife a response to whatever questions she poses, Same would insult her as if she is his house maid.

Same isolates her from any external contact with friends and families. He believes he has paid her bride price and so she has no right to disobey him. For instance, he forbids her from visiting her village and her family members. He believes that she solely belongs to him. This is revealed in his statement here. “Mets-toi dans la tête que j’ai payé la dot et que tu n’as plus rien à voir la bas. “ Same wants his wife to remain silent and obedient whenever he addresses her. In this kind of relationship there is no freedom of expression from the female spouse. He builds in fear into the heart of Mama Ida, isolating her from any external contacts like not allowing her to visit any of her family relations and also have friends, telling her that he has paid her bride price and so she belongs to him entirely.

One of the institutions through which the traditional African man enjoys authority and supremacy is marriage. With marriage comes power of African men to suppress their women. Bassek, through Same’s attitude, problematizes the patriarchal powers that the African marriage confer on the male partner at the expense of the female. . In the above quotation, Mama Ida is suppressed and agrees to whatever decisions made by her husband, Same. She has been reduced to a property or commodity because Same declares he paid her bride price and so he has the right to toss her anywhere. Mama Ida remains his property.

Furthermore, the author tries to address the issue of unwanted sex in marriage which also leads to unwanted pregnancy. Mama Ida has no power to stop unwanted sex. Same has sexual authority over his wife. Same exploits and overpowers his wife restricting her within the domestic walls of household chores and makes her to nurture many children. At the age of 55, Same still expects babies from Mama Ida. He attempts to control her womb. He uses biblical examples to convince Mama Ida, telling her she has no faith in God for being worried about having more babies at the age of 55.

Mama Ida is persuaded and agrees with her husband. The author reacts against numerous children bearing because it is anti-social behavior on health care. It is irresponsible to keep having children when they are already struggling to cope. Although, there are many people who have large families and they are functioning incredibly well, having good look on them. But, a family such as Same’s who can hardly feed his family

three times a day becomes a danger. An abusive man, no job, bringing the child into the world consistently is like starting the poverty system all over again. Hitherto, the author makes a comparison with the kind of family which Patricia advises her mother to imitate. She keeps telling her mother that she is worn out due to child bearing and rearing instead of having fewer children or smaller family which will make her home enjoyable, affordable and would even allow her to have a career and enrich her children's lives assuming she was educated.

3.1.2 **Motherhood**

Motherhood as presented by the pan-nationalist concept is mythical and used as a metaphor to symbolise Africa. However, African women who inherited this model criticise it strongly and attempted to change its tenor. Many female African writers debunk this myth by revealing the social realities of motherhood and the experiences of women as a mother. The accurate representation of African black women is revealed because they see that most of African male novels are a literary genre which is filled with masculinist stereotypical representation of women. In many works of African male writers, female characters are assigned traditional role. One of these roles is maternity especially where children are involved in a heterosexual relationship.

The absence of children in marriage is a great challenge to the peaceful co-existence of the couple. Filomina Steady (1981) notes that motherhood is very important in Africa, and that is why almost all African female writers explore the theme of motherhood in their novels. Childbearing is very important in marriages, especially in African marriages. When a couple's marriage is confronted with reproductive challenge, so many sacrifices would be made to appease the gods in the traditional way. They seek for both spiritual and medical means to get children.

A nurturing mother is seen as a committed person who is universalist loving men, women and children sexually and non-sexually as assumed by womanism. The real African value of motherhood is the rigours and ordeals of childbirth. Thus, female African writers lay emphasis on this through the experiences of childbirth. Women take on a motherly role as men's or their husbands' caretaker, their biological children's caretakers and non-biological children's caretakers because child training is a collective social

responsibility in the traditional African society. For these reasons, women are good caregivers. They believe that birth and death are common to all people. Women nurture both male and female children right from their birth till their death, which means that women are naturally gifted and endowed by God for their nurturing potentials. Even from the womb, children are tied to their mother's navels to have life.

In Ngolle's *Sous la cendre le feu*, the writer sheds light on the importance of motherhood as part of societal obligations in the institution of marriage which involves chains of challenges in the African francophone societies. As emphasised by the womanist concept, the novel captures the peculiar experiences of the couple, especially in the married life of Mina, who is portrayed as the black woman, having the real African values of reproductive challenge in childbearing and nurturing. Mina narrates how she had been nurtured by her parents to become a full adolescent. She reveals that, the nurturing of a girl-child is quite different from a boy-child. As a female child, in the Cameroonian society, the girl-child's education has to start from when she is little, a female child has to be obedient, reserved and must not raise her voice against the male child, according to their culture. A female child is saddled with domestic chores:

Mes parents ont fait de moi une petite fille obéissante et réservée, qui ne doit pas élever le tan devant des garçons – une fille rampue aux tâches domestiques ; cette petite fille est devenue plus tard, dans la suite logique des choses, la femme idéale. (Sous: p.8)

My parents made me an obedient and reserved little girl that must not raise her voice before the boys-a girl saddled with domestic chores; this little girl will become, later in life, an ideal woman. (Our translation)

The author, through the female speaker, decries social inequalities that plague the cultural milieu. The social construction of the feminine ideal is enshrined in the upbringing of the female child and it is empowered by culture “obéissante”, “réservée” “qui ne doit pas élever le tan devant des garçons” or “rampue aux tâches domestiques” are indoctrinating elements of the society's cultural engineering that fabricate the ideal out of the girl child in order to produce a submissive and full time housewife domesticated woman (wife). To the author, no child, regardless of his or her gender or sex should be treated as inferior.

Generally, both male and female children should undergo the same training while growing up to the stage of adolescent. This will make them have a real mature mind to manage their married life. This act is demonstrated in Djibri's attitude, during the early years of his marriage to Mina, he becomes caring, cooks, and even feeds the baby despite his position and status as a Lawyer. The author believes that, if this is not met, the collective well-being and complementary role of the nurturing of children would never be achieved. The author depicts the pre-natal and post-natal stages of reproduction to foreground the rigours and sufferings of women during these stages in marriage. Mina, while trying to help Sylvie, her bosom friend with her birthday party, discovers she is so tired with fatigue, feeling bloated to the extent that her mood swings; these are common symptoms of early pregnancy:

- Tu sais, Sylvie ? Je crois que je suis vraiment enceinte.
- Qu'est-ce qui te faire dire cela ? demande-t-elle sans me regarder.
- Cette fatigue, ces étourdissements... on dit souvent que les débuts d'une grossesse se manifestent ainsi, non ? (Sous : p. 25).
- You know, Sylvie? I think that I am truly pregnant.
- Who tells you that, she asked me without looking at me.
- This tiredness, these surprises ... one, often says that it is early symptoms of pregnancy, ?

Sylvie says pregnancy is not a disease for Mina's age. Pregnancy is a woman's privilege; it is the means for survival of human species. Djibril makes Mina's pregnancy a special one, he claims it. He cares for the pregnancy; he shows more care for Mina as a good womanist who cares for the welfare of other people. He calls her 'Ma petite fleur' meaning 'my little flower'. In essence, a womanist man is a domestic man whose roles in the family are not sexist, that is, defined by gender. He sees the survival of all sexes as a preoccupation.

Mina gives birth to Fanny after five months of their marriage. They are both happy especially when Djibril accepts to father her child, which means, Fanny is adopted as his true biological son. It is very rare for an African man to father a child that does not belong to him. The writer sensitises that it is possible to achieve the communitarian concept of

womanism of the well-being of people in the society. Djibril as a pro-womanist seeks the well-being of Mina and Fanny who belongs to another man. At times, in marriages, we have children that are from different mothers and fathers living in peace and harmony. This is seen in the comportment of Djibril as revealed by Mina:

Djibril et moi étions des parents heureux. Il parlait avec fierté de sa jolie petite fille, et la conviât des yeux. J'en étais arrivée à oublier que Fanny n'était pas de lui, tant son comportement a l'égard de ce bébé était paternel et naturel. (Sous: p. 69)

Djibril and I were happy parents. He spoke with pride of his little daughter and closed his eyes to the extent of forgetting that Fanny was not for him, his comportment with regards to this baby was paternal and natural. (Our translation)

Mina gives birth to her second child with ease, especially when Djibril is seen helping her with domestic chores and also occupying himself with the care of the first born saying: "C'était un plaisir de le regarder bercer la petite, lui donner son biberon, jouer avec elle" (p. 98) meaning: "It was a pleasure seeing him kissing the little girl, feeding her with her feeding bottle, playing with her". It is very unusual for most African men to take care of their baby, and also with domestic chores.

Later, Mina gives birth to another baby named Djibrilla:

Puis le bébé était né. C'était un beau petit garçon, noir dès la naissance, et qui s'annonçait aussi beau que je l'avais souhaité. Nous l'appelâmes Djibrilla comme nous l'avions prévu, et je remerciai le ciel de m'avoir exaucée. Ma mère vint m'assister une fois de plus, (Sous : p.99).

Then the baby was born. He was a little handsome boy, dark at birth, and came as handsome as expected. We named him Djibrilla as we had promised, and I thanked the heaven for having it fulfilled. (Our translation)

In reproductive health, there should be integration of people's services. The concept also recognises that the health of the adult builds on the health of the child, and that this is probably truer in the area of reproductive health.

At the birth of her second child, the mother has to come over again to assist in taking care of the child apart from the services of the house girl. For every childbirth in Africa, there are people to help the mother with child rearing. In the contemporary African society, when a woman gives birth, it is the responsibility of the immediate relative to help

the mother who has been delivered of a baby. The author reiterates reproductive health, using Djibril, Mina's mother and the housemaid as representatives to save and serve motherhood because all women should have the right to safe motherhood after the rigours they have gone through in labour. These three caregivers are also seen as really contributing to the well-being of both the mother and the child, since the theory advocates ethics of maternal care. With their supportive motives, Mina, after few weeks of delivery, is able to go out with her family friends who come to visit her and the baby. The husband advises that she takes her time to rest while he does the cooking and takes care of the children:

Djibril me conseillait alors de rester au lit, arguant que je n'avais pas encore bien récupéré. Il faisait leur toilette aux enfants, les faisait manger, m'apportait parfois mon petit-déjeuner au lit, me laissait me rendormir le temps qu'il me fallait. (Sous: p. 101)

Djibril advised me to rest in bed, arguing that I had not well recovered. He made the children to toilet, made them eat, put at times my breakfast on bed, would leave me to sleep again till whenever I like.

During the delivery of the third child, Mina undergoes a surgical operation and the husband, Djibril, stands by her. He is the first to announce to her that she has been delivered of a baby boy:

Mais oui, ma chérie, tu as accouché hier en fin de journée, et c'est un beau garçon de trois kilos deux cents grammes. Tu nous as fait bien peur, mais maintenant tout va bien.

- On a dû t'opérer, petite fleur, parce que tu étais trop faible pour pouvoir résister longtemps. (Sous: pp. 103-104).
- But yes, my dear, you were delivered late in the evening yesterday of a baby, and he is a handsome boy of 3.2 kgs. You made us fear, but now all is well.
- They had to operate on you, little flower, because you were too weak to continue the labour for long resist long. (Our translation)

Good complementary values among couples facilitate reproductive health in marriage. Due to this, Mina is able to be delivered of a baby safely. All the while, she is

able to have enough rest during pregnancy; the good harmonious relationship with the husband is also intact to facilitate her baby's delivery. All these matter for every married woman in the institution of marriage. The only time that Mina experiences ill-health and unhappiness is when Hadja, Djibril's sister, intrudes into their home. It is this intrusion that makes Djibril lose focus and change his comportment towards Mina; he will no longer be a good and devoted husband. His sister lambastes him for doing her wife's job and tells him that at the birth of every third child in their community, that child has to be named by the father; Yaya is given to Mina's child without her consent. Hadja discriminates against the happiness of Mina. The author reveals and readdresses the state at which women in the society destroy the happiness of their fellow women in the institution of marriage. This view is buttressed by Mojola (1996:253) who posits that "African women themselves, by acts of commission and omission, impede the full actualization of womanism." In the novel, Djibril with his entire caring attitude towards his wife and children becomes a changed man completely; he no longer cooperates to undertake domestic and childrearing tasks. Djibril's attitude makes Mina sad and depressed.

In Kuoh-Moukoury's *Rencontre essentielles*, motherhood is radically described as 'the seal of destiny.' That is, without motherhood, a woman should not be called a mother. The author portrays Flo who even without her own biological child, is still called a mother. Flo describes how she feels as an expectant mother. She is very pleased and happy with her state. She describes and imagines what the child will be like at the prenatal stage of her pregnancy.

Cet enfant, vous ne pouvez savoir comme je le veux beau, fort, intelligent. Mieux. Plus. Toutes les qualités au superlatif. (Rencontre: p. 40)

You cannot know how much I want this child to be beautiful, strong, intelligent-to be better, to have more, to be superlative in everything. (Essential Encounters: P. 20.)

All expectant mothers would wish the good things of life for their unborn babies. This means that nurturing a child starts from when the child is yet to be born. It commences at the prenatal or antenatal stage. Even before pregnancy comes into the picture at all, all women wish good things for their children when they get married.

In *Recontres essentielles*, quickening moments of Flo's child are felt in her womb. She derives joy and at the same time, she feels pains:

Je le sens en de petits mouvements nerveux le long de mon flanc, parfois de réelles douleurs (Rencontres : p. 40).

I begin to feel the child's little nervous movements running along my side. Sometimes, it causes real pain. (Essential Encounters: P. 20.)

Flo reflects the joys of motherhood. The birth of a child is painful, rigorous and risky, but women forget their experiences after childbirth. The mere sight of the newborn baby often overshadows the pains they encounter:

Elle doit être reconnaissante, la femme que le destin dote d'une grossesse sans histoires pénibles, et à qui, le jour de la délivrance, la vue de l'enfant fait oublier la longue attente et toutes les souffrances (Rencontres : p. 40).

A woman must truly be grateful if destiny sends her a carefree pregnancy, and if on the day of the delivery, the sight of the child makes her forget the long wait and all the suffering she incurred. (Essential Encounters: p. 20.).

As fate would have it, Flo's dreams are shattered as she has a miscarriage during latter months of the pregnancy. Many women have miscarriages which have no respect for age or status. It can occur in the early stage of pregnancy or its latter stage. At times, when miscarriage does occur, women blame themselves for such act. In the novel, Flo blames herself for the cause of her miscarriage:

Je me suis moi-même détruite. C'est ma faute, je ne me suis pas assez reposée. Le métro, les courses, la vaisselle, la maison..., de longues heures passées à tout faire moi-même, le petit salaire de Joel si insuffisant pour nous deux... Paris tout entier, la seule ville au monde où l'on accepte de souffrir. Je me sens dénoncée, la nature me refuse ce qu'elle accorde aux autres. (Rencontre: p. 42)

I have destroyed myself. It is my fault – I hadn't gotten enough rest – the subway, the shopping, the dishes, the house... the long hours spent doing everything myself, Joel's modest salary insufficient for the two of us... everything about Paris, the only city in the world where one accepts suffering. I feel deprived – nature refuses me what it accords to others. (Essential Encounters: p.21)

Kuoh-Moukoury reflects the burden of maternity which falls on the African women. Maternity is a unique privilege as Flo says : ‘Elle doit être reconnaissante la femme que le destin dote d’une grossesse sans histoires pénibles, et à qui, le jour de la délivrance, la vue de l’enfant fait oublier la longue attente et toutes les souffrances’ (p.40). Maternity is a unique health burden for women. Most women, when pregnant, overwork or are overworked. Unfortunately, some African men like Flo’s husband leave them to do all the domestic chores which should be shared between the man and the woman, for both biological and social reasons; it is the woman that receives the adverse effect of overworking during pregnancy, just like in the case of Flo. As observed in the above excerpt, Flo is saddled with domestic chores without a helper. She complains of her husband’s insufficient funds to cater for her needs. All these factors cause her dreams to be shattered. The writer shows how the heavy burden of domestic chores and poverty can affect the health of women when they do not receive proper care during pregnancy. Kuoh also shows how childlessness affects the marriage of Flo and turns her to a frustrated woman.

In Bâ’s *Une si longue lettre*, the importance of motherhood is portrayed in Ramatoulaye’s childbearing and rearing capacity. Ramatoulaye occupies herself with the upkeep of her twelve children, which causes her a great deal of concern even when her husband abandons her for a much younger girl. Since her thirty years of marriage, she has been occupied with the upkeep of her children, including buying of foodstuff and catering for schooling. In old age, she learns how to drive the car in order to take her children to school. She is a committed disciplinarian who guides her children and keeps them busy with domestic chores and private lessons for their educational progress. For instance, Aïssatou bathes the younger ones, cooks and does the house chores. Aamy and Awa, the twins, assist Aïssatou in domestic tasks too. She discusses this with her friend in the letter to Aïssatou, her bosom friend.

In Mariama Bâ’s *Une si longue lettre*, the protagonist chronicles her enslaved marital life in a letter to her intimate friend, Aïssatou. From the womanist point of view, it is a way by which the writer in the life of the protagonist expresses her exploited struggles in her marital relationship with her husband. She is emotionally and sociologically traumatised. It is on this note that she decides to document her feelings by voicing out to

her friend in a letter, in order not to destroy herself internally, which could cause her untimely death. Ramatoulaye narrates the story of her love life with her late husband Modou Fall in a letter to her childhood friend, her confidant. The letter is written during her forty-day period of mourning prescribed for a widow by Islamic and traditional customs. The text talks about love, tolerance, polygamy, endurance, grief, isolation, child rearing, abandonment, humiliation, divorce, oppression, widowhood, loneliness, unfaithfulness, death and emotional trauma.

Ramatoulaye's relationship with Modou starts while in school. She emphasises the thoughts, feelings and the care they had for each other. It should be noted that not all courtships lead to marriage. Marriage is not built in a day; a relationship develops gradually and may or may not materialise into marriage. Ramatoulaye's mother does not approve of this marriage simply because she has the impression that the degree of a man's love for a woman should be greater, well seen and shown by the man to the woman and not the other way around. If the reverse is the case, such a marriage does not last. Her mother persuades her to go for Dauda Dieng instead of Modou Fall because she believes Dieng's love for her is an authentic one.

The argument of her mother turns out to be a reality because her thirty years of marriage is fraught with disillusionment. Ramatoulaye is treated like a piece of rag, like a second-hand boubou. After procreation, Ramatoulaye and Modou's relationship diminishes. Despite her faithfulness, Modou takes to a much younger girl who is her daughter's mate in school. She enslaves herself throughout the thirty years of her marital relationship with Modou Fall. The ill-treatment of women in marriage is anti-womanist. The author uses this medium to create awareness for men to change from their oppressive act on women. Out of bitterness she asks herself where she has gone wrong.

Bâ reveals the images of women in marriages before and after procreation and portrays the rate at which African men relegate and reduce their wives to objects. Women are mostly used, dumped and abandoned by African men in the text. They have no respect for women. Men abuse, disrespect and disregard the emotions of women in marriage after taking away their dignity and debarring them from exercising their rights. All these acts are anti-women which the author denounces in the male characters. Ramatoulaye ponders on what could have prompted her husband to take another woman and abandon her after their marriage of thirty years that has been blessed with twelve children.

The foregoing reflects the womanist phenomenon whereby every woman is concerned with the progress and unity of every member of her family, most especially when it takes into consideration the complementary role of the husband and wife, which makes marriages to work. Her worry is premised on the fact that the relationship of Aïssatou and Modou before procreation is painted as smooth. However, after procreation, the husband abandons her to take another wife. When Aïssatou can no longer bear the insult, she moves out of the marriage. We shall shortly return to the question of Aïssatou's divorce in relation to womanist poetics.

Jacqueline, another female character in the novel, nearly goes mad when she discovers her husband's extra-marital affairs with strange ladies. She believes she has cancer of the head and feels strangely inside her. She conducts various tests in various hospitals, but all the results of her tests indicate that she is normal. The doctor diagnoses that she is going through stress and distress owing to her husband's misconducts.

Jacqueline suffers emotional and psychological trauma because her inner strength to bear the odds of marriage is very weak. One needs an inner strength to overcome the odds and ordeals of marriage. This inner strength is found in Ramatoulaye. Despite Ramatoulaye's marital ordeals, she still remains her normal self. She damns all consequences to destroy herself. Bâ reveals in *Ramatoulaye* the womanist concept which negates self-destruction from their spouses. Again, the feminist and womanist concepts are used by the author as a contrast by revealing the inner strength of both female characters who are represented as white feminist and black womanist. Jacqueline who represents the white feminist could not accommodate the rigours of marriage especially the constant cheating of her black husband, and therefore, wants to die with high blood pressure while Ramatoulaye is a replicate of the black womanist who can accommodate rigours of all shapes and kinds in marriage to the detriment of allowing her husband to take another wife. The womanist ideology is against a woman wanting to destroy herself despite all odds from her spouse. This notion, therefore, becomes a caution to all women to deviate from such act.

Aïssatou, on the other hand, cannot bear this; instead of staying there to watch and experience the odds of polygamy, she prefers to rescue herself by opting out so as to fulfill her destiny. The act of opting out in marriage is not totally accepted by the proponents of

womanism because the rearing of children is not seen as complete task without the input of the father. Therefore, the fatherly care and responsibilities are lost. Though instead of self-destruction by a woman, according to the womanist theory, separation is accepted to foster harmonious co-existence in the society:

De jeunes enfants ne posent pas de graves problèmes d'entretien et d'éducation ; lavés, nourris, soignés, surveillés, les miens poussent avec bien sêr la bataille Presque quotidienne contre plaies, rhumes, Maux de tête ou j'excelle, à force de combattre. (Lettre:p.145)

The upkeep and education of young children do not pose serious problems: washed, fed, cared for, supervised, my own are growing well with, of course, the nearly daily battle against scores, colds, headaches, in which I excel, simply from having had to struggle. (Letter: p. 75)

Through the character, the role of women in nurturing children is established in Ramatoulaye. Her caring and loving attitudes to her children and also to that of her husband's relatives are manifested in her character as a good care-giver. She is always after the well-being of everybody around her, which is a good attribute of a good mother. The writer reveals the importance that the Senegalese society accords to having many children because it is believed that children are synonymous with wealth.

After childbirth, the shape of women changes because of the rigours they go through. Though it is a great joy for women to have their own children after much suffering, it is still the women that lose their shapes. This is revealed in Ramatoulaye's feelings, while she looks into the mirror to view herself. She complains bitterly about her body posture which has changed because of multiple childbirths and yet she is not appreciated by her husband who abandons her for a younger girl. He benefits from her youthfulness and later abandons her, despite giving him twelve children comprising of boys and girls.

In her letter to Aïssatou, Ramatoulaye discusses her struggle to encourage her children to continue to respect their father regardless of their circumstance. When her older children advise her to quit her marriage, even though she is heartbroken, she tells them that she will not. She gives her children liberal education and curbs every wrong thing they are into. Daba, her elder daughter, stands as the prototype of the liberated African woman. She is placed on the same footing as a man. She and her fiancé do domestic chores together. This manner demonstrates a real complementary role postulated

by womanists. Abou believes that Daba is his wife and not his slave. “Elle n’est pas mon esclave, ni ma servante.” (p. 143)

In the course of raising her children, Ramatoulaye discovers that Arame, Yaccine and Dieynaba have started smoking, drinking and partying. They represent the next modernised generation after liberation from France. Even with the free hand given to the children, Ramatoulaye is able to notice their misconduct and is able to curb them. Womanist features are exhibited in Ramatoulaye’s character as good caretaker of children and hardworking woman. She contributes to the survival of her children by ensuring that they become useful members of the society. Alionne and Malick get hit by a motorcyclist while playing ball in the street. They are disappointed that Ramatoulaye does not get mad at the cyclist but at the boys because they were not concerned of their safety while playing in the streets.

Aïssatou gets impregnated by Ibrahima Fall, a law student. Their relationship is not a hidden one; Ibrahima Fall is used to visiting the home of the Modous. The pregnancy is accepted by both families. Ibrahima says that he will marry Aïssatou if Ramatoulaye would allow it. By avoiding such incident to occur in the lives of her other female children, she, therefore, teaches them sex education and the use of contraceptive: Je me decide enfin à aborder les problemes d’education sexuelle (Letter: p:170).

The training given to Ramatoulaye’s children in *Une si longue lettre* and that given to Jean Paul’s children in *Modukpè, le rêve brisé* are quite different. The children in *Modukpè, le rêve brisé* are reared in a harsh and strict way. The children, especially the girls, are not given some level of freedom. They are under cruel conditions and are maltreated. Women, according to womanism, should be free to express themselves and assert themselves to the authority they desire in a freeway. Dukpé, in her stream of consciousness, questions her birth into her family. In some of her moments of confusion, she asks why things are always going bad for her:

Pourquoi suis-je née, me demandais-je parfois ? Pourquoi dois-je porter ce monde sur mes frêles épaules ! Pensais-je. Est-ce parce que ma mère a commis le crime de m’abandonner à un âge où une fillette a besoin de sa mère pour la guider dans la vie que je dois assumer tant de responsabilités, me demandais-je chaque jour que Dieu fait. (Modukpè: pp 23-24)

Why was I born? I sometimes asked myself. Why should I carry this world on my fragile shoulders! I thought. Was it because my mother committed the crime of abandoning me at an age when a girl needs her mother to guide her in life that I am compelled to assume so many responsibilities? I used to ask myself each day made by God. (Our Translation)

When one compares both situations, one observes that children that are given liberal upbringing are freer to discuss anything with their parents. For instance, Aissatou's boyfriend is known to the mother, and nothing is hidden from her. Even when she gets pregnant, her mother is not so worried because she already knows her boyfriend. Female authority and power are displayed in the character of Ramatoulaye because both her and her children are united and understand each other. In Fassinou's *Modukpè, le rêve brisé*, the female power in child rearing is weak and is rejected as female womanist power. It is noted that the boyfriend of Modukpè is an unknown person, who poses more problems for the mother, leading to the rejection of her daughter's pregnancy. Womanist nurturing powers should be reflected in the rearing of children for their socio-cultural upbringing and development.

Moi, je laissais mes filles sortir de temps en temps. Elles allaient au cinéma, sans ma compagnie, elles recevaient copines et copains. Des arguments justifiaient mon comportement : à un certain âge, irrémédiablement, le garçon ou la fille s'ouvre au sentiment de l'amour. Je souhaitais que mes filles en fassent sainement la découverte, sans sentiment de culpabilité, sans cachotterie, sans avilissement. J'essayais de pénétrer leurs relations, je créais un climat propice au bon maintien et à la confiance. (Lettre: p.150)

As for me, I let my daughters go out from time to time. They went to the cinema without me. They received male and female friends. There were arguments to justify my behavior. Unquestionably, at a certain age, a boy or girl opens up to love. I wanted my daughters to discover it in a healthy way, without feelings of guilt, secretiveness or degradation. I tried to penetrate their relationships. I created a favourable atmosphere for sensible behaviour and for confidence. (Letter: p.77)

In *Rebelle*, Keita depicts out the nurturing and caring attitude of black women as emphasised in the womanist proposition. These features are societal obligations of the mother in motherhood. Children are blessings and comfort of a woman, especially to the sub-Saharan African woman when the world is against her.

Matou and Malimouna live alone in Boritouni, while the husband, Louma abandons them when Malimouna is hardly two years old, in pretence that Matou is unable to give birth to a male child. Matou resigns to her fate to nurture Malimonna. She remains unmarried, satisfied, and grateful to God for her only child. From childhood, Matou is the only one supporting and caring for Malimonna, morally and financially; she takes up the fatherly role to see that her child is well brought up and refuses to succumb to patriarchal structure that masterminds her unjust treatment. Her affection to Malimouna is shown on two occasions when Malimouna is lost in the bush by Dimikela and Seynou who brings her home and also during the initiation of the girls who are soon due for circumcision. When her daughter is found, she feels happy and curdles her:

En voyant sa fille aussi perturbée, Matou passa son bras autour des épaules de Malimouna et la berça doucement. (Rebelle: p. 10-11).

Seeing her daughter so disturbed, Matou passed her arms round Malimouna's shoulders and cradled her gently. (Our translation)

Mothers generally are used to cradling their children, to make them feel accepted and rest assured in bad circumstances that surround them or they get involved with. She makes sure that she never raises the issue of the accident again so as to make Malimouna happy from her sad mood. She also seats by her when they are watching the girls who are due for circumcision and looks through her daughter's eyes to read her comportment. This shows the mutual mother-daughter relationship. This quickly makes her to notice some funny behaviour in her daughter. She observes that since the incident in the bush, her daughter has been behaving funnily and strangely. Matou in her daughter's condition tries to feel her front head to see whether she has a temperature or fever.

When her daughter complains that she does not want to be part of the audience any longer, Matou also takes excuse from her friends on the ground that she wants to attend to her daughter. Mother-daughter relationship is recognised in the womanist theory as a network that provides care, support and child corrective measures to marital situations in the novel. For instance, Matou is able to survive her broken marriage because of the existence of Malimonna, if not, she would have been associated with suicide, depression or mental illness since the husband had left the marriage during Malimouna's childhood. After Malimouna's successful resistance against circumcision, her father comes from

nowhere, seeing that Malimouna is pretty and has all the good posture a lady should have, comes to drag her for an arranged marriage involving his trader friend, Sado, as the husband. In this scene, both mother and daughter follow Louma in tears. Matou decides to go with Malimouna and stays with her to witness what would happen to her. She is, of course, sure that her daughter is a virgin. She decides to keep her body, especially by preserving her clitoris. Her mother never knows her daughter has carefully resisted by circumcision. She is too worried about her safety and condition. Matou therefore consoles her daughter since she can see that she is emotionally and psychologically traumatised.

The author makes a case for the improvement of women's health and their survival in childbearing and rearing because she believes that in francophone African countries, women have many children than they can bear or that the existing social services can support. This shows the act of irresponsibility in various marriages when they are already struggling to cope in taking care of them. Some mothers are worn out due to childbearing and rearing. The number of children a woman has increases her risks during her next pregnancy. Too many pregnancies can deplete mother's nutrients and stretch her uterus. This is experienced by Fanta, who within four years of her marriage, she gives birth to four children. This act is really telling on her health as she hardly sleeps most times during the day and at night. She is disturbed by the cries of her babies. She does the domestic chores without any aid except when her friend, Malimouna, is around to assist her with her babies. This becomes so worrisome to Malimouna who sees this as act of female domestication and subordination. Malimouna complains bitterly, that her friend will never cope with such a situation:

Lorsqu'elle annonça à Malimouna qu'elle était de niveau
enceinte celle-ci ne put s'empêcher de s'écrier.

Mais comment vas-tu t'en sortir avec tous ces bébés ?

Malimouna calcula rapidement.

Noura n'aura même pas trois ans et les jumeaux auront à
peine quatorze mois quand ce bébé naîtra ! Et c'est toi qui
parlais de t'instruire comme moi ! mais quand pourras-tu le
faire ! (Rebelle: p.92).

When she announced to Malimouna that she was pregnant, I
cannot stop to shout.

But how are you going to go out with these babies?
Malimouna calculated rapidly.

Noura is less than 3 years and the twins are just fourteen months when this baby was born! And it is you who is talking of education like me! But when will you do it! (Our translation)

Fanta has no access to healthcare. She suffers from depression. Having fewer children will make family enjoyable, affordable and would also allow the mother a career and enrich her children's lives. Here, Fanta has no job and still, she is being oppressed by her husband who keeps beating her regularly. She is unable to actualise her dream to be self-empowered. To attain her goals seems impossible and at the end, she is jailed for allowing her daughter, Noura, to be circumcised, which leads to Noura's death. Good nurturing of her children could not be achieved.

The joy of motherhood is revealed in the relationship of Malimouna and Karim. The early signs of pregnancy are reflected in Malimouna's body when she feels early morning sickness. Due to her experience as an educated lady, she knows that she is pregnant and announces to Karim that he would soon become a father:

Quelques heures après leur étreinte, elle s'était sentie fiévreuse et nauséuse. Elle connaissait ces symptômes, cela ne faisait pas l'ombre d'un doute.

Je crois que tu vas bientôt être papa, avait-elle annoncé
(Rebelle : p. 161)

After gasping for some hours some, she felt feverish and sickly. She knew these symptoms that would not make a shadow of doubt.

I think you will become a father very soon, she announced. (Our translation)

Karim shouts out in joy and asks Malimouna how she gets to know it is actually pregnancy. Malimouna does not confess to him that she has earlier got the experience during her dating with the White man, whom she thought she would marry, a relationship that later collapsed. We shall later come back to Malimouna's romance with the French man. Karim tells her to go for a pregnancy test. Karim and Malimouna go to the hospital for a pregnancy test, and it is positive. He is overwhelmed and could not wait to see the baby. Their relationship during this period is captured as the womanist complementary roles to each other, viewing the progress and well-being of Malimouna which will also contribute to his well-being. This conjugal attitude will equally embellish their marriage

as husband and wife. In few months, Karim buys Malimouna a car in order to ease her mobility; this makes her happy. The happiness of an expectant mother is very important to reproductive health. This will ease quick delivery. Within eight months, Malimouna has started driving her little blue vehicle. Malimouna gives birth to a baby boy on a Sunday morning:

Elle accoucha un dimanche matin. Les contractions avaient duré toute la nuit. C'était un gros garçon. Il avait tous les traits de son père qui se pâmait d'admiration en le prenant dans ses bras. (Rebelle: p. 163).

She gave birth on a Sunday morning. The contraction had lasted throughout the night. He had all the traits of his father that, in his admiration, made him put him in his arms. (Our translation)

Malimouna never imagines she would ever have a baby. She is so full of joy. This is joy of motherhood. She shows her tenderness to her baby. She expresses her joy thus:

Malimouna n'avait pas imaginé ce qu'elle aurait ressenti en tenant ce petit être dans ses bras. Elle était envahie par une infinie tendresse. Une tendresse qu'elle ne connaît – ne sait pas et que même son mari ne lui avait pas fait éprouver. (Rebelle: p. 163)

Malimouna had not imagined what she would have felt while holding this baby in her arms. She was invaded by this infinite tenderness. This tenderness she knows nothing about, that even her husband has not tested on her. (Our translation)

The author reflects the mother-child tendencies in motherhood. Mothers always have strong feeling for their children. They put up a protecting act on their children guiding them physically and spiritually not wanting any mishap on their babies. The mother putting and cuddling her baby shows unfailing love and tenderness; she embraces her child, creating a unified accurate composition. In tenderness, mother's arms are more comforting than anyone else's, thus Malimouna carries the pains, tears, joys and tenderness as experienced in holding her child.

In another two years, Malimouna gives birth to a baby girl. She says this baby girl takes her resemblance. The couple is very much happy and lives fine together. After some months, Karim begins to put up strange behaviour. He complains of the babies' noises at night. Saying their noise disturbs him and keeps shouting at Malimouna to take proper

care of them and even goes to the extent of telling Malimouna to quit her association so as to take care of their children. He no longer helps carry the babies' feeder nor feeds them either. He rather spends time with his computer and hardly cares about Malimouna or the children – Toula and Millia. He starts keeping late nights and later spends most of his days outside with other women, until he finally tells Malimouna he wants to take another wife. Karim takes up a silly manner to punish his wife for no just reason. He wants Malimouna out of her association, so as to stay at home and with that, he can display his male authority over her. However, Malimouna refuses and keeps to her association so as to help other unprivileged women from their oppressive situations.

The author also shows the effect that emotional trauma has on a pregnant mother. For a woman, to be delivered of a baby sound and safely, she has to always be on a good mood and co-habit with accommodating people who care for her well-being and value her for what she is. Malimouna has a miscarriage when she hears Agnes's conversation with her former fiancé, Philippe Blais, a French man who happens to be Agne's brother. Philippe and Malimouna relocate from Paris to Salouma to settle down for their marriage. Getting to Salouma, Malimouna discovers she is pregnant, while Philippe is over joyous and treats Malimouna with more love and care:

Lorsqu'elle l'annonça à Philippe, il sauta de joie et redouble d'attentions à son endroit. Il était heureux, comme jamais elle ne l'avait vu. (Rebelle : p. 136)

When she announced it to Phillippe, he shouted for joy and redoubled his attention towards her. He was happy as if he had never seen her. (Our translation)

When Malimouna is outside their apartment to take some rest and later comes in to join Philippe and his sister, she overhears Agnes telling Philippe that he cannot marry a black woman:

Tu ne vas tout de même pas nous imposer cette régresse dans la famille, et un tas de petits métis par-dessus le marché. (Rebelle :p.137)

All the same, you will not impose this slave girl and a cluster of young Mulattoos on us in the family. (Our translation)

Keita reflects the exogamous black identity. Dating and marrying across racial lines are accepted by the womanist. Womanism maintains that such marriages should be

natural, common and acceptable. Malimonna enjoys her relationship with Philippe who values her for what she is and gives her respect. Malimouna, along the line, is able to integrate in both the black and white cultures as far as she is concerned. But Agnes perceives that his brother will not be able to cope with the union and declares that their mother who is a white will never agree to that. During their conversation, Malimouna overhears and suddenly her countenance changes and she falls down and has cramps in her stomach:

Malimouna fut soudain prise de violentes crampes au ventre
(Rebelle: p. 138)

Malimouna had suddenly violent cramps in stomach (Our
Translation)

In other words, she has contractions and eventually loses the baby. This subsequently leads to their break-up. Philippe returns to his country, while Malimouna stays back in Africa.

In Fassinou's *Modupkè Le rêve brisé*, childbearing is the next step after which a couple has been joined together as husband and wife. This shows that the end result of marriage is procreation. After some years, if a couple is identified with the problems of reproductive challenge, so many sacrifices would be made to appease the gods in the traditional way, while the Christians and Muslims would appeal to their God either through spiritual or medical means for the "fruit of the womb".

A nurturing mother is seen as a committed universalist person who loves men, women and children sexually or non-sexually as assumed in womanism. The real African value is the rigours and ordeals of childbirth. Women take on a motherly role as men's or their husbands' caretakers, their biological children's caretakers and non-biological children's caretakers. For these reasons, women are good in nurturing. They believe that birth and death are common to all people. Women nurture both male and female children right from their birth till death, which means that women are naturally gifted and endowed by God for their nurturing potentials.

In *Modupkè, le rêve brisé*, child rearing is also foregrounded by the author through the nurturing of Modupkè and her brothers by her mother. Modupkè grows up listening to these stories told by her mother who narrates their childhood development from one stage

to another. She tells Modukpè that she is pushed into marital obligation, which she has never dreamt of or prepared for at a very tender age, deceived by her husband Jean-Paul. She tells her that her marriage with her father is full of pain and misery. She sees her marriage as a dazzle in contrast to what she had expected. She believes it is her destiny and would not want her daughter to fall into such a trap.

Modukpè recounts her mother's experience and pays homage to her for giving her the privilege to be alive:

Je rends hommage à l'auteur de mes jours: elle ne m'en aima que d'avantage et je fus également la princesse de mes quatre frères (Modukpè: p.16)

I pay homage to the author of my days, she has not only loved me more but has equally made me the princess of my four brothers. (Our Translation)

This excerpt emphasises the womanist value of mothering and nurturing which Modukpè testifies to. Here, Modukpè, accentuates on the biological and social importance of motherhood as displaced by her mother. First, allowing her to have the privilege of staying alive and secondly, the role she played as her mother as a good teacher and a role as a medical doctor in nurturing her in the midst of her four brothers despite her suffering. This is because the act of mothering and nurturing is tied to a woman's ability to procreate. Motherhood is cherished by the author because it is seen as African's heritage. She speaks of her mother as the great woman who brought her to life and stood by her in hard times. She also praises and appreciates her mother for taking good care of her when she was still in swaddling-cloths. She recollects how she keeps disturbing her brothers and the co-wives while she hardly walks and talks:

Je passais la journée assise sur la natte apprêtée par les soins de maman. Ma mère nullement vexée par ce qualificatif dont on affublait sa fille, me ramassait de terre, et en riant, me serrant, sur son dos continuait, tout en chantant ses travaux domestiques (Modukpè : p.16)

I spent the day sitting on the mat approved by my mother's care. My mother, not at all offended by this description of which her daughter was affixed, was picking me up, and laughing, hugging me, on her back continued, while singing her domestic work. (Our translation)

She portrays her mother as a committed and hardworking mother, who never gets annoyed. In the course of her growing up, she is used to housework, cooking for a large family, going to the market and also schooling. She is reared in a large polygamous family in the absence of her mother, in which the majority of her siblings are all males. She also watches her four brothers play ball. She is monitored by her cruel father.

In the text, the reality of the experiences of nurturing mothers is captured. This nurturing aspect is mostly seen in the relationship between the black women and their children. For instance, in Adelaide Fassinou's *'Modukpè rêve brisé*, Modukpè's mother narrates all her past experiences to her daughter. She tells her all her love story from the beginning of her courtship to the periods of her separation with her father, Jean-Paul. She tells Modukpè her failures and the story of the birth of Modukpè and her siblings.

Elle me raconta que lorsque la sagefemme lui annonça que c'était une fille qui lui était née, elle était si heureuse (Modukpè : p.15)

She told me that when the midwife announced the birth of a baby girl, she was so happy. (Our translation)

Modukpè's mother's narration of stories to her daughter is to nurture her in order not to fall into the hands of oppressive men; it is to liberate her daughter and to make her know the value of her mother.

In the narrative, the pre-natal and post-natal aspects of childbearing are depicted to show the rigours and traumas of childbirth, which are experiences faced by women. Modukpè feels the constant movement and motion of the child in her womb and she becomes uncomfortable and finds this aspect awful:

...Le fruit que cet homme avait planté en moi se développait grandissait et me rappelait son existence par des coups de pieds et de coude qu'il m'assenait sans crier gare (Modukpè: p.88)

...The seed which this man has planted inside me is developing, growing and reminding me of his existence by leg kicking and elbow-dealing with me without notice. (Our translation)

The quickening of the foetus in the womb is described by Modukpè. She is very uncomfortable. She imagines that the baby in her womb tells or reminds her that he exists

within her. The pre-natal stage is characterised by loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting as experienced by Modukpè:

Je me levai en courant *et al.*lai derrière la chambre, du côté des W.C et là, je me vidai de tout le contenu de mon estomac. Cela me laissa perplexe. (Modukpè: p.78)

I stood up and ran to the back of the room, near the W.C and there, I emptied everything that was in my stomach. That made me perplexed. (Our translation)

She does not know she is going to experience this because she has passed the stage of early pregnancy experiences. It is not until the fourth month that she starts throwing up and feeling so uncomfortable. Her pregnancy continues to grow and she experiences increased salivary discharge, enlargement of the breasts, brown circle around the nipples and the secretion of lymph composed of milk water.

Modukpè's mother gives her daughter a strong support and close monitoring during her pregnancy and even after childbirth. When it is common knowledge that there is a helper beside a pregnant woman, doctors say there will be childbirth with less pains. Modukpè's mother arranges all the expectant mother's needs and the expectant mother's baby's things in the bag and waits for the day when Modukpè will be delivered of the baby. All these supports build up Modukpè's confidence while awaiting the expected day of delivery (EDD). Modukpè experiences another sign. She sees water running down her legs and she shouts in pain:

Il y a même un liquide visqueux qui coule entre mes jambes et... Elle cria quelque chose que je ne compris pas vraiment, mais à travers son monologue revenait l'expression <<poche des eaux>> (Modukpè : p.91)

There is a liquid running between my legs and... She screamed saying something which I did not really understand, however, from her monologue came repeatedly the expression<<water sac>> (Our translation).

When the water sac is broken, invasive monitoring can be used to ensure the safety of the mother and the child. The maternity home has to be visited.

Childbearing is also discussed in *Rencontres essentielles*. Flo describes how she feels as an expectant mother, she sees motherhood as “the seal of destiny.” She is very

pleased and happy with her condition. She describes and imagines what the child will be like at the prenatal stage of her pregnancy:

Cet enfant, vous ne pouvez savoir comme je le veux beau, fort, intelligent. Mieux. Plus. Toutes les qualités au superlatif (Rebelle: p.40)

You cannot know how much I want this child to be beautiful, strong, intelligent, and have the best of everything. (Essential Encounters: p.20 Translated by Toman)

All expectant mothers would wish the good things of life for their unborn babies. This means that the work of nurturing a child starts from when the child is yet to be born. Even before pregnancy comes into the picture at all, all women wish good things for their children when they get married.

In Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes*, the true mark of motherhood is destroyed by fate in Emilienne's life. The womanist concept that recognises and adds value in the act of nurturing is interrogated in the social realities of women's life. Today, that one becomes a mother, and tomorrow, one is seen as a mere woman or lady poses a problem in this novel. The problems of procreation and child rearing are shown in the traditional francophone society as a theoretical womanist concept that allows women to express their oppressive and suppressive struggles in the patriarchal society.

Childrearing and childbearing are not well elaborated since the only child of the protagonist dies at the age of eight. Rekia is the only child of Emilienne. When she was alive, she is presented as being close to her mother which portrays the mother as a caring mother, exhibiting the mother as having the womanist ethical care. She often comes into her mother's room to embrace her. Emilienne recounts her daughter's success. At the age of two, Rekia stands out in her class, which gives her mother joy. She says that this joy helps her to regain her energy despite her struggles for another child that has refused to come. Emilienne continues to appreciate her only daughter because at the age of two her daughter was more expressive than other children older than her.

Rekia is a cheerful, well-balanced and healthy child. She goes to school one day and never returns as she is assassinated by an unknown person. This causes pain and sorrow for the mother, especially when she finds it very difficult to be pregnant for a

second time. Emilienne feels the absence of her daughter who also serves as a consolation for the denied love from her husband.

Fureurs et cris de femmes reveals Emilienne's infertility as an overview of sadness and castigation. Her mother-in-law chases her away from her son, Joseph. The writer sheds light on the experiences of the protagonist in the novel. Emilienne visits various gynaecologists to help her get pregnant. After 8 years of marriage, she has Rukia as the only child and later loses her. After Rukia's death, she searches for another child which fate refuses her. Eva, Emilienne's sister, takes her to a native doctor or herbalist, telling her the importance of childbearing. Eva speaks of Emilienne's infertility, referring to her as an incomplete woman. She advises her to do something about her present condition of childlessness. The importance of childbearing is reiterated through the character of Eva, which reminds us of the importance that society attaches to children. Romandi and Eva advise her because they know that a child belongs not only to the parents but to everybody.

Emilienne ponders on the social injustice meted out women in the society which aggravates their suffering during childbirth and in marriage generally. She thinks of her deprivation as she is unable to bear another child and wishes that men could be given the same privilege by God as given to women to conceive:

Bientôt, elle ne pourra plus se prévaloir du privilège de la maternité. Si les médecins réussissent leurs essais en laboratoire et si les gouvernements donnent leur accord, les hommes pourront dans une dizaine d'années porter des grossesses et accoucher. (*Fureurs*. p.111)

Soon, she could no more overrule the privilege of motherhood. If doctors succeed in their medical laboratory tests and if governments give their consent, men in some 10 years to come will begin to conceive and give birth. (Our translation)

Due to infertility, Emilienne passes through hell in the hands of her in-law. Eyang persuades her son, Joseph, to chase Emilienne away since she can no longer conceive; she calls her a useless woman:

M'as bien comprise, coupe la mère. Cette femme est devenue inutile et tu ne l'aime plus puisque tu passes tes nuits chez une autre (*Fureurs* : p.48).

Understand me well, his mother cuts him short. This woman has become useless and you do not like her anymore since you spend your nights in another woman's house. (Our translation)

The above statement is from the mother-in-law who initiates the idea that Emilienne should be driven away because she can no longer bear children. She tries to separate Emilienne and Joseph, and she orders Emilienne's secretary to start dating Joseph, Eyang asks her daughter to attack her but she rejects her mother's bad intentions. Eyang goes ahead to quarrel with Emilienne in order to frustrate her stay in the house. She calls her all sorts of names and humiliates her. She reminds Emilienne of her infertile state:

Au lieu de faire des enfants comme toutes les femmes, tu élèves des chiens et des chats qui tombent malades, tu les portes dans la voiture et cours les faire examiner par un docteur, et quand ils meurent, tu en rachètes d'autres, ... Tu ferais mieux d'utiliser tout cet argent pour soigner ton ventre malade (Fureurs : p.59).

Instead of making children like all other woman! You train dogs and cats. When they are sick, you put them in the car and rush them to be examined by the doctor, and when they die, you buy others to replace them... It would be better using all your money to take care of your sick womb. (Our translation)

Eyang humiliates Emilienne because of her childlessness. She does this to demoralise Emilienne, her efforts at keeping her husband and her kindness to her spouse's family. Eyang does not pity Emilienne even when she loses her daughter, Rukia, to death. She does everything possible to drive Emilienne out of her son's home with constant quarrel and harassment. Eyang's character negates the womanist view that recognises that women should love one another and appreciate one another and value their emotions to achieve a good balance. Eyang, instead of portraying these good principles, impedes the progress of Emilienne and her husband Joseph. Emilienne becomes frustrated and regrets marrying Joseph.

In *Vie de femme, vie de sang*, motherhood is portrayed as element of sorrow in the relationship between Fatou and Ambroise. Normally, after childbirth, a woman should be provided with all the necessary things that will make her comfortable in her husband's

home, such as money, accommodation, clothings, care and love. But in some marriages, the reverse is the case. Women after childbirth assume the roles of both the husband and the wife. They take and bear all the responsibilities needed to make them comfortable.

In *Vie de femme, vie de sang*, Fatou gives birth to her child, Sydney in his husband's family house, which is very ridiculous. The husband abandons her to live in another apartment without any quarrel or problem. He comes in and out whenever he wants without caring for his family to the extent of quarrelling with his in-laws. This act is *un African*. Again, his child's name is given to him by the mother, not the father:

J'accouchais quelques mois après d'un beau petit garçon Sydney. Un prénom que je gardais jalousement dans un coin douillet de mon cœur. Les parents d'Ambroise avaient décidé de faire les cérémonies traditionnelles neuf jours après la naissance du bébé. (Vie: p. 33).

I gave birth some months after to a handsome little boy, Sydney. A name I guarded jealously in the corner of my heart. Ambroise' parents had decided to do the traditional naming ceremony nine days after the birth of the baby. (Our translation)

Even the naming ceremony of his son is anchored by his parents. This is odd to a black man and it is anti-womanist. In the real African societies, there are women who suffer alone in caring for their homes, when their husbands had vacated and abandoned them for several years; they only come home one day to beg for forgiveness. As Fatou struggles to rear her child without enough means, she decides to look for job and her sister and her fiancé decide to help her with the upkeep of her son, Sydney:

Elle s'occupait du petit enfant comme de son propre fils. Son fiancé aussi. Ils avaient même décidé d'être ses parrains (Vie : p. 36).

She took care of the little child like her own son. Her fiancé also. They had decided to be his god-parents. (Our translation)

The nurturing values of children can be met with close relatives, friends and god-fathers or god-mothers. In Africa, not all biological fathers and mothers' rear children. The author uses the sister, Bali, as the good shepherd of the family to cater for the upkeep of Fatou and the children since Ambrose refuses to be responsible. In sisterhood, Bali

seeks the well-being of her sister, Fatou and her child as propounded in womanist theory. Bali wants her sister to be economically stable, so that she will be able to take care of her child. As soon as the husband sees that his wife is financially strong, he comes back to beg her in order to feed on her again. He has an exploitative tendency. The writer presents this attitude in this way:

S'il te plaît, je voudrais que tu me donnes une autre chance.
Permet au petit de vivre avec son père et de pouvoir
connaître bonheur d'un foyer. (Vie: p. 39)

Please, I would want you to give me another chance. Allow
the boy to live with his father and to be able to know
happiness of home. (Our translation)

The husband's tongue is sugar-coated as he begs for forgiveness, because he knows Fatou loves him and he sees her as a weak and docile woman. Due to her flexibility and simple-mindedness, Fatou agrees to take him back, putting in the accommodating complementary roles enumerated by womanism. She wants a relationship that will give her and her child happiness, hence, she puts up a great deal of tolerance, kindness, care and woman's unconditional love.

After many trials, Fatou thinks Ambroise has changed. He deceives Fatou and her sister, Bali, by pretending that he is a changed person:

Ambroise avait complètement changé. Je croyais que ce
changement était dû à la présence de Bali et de son mari au
pays... Ambroise était devenu un mari attentionné,
amoureux, un père attentif. (Vie: p. 59).

Ambroise had completely changed. I thought this change
was due to the presence of Bali and her husband in the
country... Ambroise had become a serious-minded husband,
loving, attentive father. (Our translation)

Fatou becomes pregnant and still keeps her eyes on the husband. She combines work and house chores together to maintain her home. She forgets the past to make her concentrate on the safety of the unborn baby. The expected day of delivery has gone past and she becomes worried:

Une semaine passe, Je commençai à m'inquiéter. Je rendis
visite à mon médecin... porter une grossesse neuf mois
n'est pas chose facile. (Vie: p. 60)

A week passed, I started to worry. I visited my doctor...
carrying a pregnancy of nine months is not an easy thing.
(Our translation)

The rigours and ordeals of motherhood could be traumatic. Baboni reflects these experiences through Fatou, the female heroine who continues to complain about how she feels and the emotional trauma she undergoes in the hand of an irresponsible husband. Firstly, she sees that her husband's comportment changes for the better and also sees that her baby is quite safe within her. Disturbed with these thoughts, she has to visit the doctor to know when the baby would come for it is already due. In this condition, she becomes depressed and worried. She is unable to sleep: 'Je n'arrive plus à dormir surtout la nuit' p. 60 meaning: (I no longer sleep, during the night). She is asked to take some rest and vitamins by the doctor although she cannot just do that because the husband is not supportive. It is in this condition that an unknown person calls her to inform her, her husband has impregnated a girl named Rosemonde, who lives few houses from their street:

- Voilà, votre mari sort avec une fille qui habite dans votre rue. Et vous la connaissez très bien.
- Comment le savez-vous ?
- J'habite aussi la rue. Ce que fait votre mari ne vous honore pas du tout. Personnellement, je n'apprécie pas. C'est pour cela que j'ai décidé de vous avertir. De plus, vous êtes une femme joyeuse et très gentille. Tout le monde le dit dans la rue. Vous ne méritez pas d'être traitée de la sorte par un homme. (Vie: p. 62).
- Look, your husband is going out with a girl who lives in your street. And you know her very well.
- How do you know?
- I live also in the street. What your husband is doing is not giving you respect. It is for this reason that I decided to inform you. And also, you are a happy and very kind woman. Everybody says this in the street. You do not merit to be treated this way from such a man. (Our translation)

Fatou expects a change in her marriage and a changed behaviour from the husband. According to womanist advocates, negative comportment from people needs to

be corrected, while necessary steps are taken towards the progress of man, woman and their children. Some African men have only helped women to face solitude like Fatou's husband. Fatou is denied her lively moods, such as visiting cinemas, watching films with her husband as they usually do before their marriage. To worsen the situation the husband becomes too irresponsible by spending almost all of his time outside with different women. In Fatou's condition, she does all what her husband should have been doing for her. With her husband's escapades with women, she becomes so frustrated and humiliated in the neighbourhood. Fatou with the black woman's experiences is able to put up the womanist zeal for struggle for her survival in order to overcome her emotional trauma so that she and her baby can survive.

Fatou keeps struggling with her condition. She goes shopping to get some few items for the upkeep of the family. On her way out, she feels liquid running into her wrapper in between her legs:

Je faisais mes courses quand soudain, je sentis un liquide
tremper le pagne que je portais je sus tout suite que c'était le
bébé qui s'annonçait. (Vie: p. 70)

I was shopping when suddenly, I felt dip liquid on the
wrapper I was wearing. I was sure it was the baby that is
announcing its arrival. (Our translation).

A woman bears it all in health, and in sickness, in frustration, selflessness, self-sacrifices, her love knows no bounds. The joy of motherhood is expressed and reflected in the lives of Ambroise and Fatou's relatives. When a child is delivered in African setting, friends and relatives pay visit to the mother and child with a view to offering prayers and presents. After the naming ceremony, Ambroise packs his load to leave his family the third time. Sydney suspects that his father is trying to elope. He demands to know through his innocent question and begs his father to remain with them:

Papa où vas-tu ? Tu voyages et tu nous laisses seuls avec maman ?

Je reviendrai bientôt. Je ne vais pas tarder.

Ne pars pas ; reste avec nous.

Votre maman se débrouille bien. Elle s'arrangera sans moi.
(Vie : p. 73)

Papa where are you going? You are travelling and leaving
us alone with Mama?

I will be coming very soon. I am not going to keep long.

Do not go; stay with us.

Your mum is a good hustler. She will arrange all things without me. (Our translation).

Baboni represents the real qualities of an African woman through the words of Ambroise. African woman can struggle hard to survive without the interference of the husband in a sexist and patriarchal society. The sexist man leaves his woman to work for him, while he goes around to enjoy life and accumulate more women.

Invariably, one notices that Ambroise leaves home because he does not want to bear any responsibility in rearing his children. He goes off again to enjoy his life with other women to the extent of impregnating them and bearing him children.

Ambroise acts like a baby than a helpmate. Such men make the worst husbands. He gambles with his wife's sweats and money. He is unwilling to settle and make ends meet for the family.

3.13 **Girl-child marginalisation**

A female child is disproportionately subjected to inequality in many African societies. Looking at the diversities in culture, a girl-child is perceived and treated negatively in many ways. Generally, people believe that with a girl-child, the name of the family cannot be perpetuated, properties of the family cannot be inherited, thus, there is preference for the male-child. The following categories identify the girl-child in a given community: gender, race, religion, age and class. The girl-child has no control over these identities. It is either she is born into it or she is entrusted upon them. Along the line, the girl-child overcomes her problems while growing, which means that age is the only thing that possibly guarantees her freedom because she would eventually grow into womanhood. Religion and class are also changeable due to the type of society she associates with. That is if she lives in an environment where all her friends and relatives are generally Moslems or Christians; this will definitely affect her choice of class and religion. From the society, the girl-child will be able to make her choice which may or may not improve her class in the society. The social context where the girl-child co-exists determines or interprets the progress of the girl-child. Cultural norms and ideologies of the society can also dictate for a girl-child. A female child is powerless and vulnerable to the

decisions and positions of the society where she lives. Thus, this makes her to be marginalised, and renders her 'less than' and 'unequal' to her male counterparts. Backstrom (1996:541), explains the powerlessness of a female child:

The girl-child is literarily born into powerlessness, there are those who are simply born to power or at least with a right of entry, or easier access, to power.

In many African marriages, women generally have the belief that with a male child, her feet will be firmly rooted in her marriage. Parents (father and mother) have preference to male children as they are entering into the world, they are seen as superior sex while much desire is not placed on female children. The female parents see the girl-child as a child that comes to ruin her marriage, that is, if they are yet to have male children. Thus, a girl-child suffers cruel fate just because she is a girl. This wrong mentality has destroyed many homes and also made so many homes to be poverty-ridden. It has also complicated health history of women from the numerous adventures of looking for a male-child and it has made so many of them unhappy. Also, the girl-child is denied education because she is considered as a poor investment for the future since she is destined to marry outside to a different family. Whereas, when the boys attend school, the girls are left at home to assist the mother with household work, nurture younger siblings or sent out to hawk to generate income for the family. This is one of the ills of the society that needs eradication. Gidabo (2004) posits that cultural and religious attitudes, which endorse male superiority over the women is the primary basis for gender-based violence against females. The male-child grows up with the same perception of being superior to a female child and this is transferred consciously or unconsciously to his own children. Thus, a male-child has every right over the girl-child and asserts power over the female child. In other words, he believes that he is still socially superior.

Many critics and writers have shown that men and women are not conscious of the plight of female child in the society. An example is revealed in Aminata Maiga Ka's short story, "La Voie du salut", excision is performed on a baby girl of about three months. Thus, the baby girl is a victim of the sinister tradition. This baby gives up the ghost (1985:19). It has been submitted that custodians of cultural preservations are both women and men installed in the patriarchal societies. In some African Anglophone and

francophone novels, issues related to girl-child inequality are established. Writers often use their literary texts as “weapons” against gender and sexual inequality. .

The society, represented in most African literary texts written by women, is characterised by female excision, bride price, female infanticide, sex slavery, girl-child trafficking, arranged marriage and service marriage. In Buchi Emecheta’s *Joy of Motherhood* (1994), Oshia, the son of Nnu Ego refuses to fetch water because he is a male while also in Bassek’s *La Tatche de Sang*, Mama Ida does not allow her male children to wash plates, they are taught how to eat and drop their plates for their female sisters. “Fetching water” and “washing plates” are sexually-constructed domestic activities; they are traditionally feminine in Africa’s traditional societies. Keita’s *Rebelle* and Ngolle’s *Sous la cendre le feu* depicts girl-child marginalisation in order to address and promote the lives of women in the contemporary francophone African societies.

Ngolle’s *Sous la cendre le feu* (1990) reflects the subordinate position of the girl-child in the francophone African society. The male-child dominance starts right from childhood, whereby the training of the girl-child is quite different from that of the male-child. From childhood, the females are trained to respect their male counterparts based on age difference. Philosophy is installed in the girl-child by parents. Female children are taught to be reserved and obedient in any condition to their male counterparts. This is declared in the statement of the female narrator, who narrates what her society and culture is all about while she is still a child. This act has really affected many women generally. So many women cannot talk in the public because it is socially constructed by men for men. When it comes to logical thinking in an organisation or an association, just only few women can face the audience to air their views. Politically and socially, women are lagging because of the tradition they are exposed to.

The custodians of this cultural preservation are both father and mother (women and me). They are seen as agents in the society that enact the societal norms which make the girl-child an inferior being or sex as against her privileges in the society. These structures and beliefs make the female child a subaltern being, and subordinate to her male counterpart even from cradle. The societal structure makes the male child a demi-god and gives him more power to do and undo. This power is a right from birth. When he grows up to attain the position of a father, he believes that he is in control. This is depicted in the

text that the complementary role to be played in the system of marriage is never achieved. Even if achieved, it is very minimal. This is revealed in the character of Djibril while he tries to play along with his wife, Mina, as a well-cultured modern man who cares and helps with his wife's domestic chores in the start, and later, he is unable to complete his assignment and goes terribly bad to oppress his wife, using his masculine power which the society has given him.

Evelyne Ngollé's novel offers a strong critique of male behaviours and seeks the re-definition of the cultural norms, such as the traditional expectation of women's complete obedience (Sanusi, 2015). The author portrays Mina's inner agony through stream of consciousness when she ruminates on the domestication of a girl-child who is born to serve as a domestic servant in the family:

Une fille rompue aux tâches domestiques ; cette petite fille devenue plus tard, dans la suite logique des choses, la femme idéale, c'est-à-dire soumise à son mari, bonne mère et bonne ménagère, à la résistance physique et morale inébranlable. (Sous: p. 8)

A girl who is well versed in domestic chores, this little girl who later became a logical consequence of things, the ideal. Woman submissive to her husband, a good mother and a good house wife, with an unshakeable, physical and moral resistance. (Our translation)

Thus, the girl-child is viewed as an ideal woman when she is able to observe domestic chores; a good woman, good housekeeper, who has the moral and physical strength to resist all the odds placed on her by the society through tradition and culture; without these factors, she will not be accepted in the society.

Mina speaks against domestication of the girl-child, she feels there should be a social change in the restructuring of the society where she lives. Since womanism is grounded in the social change theory, many things need to be put in place towards the progress of women in their relationship with the environment. In the novel, the female heroine speaks of how a girl-child is often condemned if she makes a little mistake, while, a male child is always pardoned for his own mistakes or it could just be overlooked:

... dans cette société où, la réputation d'une jeune fille était compromise par une simple rumeur, fondée ou non, et où tout était permis à l'homme, et rien à la femme. (Sous : p.21)

... in this society where the reputation of the little girl was compromised by just a little rumor, founded or not where all was permitted by a man, and nothing for the women. (Our translation)

The author frowns at the social inequality and discrimination that exist in the francophone African setting in order to put a stop to such acts. The girl-child's education is rather insignificant. Mina's father is mocked for sending his female child to school. His family member says that he is wasting his money and time to have sent Mina and her sister to school. The womanist is against this point of view because for a girl-child to excel, progress, and contribute her quota to the progress of the community she lives, she has to be educated. Every individual, male or female, has the equal right to education. Most developing countries in Africa witness gender gap that is persisted at all levels of education. Through education, girls and women are empowered. Thus, the problem militating against the girl-child education has become a lingering issue that female writers attempt to fictionalise so as to sensitise people about the effect of such educational marginalisation.

In *Rebelle* Keita reveals the context of female genital mutilation as a major problem to be tackled as it constitutes threat to the reproductive health of the girl-child. The author feels this act of circumcision is a general problem in the francophone African societies which needs to be addressed. Generally, female genital mutilation is associated with a range of problems, surrounding the health of the girl-child. Through female circumcision, various health problems emanate, such as; chronic pain, infection, sexual dysfunction and obstetric complications. With these experiences, a girl-child is emotionally and psychologically traumatised. A female child who is eventually operated upon, will go through stress, anxiety and depression during the process.

The author, as a concerned womanist or with a womanist tendency, who seeks for the well-being of every girl-child educates readers through the medium of her fiction, about the harmful health effects of female genital mutilation. Malimouna opposes genital mutilation by eradicating it. During her childhood days, she followed her mother to view

the female circumcision acts, she started sweating profusely. The act makes her fear and she grieves the day when it will be her turn. During the initiation of the first sets of female girls before her, she is in great grief and fear to the extent that her mother noticed the way she was trembling and was sweating profusely. The foregoing portrays the psychological and emotional trauma that a female child is subjected to through female genital mutilation. Malimouna has not been operated upon, but the mere sight of it gives her tension and trauma. So many young girls have lost their lives during the act of circumcision, while some have run mental. For instance, Loura dies at the course of being circumcised in the text. Malimouna firmly refuses to submit to female circumcision. She declares to her mother: “Je ne veux pas’ passer cette epreuve p. 15”. Meaning: “I don’t want to go through this test”

Malimouna knows the importance of her clitoris since she has been sensitised by her friend, Sanita, who lives in the city. She manipulates her way out from the hands of Mandika, the circumciser. Fanta’s first child, Loura is circumcised at the age of 9. Fanta complains that her husband would kill her if she does not take her girl for circumcision. She says :« Mon mari me tuera si ce n’est pas fait demain » (p. 123). Later, Loura dies during the opération :

Petite Noura était morte d’une hémorragie dans les souffrances les plus atroces. (Rebelle: p.126).

The little Loura died of hemorrhage in a most atrocious guffing. (Our translation)

The tradition of female genital mutilation is not limited to Africa. Toubia (1993:38) says that “It is a human rights problem because 99% of the victims are forced into having the operation without prior knowledge of what it involves”. We can see that female genital mutilation is also practice in France, a developed country. Fanta loses her child; she, with her husband and the circumcisers are made to face the law; all are sentenced to jail for perpetrating the act of which the government sees as illegal. This inhuman (*inwoman*) practice is masterminded by men and elderly females within the patriarchal system. This double standard perpetrated by women is anti-womanist.

Moreover, child marriage is depicted as anti-womanist and a societal norm which debars the reproductive health of the girl-child. Child marriage affects both boys and girls though the girls are majorly affected, especially when such girls are from relatively poor

homes. The causes of child marriage are based on traditional culture, bride price, religion, social pressures, regional customs, and illiteracy. In the novel, as a child of age fourteen, Malimouna is forced to marry an old man. The illiterate Louma feels that he has every right to sell Malimouna in exchange for money to his rich trader-friend due to the sexist and patriarchal nature of the cultural milieu where the narrative is set. Without the consent of Malimouna and her mother, Louma thinks that it is morally right to commercialise his daughter. This act is anti-womanist because it has a lasting consequence on the future of the girl-child's health, education, and social development. If not for the womanist zeal and strength of Malimouna who takes a radical step as to her self-reclamation, she would not have been what she is in the fiction. The author shows in her the womanist strength and knowledge for being bold and focused on what she really wants. This gives her the enduring capacity as a real black girl and later to the grade of a black woman for her survival against the norms of her society which is against the girl-child.

Ngollé in *Sous la cendre le feu*, presents girl-child incest. These are societal problems emanating from her immediate environment. Such act is against the womanist view and constitutes a sexual transgression. Incest is one common form of sexual abuse on children which affects the reproductive health of a girl-child.

In the novel, Mina's daughter is sexually abused by her father Djibril who adopts her even right from her mother's womb. When Fanny is two weeks old in her mother's womb, Djibril agrees to be her father and since then, he has been taking good care of her. He feeds and takes her to school and Fanny loves her father. For over nine years, Djibril is very kind and devoted to his children, including Fanny. Nobody knows that Djibril is not her biological father because their relationship is like father and daughter. Fanny has been keeping to herself these days wanting not to converse with anybody at home. One day, as she is in her secluded corner while some visitors come to visit Mina, the visitors discuss a cousin who rapes his brother's wife; Mina never knows Fanny is in a corner listening to their conversation. When the visitors have gone, Fanny comes closer to her mummy and asks for the meaning of the word "rape":

Ça vent dire quoi, violer ?

Hou... c'est quand un homme couche avec une femme en la forçant. (Sous : p. 195).

What is rape?
Oh... it is when a man sleeps with a woman by forcing
her. (Our translation)

Fanny asks again, putting her mother right by using the most conventional word “fait l’amour” that is not euphemistic. Her mother’s “couche avec une femme” appears ambiguous and makes Fanny ambivalent.’.

Fait l’amour avec une femme ? Dit Fanny pour m’aider.
(Sous : p. 195)
Make love with a woman? Said Fanny to help me. (Our
translation).

The mother is surprised that a girl of her age will know what love is all about. But still, her mother counsels her that when she grows up she would like a man that will marry her which is normal. However, she warns her not to allow any male boy, or any man to touch her. Fanny goes further to probe wondering what happens if the supposed male is a father:

Même si cet homme est mon père ?

Bien sûr, ma chérie surtout par ton père ! On ne fait pas
l’amour avec son père, ni avec son frère, ni avec aucun
homme delà même famille que soi-même. (Sous: p. 196).

Even if this man is my father?

Very well, my dear even if it is by your father! One does not
make love with one’s father, neither your brother nor with any
man of the same family with you. (Our translation)

With all these explanations, one easily notices that this child is innocent;, her father has been defiling her. It is not until her mother explains to her that she should not allow even her father to touch her. At this point, she bursts into tears. She has been in her private world, running away from both her mother and father before that day. Fanny is traumatised and the scene is presented thus :

Elle tenait sa tête obstinément cachée dans les plis de ma jupe et
ne voulait plus relever le visage. Je ne voulais pas croire à ce
que mon esprit commençait à comprendre. Je ne pouvais pas
accepter une monstruosité pareille. Mes mains, mon corps tout
entier, tremblaient quand, au bout de quelques minutes, j’ai
soutenu doucement la tête de Fanny lui entourant le visage de
mes deux mains, elle a soutenu mon regard. Les yeux laissant
de larmes et a déclaré d’une voix blanche :

---parce que ; papa que l'a fait avec moi, un vendredi, quand j'étais avec lui à l'étude, je...
---Seigneur Dieu ! ai-je crié. (Sous: p.196).

She held her head persistently hidden in the fold of my skirt and would no longer raise her face. I did not want to know what my mind was thinking of. I could not accept a similar monstrosity. My hands, my body, everything within trembled when in period of some minutes, I lifted up Fanny's head gently, I covered her face with my two hands, she endured my sight, her eyes gleamed with tears and declared with a white woman's voice.
---because of what papa did to me, on Friday, when I was with him studing, I... Lord God! I cried. (Our translation)

At this level, the father has betrayed Fanny. She is psychologically traumatised with fear, reproach, and guilt. For so long, she has withdrawn from the presence of her father because, at the first instance, she knows that what her father has done is awkward and odd, but she cannot really determine whether it is morally right or wrong. But at the point of her mother's explanation, she knows that the act is wrong. Both mother and child are shocked, and they weep bitterly. This scene makes mother run mental. To heal herself from the trauma of incest or early sexual abuse, the victim has to tell her story to people who understand. Fanny has the opportunity to tell her mother, Mina, because she feels she is the only one that can understand her and, besides, the daughter-mother relationship is foregrounded in the narrative. The mother symbolises care, love and a nurturer emphasised by the womanist concept. Breaking the silence helps her gain perspective; she becomes aware that her voicing out contributes significantly to her psychological recovery and restoration of her overall well-being. The traumatised condition of the daughter, Fanny, leads to her mother's sudden illness which rendered her mental. The sexual abuse is a representation of violence against women.

3.1.4 **Violence against women**

Through violent acts, men display their ego on women to gain or maintain power, to have control over an intimate partner. Around the world and, particularly in the developing countries, such as Africa, millions of girls and women have been violated due to their sex and social inequality in these societies. Hence, violence against women is violation of women's human rights. Violence against women is now well recognized as a public health problem and human rights violation of worldwide significance. It is an

important risk factor for women's ill health, with far reaching consequences for both their physical and mental health (Campbell, 2002). Every woman in her lifetime has experienced some forms of gender-based abuse. From pre-birth, women have suffered sex-selective abortion, during infancy; they have gone through female infanticide, female neglect, healthcare and nutrition. In childhood, they witness child abuse, malnutrition, poverty and female genital mutilation. In their adolescence period, they witness forced prostitution, trafficking, forced early marriage, psychological abuse, rape and all forms of maltreatment.

Women who have been violated, face the consequences of health problems which are disturbing issues in reproductive and depressive challenges, and yet, little attention has been paid to these health consequences in the society. Feminine violation is prevalent within the institution of marriage and family with its long-term effect on the health of women.

In the selected texts, almost all kinds of violence are denounced by the female authors. This violence includes domestic violence, economic violence, physical violence, emotional violence and psychological violence. These acts are all also seen as health reproductive problems which have the highest state of dehumanisation, violating women's rights to life and living. All human beings should have equal treatment and should be free from all sorts of discrimination. Women have rights to liberty, expression and life.

The authors reject the erroneous belief that the husband is the lord and master and that woman is nothing but his property. To these authors, this is an avenue to elevate women to her rightful position, educationally, politically, economically, socially and culturally.

In Ngolle's *Sous la cendre le feu*, human rituals, psychological and sexual violences are depicted as forms of social injustice, reproductive and depressive challenges among female characters. Mina is broken-hearted from the odd behaviours of her husband who really changes drastically towards her. Due to the strange behaviours of Jubril, Mina's health is endangered. Mina's daughter Fanny is raped. Mina becomes depressed psychologically. She observes that since her husband's returns from his village, he hardly talks to her; he shouts at her, he treats her badly and tells her that she belongs to the kitchen and that she should only be seen there.

She is depressed and worried. To worsen the situation, her sister comes from the university to visit her during her long vacation. Seeing Mina looking so unkempt, she feels sad and advises her to, at least, create some time to take care of herself:

C'est un tort. Une femme doit toujours trouver assez de temps à consacrer à son corps quelles que soient ses occupations. Regarde ce que tu fais de tes beaux cheveux : un chignon qui te donne l'air d'une vieille demoiselle. Tu devrais les défriser les coiffer mieux. (SLSLF : P. 166)

It is bad. A woman must always have enough time to pay attention on her body like her work. Look at what you have done to your hair: that gives you an old look, you must retouch, a good curl. (Our translation)

Womanists believe that a woman should be concerned with her welfare taking into consideration the improvement of her bad living conditions and also preventing unfair treatment towards herself. In the *Sous la cendre le feu* Essèbé demonstrates sisterhood through her loving and caring concern for Mina's condition. She improves on her condition by telling her how to manage her time so as to concentrate in taking good care of herself thereby looking good. She takes her out to buy her body cream, make her hair and buys some cloths. And Mina is equally advised to tell her husband that they would be going out for a date. The frustration of a woman begins when she is neglected at home where she spends all the days of her life to serve the man, to take care of him and the children, and to stay at home always like housemaid. The usual outings they are used to when they were dating are out of fashion for the husband. This masculine attitude makes a woman sad and frustrated all days with boredom. At least, a woman deserves to be taken out frequently to places like restaurants, bitch, clubs, visiting colleagues, parties, cinema, and attending official receptions e.t.c. at least to change her environment. All these can go a long way to make her happy, healthy and kill her boredom.

Djibril attempts raping Mina's sister, Essebe who came to visit the family when Mina goes out to pick her children from school. This attempt is not only sexual harassment but a betrayal of trust and humiliation on the part of Mina. Mina's daughter, his step and adopted daughter is also raped. This attempt of rape is to make his law business profitable. He is advised by one of his brothers to use his blood relation or a closer person he likes to make rituals.

Culturally, Africans believe that anything unfortunate for every mankind is not natural. They believe in ritual making to remove every evil thing from their way. This is very unfair in human right - making use of humans for sacrifices. This is the current trend now a days in most African society. For instance, on December 19, 2016, it was reported in the Punch News that one Esomchi Ojobo in Igbo-Eze North Local Government of Enugu State, in Nigeria used some underaged girls for rituals. Also, Heritier Maila (IWPR, 2010), reported that Congolese infants were raped in black magic rituals in Lubumbashi area believing they will acquire good fortune as a result from raping six female underaged girls. While Mulamba 2010, a press officer for the child protection organization PCPDE, an NGO that works in cooperation with UNICEF, the United Nations' child protection arm, described the incidents as “deplorable”. Djibril confesses in the text that his friends lured him to sleep with his daughter Fanny to enrich himself and also makes his business boom. Instead of Djibril to admit his responsibility for the action committed, he blames Joel, the biological father of Fanny.

Mina is psychologically traumatised with the condition of her daughter and Djibril's betrayal pretending to be what he is, and also his attempt of raping her sister. All these can depress and destabilise the state of a woman. Such a woman suffers reproach, humiliation, grief and great sorrow. All these compiled together make Mina mentally deranged.

In *Rencontres essentielles*, Flo is equally emotionally and psychologically abused by her husband, Joël. According to Act 2010, of The Republic of Uganda Section Two of Control of Domestic Violence Act, emotional, verbal and psychological abuse means a “pattern of degrading or humiliating conduct towards a victim, including repeated insults, ridicule, name calling, repeated threats to cause emotional pain, repeated exhibition of possessiveness or jealousy which in such as to constitute a serious invasion of the victim's privacy, liberty, integrity or security”. Flo is treated like a piece of rag after few years of her marriage without a child. She feels bitter and lonely each day. She is emotionally troubled and fears that she might lose her husband to another woman. Joel neglected her for her childhood friend Doris. Even when Flo discovers Joel's relationship with Doris, Joel did not show any sign of remorse. One can detect neither embarrassment nor shame in his expressions to Flo. For instance, he says” But if you've known for a while, why this

reaction now? It's true that Doris and I have been...so p.74? These words are words of humiliations and ridicule that cause emotional pains in the heart of Flo to the extent that this makes Flo to confess her feelings at that particular time that she feels like she has received the final blow that would tear her apart. Even when Joel reads such sorrow in Flo's eyes, he just merely backs away, his footsteps echo mournfully in the adjacent room to the leaving room asking Flo what she is going to do with a cigarette in his hands as if to annihilate her. Joel abandons Flo. All these are emotional torture that gives Flo psychological problems. Joel refuses to talk to her. She feels depressed and humiliated because of his actions towards her:

Plusieurs semaines se passent. La maison, c'est l'enfer. Joël travaille beaucoup, ne me parle presque pas, le soir après le dîner, presque muet, il s'enferme dans une pièce, prend un livre ou sort. (Rebelle : p.75).

Several weeks pass. Our home is a living hell. He works a lot and hardly speaks to me. In the evenings after dinner, almost silently he locks himself away in a room, reads a book or goes out (EE: p.36. Translated by Toman).

The author's terms are well chosen. "Enfer", "Presque muet" and "s'enferme dans une piece" constitute the husband's psychological violence on Flo; they emerge from his actions and inactions, little words and silence, and distance and nearness. His actions produce some effects on Flo that can be described as ambivalent and traumatic since he is near and far, seen and unseen at the same time. She is embarrassed because her husband has chosen her closest friend as her rival. Flo started being possessive, unable to eat, to dress well, feeling so worthless, and degraded to the extent that she feels like dying when she can no longer bear it. She is so filled with anger, disturbed and hardly finds sleep during the nights all alone at home. Even when Joel is home there is communication gap. A woman is depressed emotionally when her partner refuses to talk to her. In fact, that is the highest level of human degradation in Flo's relationship with Joel. There is a consistent communication gap between them which irritates her the more. In constant frustration and fear she asks her husband why he has married her. She wants to know if he has married her so as to enslave her at home and pretend as if things are going on normally to the outside world. Joel ignores all the rules in marriage and jilts Flo for another woman. To make matters worse, it is her close friend Doris that he is with; the

relationship progresses to the extent of getting her pregnant. She feels bad all day and she accuses him of being responsible of her fate. It is stated as follows :

Pourquoi m'as-tu épousée, Joël ? Pourquoi ? Moi, je me suis mariée avec toi par amour, avec l'idée de vivre très longtemps possible avec toi : mais toi Joël, toi, m'as-tu jamais aimée ? (Rencontres: p.76)

Why did you marry me, Joel? Why? I married you out of love. With the idea of living with you for as long as possible. But you, Joel, did you ever love me? (Essential Encounters: p.37.).

To all these questions posed to Joel, his answer is “I don't know”. The answer ‘I don't know’ is full of deceit, that is, his mind is already made up for a divorce. His vague response above exposes him as insincere husband who does not genuinely love his wife, Flo. No matter what the problem may be or is like, every couple must learn how to support each other in pains, problems and in all circumstances. The past relationship between Flo and Joel becomes uncertain, while Flo suffers humiliation.

In Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*, emotional, economic and psychological violences are viewed by the writer as a common occurrence in relationship which could be readdressed by the womanist idea of mutual love among people sexually and non-sexually to achieve a harmonious relationship. The traumatic conditions of women in their relationship with men are presented in the long epistolary monologue. The long silence in pains and suffering alone would need a healing. Ramatoulaye's healing from the long years in silence is psychological. She describes the way in which women are being devalued by men:

J'avais entendu trop de détresses pour ne pas comprendre la mienne. Ton cas, Aissatou, le cas de bien d'autres femmes, méprisées, reléguées ou échangées, dont on s'est séparé comme d'un boubou usé ou démodé. (Lettre: p.82).

I had heard of too many misfortunes not to understand my own. Your own case, Aissatou, just like the case of many other women, despised, relegated or exchanged, who were abandoned like a worn-out or outdated boubou. (Letter: p.41).

Ramatoulaye is financially abused. She suffers from all sorts of deprivations including financial deprivations. She is deprived from her husband's body since the second wife has taken over. Even her children no longer enjoy the fatherly care Modou

ought to be tendering. Ramatoulaye faces economical crises alone taking care of the home front, paying electricity bills, house bills, buying food stuffs, and all sorts. While the second wife and the mother in-law are enjoying what Ramatoulaye and her husband, Modou have worked for jointly for the past 30 years of their marriage. Modou has deprived Ramatoulaye and her children so many benefits in her marriage such as household necessities, property jointly owned etc without looking back during his lifetime. After his death, it is just by God's intervention that Ramatoulaye's daughter, Daba, is able to recover the remaining properties.

Women are presented as objects which are sought after by men, possessed and then discarded. The novel reveals how women's lives are bound by home, work, and child care. That is, as if women exist primarily for the use and amusement of men. The protagonist sees herself as a "boubou usé ou démodé". The statement is a metaphor to brutally describe how Modou Fall replaces her with a much younger girl to rejuvenate his body, while she (Ramatoulaye), the rightful owner of the husband, is used and dumped like a rag. The imagery of worn-out boubou and the dynamics of its abandonment or replacement illustrate a domestic violence that gives rise to the traumatic life of Ramatoulaye. Her maltreatment makes her wallow in grief, pain, and self-pity. This subjects her to psychological trauma. All these aspects are against the progress of women and therefore they are anti-womanist.

Furthermore, Ramatoulaye gives an emotive account of a woman's psychology as well as the alienation of female labour. She declares to her friend that the woman is the first to get up in the morning and the last to go to bed, always working. This means that most women's efforts are never appreciated by their husbands.

Jacqueline in *Une si longue lettre* is emotionally and psychologically traumatised seeing her husband philandering. She is neglected and disregarded by her husband who does not make secret his habit of flirting with younger and slender girls. Jacqueline is demoralised and disturbed emotionally. This makes her sick and looks so unkempt. The scene is presented thus :

Jacqueline était prostrée dans son lit. Ses beaux cheveux noirs délaissés, qu'aucun peigne n'avait démêlés depuis qu'elle courait de médecin en médecin, formaient sur sa tête des touffes hirsutes. (Lettre: p.86)

Jacqueline lay prostrate in her bed. Her beautiful but neglected black hair, through which no comb had been run ever since she began consulting doctor after doctor, formed shaggy tufts on her head. (Letter: p. 43).

If care is not taken, a woman's traumatic state due to a partner's neglect can make her go insane. So many women roam the streets because they fall victim of spousal violence through emotional or physical torments.

In Kéïta's *Rebelle*, child abuse and wife battering are depicted as social ills that cause reproductive challenge. The patriarchal society where Malimouna lives really violates the rights and freedom of women, especially Malimonna, who personally struggles and triumphs against patriarchal oppression. She struggles as a little girl until the stage of womanhood, has triumphed successfully through the womanist zeal and strength. She receives all forms of violation throughout her struggle for survival. She spent almost all her years outside her home going from pillar to post to attain her freedom and success. As a female, she wanders through the thickest surroundings of the village alone, while she is under her mother. The functions of the father and mother as good nurturers. When this occurs, such a child becomes a prey. She is found in the bush, sleeping under the tree:

...Malimouna aimait à se promener par des sentiers cachés,
au milieu de la forêt voisine. (*Rebelle* p.7)

... Malimouna liked to walk hidden places, in the middle of
the neighbouring forest. (Our translation)

Parents leave their daughters to wonder in the neighbouring bush without care. This is the highest state of child abuse, on which womanism sensitises the public. The local setting of the novel supports female genital mutilation which is the highest level of violation against women's right because female genital mutilation affects women's health and survival and causes diseases like infertility, infection, sexual dysfunction, HIV, chronic pains and so on. Procedures can also cause severe bleeding and problems urinating, and later cysts, infections as well as complications in childbirth (Hoffmana, 2013).

According to the World Health Organization (2018), female genital mutilation is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women. It reflects deep-rooted inequality between the sexes and constitutes an extreme form of

discrimination against women. It is nearly always carried out on minors and is a violation of the rights of children. The practice also violates a person's rights to health, security and physical integrity, the right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and the right to life when the procedure results in death.

While United Nations Children's Emangency Fund (2016) identifies four types of Female Genital Multilation. The first type is referred to as clitoridectomy. This is the partial or total removal of the clitoris (a small, sensitive and erectile part of the cases, only the prepuce the fold of skin surrounding the clitoris). Type two is the partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia mineral (the inner folds of the vulva), with or without excision of the labia majora (the outer folds of the skin of the vulva). The third is referred to as infibulation, this is the narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the labia minora, or labia majora, sometimes through stitching, with or without removal of the clitoris (clitoridectomg). Lastly, the fourth type includes all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, such as pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterizing the genitalv area. Keita as a womanist advocate tries through this fiction to describe how FGM is performed on female girls, reflecting its dangers and also seeks to eliminate female genital mutilation from her society. In the novel, female girls undergo FGM almost every season in Boritouni by Dimikela. The author also showcases how young Noura, an eleven years old female, dies during multilation:

La petite Noura était morte d'une hémorragie les souffrances les plus atroces. Elle s'était farouchement débattue pendant l'opération, ce qui avait provoqué une très mauvaise entaille. Leur compatriot, une vieille femme qui s'était chargée de l'intervention, avait expliqué à la police que c'était la faute des parents (Rebelle : p.126).

Little Noura had died of haemorrhage in the most atrocious sufferings. She had fiercely debated the operation, which caused a very bad nick. Their compatriot, an old woman who took care of the intervention, explained to the police that it was the parents' fault. (Our translation).

The novel also chronicles physical violence against some female characters, such as Malimouna and Fanta. Fanta is constantly maltreated and domesticated by her husband, Barou. She is left alone to cater for their three children of almost equal ages. She becomes

ill and lean when the house work is becoming unbearable for her alone. She is also facing some financing crises since she has no job. She depends on her husband. The children are not well nourished. Only her husband, Barou earns a living. When, Malimouna tries to advice and help Fanta on what to do to improve on her condition, Barou warns her to stay away from his wife and beats Malimouna. Also, in the novel, Karim debar Malimouna from working to frustrate her from the association of L'AAFD which aims at fighting against all physical and social oppressions against women. She says that the aim is also for the betterment of women i.e. "La lutte pour un mieux-être de la femme." (p. 179). Since she would have preferred the word: "liberté de la femme" i.e. women's freedom or liberty, but she would not want to be castigated by men who see liberty as a taboo to women. Invariably, such men like Karim is against her, telling her she should stay at home to take care of him and the children. This leads to sharp argument to the extent that he gives Malimouna a slap in (p. 187).

Modukpè, le rêve brisé by Fassinou also reflects the exploitative and violent conditions of women, most especially sexual aggression and infidelity. The writer depicts the foregoing to advocate the freedom and independence of these females. The heroine in the text and her mother are heartbroken, betrayed and maltreated by Jean-Paul and Mr. Robert. In the novel, Mr Robert humiliates and intimidates Modukpe after making love to her violently. He mocks her openly in front of Modukpe's mother who wanted to make alliance with him. He rejects Modukpe and tells her he has never planned to marry her:

Alors je me suis dit comme elle aime ça, je lui en donnerai. Comme elle veut mener une vie insouciant, je lui donnerai du plaisir jusqu' à ce que je m'en lasse. Jamais, il n'a été question d'enfant ou du projet d'enfant entre nous (Modukpè : p.71).

So, I told myself that since she loves to pleasure I will give it to her. Since she wants to live a carefree life, I will give her pleasure until i grow weary of it. There has never been a plan between us to have children (Our translation).

The author rejects the state and place of women in a patriarchal society, exposing the exploitative manner of men and women in marital and relationships. Modukpè, is subjected to male power and abuse. She is cheated, used and dumped by her lecturer in the university. She gets impregnated by Mr. Robert. She declares her present state to him, hoping that he would accept the pregnancy to solidify their relationship, but the reverse is

the case. The behaviour of Mr. Robert breaks her heart when he refused the ownership of the unborn child:

Un enfant, aboya-t-il et qu'en ferais-je ? T'ai-je dit que j'en voulais encore. (Modukpè: p.47).

A child, he barked, and what would I do with it? Did I tell you I wanted another one? (Our Translation)

The attitude of Mr. Robert is that of a deceptive lover. Generally, many men are very unfair to girls and women when it comes to relationship or pregnancy in courtship. Most men are afraid to bear any responsibility which goes with pregnancy. They deny responsibilities and allow the female partners to bear all the consequences alone. Dukpè's university education is truncated and her dreams are shattered. She is left to bear the brunt of caring for her baby alone. So many marriages have ended in divorce owing to women's ill-treatment by their spouses. In such situations, children suffer total neglect because they are uncared for and there are no male figures to serve as the father. Modukpè's mother's marriage is not built on love, and so the marriage collapses. The mother is also traumatised in her relationship with Jean-Paul. She becomes a second wife, and wallows in pain and poverty, enslaving herself all through in the marriage until she can no longer cope with the situation. Mr. Robert and Jean-Paul ignore the feelings of their lovers, neglecting their emotions. The psychological pains and trauma of Modukpè are expressed in the novel while she soliloquises and raises various questions concerning her life, her birth and her relationship. She is troubled and frustrated on what next to do with her entire life when the one she loves dumps her:

Pourquoi suis-je née, me demandais-je parfois ? Pourquoi dois-je porter ce monde sur mes frêles-épaules ! (Modukpè: p.23).

Why was I born? I sometimes asked myself Why should I carry this world on my frail shoulders? (Our translation)

The novel equally condemns sexual assault and rape. In most cases, sexual assault and rape are rarely reported because of fear of embarrassment, and consequently so many women do not disclose that they are sexually abused. Dukpè is raped by her boyfriend during pregnancy. She explains bitterly how Mr Robert just flings her on the bed and forcefully tears her skirt to gain his penetration into her. This act makes her to weep

because love making is not done this way. This act is a violent act known as forced sex trying to intimidate her because of his age and status. Mr. Robert makes love to her rashly and aggressively, ignoring her feelings:

Alors, sans précaution, il me jéta sur le lit, retroussa ma petite jupe, déchira presque mon slip et me pénétra violemment.

-Pas ça ! Pas comme ça ! Répétais-je en sanglotant. On n'a jamais fait l'amour comme ça, je te déteste. C'est toi qui es devenu très méchant. Il ne répondait pas à mes pleurs ! (Modukpe: p.86).

Thus, without warning, he threw me on the bed, rolled up my short skirt, nearly tore my pant and penetrated on me violently. No! Not like that! I repeated sobbing. Love is never made like that, I hate you. It is you who have become wicked. He ignored my cry! (Our translation)

Rape is an act of indiscipline with dangerous implications for the health of women. At times women die when they are raped. Some contact contagious diseases that may not allow them to have children.

Baboni's *Vie de femme, vie de sang*, reveals Fatou as a character who suffers all forms of female maltreatment and battering from her spouse. Fatou is subjugated, suffer emotional, psychological and economic violence all together. Fatou is maltreated from the first day that she sights her husband in the theatre hall when Ambroise just comes from nowhere to harass her sexually. Fatou feels a man's hand squeezes her and sees the strange young man behaving in an uncultured manner:

Une de ces soirées où règnent ambiance, promiscuité et écart divers. Soudain sur la piste, je sentis un bras plutôt viril m'enlacer. (Vie: p. 14).

In one these evenings, where reign atmosphere, promiscuity and diverse discrepancies, suddenly on the track, I felt a rather virile arm, squeezed on me. (Our translation)

This is sexual harassment and physical assault which do not give the male any dignity and respect in the society. Fatou rebels against this act by giving the man a slap to also embarrass him in the party. So many ladies are raped through this act if they do not rebel or resist it or they are so weak to do that. Fatou employs womanist tenet of self-assertiveness to prevent public embarrassment. Fatou, after marrying Ambroise, starts facing neglect which causes her emotional trauma. Throughout the stage of motherhood,

where husband and wife should live together, reason together, in love and have affection for each other, instead, Ambroise is not always around. He travels here and there with so many ladies. He impregnates so many ladies outside wedlock. He comes back to Fatou as a changed man, exploits her by getting her hard-earned money and abandons her to bear all the responsibility of a man. Fatou is economically deprived. Ambroise spends his money on strange women. He comes back empty handed and collects Fatou's hard earned money to spend for his women friends outside. Fatou pays the house rent, electricity bills, school fees of her son, household maintenance while Ambrose keeps provoking and humiliating dating daughters of neighbours nearby. This makes Fatou depressed and emotionally traumatised.

The novel also reveals battery as a form of violence characterised in the novel. Wife battering has been used to describe a chronic syndrome characterized not by single episodes of violence but by repeated act of physical, psychological, and emotional abuse used by men to control their female partners (Hegarty *et al.*, 1998). Fatou is beaten many times by Ambroise when ever she speaks for her right. A typical example is when Fatou accuses him of dating a girl. As an irresponsible person and somebody who is not regretful of his act, he beats her severely that blood comes out from her body.

Quand je le surprénais avec une autre fille et que je le lui reprochais, il se mettait à me battre. Il me battit un jour jusqu'au sang et mon père intervint. (Vie : p. 35).

When I discovered another girl with him and rebuked him, he started beating me. He did beat me one day until blood came out from my body that my father had intervened. (Our translation)

In a relationship where the husband keeps beating the wife like an animal, the wife will go sad. Such relationship turns swaar because the emotional love and care for each other diminish gradually. Man and woman, as married couple, should be able to care for each other. Since Fatou can no longer accommodate Ambroise's constant beating, she has to remarry when another man asks her hand in marriage. Battering situation separates married couples. The avenue to understand each other is lost and the complementary role of husband and wife is not met in their marriage.

Also, in Bassek's *La tache de sang*, Mama Ida, who is pregnant for the eleventh time, is molested and physically abused by her husband owing to misunderstanding

between them. She receives slaps, blows, and punches from her husband. However, the beating she receives is out of all proportion to the offence she commits. As a result, Mama Ida becomes ill. She is emotionally and physically weak and can no longer bear the pains, so she travels to see her daughter, Patricia for adequate care and proper attention. Physical assaults, such as rape and wife battery, especially pregnant women, are harmful not only to the mother but also to the unborn baby, most importantly if she receives blows in her abdomen. Such attack can cause fatal fractures and injuries to the woman's uterus. Mama Ida is injured to the extent that splashes of blood come out from her uterus. Battery or rape of pregnant women leads to increase in miscarriage, fatal death, premature labour, chronic pelvic pains, headaches and contraction. In *Modukpé Le rêve brisé*, Fassinon reflects the exploitative and violent conditions of women, most especially sexual aggression and women's maltreatment.

In Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes*, Emilienne is emotionally and psychologically violated by Joseph and her in-law. She receives constant harassment by her mother-in-law. This injures her feelings, that she feels so unsafe. She is always sad, cries and grieves her dead daughter. The situation on ground makes her powerless, humiliated, ashamed and constantly feel unwanted in her own house. Joseph's mother calls her names, telling her that her dog is better than her since the dog has the capacity of procreating while Emilienne could not. Even her secretary humiliated her. Emilienne's secretary went to the extent of dating her boss's husband, Joseph. Despite her educational status, the husband does not care about her existence. She does all the buying at home, provides for all the family, including her in-laws, yet she is not appreciated. Her husband sexually deprives her, while he moves around with other girls. She becomes worried, frustrated and fed up with life. She is deprived of her husband's body who flirts around with other girls. Emilienne becomes lonely and neglected. As a result, she practises lesbianism with her secretary Dominique to satisfy her sexual urge.

By this lesbian act, Emilienne tries to make herself happy, renewing herself both psychologically and emotionally. In the patriarchal society, married women are at the receiving end whenever they engage themselves in extra-marital affairs. If the marriage is not working, it is either they move out of their father's home. But ironically, Dominique is brought in as an intruder to break Emilienne's home. Her sexual relationship with

Emilienne is just a camouflage because she wants to take over her husband, Joseph. Dominique dates Joseph, and Emilienne simultaneously; Dominique records all their activities and tells Joseph to quit his marriage:

Alors écoute-moi bien. J'exige que tu quittes ta femme dans les 24 heures. Oui, dit-elle en souriant, je te laisse le temps deregler vos affaires. Si tu refuses, sache que je déclare au monde que ta femme est une lesbienne. Dans un mois, nous nous marions. (Fureurs : p.168).

Then listen well to me. I demand that you leave your wife within the next 24 hours. Yes, she says smiling, I give you time to put your things in order. If you refuse, mind you, I tell the world that your wife is a lesbian. In a month's time, we will get married. (Our translation)

The author reveals the existence of lesbian practices among the married women who suffer emotionally and are sociologically traumatised in their relationships with their partners. She also shows how women try to quench their sexual urge when their husbands ignore their emotional and sexual feelings. Instead of losing out totally, they remain in the marriage to practice abominable things that are unheard of. In this view, Rawiri recommends a corrective measure for the woman's condition, which will offer equal gender emotional expressivity, and consequently remove emotional and sociological trauma in the patriarchal society. And at the same time, the writer, through Dominique, lampoons men for not performing their sexual responsibilities to their wives. However, the writer kicks against lesbianism in the Francophone society.

In *Rebelle*, Malimouna refuses to stay at home. She knows staying at home will paralyze her mission of fighting against violence and the liberation of women in her society. She does not want her role to be reduced to the kitchen even though she cares for her children and husband as she has stayed at home for three years taking good care of them; she has a sister friend with whom she works hand in hand as a deputy of her association who brings her messages from their association. She comes to meet Malimouna at home and they both rob minds together. Malimouna, after the birth of her two children, feels that she has to go back to work to revive her association. Bestman (2003) interprets her ideologies that define the ethos of womanism in this way:

Both wholeness and authenticity in her life. Understandably by now, she wants it all, or at least as much as she can assist in achieving in life. That means she wants her home, her family and her career, neglecting none of these for the others. Granted, the family does come first in priority for the African woman, but the other things are much needed and extremely important, as they come together to ensure harmony and security in the home. (Hudson-Weems: p.67)

However, Malimouna finally liberates herself by assuming her duty fully, while Karim goes ahead to live with his second wife. In the same vein, Malimouna launches a campaign against women's violation and advises women to educate their children (male, female). During the campaign, she tells them the evil of female genital mutilation:

À côté de son alphabétisation des femmes, l'Association avait également prévu de lancer une vaste campagne de lutte contre les violences subies par les femmes. (*Rebelle*: p.189)

In addition to the women's alphabetization campaign, the association also planned to launch a vast campaign to combat violence against women. (Our translation)

Baron violently threatens and gives Malimouna some punches when he realises that Malimouna is teaching his wife, Fanta, how to use preventive pills against pregnancy. Her lessons are means of empowerment of women against masculine oppressive and overbearing tendencies that jeopardise the health of married women. The narrator illustrates the physical violence in these words:

Furieux, il menace Malimouna de son poing. Celle-ci s'enferma dans son studio. (*Rebelle* p. 94).

Raging, he threatened Malimouna with his fist. She locked herself in her apartment. (Our translation)

Domestic threats include verbal and physical violence against women which causes emotional and psychological depression. Through this act, women can become sick and mentally unbalanced when verbal threats are becoming too much and unbearable for their condition. This is revealed in the life of Malimouna who eventually becomes fearful in the neighbourhood, and packs out from her apartment to make her mind feel at rest and for her safety.

3.1.5 Adoption

Adoption according to Aniebue and Aniebue (2008) is a universal concept that provides legal rights for adopter and adoptee to become a family. It is a unique form of child care because it does provide permanent care and parenting for the adopted child as compared to another child. Thus, the adopted child is able to access quality life in a family setting (Dimkpa, 2010). In the principles of act of adoption of the chapter 131 of Statute Law of Bahamas (2007), it states that there is a balance of rights and interests among the three parties in placement and adoption, the birth parents or parents, but the best interest of the child must be the paramount consideration. It also states that decision to place and to adopt a child must be made with clear information, full awareness of the implications and careful consideration with the benefit of knowledgeable guidance. The Law also claims that there should be opportunity for openness in adoption but a participants choice of anonymity should be respected; that the Director must exercise standards and controls in order to protect the rights and interests of those involved in placement and adoptions, that reliable records of placement and adoptions must be maintained, that an adopted person has a right to non-identifying information concerning his or her background and heritage and lastly that an adult adopted person's desire to discover birth parentage and understand his or her identity should be accommodated if possible and if it does not infringe on the right of a birth parent to maintain anonymity.

In *Sous la cendre le feu*, the writer reflects the issue of child adoption, a closed adoption, which is confidential to both parties. This type of adoption has not been the norm for most modern society going by the principles attached to adoption. It can be associated with so many consequences such as child abuse, incest and so on. Though, it could also be termed legal because Djibril is a lawyer, a married Mina legally according to the law. So, the adoption act is sealed in the secret amongst the two parties in marriage. As a means of not wanting Mina to suffer any emotional and psychological trauma, her unborn child is adopted by Djibril... At the first instance, Walker states that a womanist must be committed to the survival and wholeness of the entire people is established in the character of Djibril who stands as a pro-womanist in the novel. He comes into the life of Mina when all hope is lost for her at a time she is about to be subjected to with shame, humiliation and grief as a result of her adolescent pregnancy by Joel, a medical student who refuses her pregnancy. Djibril accepts Mina for who she is. He even loves her more

with the pregnancy of another man. He adores Mina and calls her 'petite fleur' meaning 'little flower'. When he comes in to woo Mina, she tells him her predicaments that she is already pregnant for another man who refuses to accept the pregnancy, and so it would not be possible for her to date him. He informs her that he loves her the way she is and is ready to father her child. Mina adores this, and this is shown in her expression:

Et puisque le destin avait placé sur mon chemin un homme assez généreux pour m'accepter avec mon enfant. (Sous: p. 50)

And then destiny had placed a man very generous to accept my child. (Our translation)

Djibril's plans come to pass, when he marries Mina and adopts the unborn child. Mina is so happy again that she expresses her happiness thus:

Ma petite Fanny était née exactement cinq mois après notre mariage, au grand étonnement de tous ceux qui ne s'étaient pas rendu compte de mon état. Djibril et moi étions des parents heureux. Il parlait avec fierté de sa jolie petite fille, et la couvait des yeux... Son comportement à l'égard de ce bébé était paternel et naturel. (SLCLF: p. 69).

My little Fanny was born exactly five months after our marriage, in great surprise of those that did not know the state of my condition; Jibril and I were happy parents. He spoke with pride of his lovely little daughter, and covered her eyes... His comportment as regards this baby was paternal and natural. (Our translation)

The foregoing shows love for the adopted child. However, Fanny and the mother are soon broken by the social challenges of cultural traditions in a patriarchal system. Djibril, in response to the patriarchal nature of his society is unable to maintain this affection and contract. First, his brothers make him to change from being a 'woman wrapper'. The complementary role of man and woman is not met any longer. Djibril does his things in the African traditional ways by avoiding to show love to Mina and the daughter. Meanwhile, Joel who refuses to play the role of a father to Fanny comes to trouble Djibril to get her daughter after about eleven years of his marriage to Mina. The society makes Djibril harsh, and this result in the raping of his stepdaughter, especially for boosting his law business. Fanny and her mother are emotionally and psychological depressed in this situation. An adopted child, when maltreated by a close relation becomes

disorganised and detached from the close person as seen in the character of Fanny. The sexually abused children are at the risk of developing psychiatric problems. The author shows Mina as a mother and a good womanist, who loves other women sexually and non-sexually.

3.1.6 **Mental health and depressive disorder**

In Africa, women are continuously plagued with stress due to their oppressed situation under the constructs of the patriarchal societies which have strongholds in gender inequality and sexism. When women are incapable of articulating the stress, they encounter each time; it grows to become a depressive and mental disorder. African women, by the virtue of their nature and strength, carry heavy load or burden at the expense of their own well-being. In their state of being, they would rather die than complain. Issues affecting mental disorder are found in the society such as unemployment, healthcare, infertility, family, marriage and divorce.

In literature, issues like mental health and depressive disorders are rarely discussed. Few female writers have tackled the issue of psychological disorders in the lives of married women. The womanist viewpoints are used as critical lens through which affected characters in some novels are viewed, to specify their needs and treatment as a whole. Mental health and depressive disorders are growing issues in realities which inspire fiction. Many women suffer from hopelessness, sorrow, loneliness, solitude and constant depression in their marital lives as represented in some select novels under review.

Bâ's, *Une si longue lettre*, decries the dysfunction of the family in the marriage institution as the main cause of women's depressive disorder. When a woman is depressed, there is the possibility that she will not be able to think straight, concentrate and put things right. Depressive disorder is most frequent in the relationship of man, woman and children. The most felt is between the spouses.

Jacqueline is sad, lonely and worried about her husband who turns out to be a cheat. Samba Diack neglects his wife and children and goes out all day womanising, to the extent that people start discussing his matter to his wife, Jacqueline. who has the proof of her husband's misconduct. Jacqueline is in deep thoughts and cries several times because of her husband's betrayal. She regrets marrying him. She was warned by her parents who

protested that she should not marry a Muslim but out of love, she refused. When the adverse effect comes, she is left alone by her parents to bear the brunt. She begs her parents :

Elle pausa à ses parents, à leur refus de cautionner son mariage. Elle leur écrivit une lettre pathétique où elle implorait leur pardon. Leur bénédiction lui parvint, sincère, mais ne put rien contre l'étrange pesanteur de la poitrine (Lettre : p. 84).

She thought of her parents, of their refusal to consent to her marriage. She wrote them a pathetic letter, in which she begged for their forgiveness. They sent their sincere blessing but could do nothing to lighten the strange weight in her chest. (Letter: p. 42)

When one is depressed, and coupled with guilt and regret, the depressive mood becomes chronic and unbearable. Jacqueline's sad and lonely mood turns to depressive disorder after some months. She starts losing weight, becomes sleepless and haggard. She complains of a disturbing lump in her chest.

Elle disait avoir l'impression d'être pénétrée las par une pointe qui fouillait la chair jusqu'an dos. Elle geignait. (Lettre: p. 84).

She had the impression that a sharp point had pierced her there and was cutting through her flesh right to her very bones, she fretted. (Letter p. 42).

Jacqueline's marital problem leads to depressive disorder. She does not take to the womanist advice which preaches that all women should be determined to love themselves regardless of any situation in their marriage, thereby avoiding self-destruction. In marriage, for a man to be kind, nice, accommodating and committed to the good complementary roles in marriage is adequate and perfect, but when the reverse is the case, it becomes a great burden in the life of a woman. If care is not taken or if the woman does not take precaution, she may end up destroying herself. If a woman in a depressive disorder fails to associate with women for appropriate guidance, and for her well-being, she ends up destroying herself.

For months, Jacqueline suffers from her depressive moods. She feels constant headaches, she says today, something is cutting through her flesh, tomorrow something is

running through her head. She is taken to various hospitals for treatment until she gets to a neurology ward. People go there to visit her, and they say she is looking like a man-woman especially with the look of her hair.

Jacqueline était prostrée dans son lit. Ses beaux cheveux noirs délaissés, qu'aucun peigne n'avait démêlés depuis qu'elle courait de médecin en médecin, formaient sur sa tête des touffes hirsutes. (Lettre: p. 86).

Jacqueline lay prostrate in her bed. Her beautiful but neglected black uncombed hair, ever since she began consulting doctor after doctor, formed shaggy tufts on her head. (Letter: p. 43).

Little by little, it is possible that a woman's sad mood turns to a psychosis if care is not taken. The author intends to say that women should learn to control their emotions about marital affairs, when cohabiting with a man who is not responsible or who does not even think of the woman's existence. Womanist ideals construct a resilient woman, who, notwithstanding the patriarchal and marital pressures, is able to weather all storms in her attempt to build a better heterosexual society. Jacqueline's depressed attitudes could be seen as anti-womanist. The ideal womanist woman must be strong. In the novel, Samba Diack, who is the husband of Jacqueline, does not even check how she feels despite the fact that he is a medical doctor. The act of self-destruction is not accepted in mental disorder due to some little problems from the marital setting. In the hospital, Jacqueline is given some tranquillisers, which means, nothing is really wrong with her. Again, Jacqueline still feels unsettled and disturbed after getting some injections and tranquillizers for months. Various tests carried on her reveal that she has no problem. As a result, the doctor informs her that she is only depressed, and she is offered some pieces of advice.

The doctor's advice matches with the womanist point of view in mental illness and disorder. He says: "You must react, go out, give yourself a reason for living." Alice Walker (1983) opines that the womanist consciousness is informed by women's determination to love themselves. This translates into an admonition to black women to avoid the self-destruction, associated with marital challenges. If not for the talk therapy by the therapist, Jacqueline would have been totally mad. A depressed person needs to have a voice when it comes to progression with the therapist. Jacqueline is helped by the doctor

to gain a new perspective about life. After the therapy with Jacqueline, and also taking the womanist steps to be strong and not to destroy herself for no just cause, she becomes morally uplifted as narrated by Ramatoulaye.

In Ngolle's *Sous la cendre le feu*, mental health and depressive disorder are reflected in the lives of the mother and daughter due to changes in the family. The narrative opens with the recovering state of Mina in the hospital. Her depressed state is caused by her husband's abnormal behaviours. Cummins (1995) maintains that the state or changes in a family environment can cause depression in the life of the parents or the children, It is observed that Djibri's behaviours led to Mina's critical mental disorder. Djibril whose character changes drastically towards his wife, takes a new dimension as it worsens the situation of the family. He attempts to rape Mina's sister and also goes further to rape Mina's daughter, Fanny. Fanny who feels depressed and withdraws to herself :

Elle ne voulait pas voir son père, sans que personne s'en expliquent la raison. Elle s'occupait bien de ses petits frères et sœur et parlait avec eux, tant qu'ils étaient seuls. Mais en présence d'un adulte, parent ou ami de la famille, Fanny se recroquevillait sur elle-même (Sous : p. 200).

She did not want to see her father, without anyone explaining the reason for that. She took care of her little brothers and sister and talked to them, when they are alone but in the presence of an adult, parent or family friend, Fanny curled up to herself. (Our translation)

Through her physical abuse, Fanny suffers depression, and insecurity. She keeps to herself, finding it difficult to interact with her junior brother and sister. Since she is able to talk with her mother, Mina, she becomes balanced. But for her mother, the emotional distress and ill-treatment of the child by her foster father affects the mother. Through the use of talk therapy, Mina is able to recover.

The author of *Sous la cendre le feu* uses the Cognitive behavioural therapy, which is a talking therapy, to manage Mina's mental health problem along with the use of sedatives. Talking therapy works well for depression, anxiety, and helps to improve relationships, helping a person to express emotions in healthier ways. Talking therapy involves changing the way people think, responding to their thoughts and experiences (SACAP, 2017). The therapy also involves developing strategies to reduce distress and improve wellbeing and for individual experiencing psychotic symptoms, common in

schizophrenia and a number of other psychiatric disorders, the therapy involve hearing to think differently about unusual experiences such as distressing beliefs that others are out to get them (SACAP,2017). While, Schizophrenia (2016) emphasizes on Art therapy which involves using of music, dance, drawing and other art forms as helping therapy for emotion expressions and healing therapy. He posits that psycho-education helps people understand mental health conditions and ways to promote recovery.

It is observed that Mina attains the stage of self recognition and a state of awareness about her own proper mental disorder. She is able to achieve her proper recovery through the use of flashback as the doctor keeps asking her questions to know whether she is truly okay or not. Dr Lobé keeps asking Mina some questions in a very friendly way to make her think and talk about her past experiences. This is because, sharing what one has been through can help others as well as yourself. If we do not talk about what has happened to us, how will the medical professionals be able to perfect procedures and treatments? Or how do we learn to support others? Here, the author makes use of spoken stories, which awakens the patient's brain from memories involving flashbacks and hidden stories that could be responsible for the present state of the ill-health of the patient who is suffering from mental disorder. Mina finds her voice, a voice that is able to tell all. Mina tells all her stories from the past to the present so as to make a link with the future to make a progression to the future. When stories are not told, one faces anxiety, distress, trouble and tribulation. Mina faces troubles, anxiety and tribulations because she decides to keep her stories to herself. Mina even confirms this that without telling her stories she will be in continuous silence of bitterness. She then, begins to tell her stories to the doctor from her childhood to her present condition. It was from her stories that the doctor learns Mina's father cheats on her mother. The father dates Mina's mother's best friend. This makes her sad when ever she remembers the scene since childhood, it is from her stories that the doctor discovers Mina is pregnant without marriage, and later marries Djibril who claims her six weeks pregnancy, still through her stories the doctor learns Djibril rapes Fanny the adopted daughter of Djiril and all other ill treatment to Mina. Thus, Mina's stories started from the very first page of the novel when she took ill till the last page of the novel notifying her full recovery. Mina's stories eventually make her

whole. Through Mina's ability to narrate her past, the doctor realises that she is coming out of her state:

Vous n'êtes pas folle, madame. Vous avez traversé des moments difficiles, mais c'est presque la fin de tant cela, maintenant. Racontez-moi tout.

Mon mari violé ma fille assénai-je brutalement d'une voix blanche. (Sous: p. 193)

You are not mad, madame. You went through difficult times, but it is almost through now, tell me all.

My husband raped my daughter brutally I asserted in a white voice. (Our translation)

From the foregoing, it is revealed that talking therapy cures mental disorders. Dr Lobé instructs Mina to tell it all so as to recover quickly. He does not want her to harbor any other thing in her mind because he wants to manage her grief and her traumatic state. Mina is seen in this page articulating her thoughts and feelings in a way that represents her authenticity or genuineness. This is achieved through Dr Lobe's friendliness and approachable manners to Mina. Mina and Dr Lopé talk for hours per day because it is believed that out of much words from a man, healing of pains from the past could be achieved. Through this method, the doctor is able to know the cause of Mina's mental illness. Ngolle emphasises the contact of the doctor's therapy which the womanist preaches, that is bringing the experiences of women as multifaceted networks of relationships, contacts and obstacles. This is to create the most effective services that acknowledge and understand the experiences of women in a patriarchal society. Mina's empowerment comes from her treatment.

3.2 Positive forms of societal context in reproductive challenge in the selected novels

This segment examines the positive forms of reproductive challenge as seen in the novels to juxtapose the negative aspect earlier discussed. For the positive aspect, education is seen as the most vital tool of empowerment through which women can overcome the odds of patriarchy and attain their social, political, and economic status in the francophone African society. This part of the work suggests the use of family planning/contraceptives, education/emancipation and abortion as a means of good reproductive health in the lives of women. Though, abortion may sound funny as a

weapon of making women to have sound mind. In our analyses, abortion will be discussed as both negative and positive aspects to reproductively-challenged women.

3.2.1 Family planning and contraceptive

Family planning programmes are associated with lower fertility and lower maternal mortality (Cleland *et al.*, 2006). Pregnancies that are unplanned and unexpected poses a major public health challenge in women of reproductive age, especially in developing countries. It has been estimated that of the 210 million pregnancies that occur annually worldwide, about 80 million (38%) are unplanned, and 46 million (22%) end in abortion (Kaplan, 2013). More than 200 million women in developing countries would like to delay their next pregnancy or even stop bearing children altogether, but many of them still rely on traditional and less effective methods of contraception or use any contraceptive method may lack access or face barriers to using contraception (Kaltenborn, 2018). A more recent review of women's empowerment and fertility shows that women's empowerment is associated with lower fertility, longer birth intervals and lower rates of unintended pregnancy (Upadhyay *et al.*, 2014). Women are able to make strategic life choices, they might want to plan for the future and extend their life roles beyond being a wife and a mother since using family planning would allow them to delay, space or limit their pregnancies, freeing their time for other pursuits. United Nations Population Fund, (1994) declares family planning as the ability to decide freely the number, spacing, and timing of one's children as a basic human right, endorsed at the International Conference on Population and Development,

In many African communities, absence of awareness and inaccessibility to effective use and methods of contraception and family planning impedes the health of adolescent mothers and young women. Family planning or the use of contraceptives is advised to avoid unwanted pregnancy and it equally enables the birth of children to be spaced in a family. In places where couples live in abject poverty, family planning is of a great financial help to a family. Invariably, family planning helps in nations whose citizens live in poverty.

In many male-dominated societies, men consider the use of contraceptives as an aberration. This is due to lack of sufficient education regarding the importance of reproductive health. They believe that having many children is considered a benefit from

God. People have faith that the more children they have the more chances they have of being taken care of in their old age and, of course, nobody knows which child will be most useful to them. Traditional elders often go against family planning and the use of contraceptives due to old tradition and superstition. Youngsters who want to go for family planning risk the wrath of elders who have the power to choose the number and timing of their births. This also paves way for great economic opportunities for women and adds more to the value of their family health.

Three novels reiterate the importance of family planning and the use of contraceptive as good measure to improve the reproductive health of women and adolescent girls. In *Sous la cendre le feu*, Ngolle creates some awareness in her readers. She reveals the effect of the use of contraceptives in the life of Mina's friend, Sylvie, who has been using contraceptives with her fiancé for the past nine years before they finally got married. Sylvie and Maurice live together as husband and wife, a cohabitation that the author refers to as "union libre" (p. 13)

Sylvie et Maurice habitaient un petit studio très sympathique
au premier étage. (Sous: p. 13)

Sylvie and Maurice lived in a little nice apartment at the
first story building. (Our translation)

They both stay in the above-mentioned apartment to study each other in their courtship before they finally get married. In Mina's relationship with Jöel, Jöel gets Mina pregnant which sounds ridiculous to Sylvie. She mocks Mina for such an act and asks her if she never uses contraceptives to prevent pregnancy:

Tu voudrais savoir pourquoi moi je cache tons les jours avec
Maurice et ne suis pas enceinte.

Et bien, moi, je le fais avec un homme qui m'aime, qui sait
ce qu'il veut et ce qu'il fait, avec qui je fais des projets d'un
avenir commun, et qui par conséquent, prend des
précautions. (Sous: p. 19).

You want to know why me. I slept everyday with Maurice
and I did not get pregnant.

And well, me, I do it with a man that loves me, who knows
what he wants and what he is doing, with whom I plan my
future plan and consequently he takes some precautions.
(Our translation)

In the excerpt above, Sylvie educates Mina on the importance of making use of contraceptives. Many in the developing world do not have access to contraceptives due to ignorance. Sylvie tells Mina that it makes one to plan towards the future and not only that, it involves the male and female in relationship, it enhances the mutual understanding of the male and female in relationship to plan towards their goals in life. Sylvie and Maurice are not yet ready to get married. Sylvie and Maurice agreed in this workable solution to improve on their quality and health. The use of contraceptives is well buttressed in the relationship between Sylvie and her fiancé who is not really ready for a child now until they are really ready for it. In the womanist concept, family planning and the use of contraceptives should be resolved amicably as married partners accommodate each other's opinion.

If not for the action of Djibril who agrees to father her child, it is possible that Mina would face the consequences of her life. Aborting is not all that good, for she may end up losing her life. The advantage of making use of contraceptives is also reflected in Mina's auntie's question to Mina to know whether she knows what the use of contraceptives is all about. She wants to guide Mina as a young adolescent of 18. Mina, herself knows that her aunty is just pretending not to know:

Ma tante avait-elle deviné mon état ? Ou bien voulait-elle simplement mettre en garde contre les dangers qui quêtent les adolescentes ? (Sous: p. 62).

Is my aunty aware of my condition? Or she simply wanted me to take precaution on the dangers that adolescents face. (Our translation)

As an adolescent who is still schooling, Maurice lectures Mina on the use of contraceptives since they are not yet ready for the task of childbearing and child rearing. Sylvie tells Mina :

C'est lui qui m'a fait mettre sous pilule pour que nous ne sayons pas encombrés d'un enfant alors que j'étais encore au lycée. (Sous: p. 142).

It is him that makes me use pills so that we do not have children when I was still in school. (Our translation)

Later, Sylvie gets pregnant for Maurice after about nine years in order to readdress teenage and unwanted pregnancies. This is because they use contraceptives such as pills and condoms from protection diseases, and unwanted pregnancy.

In *Rebelle*, Keïta introduces the use of contraceptives as the best measure that could redress maternal depletion syndrome that is back to back pregnancies which can deplete essential nutrients in women. So also, to aid the promotion of reproductive health in the life of her female character is a typical character in the novels that that is used as a sex machine. She has unprotected sex with Barou, which makes her pregnant constantly. This is not too good for her health and debar her progress. Fanta, who is arranged from Mali to meet her husband in France. She is ignorant in the usage of pills for family planning for years. When she gives birth to four children, she says that she wants to be educated like Malimouna. She can hardly sleep, and the wailings of children disturb her. Malimouna pities her condition and asks her why she has not been making use of preventive pills because she feels her life is in danger:

Pourquoi ne prends-tu pas la pilule ?

Pourquoi je ne prends pas quoi ?

Le médecin peut te donner des comprimés pour que tu ne tombes pas enceinte, Fanta.

Ah bon ? Ça m'aiderait drôlement. Il faut que j'en parle à Barou... (Sous: p. 93).

Why are you not taking pills?

Why am I not taking what?

The doctor can give you some tablets that will not make you pregnant, Fanta.

Ah that's good? That would help my family. It is necessary I discuss that with Barou. (Our translation)

As an illiterate person, Fanta knows nothing about that. However, she is happy to hear that several pregnancies could be avoided with the use of contraceptive pills. The only condition is to first discuss with her husband to seek his opinion. In many African societies, girls and women of reproductive age still lack the knowledge of family planning and the use of contraceptives. As described by the author, Fanta just gets to know about

family planning following her discussion with Malimouna. When she eventually discusses with Barou, her husband, he is annoyed to the extent of wanting to slap her:

Il l'avait Presque giflée en lui disant que c'était contre leur religion et que seules les femmes. Volages avaient besoin de ce genre de protection. (Sous : p. 93).

He had almost slapped her in saying that it was against his religion and that it was only flirtations women that need such a protection. (Our translation)

Barou's refusal to allow Fanta to go for family planning is anti-womanist. Barou is not supportive of the well-being of Fanta who is constantly in struggle with both the rearing of her children and also the upkeep of the house without any housemaid to help her. It is only when Malimouna is less busy that she begs her to lend a helping hand. This reveals that in most patriarchal societies, women are disempowered to take decisions about family planning and their reproductive health challenges. Malimouna who is enlightened and educated tries to help Fanta without the knowledge of her husband, Barou; they (Malimouna and Fanta) plan everything together. In the womanist spirit of solidarity which sisterhood enunciates, being one another's keeper and ensuring the well-being of one's friend are to be upheld. They both went to see a gynecologist as they pretend that they are going to the market:

Prétextent qu'elles allaient faire des courses, les deux amies se rendirent un après-midi chez un gynécologue. Fanta portait le bébé sur son dos et poussait les jumeaux dans leur double poussette, tandis que Malimouna tenait Noura par la main. (Sous: p. 94).

In pretence that they were going to shop, the two friends went one afternoon to see a gynaecologist. Fanta put the baby on her back and pushed the twins in their stroller, while Malimouna held Noura by the hand. (Our translation)

From this vivid description, it is clear that Fanta really needs to be placed on family planning. The two friends agree that the contraceptives given to Fanta should be kept in Malimouna's custody and that whenever Fanta wants to make use of it, she should go to her neighbour's house (Malimouna's house). One day, her husband follows her early in the morning without her knowledge, as she is about to use her pills, Fanta's secret is

discovered. He warns Malimouna and beats her up. Women in such situations are in great danger with their health.

Vie de femme, vie de sang presents female adolescents and women in a dysfunctional marriage, especially those married to irresponsible men. When Fatou notices that Ambroise is an irresponsible husband who never spends his money and time to cater for his family, she decides to use contraceptive pills until she is financially strong. And she also desires to see whether her husband will change for the better. For few years, she has been on contraceptives for her child to grow up for a schooling age. Along the line, when she is quite comfortable with the age of her son and also satisfied with the attitude of her husband, she decides to stop using contraceptives:” Les jours qui suivirent, Ambroise était devenu un homme nouveau. Je décidai alors d’arrêter la contraception. (Vie : p. 56)”. Meaning: The following days, Ambroise had become a new man. I decided then to stop contraceptive pills. (Our translation)

Thus, contraceptive usage is encouraged in the womanist concept because it improves the well-being of female adolescents and women especially when their husbands are not supportive of other family planning methods and incapable of providing all the basic needs of life in a family. It is discovered that after the discontinuation of contraceptive pills Fatou becomes, once again, pregnant. The author intends to show that contraceptives are effective measures of protection from unwanted pregnancies for the sake of the health of the mother and to prevent maternal mortality. The emphasis on the needs for proper family planning helps in the education and empowerment of women.

3.2.2 Education and empowerment of the female characters

Royston (1989) posits that education is a medication against fatalism. Today, women have made tangible effort to see that they are politically, socially, economically and culturally upgraded. Women are moving out of religious and cultural bondages. Women have proven to be more responsible and dedicated in attaining and elevating their social status in the society.

Through education, women have been able to overcome various challenges relating to reproductive health challenges in their societies. Through education, women are being empowered and emancipated. Women’s empowerment is defined as the expansion of people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was

previously denied to them Kabeer, (1999). Thus, the ability for women to be able to make decisions are basic women's right. The United Nation's Girls Education Initiative (UNGEL) – Nigeria describes education as the most important factor used by man to conquer his environment and it has shattered his destiny. Education is the only medium through which poverty and ignorance can be eradicated in the lives of women. Education is a continuous process in one's life. New experiences bring new knowledge, attitude, values and skills. Musaaazi (1986) posits that education includes all those activities outside the family that are consciously planned and organised to achieve specific educational objectives.

Today, women's education is as important as men's education. This is because the contributions of women are inevitable to national development. If women are exposed to functional literacy, the level of their ignorance will be reduced. An educated woman can perform her duties with great efficiency. She will be able to run her family in a better way and will, of course, help her children in their studies. An educated woman in the society is treated with respect; she does not depend on her husband permanently. She will also bring something to the house for her family. With education, a woman will be able to win her due place in the society and thus, contribute to the development of her community and the society at large.

Women are in the process of achieving independence of their own from constraints that used to reduce them to a non-thinking, non-feeling, non-participating and irrelevant members of the society. Years back, African traditional cultural values have banished women to be domesticated, accorded them weaker vessels status and gave them no equal rights with their male counterparts. However, in the contemporary society, the reverse is the case. Omolewa (1981) and Fafunwa (1992) among others examined the impacts of women's educational level on socio-cultural and economic development and find out that there is a perfect and 'cross-generational' relationship between adult literacy and national and communal development. Thus, a contemporary woman is much better than a woman of the past. Women of the past were confined to the house only, but now, women do work shoulder to shoulder with men in every sphere of human activities.

In literature, many female writers depict the importance of education in the lives of their female characters. Female writers allow their female character to fulfil their aspirations in and outside their homes through their educational standard.

In *Une si longue lettre*, Ramatoulaye is portrayed as an educator, a good teacher and a liberator and she appears to be the implied author of the text. Due to her educational background, she is able to liberate herself from the male dominance and traditions of her society. As an educated woman, she is able to put her oppressive dominance in black and white stating to the world, and creating awareness that women still live in the world of dominance. Ramatoulaye, therefore, represents the female voice. Through her achievements in education, she wants all other women in the society to be enlightened. If not for her educational background as a woman and wife, she would not have been able to write what women go through in the society. Ramatoulaye, who is abandoned by Modou Fall, her husband of thirty years, rises up to the challenge of financing her twelve children's education and their upkeep, knowing fully well that it is only through education that her children could measure up to standard in the modern African society. Her strength and responsibilities which her husband fails to shoulder are explained thus:

Modou mesurait-il à son exorbitante proportion le vide de sa place, dans cette maison ? Modou me donnait-il des forces supérieures aux miennes pour épauler mes enfants ? (Lettre: p. 102).

Did Modou appreciate, in its full measure, the void created by his absence in this house? Did Modou attribute to me more energy than I had to shoulder the responsibility of my children? (SLAL: p. 53)

Ramatoulaye who is torn between the pain of betrayal and neglect by her husband is able to manoeuvre her ways through her enlightenment in education. As an educated woman, she listens to music, news and reads newspapers frequently to ease the tension of abandonment. All these are strategies to keep her busy and triumph in her life career.

Furthermore, Aissatou is able to make a choice in her marriage to Mawdo Ba, who marries another wife who is old enough to be Aissatou's daughter. With Aissatou's exposure to Western education, she refuses to remain in the marriage but seeks a divorce which would rather make her happy than to face the deadly ordeals of polygamy. Divorce is seen possible in womanism when a woman is seen unable to cope with marital

traumatic problems that could lead to self- destruction. On the verge abusive relationships, that could end up in self-destruction, the womanist is against it according to (Alice Walker, 1983). Thus, divorce or separation is the solution. But this is always on a mutual ground. In a mutual way, Aissiatou confidently announces to her husband thus:

Je me dépouille de ton amour, de ton nom. Vêtue du seul habit valable de la disputé, je pair suis ma route. Adieu. (Lettre: p. 65).

I am stripping myself of your live, your name. Clothed in my dignity, the only worthy garment, I go my way. Goodbye. (Letter: 32).

As an educated womanist, a renowned Lawyer, Aissatou exerts her female action and voice through her letter to reject polygamy which her husband, Mawdo who represents the sexist society imposes on her. She takes her future and the future of her three sons in her hand. She believes her womanist solidarity lies in the relationship of her three sons and her book which has given her the power to make her choice and decision. Her friend, Ramatoulaye lends credence to this :

Puissance des livres, invention merveilleuse de l'astucieuse intelligence humaine. Signes divers, associées en sons, son différents qui moulent le mot. Agencement de mots d'où jaillit l'Idée, la pensée, l'Histoire, la science, la vie. Instrument unique de relation et de culture, moyen inégale de donner et de recevoir. Les livres soudent des générations même labeur continu qui fait progresser. (Lettre: p. 66)

The power of books, this marvelous invention of astute human intelligence. Various signs associated with sound that form the word. Juxtaposition of words from which the idea, thought, history, science, life. Sole instrument of interrelationship and of culture, unparallel means of giving and receiving. Books knit generations together in the same continuing effort that leads to progress. (Letter: p.36).

The above words of Ramatoulaye reveal that education is the only vital tool for women's emancipation, solidarity and freedom. She argues that education is the main instrument to overcome and conquer her cruel environment, such as evil family pressures and societal pressures that are encompassed in reproductive challenges. Also, through the university education, Ramatoulaye's daughter Daba recovers all her mother's rights from Binetou and her family. Ramatoulaye declares thus :”Ah! l'héritage, la rondelette part

acquise par ma fille Daba et son mari et mise à ma disposition. (Lettre: p 121).” Meaning: Ah! The inheritance, the fat shares acquired by my daughter Daba and her husband and put at my disposal. (SLAL: p. 70).

Education makes her to know her mother’s right and, therefore, reclaim her father’s properties from Binatou’s family legally. Due to Ramatoulaye’s educational status, she protests to Daouda Dieng that having four women out of hundred deputies in their communities at the National Assembly is not ideal. She educates him on the importance of women’s participation in politics, contrary to gender inequality militating against women’s involvement in the political system in the country. This shows that she advocates women’s active participation in politics. She believes that it is only through education that this could be achieved. Education remains a potent tool for women to attain their political and socioeconomic advancement in a nation and also a viable instrument of change upon which womanism is built.

In Adelaide Fassinou’s, Modukpé *Le rêve brisé*, Modukpé’s educational status is reflected in the quality of her child rearing. Modukpé as a law student drops out from the university when her lecturer deflowers her and impregnates her. Throughout her higher-level certificate, she manages her life and those of her children. As a young adolescent in her secondary school days, she harkens to her father’s advice and promises to be up and doing. She declares this to Monsieur Robert, her lecturer :

Je lui racontai ma vie : ma jeunesse auprès d’un père qui me surveillait comme la prunelle de ses yeux. A part l’école et l’église le dimanche matin, je n’avais droit à aucune sortie. (Modukpè: p. 44).

I told him my life: my childhood with my father that dominated me like a pupil in his eyes. Apart from school and church. Sunday morning, I did not have right to any outing. (Our translation).

As a secondary school girl, she has no right to go out because her father wants her to be a lawyer and he makes sure he works towards that because he knows the value of education. Through her father’s persistence, she gains admission into the university to study Law. As a serious student in the university, she goes to the university library to read and borrow some books:” Je m’héritai à lui à la bibliothèque, où j’étais allée chercher des

libres, pour des travaux dirigés. (Modukpè: p. 43)”. Meaning: I was at the library, where I went to look for some books for my assignment. (Our translation)”.

With her educational background, she is able to suppress the physical abuse by men. She stands by her son, Sedolo and trains him toward being a good boy. She refuses to cleave to the offer of Monsieur Robert who wants to claim her son after years of suffering. As an informed woman, she knows her rights. But after much persuasion from her mother, she decides to forgive Monsieur Robert:

Alors, Robert, j’ai pardonné ! J’ai pardonné l’humiliation et la trahison. J’ai pardonné le viol le crachat. J’ai tout pardonné, par amour pour mon fils. (Modukpè: p. 99).

Then, Robert, I forgave! I pardoned his humiliation and betrayal. I pardoned my rape and exploitation. I pardoned all, for the love of my son. (Our translation)

The spirit of forgiveness is the spirit of progress which is seen in women; it is the womanist zeal to make progress in life no matter what the situation is. This zeal makes her to forge ahead to get married to a medical doctor, Freddy. She is able to secure a job to keep her going. Without her educational standard in the modern society where she lives, she would never have gotten married to a medical doctor. Through her education, she is able to communicate through phone conversations with Robert who lives abroad and writing to hear her opinions and views about the welfare of his son, Sedolo. Her formal education helps her in training her daughter, Yemalin to ensure that she also acquires university education. “Les enfants ont grandi sont toute ma joie; le collège, l’université, bientôt le mariage. (Modukpè: p. 127).” Meaning: Children grown and is all my joy; the college, the university, very soon marriage. (Our translation)

In *Fureurs et cris de femmes*, Emilienne is able to carry her struggle to a victorious level due to her educational standard. Emilienne is economically independent and does not rely on her husband for survival. She provides for the upkeep of the home; this differentiates her from an illiterate woman who must depend on her husband for everything necessary in the house. Through her educational status, she becomes self-reliant. Though Emilienne becomes frustrated by the traditional rites deeply rooted in her society, being a graduate, she overcomes her problems. Emilienne is a victim of cultural practices and deception by her husband. As a product of Western education, she educates

other challenged women who are facing such problem like infertility. She believes that infertility or having a child is not the ultimate end of a woman. That is, there are more useful things in life to achieve rather than to destroy oneself. Emilienne denounces all what could make her frustrated through her knowledge of arts and science. She states that she is productive even without a child and that the society is harsh on her by saying she is sterile. She compares sterility with a non-living thing because she is educated and as an educated person, productivity means the ability of a woman to add value to herself economically, socially and educationally:

On me disait stérile, quel mot cruel. Une pierre pouvait être stérile, un granit car il ne produit rien, rien ne peut en germer et encore ! (Fureurs : p. 70).

I was called sterile, that word is cruel. A stone can be sterile, a granite because it produces nothing, nothing can sprout and again! (Our translation)

She suppresses the problem through her economic empowerment as an educated woman. She occupies a high position in the society as a top administrative leader, a Director in (SNEBA): “Directrice chargée des Affaires Nationale d’Entretien de Bâtiments Administratifs de son pays.” She is in charge of all the private and public buildings in her town, Kampara. She pays the hospital bills of her mother-in-law, sister and helps her husband financially. Through her economic power, she caters for herself ignoring her infertility, humiliation from her mother-in-law, and her husband’s infidelity towards her. She keeps herself busy in office as a way to overcome her psychological and emotional trauma. She is self-fulfilled.

In *La tâche de sang*, the value of education is shown in the life of Patricia, Mama Ida’s daughter. Mama Ida is a dropout. She did not finish her primary school, and this becomes her limitation. In contrast, her daughter is a highly-educated woman. Although Mama Ida strongly believes in the values of education and she trains her children in school. She has some satisfaction for having brought up and trained her children who are given opportunity to acquire western education, a key that will open many doors to their future. Mama Ida as a traditional African woman is obliged to pay great sacrifices for the education of her numerous children since she is just a farmer.

When Mama Ida becomes ill due to the beatings she receives from Same, her husband, it is discovered that she is pregnant for the eleventh child. Same sends Mama Ida to their daughter's place for treatment. This is because she is simply educated and believes that Mama Ida would be very safe in hands of their daughter. When Patricia notices that her mother is pregnant in her poor health, she runs to meet her friend who is a doctor for help. Modi and Patricia plan to save Mama Ida from her ugly situation. For both friends, Patricia and Modi, they know Mama Ida is in a great danger due to multiple pregnancies. They plot to abort the pregnancy without her mother's consent. In womanist solidarity, both friends aborted Mama Ida's pregnancy. When a woman is educated, she has the confidence to communicate with her sister outside of her culture in agreement and understanding. Patricia and Modi are like sisters, they discuss at length the problems of multiple pregnancies which could cause maternal mortality. Learning from each other, they have to reach an agreement on Mama Ida's case. To be able to attain the goals and objectives of the womanist concept perfectly, one needs to be educated. Education of women is the transfer of knowledge to many women.

Educated women are self-fulfilled. They tend to broaden their horizons by going out of their boundaries and villages to reeducate other women who are less educated. This is seen in the character of Patricia and members of the association of the black feminists. They discuss the barriers of polygamy, girl-child infibulations and cultural problems that affect women globally. Through Patricia, Mama Ida is enlightened, and she is also invited to the association's meetings.

In Keita's *Rebelle*, education is foregrounded as the vital tool for the heroine's liberation. Little Sanita Diama, a friend to Malimouna who has a French background, comes to Malimouna's village to learn her native language, she teaches Malimouna how to speak a little French, while Malimouna teaches her how to speak her native language. From there, Malimouna picks some communicative speech in French language. In their friendship, they discuss issues concerning the cultural tradition that encourages the girl-child circumcision. Sanita tells Malimouna the importance of her clitoris and some other issues that relate to the welfare of the girl-child. Malimouna gets enlightenment through her little friend. She is now able to struggle against circumcision which makes her eventually free from being circumcised.

With the womanist love and welfare for oneself, Malimouna goes against her marriage with Sado and runs out from the bondage of forced marriage. Malimouna who knows the importance of education works as house help for several families to earn money so as to train herself in school. In her adventure before leaving for France, she is able to communicate in French and do some mathematical calculations. In the city of Salouma, Malimouna works in rapid succession as a domestic servant and as a nanny with two French expatriate families. She learns how to count numbers and read the French alphabet.

The second family decides to take her to France for the holiday. There, her master tries to rape her, and she escapes to the city of Paris where she makes her living. She makes hair for people and works in the restaurant in the evening. She attends evening lessons to upgrade her education : "Elle prenait des cours du soir, elle savait à présent parfaitement lire et améliorerait tous les jours sa culture générale. (Rebelle: p. 79). Meaning: She takes evening lessons, she could at this moment perfectly read and ameliorate all the days her culture generally. (Our translation).

She later goes in for a Diploma course in Social Works (L'institut d'Etudes sociales). She occupies herself with books in the library, books to read for success. At the end of her studies, she becomes the best student. This feat astonishes her director, Philippe Blain. In Paris, Malimouna works tirelessly as an activist who is interested in women's progress. Malimouna, in her encounter with Fanta in Paris, promises to help all other women facing any form of female violence. She forms L'Association d'Aide à la Femme en Difficulté" (AAFD); she is very active in this association and believes that there is no justification for women's mutilation because it violates women's rights.

Malimouna is known as "femme – garçon" (p. 22) meaning 'boy woman' for her brilliancy and dedicated act as a good activist. Because of her intelligence, fearlessness, education and economically-empowered status in her society, she is well respected. As an educated person, she cares for the welfare of other people; this has a social impact in the lives of women in her community. She struggles single-handedly and later, her struggle becomes a social struggle, that is, her struggle is from personal to the collective. The womanist concept believes in community struggle which emphasises an accommodating spirit of one another no matter the differences or conditions. Malimouna relates easily with uneducated females, old and young. With this, her fight can have meaningful social

impact in terms of changing men's perception about women. She keeps her body and strives hard to get the weapon which is education so as to fight the socio-cultural inequality against women.

When she comes back to Africa her husband who pretends to be a good and understanding man later disappoints her out of envy and inferiority complex. Since age fourteen, she has been known to be a rebel, which is explained here in the title of the novel 'Rebelle'. She rebels against all forms of female subjugations. She becomes a social figure helping the deprived and less-privileged to be successful in life. With her money, she finances her non-governmental association (AAFD) to fight against all physical and social oppression against women. Her aim is for the betterment of women. i.e. "La lutte pour un mieux – être de la femme" (p. 179). Through the establishment of the association, she accomplishes much. Through her campaign, women are motivated, inspired and they regain their voices. Awareness is created in the lives of the illiterate women who are participants in her forum. At the end, Karim plots against her by kidnapping her to the town of her first husband to humiliate and frustrate her. However, they are surprised at the way police men, women and law enforcement agents come to her aid and arrest all those that are involved in her case. All these achievements are made possible through her educational attainment.

The educational value of women's capacity is equally reflected in Baboni's *Vie de femme, vie de sang*. The heroine, Fatou, who knows the prospects and values of education, attempts suicide twice because of her failure in Baccalaureat examinations: "J'avais échoué un Bac. Ma mère faisait tout pour que je ne fasse plus une deuxième tentative de suicide. (Vie: p. 28)". Meaning: I had failed 'A' level exams. My mother did all to avoid any possible attempt of a second suicide. (Our translation).

Fatou is embittered by her poor performance in a Baccalaureat examination. This is all because she knows the value of education which would help to improve her quality of life and would offer her the opportunity for employment, income and upliftment of social status. The parent also knows that the key to gender equality, justice and poverty reduction is for Fatou to have qualitative education. The mother tries by all means to prevent her daughter from committing suicide. The author portrays Fatou's mother as a guiding angel who prevents her daughter from suicidal obsession. Suicide, from the

womanist view point, is a sign of weakness and bad faith. For every woman, the spirit of resilience in life should continue to run in her vein. Apart from the academic works, a woman should involve herself in social activities and sport during her leisure period. The value of social education and sport is revealed in the heroine as a status quo for qualitative health for female adolescents and women. Women should not be relegated to the kitchen and domestic chores. In many African families, the leisure periods of their female children are restricted to domestic chores and hawking. This is why they usually fall victims of various vices outside their homes. In the novel, Fatou is very active in social activities like long walk, dancing, acting, modelling and matching. She does these always during long vacations with her group called “Rock’n Roll” (p. 18). In this club, she dances, and dramatises :

Les examens finis, c'étaient les vacances. Deux semaines de pause. je pris ce temps pour reprendre mes cours de danse. Notre club de danse était spécialisé dans le rock. (Vie : p. 25)

Examination finished, it was vacation. Two weeks of relaxation. I took my time to go back to my dance classes. Our dance club specialised in rock. (Our translation)

Socio-cultural activities in the life of a female child and women are also part of education in human life. Being a womanist advocate, Baboni reveals the importance of social activities as very essential to community building. It allows both female and male youths to participate in various activities, interact with one another in a supervised setting and also form relationships with adults. Through this, female and male youths develop skills to achieve a team spirit which can help them to contribute to community building.

The author also emphasises the importance of education as a vital instrument that can facilitate job creation for women. Fatou is taught by her mother to do little business. With her little education, her sisters' advice that she should take a job by applying to the Ministry of Education for a teaching job:

J'appris que le Ministère chargé de L'Education recrutait des enseignants. Mes sœurs me poussèrent à déposer ma candidature. (Vie : p. 28)

I heard that the Minister in charge of Education was recruiting teachers. My sisters urged me to apply (Our translation).

This is to show that no matter the level of one's educational attainment, there is opportunity for one. All levels or categories of education have value. Fatou's minimum education is evidenced by her secondary school certificate while she fails Bac examinations. For a woman at this level, she can write and read letters to communicate in her nation's official language; this basic education can pave ways for her self-sustainability. This view is buttressed by National Gender Policy (2006) which states that the basic education plays a crucial role in national development by encouraging social participation across groups. With this level of education, she is privileged to be in one of the primary schools in the city. She relocates and gets an accommodation nearer to her place of work. She is put in charge of the higher and lower classes. It is from this responsibility that she earns her living as a responsible woman in the society. She is also able to contribute her own quota to the development of her society instead of being redundant like her husband who lies, feeds on others and adds no value to the development of the society. It is equally from this job that Fatou feeds her child and even her husband.

Professional responsibility keeps a woman going and contributes to her wellbeing. Fatou is also able to maintain her marital status through her education. She keeps on believing through the womanist spirit, strength and hard work that things would change in her state of depression when her husband is no longer supportive, lavishing her hard-earned money on women. She puts on an accommodating spirit which is one of the womanist ideologies thereby saving her marriage from total collapse. She keeps on overlooking and forgiving her husband to make room for future progress. This can only be achieved effectively through a woman's educational attainment. For instance, the husband, Ambroise, takes over her motorbike, car and still beats her up. He equally nags in front of Fatou's friend, Salima, like an illiterate person. He has become so depressed that he even tears up his baby's feeding bottles and the furniture in his living room simply because Fatou refuses to release her car key. Fatou regrets her husband's attitude in this way: *Il porte une paire de ciseaux et se mit à déchaîner le divan.* (Vie: p. 101). He took a pair of scissors and started cutting the cushion chair. (Our translation)

Ambroise brings in women to his matrimonial home. Fatou complains that the house has turned into a hotel room. Women who really wanted a complimentary role to work will always harbour such a man. If it were to be two illiterate marital partners, heads

will roll and people in the neighbourhood would be coming frequently to settle matters. As a gentle, cultured and educated woman, Fatou keeps watching her wailing husband. One day, Ambroise shows his attitude in the presence of Fatou's friend, Salima, who is shocked and embittered:

Tu ne casseras plus rien ici tant que je serais là, c'est compris ? Mon ami m'a toujours narré tes comportements de sauvage mais de là à faire cela en ma présence, c'en est trop.

C'est normal, tu ne sais pas comment Fatou a fait pour aménager son appartement. Tu ne connais pas le prix d'une chaise, d'un divan.

C'est facile d'endommager ce que tu n'as pas pu acheter et que tu ne pourras jamais acheter. Avec mode de vie, tu ne pourras même pas t'acheter une aiguille (Vie : p. 101-102).

You will no longer break any thing here when I am here, is that understood?

My friend has always narrated your animalistic behaviours to me but in that way, you have proved yourself in my presence, that is too much.

It is normal, you do not know how Fatou had been managing her apartment you do not know the price of a chair, of a cushion.

It is easy to destroy what you cannot buy and what you have never bought.

With your kind of life, you will not be able to buy a needle.
(Our translation)

It takes a cultured person not only western educated person to appreciate the value of investment. One believes that in spite of one's state of anger he or she should not indulge in wanton destruction of life and property. Ambrose fails to depict an act of civility by embarking on needless destruction of property. As a good cultured man or woman, education is meant to remould, change people's mentality, behaviours and reasoning.

As an educated woman, Fatou adds business to her normal work to boost her economic power in order to keep her family going. The first business is run down by her husband who takes all the money from her to drink and womanise. The second time she ventures into importation of cosmetics with her friend Salima as a joint business; within

some months, the business becomes lucrative that they become main distributors. Meanwhile, their normal office work is sustained. Apart from this, Fatou goes out for modelling. In the society, many women with white collar jobs add vocational skills to what they do. Women's participation in vocational skills and jobs is an aspect of informal sector that boosts economic power of women. Once this is done, the issue of financial hardship confronting women will definitely be a thing of the past. It is through this business that she meets Eric, who also has great problem with the wife, woos Fatou and wants her hand in marriage after Ambroise leaves the house again for the seventh time. Eric and Fatou are educated and understand each other: "Deux cœurs meurtris par ceux que nous aimions. (Vie: p. 111)." Meaning: Two hearts broken by those we loved. (Our translation).

In *Sous la cendre le feu*, Ngolle rejects and criticises gender imbalance in women's education in Francophone African countries. Ngolle narrates gender inequality in most communities where the girl-child's education has no significant value to the development of women. In some communities, a girl is not allowed to go to school, but she has the right to be domesticated, while only male children are allowed to have access to education. In Mina's case, her educated father who is a civil servant allows all his female children to go to school. She works towards her final examinations in the secondary. Knowing what the value of education is, she is supported by her husband, Djibril by keeping her pregnancy and allowing her to finish her exams before getting married with him. In Lycée de New-Bell à Douala, Mina is able to complete her 'A' level with her mates before she gets married to Djibril.

Djibril knowing fully well that education raises a woman's self-esteem and respect, Djibril allows Mina to further her education after the birth of their daughter, Fanny. Djibril allows her to go for her Higher Diploma. He makes things easy for her by providing her with a female nanny to take care of Fanny while Mina goes to school to attend her lectures: "J'avais beau être secondée par une femme de ménage et par ma mère qui s'occupait beaucoup de Fanny". (Sous: p. 76). I had been well assisted by a house help and by my mother who kept charge of Fanny. (Our translation)

Mina combines maternity and education. She starts at age 19 after giving birth to Fanny and finishes at age 29 as a full graduate.

Some married women attend classes while nursing their children due to the value they attach to education. She agrees with any idea or decision her husband comes up with concerning her educational upliftment.

When a woman is so comfortable that her husband does things for her, she may become almost useless. Her sister, Essebé an undergraduate, tells her that she does not look well physically. That she is always concerned with her books and children but has not been taking good care of her looks as of recent, that she should improve on herself. Mina spends much of her time to take care of her four children and go to work. As a working mother, women should appear good both outside and within. Her shabby dressing makes her husband change his attitude towards her. As a graduate, a woman should be able to look good and take good care of herself and her children. She only concentrates on the well-being of her children which portrays her as a good educator at the expense of her wellbeing as a mother and caregiver.

Mina confirms that she has been concentrating on her children's education and work without caring for herself; her confession is presented in this way:

Je consacrais beaucoup de temps à l'éducation de mes enfants, ainsi qu'à mon travail, il ne m'en restait guère beaucoup pour penser à moi-même, d'autant plus que je sortais peu (Sous : p. 171).

I spent a lot of time educating my children's education, as well as my work, I did not have much left to think about myself even to go out. (Our translation)

Through her sister, Mina is able to think straight like other women who are educated. It is Essèbe who teaches her sister, Mina how to take decisions for herself and how to give her body all cares it deserves.

Rawiri, in *Fureurs et cris des femmes*, represents education as a strong weapon to suppress all manners of oppression in the life of the heroine. Emilienne, who is frustrated by her mother-in-law and her husband employs the instrumentality of education to make things work. She gets married to Joseph as a graduate. Along the line, things go bad for her in their relationship when she is faced with the challenge of infertility. Though Emilienne is educated, she is equally endowed with good character.

As a virtue of good character, she is assisted to occupy her present position by an old friend and college. The narrator relates this testimony thus :

Emiliénne obtint son poste de directeur chargé des affaires administratives grâce à un ancien collègue de fac devenu ministre, natif de sa région. (Fureurs: p. 19).

Emilienne obtained the post of a director in charge of administrative affairs courtesy of an old friend from her faculty, native of her region, and who is now a minister. (Our translation)

In her career, she is an activist who fights for the right of women. She occupies a high post in the administrative sector of her town as a Director in *Société Nationales d'Entretien de Bâtiments Administratifs* (SNEBA). As a principled woman she has links in all the administrative sectors and she helps some of her family members to secure job; thus, she helps the less-privileged. She re-educates all her subordinates under her supervision so as to avoid any maladministration in order to achieve good governance and success.

Emilienne is economically independent and rich. She owns the house where husband and his family live. As a good community leader, she participates in unions, feminist conferences and makes sure all programmes are well organised in her advertised broadcasting programmes. On televised programmes, she speaks about issues relating to women so as to ameliorate their condition of living. She also talks about the problems encountered by women in African societies in the African way. Through these, she achieves a form of social transformation of women in all spheres of their lives to make a better living.

3.2.3 **Abortion**

Abortion differs greatly across cultures. For instance, in the Ancient Assyria deemed induced abortion illegal, with execution of the women as punishment for the crime (Kaplan *et al.*, 2017). There are many problems that can cause abortion. Abortion is done in some families to save the life of the mother; it is based on health ground. This could be when a pregnant woman is plagued with a chronic ailment. Considering the fact that the pregnancy could affect her health, her physician carries out abortion after due consultations with relatives. In some families, abortion is done on the basis of sex-selective preference, that is, preferring a boy child to a female child. This method is practised in areas where the male children are valued more than the female children. Sex-selected abortion refers to the targeted abortion of female foetuses. The foetus' sex may be

identified through ultrasound but also rarely through amniocentesis or another procedure (Zubair, 2006). Another case for the need for abortion is incest pregnancy – when an underage girl is impregnated by her father or close relative. To avoid difficulty of giving birth due to age and also to avoid unnecessary embarrassment, the pregnancy has to be aborted (Faheen, 2012). Issues of abortion are raised in our selected works because female writers treat it in the social context of women’s reproductive health challenges.

Only two of the selected novels explore the subject of abortion. *La tache de femme* reflects abortion on the basis of the protection of women on their reproductive health. This is accepted by the womanist in order to improve on the well-being of women. *Sous la cendre le feu* portrays abortion based on the promiscuity of female adolescent, which brings shame and reproach to the family and leads to death. This is anti-womanist and it has a negative effect on reproductive health of women. In Bassek’s *La tache de sang*, the suffering of a black woman is reiterated as what the womanist emphasises as black women’s strength and experiences. This is because it recognises the fact that women are survivors in a world that is oppressive on multiple platforms; it seeks to celebrate the ways in which women negotiate their oppressions in their individual lives. Mama Ida is controlled by her husband to the extent that he controls her womb. Same Hanack wants Mama Ida to give birth to several babies at age 55 after she has ten children, including that of her co-wives. This demonstrates the ego and self-centredness of man’s nature. He never thinks of her condition at that age. Mama Ida with the womanist zeal built in her continues to survive in these oppressive platforms. She gets pregnant for the eleventh child and she is beaten up by her husband, Same, because it takes her long time to cook the pot of snacks for her husband’s brother and so Same thinks she deserves some beating even with her pregnancy:

Same venait de lui, administrer une violente jifle que suivirent quelques coups de poings. Elle en perdit son équilibre et s’affaissa sur le sol dur (Tache : p. 40).

Same has just given her a violent slap that was followed by some blows. She lost her balance and fell on the hard floor.
(Our translation)

This act of violence is totally anti-womanist. The writer reacts against the beating of women by men who do not accord their wives respect. This act becomes so serious that

Mama Ida starts bleeding which leads to her ill health. The author enlightens the society the reasons why therapeutic abortion should be administered on women. This type of abortion is done to save the life of a pregnant woman in order to preserve a pregnant woman's mental or physical health, terminating the so-called pregnancy that would result in a child with a fatal congenital disorder, or selectively reducing the number of fetuses born as a result of a high-risk multiple pregnancy. Thus, Mama Ida's case is seen as inevitable in performing abortion since the doctor confirms her constant bleeding which has made the cervix profused and cervix dilated which can lead to her death. Same is concerned about the poor health of Mama Ida, which keeps deteriorating now and then; he now sends her to her eldest daughter Patricia, a civilised and educated daughter, the first born of Mama Ida for proper care and medication. On getting to Patricia's place in the city, she sympathises with her when she hears that her mother is again pregnant after ten children and now she is ill and still with another pregnancy. She complains that in all other families in the society, children are being taken care of by extended families because children belong to everybody and that her mother's own is different. She always takes care of children and the nurturing of these children practically makes her get locked up at home:

Seule, enfermée dans une maison relativement étroite, elle devait s'occuper de ses enfants, de leur éducation, et s'aliéner dans les travaux domestiques (Tache : p. 133).

Alone, locked in the house relatively tight, she was to take care of these children, of their education, and alienated with domestic chores. (Our translation)

Patricia sees this as an eyesore and takes Mama Ida to her friend, a physician called Modi who advises Mama Ida against nursing or having another baby. As an African woman who only cares for the welfare of her husband, she does not care about herself; she even risks her life. Mama Ida tells Modi that her husband adores children: "Mon mari adore les enfants." (p. 130). At the point of her ill health, her reaction baffles Modi which makes her to voice out that she (Mama Ida) talks as if she does not exist. In such a situation, a woman has to save her head. It is at this point that both friends plan to abort the pregnancy for the sake of her health. At a point, Modi wants to involve Same, as she can understand that Mama Ida is not in a safe hand with Same who humiliates and beats

her frequently; she believes there is no point relating or getting his consent before abortion. Modi reassures Patricia: "Ne t'alarme pas, Patricia, ton drame et combat sont les miens. (Tache: p. 131)." Meaning: Do not worry, Patricia, your wish and your struggles are mine. (Our translation)

Mama Ida goes through induced abortion with the consent of her daughter but without the patient's knowledge. Modi gives Patricia some drugs that will work and last Mama Ida for seventeen hours. Mama Ida experiences some contractions in her fetus before being operated upon within 14 hours.

Tu peux me faire confiance. N'hésite sur tait pas à la ramener s'il se pose un problème. Je prends la garde dès dix-sept heures. (Tache : p. 132).

You can rely on me. Do not hesitate at all to bring her if it poses any problem. I look after her for 17 hours. (Our translation)

Patricia gives her mother the tablets with water and tells her mother to go to bed that she only needs to rest. After several hours, Mama Ida starts to have complications in her womb. She declares :

Jene me sens pas mal, dit Mama Ida. Il y a ces relâchements des muscles du bas – ventre qui me semblent plutôt s'accroître, mais je crois que ça va passer. (Tache: p.141).

I am not feeling fine, said Mama Ida. There are some slacks of muscles within my stomach that are rather accentuated, but I think all will be fine. (Our translation)

After several hours when the complications become unbearable, she has to be rushed to the hospital for the operation:" On transporta Mama Ida à l'aide d'un chariot, vers la sale d'urgence." (Tache: p. 147). Meaning: "We transported Mama Ida with the help of troller, towards the emergency room." (Our translation)

Mandika is surprised to hear that at that age, Mama Ida is pregnant, and she is subjected to induced abortion. With the womanist strength, Mama Ida survives the operation and she appears ashamed whenever she sees Madika, her daughter although she becomes healthier and happy later.

In *Sous la cendre le feu*, Ngolle condemns female adolescents who seek abortion which leads to complications, future infertility and death. Mina, who represents the voice of the society talks on the disadvantages and consequences of abortion. In the novel,

young school girls become dropouts due to teenage pregnancies, while some die due to abortion. A female child should be properly monitored while under her parents if not, she would turn out to be victim of unforeseen situations. Mina who is pregnant for her boyfriend worries about what to do and in that mood, she has a reflection on some female adolescents who are pregnant and go for abortion:

J'avais entendu dire plusieurs fois au lycée de telle camarade ou de telle autre qu'elle était enceinte. Certaines avaient abandonné leurs études, d'autres avaient disparu pendant un ou deux trimestres, le temps de mener à terme leur grossesse et d'avoir leur bébé, puis revenaient munies d'un certificat médical grâce auquel elles étaient réadmissées au lycée (Sous : p. 39).

I heard them say many times in high school about a classmate or some others that she was pregnant. Some had abandoned their studies, others had disappeared for one or two semesters for them to have their babies and later come back with medical certificate with which they were readmitted in high school. (Our translation)

From the above report, it means that Ngolle is concerned about the rate of abortions and unwanted pregnancies among young girls of high school. The effects could be calamitous and detrimental to the health and studies of the high school victims. After a child is born as seen in the text, the young girl-mother is readmitted and possibly reoriented into the college. The writer's interest is predicated on the growing number of unwanted pregnancies that lead to abortions in many African societies. For example, in the 2000s, teenagers aged 17-19 account for 93% of teenage fertility in South Africa where abortion was legalised in 1996 (Panday *et al.*, 2009, p.35).

In Ngolle's *Sous la cendre le feu*, abortion is seen as illegal since it is not on health basis and because it is not as a result of incest or rape. The teenage adolescent is aged 18 and if she decides to keep the pregnancy, the better for her at least she would have saved her life and also the life of the unborn baby. For the womanist point of view, it is morally wrong for a female adolescent to get babies aborted when she is physically fit and balanced without any health problems. And apart from that, one never can tell what those aborted fetuses might turn out to become in life. In other words, it will be viewed that adolescent females who go for abortion may not want to bring some inconveniences to their parents through the burden of their pregnancies. For the womanist, abortion is seen

as an exceptional hard case to treat. Hospitality should be rendered or extended to help female adolescents who are victims of teenage pregnancies and rape in the society. In this way, the womanist policies of nurturing and well-being for these babies are rendered. As a writer that projects the womanist ideals, the author discourages the act of abortion and uses the womanist concept of spirituality in comforting the relatives of the victims of abortion.

This chapter has carefully examined the negative and positive forms of societal context of reproductively-challenged women in marriages. The womanist theory is adopted for its analyses to capture the experiences of women in their challenged state, thereby creating awareness for all women by depicting their various problems in the African society.

CHAPTER FOUR

DEPRESSION AND COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL HEALING THERAPY ON REPRODUCTIVELY-CHALLENGED WOMEN IN THE SELECTED NOVELS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter examines depression and cognitive behavioural healing therapy on reproductively-challenged women in selected texts. It highlights the emotional and psychological traumas of women as it affects their behaviour and their thinking. The cognitive behavioural theory is used to reveal the traumatised characters of women in the novels.

4.1 Depression in women

Depression is common among women who are twice clinically depressed than men (Kessler R.C., Walters EE, 2002). The consequences of depression in human lives are sadness, loneliness, illness, instability, anxiety, irritability, excessive crying and loss of weight. At times, depression is very hard to overcome. This is where depression becomes a disorder that requires active treatment through a therapist (Beck, 1970). People, especially women, get depressed through their relationship with their surroundings and people around them. Black women are generally depressed due to their socio-cultural environment and their stressful state. Stress is also a system of a depressed person. When a woman is stressed, she feels so uneasy; such as tiredness and inability to think straight. Hooks (1993) defines stress as a major health problem Black woman face. Adisa (1990:13-14) vividly describes how stress affects Black women:

Stress is hemmed into their dresses, pressed into their hair, mixed into their perfume and painted on their fingers, stress from differed dreams, the dreams not voiced. Stress from the broken promises, the blatant lies; stress from always being at the bottom from never being thought beautiful, from always being taken for granted, taken advantage of, stress from being a Black woman in a white world.

The above emphasises the burden of Black women who are incapable of articulating the stress that gnaws at their souls which invariably leads to depressive disorder. The foregoing views Black women as suffering from male supremacy. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:36) describes her suffering from:

The heritage of tradition... this second mountain on the African women's back is built of structures and attitudes inherited from indigenous history and sociological realities. African women are weighted down by superstructural forms deriving from the pre-colonial past. In most African societies, whether patrilineal or matrilineal, gender hierarchy, male supremacy or sex asymmetry (or whatever term we choose to use was known and taken for granted... men are still dominant in private and public life.

The experience of women represents multifaceted networks of relationships, contacts and obstacles that are all interconnected, which contribute to their stressful and depressive conditions.

In all, Africans need social transformation to relieve women of stressful and depressive states. Treatment should be focused on women's emotional development, trauma, recovery and parenting skills. Many interpersonal instances can lead to depression in women, such as discrimination against women gender in certain cultures, family environment and the social context. There are so many effects and symptoms of depression in women, which include, persistent sadness, loss of interest in pleasurable activities including sex, lack of sufficient sleep due to domestic activities, inferiority complex, tiredness and loss of energy.

In Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*, the author paints depression caused through marital disorder, polygamy and male deceit. Ramatoulaye's depressed mood is as a result of the problem of polygamy which is embedded in the ambiance of marriage. The marriage of Ramatoulaye and Modou Fall is characterised by friction, hostility and lack of affection which lead to the depressive state of Ramatoulaye and also the death of Modou Fall. Ramatoulaye exhibits the symptoms of depression like loneliness, irritation, inability to concentrate, anxiety and empty mood. All these symptoms are manifested when Modou's brother, Tamsir, from the Mosque in Grand Dakar comes in with other family members to brief her that Modou Fall, has married a second wife, her daughter's friend, Benatou. Ramatoulaye repeats Imam's speech in her letter to Aissatou.

Ramatoulaye has a depressive mood that brings in shock, sadness, and an uneasy physical and psychological emotion: “J’acquiesçais sous les gouttes de poison qui me calcinaient.” (Lettre: p. 75). Meaning: “I acquiesced under the drops of poison that were burning me.” (Letter: p. 37).

Ramatoulaye’s mind travels to her past in ‘a quarter of a century of marriage’ with her husband. She recounts her marital events with her husband, the even and uneven relationship with him until she is unable to think again. She states that she forces herself to check her inner agitation not to relate her inner distress.

Ramatoulaye, upon all her depressive manifestations, is able to overcome through some strategies. The first act of healing therapy is seen through the title of the novel *Une si longue lettre*, meaning, “So long a letter”. She employs the talking and discussing therapy which is adopted by Dr. Aaron Beck. This helps one to manage problems by enabling one to recognise how one’s thoughts can affect one’s feeling, using the past to heal the future. In the novel, Ramatoulaye regains her voice through the letter. She communicates all what is discussable in her environment, in her religion, in her society, in her marriage, involving all her friends in order to be healed physically and psychologically. Therefore, her letter becomes the measure which represents the therapist.

The other strategy that Bâ uses to heal is the use of recreational activities which are strong weapons to address reproductive challenges in women. This medium is used to break boredom, loneliness, and forms of emotion which can cause depression. Recreational activities are also used by physician to remove depression from those who have mental disorder. Ramatoulaye is relieved of her depressive state, her mood of loneliness by going to the cinema to watch films. She expresses her joy because she derives courage to survive the harsh conditions of depression.

In reality, recreational activities are good means to make one active, forget about one’s problems at the moments of depression and when one is going through emotional trauma. Through film watching, one finds the causes and solutions to one’s problems because films are inbuilt realities. One compares, contrasts and makes one’s final decision. All these are healing strategies to depressive situations.

Eventually, Ramatoulaye finds happiness in her depressive moods. With the written letter, she admits that she would have to find the happiness she lacks; at least, she

is healed. It is a healing made possible through her narrated stories about her life and people's lives in *So Long a Letter* to Aissatou, her friend. Moreover, Ramatoulaye equally describes her neighbours' depressed state. In the novel, Jacqueline is depressed by the attitudes of her husband towards her. Her husband abandons her, cheats on her, and neglects her and her children. He goes out early and comes back late at night. Jacqueline becomes lonely and distressed, while life becomes unworthy to her. She loses her appetite and weight. She consequently has constant headaches and she is unable to think straight and concentrate. All the above mentioned are symptoms of depression. She is hospitalised, treated regularly by doctors. The therapist discovers that she is normal but depressed :

Madame Diack, je vous garantis la santé de votre tête. Les radios n'ont rien décelé, les analyses de sang non plus. Vous êtes simplement déprimée. (Lettre: p. 89)

Madame Diack, I assure you that there is nothing at all wrong with your head. The x-rays have shown nothing, and neither have the blood tests. The problem is that you are depressed. (Letter: p.45).

In her own case, the strategy employed for her healing is to go out, make more friends, create events that would make her happy, engage herself in games, recreational activities and react against her problems. All these are healing therapies advocated by her doctor.

Furthermore, Ramatoulaye narrates that Jacqueline actually gets her healing through these methods because she knows (Jacqueline) her illness: "Elle connaissait le noyau de son mal et le combattait. Elle se moralisait". (Lettre: p.89)". Meaning "She knows the heart of her illness and would fight against it. She was morally uplifted. " (Letter: p. 45).

Ramatoulaye lays emphasis on the cognitive behavioural therapy of healing by looking at the past events in the life of Jacqueline through flashbacks. Through the use of flashbacks, the future comes into existence. Jacqueline is healed by ruminating on her illness and determining to be healed. She becomes pessimistic about her failure, sickness and depression.

Both Jacqueline and Ramatoulaye are influenced by the deceptive acts and misconducts of their husbands which make them to think negatively about their conditions and maltreatment in their marriages. Their feelings show in their behaviours. Jacqueline

witnesses a long-term treating model, while Ramatoulaye undergoes a short-term model. In Ramatoulaye's short-term healing processes, the social context of reproductive challenges is distorted because she admits that she would go out to search for happiness, while the social context of reproductive challenges faced by Jacqueline is also distorted because at the end, Jacqueline is morally uplifted.

In Fassinou's novel, the traits of depression are found in the life of Modukpé's parents and also found in the behaviour of Modukpé who bears depression to the tail end of her adulthood. Her depressive manner is manifested in her marriage and this makes her to perform poorly in her marriage expectations. Since childhood, Modukpé knows her family to be a dysfunctional one. Her parents divorced when she was still a child. This divorce is attributed to her father's deception. Jean-Paul, her father, is known for deceiving her mother in their relationship. Modukpé's mother has no knowledge about the first marriage of her husband. In addition, he maltreats her and her divorce is premised on her suffering. With this, he transfers his aggression on the children and maltreats them. This makes Modukpé sad and depressed. She has been emotionally and psychologically depressed for so long through her father's maltreatment of all his children. According to her, she runs away from love because this sentiment makes her sick, which destroys her and makes her suffer giving her psychological problems. For this reason, she will never change her views about loving someone. Her relationship with Robert is not different from the situation of her mother. She says her father is very wicked to them and treats them (children) so badly:

D'abord, tous les hommes étaient dans ma tête pareille à mon père : méchants, coléreux, incapables d'amour pour leurs propres enfants. (Modukpé: p. 35).

Firstly, all men were in my head like my father: wicked, tempered, incapable of love for their own children. (Our translation)

Modukpé is depressed, lonely and sad throughout the days of her adolescence due to her father's behaviours towards her and her mother. She is again depressed by her boy friend's behaviour, who uses her and dumps her during pregnancy. She cries regularly and becomes so sad; she is abandoned by Monsieur Robert. Even in her second marriage with

Frieddy, she is dumped. Her life is full of grief, solitude, loneliness, deep thoughts and anger which are symptoms of depression.

Modukpé is able to overcome her depressive mood through her strong will for her daughter who epitomises happiness and fulfilment. The success of her daughter would break all the unhappy moments of her life. She believes that children are the salt of life. Modukpé's mother makes use of the talk therapy to divulge all her life histories to her daughter. She believes in this way, she would be a happy woman. Modukpé also narrates her own story as a storyteller. She relates the conditions and situations that make her to aggressive, solitude, and depressed, which are effects and symptoms of depression. Through this mechanism, she becomes healed.

In the behavioural cognitive therapy, Modukpé's healing is based on long-term, and short-term healing, therapies. The short-term is understood by the fact that she is happy because at this very moment, she has hope for being happy, but this happiness will only come to pass in the near future: "Les enfants ont grandi sont toute ma joie". (Modukpé: p. 127) meaning: "The children are grown; and they are all my joy." (Our translation).

In *Sous la cendre le feu*, Ngolle reflects the ambivalent situation of family as having great impact on a depressed person. For instance, the well-being of a person in the family would affect the well-being of another person in that family. Similarly, the depressed condition of a person would affect another to have depression. In the narrative, it is depicted that Fanny's depressed mood leads to the mother's depressive mood. Gotlib and Hammen (1992) maintain that the well-being of a spouse has a notable influence on the other spouse. The depression in these characters is characterised by friction, hostility and lack of affection between the father and the mother. Fanny is raped by her step-father and She becomes lonely and isolated. She keeps to herself, while her mother also becomes depressed. Mina's depressive state leads her to having mental disorder. The problem of the daughter equally affects her mother. Mina cannot think straight as her thinking affects her behaviour:

Quelque chose s'est contracté dans mon ventre, puis s'est déroulé, lentement d'abord, puis avec une vitesse fulgurante a envahi tout mon corps, est monté jusque dans ma tête, et a fait éclater mon cerveau. (Sous: P. 197.

Something is contracting in my belly, then moving, slowly at first, then with a high-speed dazzling invaded all my body, climbed to my head and burst into my brain. (Our translation).

Mina narrates the beginning of her madness. She feels something strange has entered into her from her stomach up to her brain. Her strange behaviour takes her to the hospital where she undergoes medical treatment. The cognitive behavioural therapy is used to cure Mina with the help of a therapist who constantly asks her questions on her relationship with her husband, children and father. It is in his discussion with her that he eventually knows Fanny is not the biological daughter of Djibril and that Fanny is raped by her stepfather who claims to be her father. It is through these questions that the therapist gets to know that Mina's father has divorced her mother (Mina's mother) which also affects her manner of behaviour. Through the talk therapy, Mina is made to narrate her past to enable her recognise how her past events can shape her thoughts and behaviours. With the help of the therapist, Mina narrates all the events of her past down to her present state. The novel opens with her ability to talk about herself when the therapist realises that she is well.

Kuoh-Moukoury's *Recontres essentielles* portrays the problems of a stressful marriage. Flo experiences a distressed marriage. In Flo's relationship with Jöel, Jöel's behaviour triggers negative effects in her life. Thus, her feelings and thinking trigger her social behavior. Jöel's attitudes change after few years of his marriage with Flo which causes depression in the life of Flo.

Due to her problem of infertility, Flo is maltreated by Jöel who hardly talks to her. Flo tries all her best to win her husband back but to no avail. With the situation in her stressful and depressive marriage, she becomes sad, lonely, worthless and abandoned:

Je reste seule dans le noir, porte close, volets clos comme si je veillais un mort. Les yeux dans le vague, happé par un autre monde, celui de la démence après celui de l'absurdité. Le monde s'éveille et déjà il me dégoûte. La dépression commence par l'abandon total de toutes les forces. L'amour même devient un vain combat. Tout est fini (Rencontres : pp. 100-101)

I remain alone in the dark with the door and the blinds shut, as if I were holding a vigil for the dead. I have a faraway look in my eyes, as if I had been dragged from a world of absurdity to one of madness. The world comes to life, and already it disgusts me. An early sign of depression is the total loss of energy. Even love becomes an empty battle. It is all over. (EE: pp. 48-49)

Kuoh-Moukoury employs emotion-focused coping of Lazarus S. Folkman (1984). Flo seeks social support to quit her problems (marital problem of infertility) that continuously give her stress and make her depressed. She involves her friend in her marriage, to see whether her depressions will be solved. She decides to give her friend to her husband in order not to lose out totally. This is a coping strategy to remove stress and depression off her way. For this act, people blame her for denying that because they feel it is not normal:

On m'accuse d'avoir jeté mon mari dans les bras de mon amie. Dans la tradition, n'est-ce pas l'épouse qui choisit elle-même, une nouvelle femme à son mari ? (Rencontres: p. 88).

I am accused of having thrown my husband into the arms of my friend. According to African tradition, isn't it the wife herself who chooses a new wife for her husband? (Essential: pp. 42).

Flo's coping strategy does not appear successful. First, the divorce which her husband, Jöel, opts for does not work when he begins his relationship with Doris, Flo's friend. The communication gap between Flo and Jöel at least, turns out to be lively interaction, while the state of depression becomes minimal. Three of them can now go out together. They go to movies. During these periods, she is able to control her depressed state of anger; she has courage to continue to live instead of feeling like dying. This coping strategy only lasts for a while. Later, Flo is completely abandoned by Jöel for Doris. But as fate would have it, this strategy later yields to success. This is because, Flo takes over her friend's child, when her friend Doris, is also faced with distress and depression when she sees that Flo refuses to opt for a divorce. Doris dies in an accident, and her son becomes Flo's son. Flo exercises some self-control and accepts responsibility in order to make a success towards her depressed state. This is good mechanism to avoid depressive state.

In addition, Flo battles her depressive manners through the talk therapy. Through her voice as a female activist against depression, she struggles for survival in a stressful marriage. She struggles to have a baby which makes her to be depressed; she, however, overcomes and plans to continue to strive harder to be able to have a future. It discursively appears that Doris' appearance and disappearance are narrative processes to unsettle and settle Flo's conjugal challenges; her death becomes a restitution for the life of Flo's marriage.

In *Fureurs et cris de femmes*, a stressful marriage is also portrayed in the life of the character. Emilienne becomes sad and lonely, due to her mistreatment by her husband, her mother-in-law and her secretary. She gives her husband a child after the death of her only daughter. Thus, she is humiliated by her mother-in-law who ridicules her almost everyday; she is addressed as a useless woman. Iyang, her mother-in-law, tells Emilienne that her dog is much better than her because her dog is able to bear children. Emilienne goes to work sad and comes back home sad. She faces a world of solitude, because her husband, hardly speaks to her. Hence, she minds her own business all day in a very sad mood. It is this attitude that leads to her depression. Emilienne feels so irritated, sad and depressed to the extent:

De grosses larmes de désespoir roulent sur les joues de la jeune femme "jusqu' où isa-t-il dans cette humiliation qu'il me fait subir. N'est-il pas suffisant que toute la ville sache que mon mari a deux foyers ! faut-il à présent qu'il me l'impose sous mon propre toit !. (Fureurs: p. 37)

Massive tears of hopelessness rolled down the cheeks of the young lady. "Just from where comes this humiliation that I'm suffering? Is it not enough for all the town to know that my husband has two homes! Is it compulsory at this moment that he imposes on under my own roof? (Our translation).

The foregoing is a manifestation of depression and sadness which cause ill health in the lives of people in any sad situation. Emilienne cries because her husband takes a new wife. What makes her so sad is that the husband compounds her humiliation by marrying her secretary, a subordinate, a woman she sends on errand and who types for her. She feels it is very degrading. Thus, she reacts on the cognitive behavior specified by Dr. Aaron Beck. She displays the negative view of depression. She feels humiliated and

worthless. Emilienne is about to redeem her worth to cure herself from the grief of feeling worthless with strong determination. She does this by problem-focused coping strategy. She changes the source of her depression by reacting against the view of people about her. With what she sees of her image in the mirror, she gains her confidence back. With all these confirmations, Emilienne conquers the problem of depression. She perceives herself as good and capable. These feelings of her change her behaviour positively because Dr. Aaron Beck's cognitive behavioural therapy emphasises the way one perceives situation. He or she behaves positively and, therefore, receives her healing. It is when Emilienne gets her healing that she eventually gets pregnant, and later decides to part ways with her husband, Joseph who makes life miserable for her.

In *Rebelle*, Keita examines the issue of depression as it affects a girl-child. It particularly views gender inequality and violence in the African context. The writer reveals depression from the angle of breaking the social norms. The social norms are broken by Malimouna. The lumps of girl-child experiences are viewed to reflect their depressive state in the society which has negatively distorted their future and well-being. Malimouna is depicted to be in a very bad depressive state. She is gripped by constant fear during her childhood to adulthood in many circumstances. She is grieved in many occasions. She cries and feels lonely. She feels lonely because she is the only child of her mother, as there is no father that could take care of her. She loses contact from her only childhood friend due to her instability.

Malimouna moves from village to village, city to city and finally to another country outside Africa for her safety and survival. This trait is that of a miserable, disturbed, distressed and depressed girl-child. Malimouna is depressed especially when she is compelled to be circumcised, a mandate from their cultural tradition. On the day of her circumcision, she manages to escape. She is forced into marriage by her father, at the age of fourteen to a man who is old enough to be her father. She is depressed during these periods. She cried, feels unsecured and uncared for. She is stressed and depressed as she walks night and day looking for where to harbour herself in the street. She is found many times feeling bad and crying: "Malimouna s'assit sur le lit en sanglotant." (*Rebelle*: p. 69). (Malimouna sat on the bed sobbing.) (Our translation)

Malimouna is depressed when she gets the information from Fanta that Noura died through excess bleeding due to circumcision. She becomes miserable with her culture and the people who perpetrate circumcision for female adolescents, a people that Philippe calls barbaric.

Malimouna is dejected when Karim gangs up against her to kidnap her first husband's family. Her depressed state is expressed by the writer thus :

Elle aurait voulu crier, hurler, mais aucun son ne sortait de sa bouche, elle était de nouveau paralysée par cette torpeur qui s'infiltrait dans son corps tout entier. Elle ne savait plus si elle avait chaud ou si elle avait froid. (Rebelle: p. 227.

She has wanted to cry, scream, but no sound came out from her mouth, she was first paralysed by this torpidity that was infiltrated in her whole body. She did not know whether she was feeling hot or she was feeling cold. (Our translation)

The above quotation portrays the symptoms of depressive condition in the life of a person. With the cognitive behavioural therapy, Malimouna is able to heal herself from depressive state: "Elle saisit la lampe de chevet et tout d'un coup, comme dans un flash-back, l'image du vieux Sando lui revint à l'esprit (Rebelle: p. 69)." Meaning: She took the lamp by the head and in a twinkle like a flash-back, the image of old Sando came into her mind. (Our translation)

With the constant use of flashbacks, Malimouna is able to recollect her traumatic experiences which really help her to shape her thought and behaviours so as to ameliorate or make a change in her life. With the use of cognitive behavioural therapy, Malimouna develops a voice when it comes to her future progress. She uses her voice and flashback strategies to get her freedom. The past speaks for her future progress. She speaks of her past experiences during her campaign with both educated and uneducated women for the liberation of all other women who are under bondage of the patriarchal systems especially those who still believe in girl-child circumcision, forced marriage, women's domestication and unequal educational standard for girls. Malimouna's rebellion against all act of injustices inflicted on her is seen as her behavioural attitudes towards her maltreatment. This therapy helps her to get out of negative cycles which can debar her progress. With the cognitive behavioural therapy, Malimouna is able to change her destiny from illiterate,

uncultured, village girl or woman to an educated, civilised, activist who stands out to be a great woman in the society.

In *Vie de femme, vie de sang*, Babaoni shows depression in the ambiance of a family, which is characterised by friction, hostility and irresponsibility in the relationship between Fatou and Ambroise. Fatou becomes hopeless when she fails her Bac twice, which led to her attempted suicide. In her marriage with Ambroise, she becomes more depressed and frustrated as a result of the attitude of Ambroise. She is left alone on many occasions by Ambroise. She has no one to speak to or discuss her matter with. Even when her husband, Ambroise is at home, she brings her more problems. He beats her and nags at her like a dog. This attitude is revealed in these words:

Cett nuit là, je ne pus fermer l'œil un seul instant. Je sanglotais dans le lit. Ambroise l'avait remarqué mais ne voulait rien dire. Je tombais progressivement dans une grande déprime. Je dépérissais à vue d'œil. (Vie : p. 50).

This very night, I was unable to close my eye for a single minute. I sobbed on the bed. Ambroise noticed but could not say anything. I was progressively in a great depression. I was visibly dying. (Our translation).

She is beaten in the presence of her son by her husband who also cheats and exploits her. This affects her health and job. At the end, Fatou is able to receive her healing from her depressive state through her voice. With her voice, she narrates how she feels cognitively, and how she reacts to ameliorate her situation by making use of the cognitive behavioural theory. Fatou makes use of recreational and social activities to reduce her sad moods by joining the drama and dancing group when she was young before her marriage, and during her married life. She adds modelling as part of her job which makes her depressed condition to be minimised. Recreational activities are strategies propounded by the cognitive behavioural therapists that can aid curing overwhelming problems.

Bali and Salimo are depicted as people from whom Fatou seeks reassurance to control her depressive state. Hammen and Brennan (2001) state that depressed people are dependant on other people and constantly seek reassurance in such a way that drives people away. Thus, with the reassurance given to Fatou by her sister Bali, she is able to react and make life worth living for herself.

This chapter examined the depressive and mental disorder in the lives of reproductively challenge women with the use of cognitive behavioural therapy. It emphasised the importance of cognitive behavioural therapy as a useful tool to address emotional challenges related to abuse and violence in women represented in our selected texts.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.0 Summary of major findings

This chapter presents summary and conclusion to the study. The major findings of the study are highlighted. In addition, the chapter summarises the contribution of the study to knowledge and makes some recommendation/suggestions for further studies.

The study shows that the female protagonists suffer emotional and traumatic experiences as a result of family dysfunction. Infertility, miscarriage, polygamy, violence, gender inequality, incest and child marriage are depicted as the causes of reproductive and depressive challenges.

In Angèle Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes* and Thérèse Kuoh-Moukoury's *Rencontres essentielles*, infertility results into Emillienne's and Flo's marital crises. In Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* and Evelyne Mpoudi Ngolle's *Sous la cendre le feu*, Jacqueline and Mina experience mental disorder, while Ramatoulaye suffers solitude and persistent sadness respectively due to their husbands' infidelity. Fatou and Emillienne are depressed by their husband's infidelity in Azaratou Baboni's *Vie de femme, vie de sang* and Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes*. Fanta, Malimouna, Mama Ida, and Modukpé endure physical violation, miscarriages and depression in Keita's *Rebelle*, Philomène Bassek's *La tache de sang* and Adelaide Fassinou's *Modukpé, Le rêve brisé*. While Malimouna contends with exile and its destructive dynamics, Fanta suffers imprisonment which leads to the death of her daughter, in *Rebelle*. Fatou and Ramatoulaye undergo economic violence and deprivation, while Assiatou in Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* is forced to leave her marriage when her husband takes a second wife.

It is established that many of the female characters are able to overcome their challenges through several coping strategies. For instance, Mina, Ramatoulaye and Malimouna deploy narration, letter writing and social works in Ngolle's *Sous la cendre le*

feu, Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* and Keita's *Rebelle* respectively in order to be able to manage their traumatic experiences. Mina, Modukpé, Jacqueline and Malimouna address mental disorders by recollecting their past encounters so as to make future projections in Ngolle's *Sous la cendre le feu*, Fassinou's *Modukpé, Le rêve brisé*, Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* and Keita's *Rebelle*. In Baboni's *Vie de femme, vie de sang* and Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*, Ramatoulaye and Fatou deploy modelling, reading, going to the cinema and watching plays to treat and heal depression.

Similarly, Malimouna and Emillienne deploy education to challenge female subjugation and forced marriage in Keita's *Rebelle* and Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes*. Fatou and Mama Ida, in Baboni's *Vie de femme, vie de sang* and Bassek's *La tache de sang*, employ family planning and contraceptive respectively to promote birth control, while child adoption is employed in Kuoh-Moukoury's *Rencontres essentielles* by Flo and in Ngolle's *Sous la cendre le feu* by Djbril.

In all, employing the womanist theory and cognitive behavioural therapy as theoretical framework, the study has been able to critically investigate the negative and positive forms of societal context of reproductively-challenged women in marriages and the depressive and mental disorder in the lives of reproductively challenged women in the selected francophone African women's narratives.

5.1 Conclusion

This study has examined eight novels of eight different francophone female writers on the social context of reproductive challenges. The selection is carefully made from five francophone countries, using their writers to set examples from what reproductive challenge entails in the cultural milieu. From the Cameroonian society, the following writers are selected: Evelyne Mpoudi Ngolle, Thérèse Kuoh-Moukoury, and Philomène Bassek. In Senegal, Mariam Bâ is chosen, from Benin Republic, we have Adelaide Fassinou and Azaratou Baboni, while from Gabon, we have Angèle Rawiri and lastly, we have Fatou Keita from Côte d'Ivoire. These writers represent their various societies. All the eight writers represent the female voice in the francophone African societies. It is observed that five novels are self-narratives, with the use of autobiographical 'Je' meaning 'I', which means, the narrators narrate their life experiences. The said novels are Kuoh-Moukoury's *Recontres essentielles*, Mariama Bâ's *Une longue lettre*, Adelaide Fassinou's

Modukpé, *Le rêve brisé*, Azaratou Baboni's *Vie de femme, vie de sang*, and Evelyne Mpoudi Ngolle's *Sous la cendre le feu*, while the rest of three novels are narrated from third person point of view which involves the use of 'Elle' meaning 'She'. The novels are Fatou Keita's *Rebelle*, Angèle Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris des femmes* and Philomene Bassek's *La tache de femme* where the narrators present the experiences of other persons with limitless information.

The study shows, that the emergence of the male francophone writings paved way for the advent of female francophone literary writings after independence, which actively depicts women as subaltern and objects.

The study carefully examines issues that are associated with social contexts of reproductive challenges in all the novels where female characters are faced with all kinds of problems in their marriages such as infertility, polygamy, motherhood, girl-child marginalisation, forced labour, incest, childbearing, child rearing, women's subjugation, physical assault, violence, adoption, abortion, mental disorder and depression. Also, we have carefully sought out some of the positive outcomes of the social contexts in reproductive challenges which could improve on the progress of women in our societies. These are the uses of family planning and contraceptives, women empowerment and education, and adoption of children. It is observed that all the eight female writers represent the institution of marriage as complicit in women's maltreatment, depressive and oppressive states across their countries.

The study adopted the womanist theory of Alice Walker (1983) and Dr. Aaron Beck's (1970) theory to examine the interpersonal experiences of the female characters in the novels. The womanist theory which is known as Black feminist theory helps to identify the root problems and the experiences of the black female characters in the novels to showcase the value of characters, portray their efforts for survival in their reproductive challenged state. Also, Dr. Aaron Beck's cognitive behavioural healing therapy theory is portrayed as a good healing mechanism employed by all the female characters in the novels to subdue their depressive state of health disorder in their marriages.

All the heroines are faced with taunting challenges in their marriages. In the early years of their marriages, it is noticed that there is a mutual understanding and harmonious co-existence between the couple which the womanist ideology propagates. While in the

later years, it is noted that nearly all the female characters have their marriages in disunity. All the female characters witness polygamy; they are abandoned by their spouses who take other women as second wives. This leads to disharmony in their marriages. In *Rencontres essentielles*, Flo is abandoned by Jöel, becomes sad, lonely and depressed. In *Une si longue lettre*, Ramatoulaye is abandoned, lonely and depressed. Issues of abandonment, sadness and depression are revealed in the life of Modupké. In *Sous la cendre le feu*, Mina is sad and mentally derailed and domesticated. Also, in Philomène Bassek's *La tache de sang*, Mama Ida is violated physically, ill and domesticated in her marriage with Same Hanack. Emilienne other is emotionally and psychologically violated, abandoned, grieved and lonely in her marriage with Joseph in *Fureurs et cris des femmes*, while also Malimouna is also physically violated, abandoned by Karim. In *Rebelle*, Fanta is domesticated, battered, imprisoned in her marriage. In *Vie de femme, vie de sang*, Fatou is economically and physically violated, battered, sad, lonely and abandoned by Ambroise. With the life experiences of these female characters, it is deduced that none of them enjoys their marital relationships. In this study, all the writers are seen as good womanist advocates helping all their female characters to build strengths, skills to meet their goals as they reject all forms of women's violation through marriage.

The study reveals that all the female characters are depressed, lonely and sad in their marriages, while the emotional effects of reproductive challenges and childbearing are emphasised. The emotional effects of reproductive challenge are depression-persistent sadness, feeling of being worthless to live, tearful grieving, isolation, and mental disorders. The victims find it so hard to concentrate. These problems are seen in the lives of some characters like Flo, Mina, Modupké and Emilienne. Due to infertility in the marriages of Flo and Emilienne, life becomes unbearable for them. They feel worthless and isolated among their friends.

It is established that some of the male characters like Djibril in *Sous la cendre le feu*, Jöel in *Recontres essentielles*, Karim in *Rebelle*, and Joseph in *Fureurs et cris des femmes*, Ambroise in *Vie de femme, vie de sang* are portrayed as true pro-womanists at the initial stage of their marriages with their spouses; when they support the progress of their wives, care and put up good complementary roles which the womanist advocates in familial relationship. Later, these male characters back out and treat their spouses very

badly. Djibril in *Sous la cendre le feu*, rapes his step-daughter and maltreats his wife, Mina. Joseph cheats on his wife and abandons her to marry her secretary. Ambroise abandons Fatou many times, exploits and violates her physically; Jöel abandons his wife to marry another wife and Karim abandons his wife to remarry.

Furthermore, it is revealed also that the dignity and self-esteem of women are closely related to their procreation potential in the family and in the African society. This notion is foregrounded in *Fureurs et cris de femme* and *Recontres essentielles*. The two characters are faced with humiliation by the society as represented by friends, mother-in-law, sisters, brothers and husbands. The women are castigated and physically molested, neglected and maltreated. This is against the view point of womanism. They are supposed to create an accommodating atmosphere for themselves, men and children for harmonious co-existence. It is observed that such women find it very hard to cope with social castigation; as a result, they feel isolated, worthless, and always experience perpetual sadness for inability to experience motherhood. At the long run, Flo is blessed with the child of Doris who dies in a plane crash; it is because of her depressed condition due to the fact that Flo refuses to divorce Jöel. In the same vein, Emilienne is found pregnant but decides to live a single life to cater for her child.

The study finds that emotional and psychological trauma, and reproductive challenges are confronting issues to women. Their traumatic state leads them to depression. In the depressed states of these women, both the womanist and the cognitive behavioural theories help them to recognise their condition of depression as problems which affect their health. These theories enable to fashion out how to solve their problems of infertility in order to make life worth living. The womanist tenets make them stronger to bear brunt of their problems, while the cognitive behavioural therapy makes them to acknowledge their problem and to raise their consciousness about their future progress.

All the female womanist writers document the experiences of the black women in the African society. The female characters epitomise the critical lens through which the ills of polygamy, injustices and social inequalities which permeate marital relationships are captured. The male characters abandon their first wives to the extent that they become depressed, sad and lonely.

It is observed that all the women exhibit womanist zeal and strength to overcome their problems. For instance, Malimouna in *Rebelle* revolts against all forms of violation perpetrated against her, such as girl-child mutilation, child and forced marriage, rape and female domestication. In *Vie de femme, vie de sang*, Fatou reacts against male dominance, domestication and exploitation, while Modukpé rejects male exploitation and maltreatment. In *La tache de sang*, Patricia kicks against her mother's domestication and violent state, while Ramatoulaye in *Une longue lettre* and Aïssatou denounce women's domestication and polygamy.

It is noticed that arranged and child marriages in *Rebelle* cause emotional pressure and depressive state in women and girls. This is viewed in the characters of Malimouna and Fanta in *Rebelle*. This act is debunked by the womanist theory.

It is established that societal problems and reproductive matters are key factors responsible for mental health challenge and depressive state/disorder among women. Black women are prone to stress and depression which continuously plague them due to their oppressed situation under the constructs of patriarchal societies which contribute to gender inequality and sexism. For instance, the issue of women's violation, such as sexual assault, physical violence, female circumcision and girl-child challenges, are interrelated as found in the selected texts.

It is foregrounded that mental health, depressive disorder, grief, stress and loneliness are issues that make family dysfunctional in the eight novels. The female characters suffer from hopelessness, sorrow and solitude. The study, therefore, implies that both the womanist and cognitive behavioural theories are coping strategies through which these problems could be solved. Firstly, the womanist is against negative feelings or ailment that can derange a woman from functioning well. Womanism is founded on women's determination to love themselves and avoid self-destruction. Thus, in the study, all the womanist female writers allow their female protagonists integrate the past and present to have a 'voice' so as to achieve progress in life. In other words, a voice needs to be developed when it comes to making progress in life to denounce any act of injustices against women. The cognitive behavioural healing therapy is also recognised with the use of voice to gain consciousness through the recollection of past events, and occurrences that make a woman to be downcast, lonely, or depressed, thereby facilitating her healing.

The cognitive behavioural therapy is used as healing therapy for depression. All the characters that are depressed employ flashback to recollect where they are coming from and decide where to go in order to make progress in life; this decision is anchored on the inner strength that womanism talks about.

Both theories aid the female characters to react against depression and allow them to have a talk therapy with therapists and friends. This makes all the female characters to heal their pains from the past, build relationship skills, figure out their goals, strengthen their self-confidence, and handle strong emotions like fear, grief, or anger. Examples are given in all the novels. Ramatoulaye develops her voice and tells it all in a long letter to her friend with all confidence. In *Rebelle*, flashback is deployed as coping and healing therapies to heal Malimouna's depressive state giving her the idea of working with her community as a social worker with all confidence. She recollects her past encounters to make a progression into the future with the womanist strength as a Black woman. In *Sous la cendre le feu*, Mina uses the talk therapy as a coping strategy to receive her healing through the help of a therapist.

Modukpè, Le rêve brisé employs the use of flashback and talking strategies to cure both the mother and daughter. In all the novels, talking flashbacks are used for healing. Apart, from talking flashback strategies for healing, some other writers like Azaratou Baboni and Mariama Bâ employed recreational strategy to heal their depressive states. For instance, Ramatoulaye, in her depressed mood, goes out to cinema to watch films at nights. In her age, she reads magazines and newspapers daily in order to cure her depressive state, while Fatou engaged in sports, match, modelling, dance and theatre to kill off her depressive state. All these are good methods to make women feel undisturbed in their depressive state.

Findings reveal that education, family planning and abortion are positive weapons which all the female characters use to overcome the odds of patriarchy and also attain their emancipation, socio-cultural and economic status in the society. All the novels advocate the use of education as the only primary instrument for women's emancipation and liberation from poverty and ignorance. For instance, Malimouna conquers all forms of subjugation such as child and forced marriage, girl-child mutilation, poverty and ill health. With her education, she is able to survive, fend for herself, claim her rights, defend the

less-privileged and become useful for her entire community. In *Fureurs et cris de femmes*, Emilienne is educated and well placed in her community. She knows her right and fends for herself. Thus, virtually all the female characters in the seven novels are educated and earn good job. Their education relieves them of the oppressive ideas of their husbands. Education adds more to their values as individuals, mothers and good citizens of their communities. Of all the novels, it is only in *La tache de sang*, that it is revealed that the female protagonist is not educated, however, she knows the value of education and makes sure she gives all her children sound education. Patricia, her daughter, rejects her mother's domestication. She believes and thinks less of childbearing and child rearing unlike her mother who believes that childbearing and child rearing are the ultimate values for her existence.

Moreover, it is discussed that the female writers advocated for the use of family planning and contraceptive as good measures to promote reproductive health among women, and to keep women in a sound health condition. This is because they believe it can smoothen male and female relationship which the womanist has advocates. Examples are revealed in *Sous la cendre le feu*, *Vie de femme*, *vie de sang*, and *Une si longue lettre*. Sylvie and Maurice use this method to plan towards their future goals in life. Fatou, in *Vie de femmes*, *vie de sang*, uses this method when she sees that her irresponsible husband is not ready to cater for her and her son. Ramatoulaye, on her own part, educates her daughters on the use of contraceptives and sex education to avoid unwanted pregnancy. Fanta is advised to use it by Malimouna but along the line, her sexist husband does not allow it to work. Fatou Keita and Philomène Bassek denounce the act of turning women to children producing machine.

The issue of abortion is portrayed as a way of protecting women from reproductive health challenges. It is accepted by the proponents of womanism to improve the well-being of women who are facing health challenges. Thus, the good and bad sides of abortion are viewed by writers. In *La tache de sang*, abortion is represented by the author as good, to save a life. Patricia and her doctor friend, Modi, abort Mama Ida's eleventh pregnancy on the basis of her health, while in *Sous la cendre le feu*, the consequences of abortion are depicted as a way sensitising people to deviate from such act, especially among teenagers or adolescents (females). In some texts, abortion is seen as illegal when

it is not on the basis of health, incest or rape. Mina's classmate commits abortion and dies. In other words, it is morally wrong for a female adolescent to do abortion when she is physically fit and has no health problem.

In the study, women's violation and subjugation are depicted to create awareness that both sexes are born with equal rights and as such, women should be given fair treatment in society. In the novels, a number of female characters reject female domestication. In *Rebelle*, Malimouna rebels against being raped by the French expatriate she works with; she rebels against her father who wants to give her out in marriage by overpowering the old Sado. She rebels against her community that wants to give her out for female circumcision; she rebels against her husband, Karim, who wants her to be a full-time housewife. In Ba's *Une si longue lettre*, Daba, Ramatoulaye's daughter, sees herself as equal to the tasks traditionally performed by men. Aissatou rejects silence in the face of betrayal and runs away after divorcing her husband in order not to face the horrors of polygamy. Fatou denounces her husband for his irresponsibility and for her constant maltreatment and remarries a man of her choice. Mina rebels against her husband's maltreatment and calls a family meeting with the help of a pastor to resolve their problems. Mama Ida runs to her daughter's place for help to seek medical treatment when her husband beats her up continually.

Dominique, in *Fureurs et cris de femmes*, speaks out her mind to Joseph, telling him what she really wants. Emilienne withdraws to herself from her husband when she acknowledges her worth in the society. Flo, in *Recontres essentielles* rebels against divorce, and stands to her point to get her husband, Jöel back after going through emotional traumas due to her maltreatment. All the authors express their opinions about women's emancipation and their desires and feelings through the voices of their characters.

Child adoption is used to inspire and empower women to develop self-esteem and confidence in their lives even without having a biological child. In Thérès Kouh-Moukoury's *Recontres essentielles*, Flo adopts the child of her bosom friend and co-wife after her death. There is a subtle hint here that child adoption may be an option for childless women in Africa. But even then, without a biological child, a woman is, in one way or the other still saddled with the responsibilities of child rearing. In Africa, whether

a child has a mother or not, the fact still remains that a mother somewhere will definitely rear him or her. Also, Flo's hope is not shattered, the child of her friend, Doris, finds succour in the hands of a childless mother. In *Sous la cendre le feu*, Djibril adopts Mina's unborn baby to save her from humiliation and reproach. The pro-womanist act is seen in his measures of being kind and later the baby at the age of 9 is raped by the step-father, Djibril. The writer views such act as cruel to womanhood. The author creates awareness that adoption should be done in a legal way. With this, there will be peace and harmony in the family.

All the female writers seek to fight and eradicate all forms of gender-based violence, economic discrimination, reproductive health challenges, inequalities and harmful traditional practices, educational deprivation against women in the patriarchal sexist societies. It is observed that all the novels belong to the first and third generations. All the female writers use the womanist concept as a theory to improve and ameliorate the lives and states of the African women. The writers make all her female protagonists to protest against their reproductively-challenged state. The female characters develop their own voices to become free from the problems they have encountered in their marriages. The eight authors also employed the cognitive behavioural therapy as a healing therapy for all their violated and maltreated female characters. The female characters with the cognitive behavioural theory are able to change from their sick depressive situation to able-bodied women in order to actualise their dreams, reclaim their status and restore peaceful coexistence with their spouses. Thompson *et al.* (1991:50) opine that:

Literature brings us to the realities of the human situation through speculations, not only on what it is, but also on what has been, what ought to be, and what might be. It broadens our knowledge of human affairs and strengthens our awareness of human condition of the problems and possibilities of human life, how we come to live at a particular time, and place. It shows us human motives and reveals the dilemmas and fragmentations of human life. Beyond these general functions, literature in more specific terms helps to reveal the institutions of society.

The above definition of literature means that literature acknowledges what it entails in the life of individual at a particular time. It therefore expresses our feelings, thinking and attitudes towards life in the society. All the problems raised in this study are

resolved for social transformation in ensuring women good reproductive health and future progress in the society.

5.2 Contribution to knowledge

Considering the fact that there has been paucity of literature on literary interrogation of the representation of reproductive and depressive challenges in francophone African women writing, this study has significantly bridged this lacuna as it becomes a strong reference material for future studies on the subject matter or other research concerns related to it in literary scholarship. The study, therefore, raises awareness on reproductive and depressive challenges of women and on how societal attitudes and practices affect reproductively-challenged women emotionally, psychologically and sociologically, thus demonstrating how they are represented or treated in Francophone African literature written by women. The investigation of the perceived causes and effects of reproductive and depressive challenges becomes contribution to knowledge as it pushes for a redress. The intention is, therefore, the promotion of the cause of women, enhancement of their identity, improvement of their welfare and equity in their relationship with men, alleviation of their poverty and upliftment of their general politico-economic development.

Moreover, this study has been able to critique the traditional male-biased and male-dominated theories as well as re-interpret gender-biased images of women who are seen only as childbearers and domestic laundry personnel. Through this study, therefore, women's sensibilities and realities are more exposed in African society and African literary enterprise.

5.3 Recommendation/Suggestion for further studies

Having examined reproductive and depressive challenges of women in selected francophone African women's fictional works from womanist and cognitive behavioural theoretical standpoints, it is important that the subject be investigated from other theoretical perspectives. Specifically, future studies could interrogate the motif of reproductive and depressive challenges in francophone African women's novels from trauma lense. This would afford people the opportunity to understand the complexity and effect of reproductive and depressive issues on the psyche of the victims as represented in

the fictional works. Similarly, the focus of this study could be replicated in other regional literature of Africa such as Anglophone African literature. Besides, comparative examination of reproductive and depressive challenges may be carried in different regional literatures in the African continent.

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