

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The research into male domination over female, masculine control of political social and economic affairs in most societies in the world as well as efforts to correct the anomaly shores up the notion of patriarchy in feminist theory. Patriarchy is a political and social system which endorses male domination over female in political social and economic issues. A *Journal of Solidarity and Sustainability* (2016), which is a publication of the University of Chicago, traces the origin of patriarchy to the Greek word *patriarkhes*, *father of a race* or *chief of a race*. It adds that historically, the term was used to refer to autocratic rule by the male head of a family but that in modern times, it generally refers to a social system in which power is primarily held by adult men. Authors (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004; Patil, 2013; Rosbech, 2013) among others, state that the concept has also been adopted by early feminist writers to research, describe and explain female domination by men. Patriarchy as a concept in gender studies, has led to the evolution of theories aimed at explaining the bases of male domination of the female gender. Prominent among these theories are radical Feminist theory, Marxist theory and the “dual” systems theory.

A school of thought among the radical Feminists underscores patriarchy as a source of social division, while for another, the family setting is a ladder for perpetuating male domination over women as observed by Millet (1977). Firestone (1972), a proponent of biological determinants in masculine domination over women considers partiality in the treatment of male and female genders as biological based, with the different reproductive capacities of women and men being especially important. One can infer from Firestone’s position that the ability to procreate and nurture that God bestows on the woman, influences the society into ascribing to her roles that are limited to the home. Since this procreative role is considered inimical to leadership responsibility, the woman is therefore excluded from such responsibility. Yet, another group (Brownmiller, 1975; Zielinski, 2015) accentuates masculine control over women’s bodies through sexuality or male violence like rape. Marxist Feminists consider patriarchy and capitalism as being interwoven; exploiting women in the home and depriving them of remuneration

for their labour. Barret (1988), opines that class inequality determines gender inequality because it is a dominant social system. The “dual” system theory attempts to synthesise Marxist and Radical feminists’ explanation of gender relations as they view capitalism and patriarchy as inseparable in their interpretation of gender relations. This is reflected in the assertion of Hartmann (1979), who considers patriarchy and capitalism as symbiotic in the sense that they oppress women by benefiting from placing them in subservient state.

Having considered the concept of patriarchy as viewed by Feminists, it is therefore pertinent to take a look at the aforementioned definitions and interpretations of patriarchy as presented by Radical and Marxist Feminists. Discrimination against a particular group of people in the society either as a result of their sex or class is bound to elicit misgivings among the aggrieved groups. However, a careful handling of such grievances will prevent a social division; a division which the radical Feminists insist is caused by patriarchy. In the same vein, the claim by a group of radical Feminists that the family is a ladder for perpetuating male domination over women is an accusation that demands to be handled with caution since it might imply the dissolution of the family. This is tantamount to destroying an institution established by God and consequently generating moral and social decadence. Eradication of the family should not be the solution; rather, it is doing away with the norms and values of the society that foster female oppression within the family.

The radical Feminists’ group which underscores masculine control over women’s bodies through sexuality or male violence like rape might not be totally wrong in the sense that wife battery and rape are ways by which men take advantage of their God given physical strength to inflict injuries on women’s bodies. The “dual” system theory seems to adopt a more tolerant strategy in its synthesis of Marxist and Radical Feminists’ explanation of gender relations. The explanation view patriarchy and capitalism as having a collaborative tendency to oppress women at home (through unremunerated domestic, sexual and reproductive services) and in the society through denial of voting rights, access to education and to profession, access to legal rights and property ownership, rights in marriage and divorce among others.

However, criticisms leveled against Marxist and radical Feminist explanation of gender relations as portrayed by Pilcher and Whelehan (2004), is directed at their excesses in the explanation of class and capitalism, patriarchy and biology respectively. According to Pilcher and Whelehan, the interpretation of Marxist and radical Feminist

basis of patriarchy is confined to biology, capitalism and the family. Additionally, the critics claim that gender relations is only viewed in respect to men and women, neglecting relations between men and men, women and women. Also subjected to criticism, is the presumption that relations between the genders worldwide are similar thereby relegating to the background the place of cultural variation. According to them, in Black Feminism, the non inclusion of racism in Feminist criticism is unacceptable. For the group, women liberation can only be achieved if racism, capitalism and patriarchy are addressed. In support of Pilcher and Whelehan's assertion, interpretation of gender relations is incomplete without taking into consideration variations in culture worldwide, as women subordination and sexual relations vary from one culture to another. This informs the struggle for female liberation, taking into cognisance the peculiar experience of the various cultures of the women involved in the struggle.

From another perspective is Kolawole's (1997) defence of women's struggle as she cites the Yoruba philosophy; "Ona kan o wo oja" used in the work of Sekoni (1995) and a similar Igbo proverb "There is no absolute way to anything". In this researcher's view, when you have a number of people going to the market, everyone does not necessarily need to go through the same route, each individual takes a route that best suit his/her purpose. In other words, in the struggle for women liberation, women are not compelled to adopt the same approach because there is bound to be interplay of variables in the course of the struggle. These are geographical location, culture, level of education and consciousness and religious belief among others. Therefore, each group takes into consideration its peculiarity in the course of the struggle.

Walby (1997), classifies patriarchy into six groups; household production, paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality and culture, insisting that patriarchy became modified in the 20th century in Britain with the transformation from private form or domestic patriarchy to public form, an assertion which Patil, (2013) also reiterates. In private patriarchy, a woman's presence is restricted to the family and household where husbands exploit their wives' labour and limit their participation to the home. Women's participation in public life without a corresponding pay as their male counterparts doing the same jobs beget public patriarchy. Public patriarchy is therefore associated with Feminists demand for voting rights, access to education and to profession, access to legal rights and property ownership, rights in marriage and divorce among others.

In the Greek's world-view as cited by Patil (2013), a man's responsibility is majorly the administration of the state while a woman's duty is restricted to domestic

chores and submission to her husband. The author adds that Aristotle's works depict women as morally, intellectually, and physically inferior to men, claiming that women's primary role in the society was to reproduce and serve men in the household since they are the property of men. Lerner (1986), quotes Aristotle as insisting that women had colder blood than men, which made women not to evolve into men. He depicts man as perfect and superior, adding that any imperfection that ever exists in the world must have been caused by a woman. The Greek's world-view seems to be in consonance with the traditional view of most societies in the world (Africa inclusive), being one of the issues that birthed the female movements

Most world societies are patriarchal in nature and the system has been characterised by the oppression of the female gender. This is manifested in the treatment of women who are subjected to various forms of oppression because of their gender. Until recently, women have been greatly denied access to education, employment, decision making, and resource control because of their gender. In the process of creation, God created male and female with biological differences. Burton (2012), asserts that a man is created to be physically strong which makes him always want to assume leadership role. According to him:

men are physically stronger than women because the average man is larger, more robust and has a greater proportion of muscle mass than the average woman. Having longer limbs means you have a longer lever to exact force with, having longer muscle mass controlled by testosterone means there is a more pushing force at the end of the lever. Men are generally more robust meaning their bone structure is larger than that of women...p.400

On the other hand, significant biological differences exist between a man and a woman. The latter is assumed to possess a greater body of fat than the former and have trimmed back on muscle tissue, a quality which makes her more fit to carry babies to term and produce milk. However, gender is a social construct with the society attributing specific qualities and behaviour to each gender. It is based on this conception that a male is expected to behave in a particular way which is regarded as masculine while a female is expected to behave in a way that is considered feminine. How men and women behave is a result of a process of gender role socialisation. Men are expected to be bold, courageous and aggressive while women are expected to be submissive. This may have been the reason why toys made for male children are mostly footballs, cars and guns while the ones for female are dolls. Each type of toy depicts the nature of training required for

either of the sexes. A male child is expected to acquire skills in football games while manipulating cars and handling guns connote preparation for leadership roles and the act of presenting the girl-child with female toys to play with and tie to her back signifies a pre-determined role of motherhood. This might have influenced the suggestion of Collins (2012), that the distinguishing characteristic in men and women is much socially produced as it is biological. In other words, the physiological make-up of the genders as mentioned above has influenced the society into creating gendered-segregated activities for the male and female genders.

Achebe (1981), posits that in the course of creating gendered-segregated activities, the society appears to have ascribed a more prominent place to the male gender over the female. She insists that the narrow role of helpmate and mother has been prescribed to the woman by society which measures the woman's fulfillment as a human being by the number of children (especially males) she has. This implies that men belong to the privileged group while women and children are in the group of the underprivileged. Asiyanbola (2005) considers patriarchy as a social arrangement in which advantageous positions are the prerogative of males while restrictions are placed on the responsibilities of women. It is also a relationship between the dominant (male) and the subordinate group (made up of the female and the children). Societies in the world are heterogeneous in nature; some are more patriarchal than others and by implication the degree of female subordination differs from one society to another. This informs the non universalisation of the struggle for female liberation, a properly channeled struggle takes into cognizance the peculiar experience of the women concerned in the struggle.

1.1.1 Oppression

When an individual or a group of people is badly, unfairly, unjustly treated, discriminated against or denied certain privileges, such individual or group is said to be oppressed. The oppressor is backed up by powers or laws that legitimise the act of oppression he metes out to the one being oppressed. This justifies the position of Sharma (2015), who considers oppression as an organised ill-treatment of a group of people by another or by society as a whole; with institutional power as a means of insisting on that maltreatment. It can also be in form of special treatment accorded to some groups of people in the society, or the use of social structures and institutions to favour a group of people over another.

Sharma's definition consists of two inter-related phenomena: subjugation and privilege which exist side by side. He opines that dismantling oppression means dismantling both phenomena. The reasons for this may not be farfetched because oppression is about dominant and subordinate relations between groups. A person can be oppressed because of his class, gender, race and tribe. Marxists believe that capitalism is the root of class oppression in the society and therefore advocate the overthrow of capitalism as a catalyst to ending class oppression in the society. Feminists, especially the radicals opine that doing away with patriarchal laws that legitimise gender oppression is the solution to ending gender oppression. Although, the three women authors of the novels selected for this study deny being Feminists, however, they are unanimous in advocating the eradication of patriarchal laws which reinforce female oppression.

1.1.2 Gender Oppression

Gender oppression is a situation whereby a supposedly inferior gender is being repressed by a supposedly superior gender. It involves domination, subjugation, suppression, and marginalisation of a group simply because of its gender and this act of oppression is legitimised by societal laid down rules and regulations. Gender oppression is internalised through socialisation process. As it has been observed over the years, the female gender has been at the receiving end of the society's oppressive laws because she is considered to be the inferior gender while the male gender is considered the superior gender. Palti (2013) presupposes that gender oppression permeates the norms, relations and stratification of a given society with issues that are beneficial to men/boys being accorded more priority over those that are of interest to women/girls. One cannot but agree with the author's assertion because boys are usually initiated into professions that take them outside the home while the girl-child is socialised into the domestic sphere; cooking, cleaning, house hold chores, etc. Myth, legend and proverbs are also media of perpetuating female oppression because stories, folklores among others are concocted to mystify the manhood while a miniature picture of women is presented.

Patriarchy is a societal means of oppressing the female gender by giving the man excessive power to control and dictate; any attempt on the part of the woman to resist being oppressed is either regarded as a taboo or a deviation from the norm. Mill, (2009) corroborates this view as he considers the subjugation of women to men a universal custom, and that any contrary behaviour is regarded as an aberration. Patriarchy gives excessive power to men to dominate women. The system lays down the rules that back up

female oppression, for most societal norms and values are patriarchal in nature. In most societies, economic and social processes operate directly or indirectly to support a patriarchal (male-dominated) social order and family structure. Patriarchy is therefore associated with the subordination (restriction to inferior status and oppression) of women. Gender oppression is conceptualised as discrimination, subjugation, denial of privileges and unjust treatment meted out to the female gender. In this case, the male gender is considered to be the superior gender while the female gender is regarded as the inferior gender. It also involves the enactment of laws and legislations which supports the oppression of the female gender.

1.1.3 Gender, Sexism and Feminism

Authors (Francis; 2002, Pilcher and Whelehan; 2004), suggest that gender is a concept associated with the early 70s. According to them, the word was used as an analytical category to draw a line of demarcation between biological sex differences and the way these are used to inform behaviours and competences, which are then assigned as either “masculine” or “feminine”. At birth, a person is either born a boy or a girl (biological/physiological) but the society divides the group into male and female genders with each gender being expected to behave in a particular way that is referred to as masculine/feminine. This is reiterated by Jule (2006:7) and Mustapha (2010:76) as they attempt to point out the distinguishing feature in gender and sex respectively. According to them “...while sex is a biological property, gender is a cultural construct, the social construction of behaviours, rather than the biological condition of maleness and femaleness.” For example the attributes expected of a man include boldness, toughness, courage, etc. A man is expected to be strong, assertive, domineering, fearless, and should be able to wield authority over a woman. On the contrary, a man who weeps, gossips, is soft, fearful or is a talkative, is derogatorily referred to as a woman. On the other hand, a woman is expected to be soft, gentle, caring and homely among others, while the one who is tough is complimented and referred to as a man. These roles that are socially and culturally constructed for men and women in families, societies and cultures are learned through socialisation.

Sexism is a situation whereby a particular sex is considered superior to another and the arrangement is endorsed by the law. It is also the unfair treatment of people, especially women as they are regarded as the inferior gender. The supposed inferior gender is subjugated, discriminated against and denied benefits that are made available to the

supposed superior gender. Women are therefore oppressed physically and psychologically (physical and sexual assault and mistreatment among others). Sexism also occurs when a woman does not have a say in the choices available to her but is remotely controlled by the culture which hinders her from realising her full potential. Sexism also begets patriarchy a social system which endorses male dominance over women. This difference in the treatment of the genders is portrayed in de Beauvoir's *The second sex* (1949), where she insists that issues that are of interest to men become accepted as the standard while those that are of concern to the female is skimmed over.

In the traditional African society, the vocation reserved for the male gender is to groom them for leadership positions like kingship or head of a clan. For the female gender, it is mainly to prepare them for child bearing and nurturing, submission to their husbands and general upkeep of the home. With the introduction of western education, male children were enrolled in schools in order to groom them into taking up subordinate positions in the colonial administration like interpreters and clerical works among others. On the other hand, girls were excluded from the programme because the colonial administration also considered their role as predominantly limited to the home. It was much later that western education was made available to the girl child.

Feminism is the struggle for equal opportunities between men and women. The difference in ideology, religion, culture, geographical location, among others led to the emergence of variant of Feminisms such as Liberal Feminism, Marxist Feminism, Radical Feminism, Black Feminism, and Womanism among others. For Barton (1995), the most glaring difference between the theological quest of white and black women is the fact that black women are dealing with three levels of oppression (racism, sexism and classism). In addition, Ogunjide-Leslie's (1994) image's of the six mountains on the back of the African woman (tradition, colonialisation, race, patriarchy, global order and herself) is a pointer to the fact that the African woman's experience is characterised by multiple oppressions. On the other hand, the white women's war against oppression can be defined as one dimensional: challenging the Victorian prototype of the frail and over pampered woman.

Extensive studies on patriarchal oppression of female characters in Francophone African women's writings have focused on Francophone countries like Senegal and Cameroon, while to the best of our knowledge, it appears that little attention is paid to the Republic of Bénin. Patriarchy and oppression of female characters in selected Beninese women's novels were examined with a view to establishing the nature, role and

consequences of patriarchal oppression and the strategies adopted by the female characters to counteract oppression.

1.2 African Tradition, Colonialism and Religion; Confederates of Women

Subordination

The subordinate position occupied by the African woman appears to be an offshoot of patriarchy, traditional beliefs and upshot of colonial heritage. The composition of the African society can be described as patriarchal in nature. It is characterised by unequal relations among the genders with the placement of women in subordinate positions. Patriarchy, a social system in which male hold primary power and dominate in roles of leadership has been used by Feminists to explain the social, economic and political domination of women by men. In traditional Africa, a woman is confined to domestic roles like cooking, procreation and nurturing, while leadership position is considered the exclusive prerogative of the man. This is reflected in literary works by male writers from the African continent: Mongo Beti's *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba* (1956), and *Mission terminée* (1957), Achebe's *Things fall apart* (1958), as well as Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les soleils des independences* (1970) among others. From birth, children are brought up to assume the different roles that the society ascribes to the sexes. Therefore, as children advance in age, they are conditioned to behave in accordance with the roles expected of them by the society.

A school of thought (Chukwukere, 1995; Adebayo, 1996 and Kolawole, 1997) presupposes that although patriarchy has been the social arrangement in Africa, colonialism further widened the existing inequality between the male and female gender. Chukwukere (1995) highlights the role of the traditional African woman as being important socially, economically and politically. According to her, the responsibility of house keeping rests upon the woman; she does the cooking, feeds the family members and keeps the home tidy. Girls are socialised to assume the role expected of their gender as prerequisite for admission into womanhood. Chukwukere also affirms that the traditional woman is involved in farming as her contribution to the sustenance of the household. Her ability to procreate is given prominence and she is celebrated if she gives birth to male children. This procreative ability guarantees her continual stay in her matrimonial home for a childless woman is regarded as a "sinner" or a "victim of leprosy." This is portrayed in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966), Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes* (1989) and Calixthe Beyala's *Maman a un amant* (1993) among others, where the

female protagonists are made to feel unfulfilled because of their inability to produce biological children. Adebayo (1996) corroborates this role of procreation that society attributes to the woman when she insists “African culture avers that the moment of fulfillment for a woman is childbirth.” p.178

Hence, it will not be out of place to state that the trivialisation of the important roles of the woman as highlighted by Chukwukere (1995) and Adebayo (1996) accords her a lower status than that of her male counterparts, no thanks to patriarchal tradition and colonialism. The African woman has therefore been a victim of domestic oppression; being oppressed by her husband and endorsed by the socio-political structure in place in the African society. Patriarchal laws and culture continue to beget inequalities between the male and female genders as the former employ their major control of economic resources especially land as weapons to dominate women. Correspondingly, bride price practice endows the man with authority over the woman. Chukwukere opines that with colonialism, Europeans advanced the notion that agriculture and cultivation are men’s exclusive domain. Therefore, men were solely initiated into the use of new and improved agricultural techniques in farming while women had to put up with sustenance methods of food production. The result according to the author, was a decline in the level of production by women. Moreover, the colonial officers excluded women from politics with the assumption that politics is an area that is solely restricted to the male gender. Futhermore, Chukwukere suggests that the position of warrant chiefs which affected women negatively were created and some of them were reported to have been forcefully taken into marriage by these officials.

Reinforcing the assertion of critics as regards the negative impact of colonialism on women, Kolawole (1997), insists that colonialism broadens the existing gender gaps in Africa in the sense that the colonial administrators did not take girls’ education into consideration while establishing schools. According to her:

The earliest schools for girls in Nigeria were primary schools and domestic science centers for training women to be good wives for the early African teachers and administrators. On the other hand, boys’ schools included grammar schools that produced the pioneers of Nigeria as a nation. p.33

Colonial masters transferred to their colonies, the view that female roles are restricted to the home as wives and mothers and accorded men priority in agriculture, politics and education. One cannot but understand the attitude of the colonial masters as regards the place of women in the society. The colonial period was an era when women

world wide occupied subordinate positions in the society and the best the colonial administrators could do was to introduce a policy which they are very much familiar and comfortable with, into all sectors of their administration. Dogo (2014) concurs with the assertion of Chukwukere (1995), Adebayo (1996) and Kolawole (1997) that a binary relationship exists between patriarchy and colonialism. He however affirms that colonialism is at the root of the patriarchal social arrangement in Africa suggesting further that most African societies were matriarchal in nature. He infers that Cheikh Anta Diop (the historian), illustrates how as early as 10000 BC, women in Africa pioneered organised crop and livestock cultivation, a prerequisite for surplus, wealth and trade. Dogo also asserts that African women were responsible for the greatest invention for the well-being of human kind, namely food security. Additionally, according to him, it is this practice of organised agriculture that made population expansion, food surpluses and civilisation possible. Colonialism therefore prioritised the place of men in the society while women were excluded from position of prominence in social issues.

A school of thought among Feminists presumes that religion also aids the perpetuation of inequalities between the genders in the sense that the Bible and the Koran are interpreted by men to support their oppression of women. Sanusi (2004), assumes that a number of Feminists consider the Biblical story of the Garden of Eden as crucial as it was written that Eve seduced Adam into eating the prohibited fruit. In the view of Feminists, this alleged action, interpreted by generations of Bible readers as "sinful," led women to be viewed variously as "sinners" or "evil." Furthermore, Sanusi asserts that Muslim Feminists trace female subordination to traditionalist and conservative interpretations of the Koran. He cites Fatima Mernissi's (1975), *Beyond the veil* where some Muslims use the Koran to support their belief in the relegation of women to the domestic sphere. These adherents propose that since a woman is considered by Allah to be a destructive element, she is to be spatially confined and excluded from matters other than those of the family.

During the colonial period, the portrayal of the African woman in literary works by European chauvinists is characterised by docility, inferiority and submissiveness. According to Whisler (2001), the portrayal of the African woman is inherited by male writers from the African continent as most of them reserve only limiting roles for their women characters. The patriarchal structures in place in the African society which affect the well-being of the female gender as well as her portrayal in literature by European chauvinists and male writers from Africa motivate the female African literary writer into mobilising her "sisters" to resist patriarchal oppression. The Advent of women writings

from sub-Saharan Francophone Africa in the late 1960s which used to be the prerogative of their African male counterparts signifies a turning point in the literary arena (Appiah and Gates, 2005). Sanusi (2004) affirms that the emergence of these women on the literary circle is apparent as their names are included in a number of critical anthologies. They underscore the objectification of women characters in their male counterparts' writing in the same way that the latter attack colonial negative depiction of the African continent. These women condemn the subordinate position reserved for the African woman in politics, economy and in social life with the aim of effecting positive change in the society.

Sanusi (2004), Appiah and Gates (2005) insist that presently, sub-Saharan Francophone African women writers are acknowledged for their audibility in the social, economic, political and literary scenes of the continent. Gaining access into the literary scene affords these women writers the privilege of embarking on the mission of deconstructing patriarchal order of male superiority over female in economic, political, social and cultural issues. In attacking patriarchal traditions and depicting African women positively, these writers are in pursuit of a goal: bringing the African women out of obscurity to limelight. They decrypt among other issues African cultural as well as religious beliefs that restrict a woman's place to the home.

The first generation of literary works produced by sub-Saharan Francophone African women writers are *Rencontres essentielles* (1969) by Therese Kuoh-Moukoury, *Obali: a play* by a Gabonese Josephine Kama Bongo (1974), *La vie d'Aoua Keita par elle-même* by Aoua Keita (1975), Nafissatou Diallo's *De Tilene au plateau: une enfance dakaroise* (1975), Aminata Sow Fall's *Le revenant* (1976) and *La grève des battus* (1979) which was preselected by the Cocourt jury in 1979 and won the Grand Prix Littéraire in 1980 and Mariama Ba's award winning novel; *Une si longue lettre* (1979). The next generation of literary works are Aminata Maiga Ka's collection; *La voie du salut* and *le miroir de la vie* (1985). Others are Calixthe Beyala's *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée* (1987), *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* (1987) and Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes* (1989).

These female writers' works point the finger at the African woman's peripheral placement in male writers' literary works. They equally decry customs and attitudes laid down to perpetuate female subordination in the society. Such negative inhibiting cultural values include forced marriage, female circumcision and polygamy among others. Women characters hitherto accorded marginal roles in writings of European chauvinists and that of male writers from Africa now occupy prominent place in literary works as protagonists (University of Western Australia, 2017). These characters constitute channels through

which the authors transmit their ideologies to the society at large for the purpose of effecting positive reform. The African women writers therefore exploit literature to challenge certain injustices of which women have been victims. Sanusi (2004), observes that Ramatoulaye, Mireille and Emilienne, the protagonists of *Une si longue lettre*, *Un chant écarlate* and *Fureurs et cris de femmes*, struggle against traditions that oppress women but that these women do not finally overcome all the obstacles. In addition, he presupposes that Malimouna and Affiba, protagonists of *Rebelle* and *Le prix de la revolte*, continue the struggle initiated by their predecessors. Invariably, the struggle for total emancipation of the African woman is a continuous one and as long as women writers from the continent are still speaking out in response to Awa Thiam's (1986) counsel to her black sisters, victory is assured in the final analysis.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Extensive studies on patriarchal oppression of female characters in Francophone African women's writings have focused on Francophone countries like Senegal and Cameroon, while little attention appears to be paid to the Republic of Bénin. To the best of our knowledge, literary works of women writers from these countries seem to be unknown in Nigeria despite their closeness to Nigeria. This group of publications could be likened to an untapped virgin land. A close reading of the writings reveals quite a number of promising female writers from the Republic of Bénin whose works when properly analysed, would contribute to the body of knowledge in the literary circles in general and in African women's writing in particular. Patriarchy and oppression of female characters in selected Beninese women's novels were examined with a view to establishing the nature, role and consequences of patriarchal oppression and the strategies adopted by the female characters to counteract oppression. In order to fill this gap, the novels of the following Beninese female writers were examined: Adélaïde Fassinou, Flore Hazoumé and Hortense Mayaba.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the social context of the novels and how does it illuminate the patriarchal set up in this study?
2. What is the relationship between the patriarchal set up and forms of oppression in the novels?

3. What are the relationships between the genders and what roles do they play in the novels?
4. How do these determine patriarchal oppression of the female characters?
5. What are the coping strategies of the female characters against patriarchal oppression and social lessons that can be learnt from the use of these strategies?

1.5 Objective(s) of the Study

The overriding aim of this study is to bring to the limelight the immense but unexplored contributions of Beninese women's writers to their national literature in particular and to women's literature in general. Beyond the Republic of Bénin, we want to recognise the writers as having contributed considerably and meaningfully to African literature in general. Furthermore, the specific nature of patriarchy and gender oppression, were examined in the works of selected female writers, as their contributions to gender study. Thus, the focus of the study is to:

1. Examine the patriarchal set up in the selected novels with a view to determining the social context of oppression and the peculiarity or otherwise of the Beninese experience.
2. Examine the nature of oppression which is domestic.
3. Examine inter and intra-gender roles as a way of determining the extent of gender oppression in the novels through the study of characterisation in the novels.
4. To examine the coping strategies of female characters in the novels through their actions and pronouncements in order to underline the inner strength of the Beninese woman.

Hence, the broad objective of this work is to analyse the novels of selected female writers from the Republic of Bénin, using the womanist theory. Against the above background, this present study is embarked upon with a view to bridging the gap so far created by the little attention paid to Beninese women in previous literary studies.

1.6 Significance of the Study

To the best of our knowledge, there has not been any serious and holistic study of Beninese women literature by Anglophone critics. This study is significant in that it will add to the body of knowledge of female literature in general and open up Beninese literature to the Anglophone readership and literary research. It will also help to portray

the authors' own way of pursuing womanist ideology. It is believed that the findings of this study will be of benefit to parents, young female folks and literate Anglophone society.

1.7 Theoretical Framework (Womanism)

The study adopted Alice Walker and Mary Kolawole's versions of Womanism, which distinguishes the struggle for gender equality as embarked upon by women of colour and the peculiar experience of the African woman. Womanism as a theory is concerned about the individual and the society and focuses on the liberation of the oppressed (male and female). It also identifies the preoccupations of Womanism in texts written by male and female authors. Mary Kolawole's Womanism underscores the totality of feminine self-expression, self-retrieval and self-assertion in positive cultural ways. The theory is relevant to this study as a close reading of the selected novels reveals patriarchal oppression of the female characters and their efforts at achieving self-expression, self-retrieval and self-assertion in positive cultural ways. Important issues discussed in Womanist writings include racism, sexism, classism and culture.

One major difference between Womanism and Feminism is the fact that Womanist writers believe in uniting with the menfolk to dismantle oppression in general and gender oppression in particular. On the other hand, the struggle for gender equality as embarked upon by Feminists is exclusive. Also, family relationship and motherhood are given prominent place in Womanist writings. Womanists celebrate motherhood insisting that mothers be treated with great respect while Feminism on the other hand rejects motherhood for placing limitations on women. Women from Africa embraced Womanism because it is an ideology that defines their experience. Furthermore, the significance of culture, sisterly bond and the complimentary roles of men and women in the struggle for the African woman's emancipation as proposed by Walker and Kolawole are highlighted in our selected texts.

1.8 Methodology

Six novels by three female writers were purposively selected based on their thematic affinities for Womanist traits in the female protagonists. These were; *Modukpè le rêve brisé* (MLRB) and *Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne* (EDFP) by Adélaïde Fassinou, *La vengeance de l'albinos* (LVDL) and *Le crépuscule de l'homme* (LCDL) by Flore Hazoumé, *L'engrenage* (LE) and *L'univers infernal* (LUI) by Hortense Mayaba.

Texts were subjected to close reading and textual analysis. In the course of the study, interviews were conducted with the selected authors, so as to authenticate information gathered through the review of literature.

1.9 Scope of Study

The study focuses on three female writers from the Republic of Bénin namely Adélaïde Fassinou, Flore Hazoumé and Hortense Mayaba. Two novels from each of the three female authors have been selected: MLRB and EDPF by Adélaïde Fassinou, LE and LUI by Hortense Mayaba and Flore Hazoumé's LVDL and LCDL. They were chosen based on their thematic affinities for womanist traits in the female protagonists. The social context is post independence Republic of Bénin, a francophone West African country. The characters have defined roles and relationships as husband and wife, father and daughter, mother and daughter, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and lovers. This binary relationship engenders various forms of oppression such as deceit, infidelity, degradation of the female gender, child abuse, wife battery, rape and wife-prostitution among others. In order to cope with male oppression, the female characters adopted passive and active strategies.

1.10 Justification of the Study

Extant studies on patriarchy and oppression of the female gender in Francophone African women's novels underscore francophone countries like Senegal and Cameroon, while it appears that little attention is accorded to the Republic of Bénin. The selected women authors are among the frontline female writers from the Republic of Bénin whose works at a close reading reveal quality in terms of good story lines. The scintillating story lines mirror the typical Beninese society worth subjecting to critical literary analysis. The selected novels reveal the resilience of female characters as they evolved through the pain of gender inequality in a patriarchal society. Patriarchy and oppression of female characters in selected Beninese women's novels were examined with a view to establishing the nature, role and consequences of patriarchal oppression and the strategies adopted by the female characters to counter it.

1.11 Operational Definition of Terms

Some of the terms used in this study are defined below:

Male Deception: refers to the act of hiding the truth from one's wife or female partner in order to take advantage of her.

Objectification of Women: is the act of belittling a woman and reducing her to the status of a mere object.

Child Marriage: connotes giving out in marriage a child who is yet a minor or below the age that is commonly accepted by the civil law.

Baby Factory: denotes having several wives for the purpose of producing male children to serve as manpower in the farm.

Wife Battery: is the unlawful infliction of personal violence on one's wife or a behaviour exhibited by a man with the intention of physically hurting his wife.

Male Violence: is the behaviour exhibited by a man with the intention of hurting or intimidating his wife.

Rape: refers to sexual assault usually involving sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual penetration carried out against a person and without the person's consent.

Wife Prostitution: is a sexual act by a married woman for financial reward.

Intra-Gender Conflict: refers to struggle or disagreement among individuals of the same gender.

1.12 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is made up of six chapters. Chapter one constitutes the general introduction, which encompasses background to the study, statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, objective(s) of the study, theoretical framework, methodology, scope of the study, justification of the study, clarification of key concepts, biographies of selected authors and contextualisation of the selected novels. In chapter two which is a review of related literature, issues discussed are male African writers' portrayal of female characters in literary works, francophone African female writers' depiction of their gender in literary works, forms of oppression in the society and gender oppression in the Republic of Bénin. Others are women liberation in the Republic of Bénin, the literature of the Republic of Bénin, previous studies on the literary works of selected Beninese female writers, Alice Walker's ideology of Womanism, Mary Kolawole's ideology of Womanism and appraisal of literature reviewed. Chapter three focuses on women's mobilisations in Europe, America and Africa, Womanism, major themes in Womanism as well as the theoretical framework adopted for the study which is Alice Walker and Kolawole's versions of Womanism. Chapter four analysed themes in

Fassinou's selected novels while chapter five focused on related themes in Flore Hazoune's and Hortense Mayaba's selected novels. The thesis concludes in chapter six with a lesson for the contemporary African society and an opportunity for further research into women novels. The selected novels are analysed against the backdrop of Alice Walker and Mary Kolawole's versions of the Womanist theory.

1.13 Biographies of Selected Authors and Contextualization of the Novels

(1) Adélaïde Edith Bignon Fassinou

Adélaïde Edith Bignon Fassinou was born in Porto-Novo, the Republic of Bénin, in 1955. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Contemporary Literature and a Master of Philosophy Degree in Stylistics from the Université Nationale du Bénin (presently Université d'Abomey Calavi). She served as officer in charge of education at the National Institute for Training and Research in Education. She taught French at the secondary and college levels before her appointment as Bénin's General Secretary to UNESCO. Adélaïde Edith Bignon Fassinou has a number of literary works to her credit; novels, short stories, children literature and poems. Among her publications are: *Modukpè, le rêve brisé* (*Modukpè, the shattered dream*; 2000), *Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne* (*Another's child, no one's daughter*; 2003), *Jeté en pâture* (*Thrown to the lions*; 2005), *La petite fille des eaux* (*The little sea girl*; 2006), a story composed of ten chapters and written by ten different authors including Adélaïde Fassinou. *Papa je ne suis pas ta femme* (*Father, I am not your wife*; 2010) and *La sainte ni touche* (*Neither do the saint touch*; 2011). The children literature published by the author are *Yemi ou le miracle de l'amour* (*Yemi or the miracle of love*; 2001) and *L'oiseau messager* (*Messenger bird*; 2002). Her short stories are *Toute une vie ne suffirait pas pour en parler* (*A life time is insufficient to tell the story*; 2002) and *Les bénis des dieux* (*Blessed of the gods*) among others. Two of the works listed above have been selected for analysis: *Modukpè, le rêve brisé* (MLRB) and *Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne* (EDFP).

(i) *Modukpè, le rêve brisé*

Adélaïde Fassinou's *Modukpè, le rêve brisé*, centres on correcting the wrong placement of women in a patriarchal society. It is a combination of subtle and overt rebellion against a system which seems to gloss over the emotion of female members of the society while according prominence to the interest of their male counterparts. In the novel, Fassinou dramatises the fate of Modukpè, the subaltern, whose ambition of

becoming a lawyer is aborted when her teacher (a symbol of patriarchy) deceives her into having an affair with him, impregnates her and thereafter abandons her. Modukpè's mother is also deceived by her husband, Jean Paul (another representative of patriarchy) into becoming a second wife. Although mother and daughter are unhappy with their predicament, the mother appears to resign to her fate while her daughter questions man's resort to the African culture to reinforce female oppression. The autobiographical style of narration is employed in the work with the intention of effecting positive, social and political changes in the society.

(ii) *Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*

The story line in *Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*, centres on Ananou who is an epitome of self-assertion. She attains an enviable career in business amidst a polygamous marriage and in spite of her husband's *laissez faire* attitude to his family's welfare. Through Ananou's efforts, Cica (her daughter), is able to receive both qualitative traditional and formal education and also to realise her ambition of becoming a mid-wife. The third person narrative structure is employed in the work.

(2) Flore Hazoumé

Flore Hazoumé, grand-daughter of the literary canon, Paul Hazoumé was born in Brazaville in 1959. Her father is a Beninese while her mother is a Congolese. She lived in France during her adolescence and has been living in Ivory Coast since 1979. A graduate of English from the University of Abidjan, she is married and is a mother of two children. She was once the manager of a communication Agency and also the editor of "scrib magazine". She considers herself a world citizen because of her background; Beninese's father, Congolese's mother, once a resident of France and presently residing in Ivory Coast. In two of her novels chosen for analysis in this work; *La vengeance de l'albinos* and *Le crépuscule de l'homme*, the author treats a variety of themes among which are oppression and suppression of the female gender, wife battery, oppression through polygamy, male violence, the female gender's coping style in the midst of oppression and motherhood as a weapon to reducing the torment of female oppression. Her publications include novels, short stories, children literature and autobiography. Her published novels are: *La vengeance de l'albinos*, (*The albino's vengeance* 2001), *Une vie de bonne* (*Life of a maid* 1999), *Le crépuscule de l'homme* (*The twilight of man* 2002) and *Au coin de la rue, La vie m' attendait* (*Life is awaiting me at the corner of the street* 2006). Her short stories are *Rencontres* (*meetings*1984), *Déchirements* (*Heartbreaks*) and *Cauchemars* (*Nightmares*1994). The children literature is titled *Et si nous écoutions nos*

enfants (*How about listening to our children* 2002) while *Je te le devais bien* (*I owe you* 2012) is an autobiography.

(i) *La vengeance de l'albinos*

Flore Hazoumé exposes a cultural practice where a girl is exploited for economic benefits. Her feelings and sentiments are sacrificed on the altar of materialism by her parents who expect her to marry a man rich enough to guarantee the family's regular sustenance. The novel also exposes man's desperate quest for wealth as well as intra gender conflict.

(ii) *Le crépuscule de l'homme*

Flore Hazoumé paints the picture of post-independent Africa; corruption, poverty, social decadence, preferentialism and tribal wars. The consequences of such wars are loss of lives and properties, lawlessness, famine, epidemic and the subsequent emergence of refugee camps. The damaging effect is more on pregnant women, nursing mothers and children who die due to insufficient immunity to fight the epidemic. Hazoumé makes no effort to spare the colonial masters who use the divide and rule system to sow the seed of rivalry among the tribes. The war lords also receive their dose of criticism for conscripting child soldiers into the army. A critic of male bestiality is evident in the work where soldiers regard times of wars as an opportunity to rape women. Womanists denounce neo-colonialism in Africa and its attendant effect. They therefore preach liberation of the genders (male and female).

(3) Hortense Mayaba

Hortense Sallan Mayaba was born in Djougou, Bénin. A former employee of Bénin's "Office National de Pharmacie", she devotes her time to two passionate concerns in her life; business and literature. Issues treated in her novels selected for this study; *L'univers infernal*, (1997) and *L'engrenage* (*gearing* 2007) are intra-gender conflict, female oppression and suppression, oppression via polygamy, female characters' copying strategy in the midst of oppression and motherhood as a weapon to cushioning the torment of female oppression. Her publications include novels and children literature. The novels are *L'univers infernal* (*Infernal universe* 1997) and *L'engrenage* (2007), while the children literature are *Molie au port de pêche* (*Molie the fishing port* 2002), *Kokou deviant sage* (*Kokou becomes wise* 2002) and *Les bulles de toutes les couleurs* (*The boules of all colours* 2002).

(i) *L'Univers Infernal* and *L'engrenage*

L'univers infernal, the first of the two novels written by Hortense Mayaba focuses on intra-gender conflict and lack of solidarity among women, (one of the concerns of Womanism). The author advocates female bonding as antidote to intra-gender conflict. In *L'engrenage*, Hortense Mayaba leads her audience on a journey into the political state of a small African country twelve years after independence. It is the story of quest for power, incessant coup-d'état, dictatorship, bad governance and insensitivity on the part of African leaders. It also recounts the emergence into limelight of women hitherto invisible as a result of patriarchal laws and restrictions. Like Sembène Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* (1960), women in *L'engrenage* collaborate with their husbands and other male compatriots to rebel against the incumbent government's oppressive policy. Like Celie in Alice Walker's *Color purple* (1982), these women activists emerged victorious in their struggle to end female oppression in particular and oppression of the two genders in general. In addition, they seem to take a clue from Walker's protagonists who consider their precursors as models in the struggle for female emancipation and from Kolawole's self-assertive pre-colonial women, whose struggle for women emancipation in pre-colonial period cannot be ignored.

The social context of all the novels selected for analysis is post independence Bénin Republic, a francophone West African country. The social arrangement in Bénin Republic like in many African societies is patriarchal in nature. It is characterised by unequal relations between the genders with the placement of women in subordinate positions, an offshoot of patriarchy, traditional beliefs and colonial heritage. In addition to the activities of the Women Liberation Movement in the Republic of Bénin, anchored by women in the legal profession, is that of women writers whose purpose is to effect positive changes in the lives of women in particular and in the society in general through literature.

1.14 Women as Agents of Social Change

Change can be regarded as the action or an instance of making or becoming different. Women in our selected novels can be described as agents of social change as they attempt to become different by challenging the status quo as regards the place of women in the patriarchal society. The female characters in Fassinou's novels condemn the objectification of the female gender through male deception, infidelity and polygamy

as in the case of Modukpè and her mother in *Modukpè, le rêve brisé*. They also criticise cultural laws that perpetuate the oppression of women but do nothing to protect girls abandoned during pregnancy. Rejecting the philosophy of women being likened to wagons, Adélaïde Fassinou's main female protagonist, Modukpè, in *Modukpè, le rêve brisé* questions patriarchal structure oppressing women, insisting that a woman should be able to direct the affairs of her life and occupy her rightful place in the society.

Ananou, the main female protagonist in *Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*, condemns the culture of associating a woman with a baby factory. This, she depicts by putting an end to child bearing after giving birth to her seventh child. The resolve to make a success of her life is applauded instead of being distracted by the animosities and competitions that characterise polygamous setting. The fact that she sets up an "informal NGO" by using her money to care for the less privileged is also a way of rewriting the story of several abandoned children in her custody most especially girls. Cica and Emma, erstwhile rivals purpose to cease to be "nothing but pawns that destiny has placed in the hands of a man (Koko) to toy with as he wishes." These ladies posit that an end should come to the philosophy of Mother, daughter, a woman's life, women's destiny being synonymous with oppression, marginalisation and male violence. Emma considers her suicide attempt (orchestrated by male deception) as an act of stupidity and determines to apply her medical experience to benefit the poor. This is a Womanist approach to the oppression of these two ladies; the desire to live and not die and being useful for one's generation is more profitable than taking one's life because one has experienced a broken relationship.

Mado's attempt (*La vengeance de l'albinos*) at initiating sisterly bond between her and her sisters-in-law is applauded as this is one of the antidotes of intra-gender conflicts in the African society. Emilienne (*Le crépuscule de l'homme*) rebelles against male dominance as she seeks self-definition, self-valuation and self-retrieval. She insists on her true identity and ceases to assume the identity of a dead person. Hortense Mayaba's women characters (*L'engrenage*) become victorious as they challenge the cultural placement of women in the society. This is achieved through collaborating with their husbands and male compatriots to resist the oppressive policies of the government. The success of the women's demonstration is a turning point since it begets self-assertive women in the society. In *L'univers infernal*, Tante Ngoné's adoption of a nephew who loses his parents in an auto crash at the age of five qualifies her as an agent of change as she gives hope to the orphaned Alioume.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

Simone de Beauvoir, a Feminist writer and an existentialist philosopher condemns patriarchy as she underscores social, political and religious categories used to justify women's inferior status. Her work *Le deuxième sexe* (1949), serves as starting point for the second wave Feminism which broadens its scope to include sexuality, family, work place and reproductive rights among others. The first wave Feminism was preoccupied with women's suffrage and property rights. De Beauvoir posits that women are not born with roles that the society ascribes to them, rather gender identity are social constructs. Her existentialist ideology accentuates the need for an individual to achieve radical freedom, the type that is derived from decision making via the expression of a genuine self. Sartre, a philosophical colleague of de Beauvoir with whom she shares a romantic relationship defines the struggle for freedom in terms of what he describes as good and bad faith as cited in Mittal (2018). The former encompasses the kind of freedom that derives from making conscious decisions while the latter involves allowing oneself to be controlled by identities imposed by outsiders. Moi (1987), concurs with de Beauvoir as she affirms that male and female children are not given equal opportunities to enable them develop to their fullest potentials, an offshoot of the patriarchal society's placement of the woman.

In debunking the theory that African women are invisible and voiceless, Ogundipe, Leslie (1994) and Kolawole (2007) insist that they are not if one cares to search for their voices where they are. Chukwukere (1995) and Kolawole (2007) cite examples of pre-colonial African women who were powerful and self assertive, suggesting that colonialism which favoured boy's education to that of girls encouraged female subordination. Among such powerful women cited by Kolawole are Madam Tinubu, the Egbe Iyalode of Oyo, Iyalode of Ibadan, Queen Amina of Zaria and Yaa Asantewa, an Ashanti queen mother in Ghana among others. Although, Kolawole is not far from the truth, however, one thing is certain; the percentage of these women is insignificant when compared to that of men who exercise control over the world's affairs. Tradition subordinates the placement of the African woman which reflects in imaginative literature. European chauvinists and male writers from Africa reserve limiting roles for their women characters. The female African

literary writer therefore, on exposure to western education embarks on the mission of mobilising her “sisters” to resist patriarchal oppression in all ramifications.

This chapter examined male writers’ patriarchal portrayal of the African woman as they confer marginal and limiting roles on the latter. The depiction of these female characters is influenced by patriarchal ethos and cultural benchmark. As a retort, women writers, on exposure to western education, embark on the mission of correcting the hitherto negative portrayal of their gender in literary works. Analysed works of female writers like Mariama Bâ, Angele Rawiri and Calixthe Beyala among others were reviewed, underpinning their themes and determining the level of radicality demonstrated in their female characters’ resistance to patriarchal oppression. Furthermore, other areas looked into include types of oppression in the society, gender oppression in the Republic of Bénin, Women liberation in the Republic of Bénin, literature of the Republic of Bénin, previous studies on works of selected women writers from the Republic of Bénin, Alice Walker’s ideology of Womanism, Mary Kolawole’s Ideology of Womanism and appraisal of literature reviewed.

2.1 Male Writers’ Portrayal of Female Characters in Literary Works

The African woman like her counterpart worldwide has experienced abandonment in patriarchal Africa. She is visible but “verbally veiled” and this is transferred into imaginative literature. African chauvinists portray her negatively in their literary works as evil, docile and passive: Chinua Achebe’s *Things fall apart*, Mongo Beti’s *Perpétue* and Cyprian Ekwensi’s *Jagua nana* among others. Before her arrival into the literary scene, the male gender depicts her in the light of the limiting role that the traditional society ascribes to her. Her late arrival into the literary scene is caused by colonialism which accorded priority to male education, with the first girls’ school being established only 50 years after that of the boys: According to Adebayo (1996):

Unequal access to education between men and women, excessive domestic responsibility, societal expectation, as well as the lukewarm attitude of publishing houses to female-authored texts have been adduced as causes for this relative tardiness of female literary creation in Africa in general and in West Africa in particular p.37.

The image of the African woman in literature could be ascertained through a thorough investigation of literary work authored by male and female writers. Works of renowned male authors (Mongo Beti, 1956; Ferdinand Oyono, 1956; Chinua Achebe,

1958; Wole Soyinka, 1975; Cyprian Ekwensi, 1975 and Francis Bebey 1980) are good examples of such unfavourable depiction of the African woman. Characters like Jagua in *Jagua nana*, Hélène and Cathérine in *Mission terminée* and *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba* respectively fit into this stereotype. Free women and prostitutes permeate Mongo Beti's work while women are associated with envy and weakness in Camara Laye's work. In Achebe's *Things fall apart*, the women are invisible while in *No longer at ease*, Clara, the representation of the supposedly powerful main female protagonist is tarnished with the "osu" caste, that is, an outcast.

For the most part, male writers portray patriarchal traditions and institutions particularly how they operate to subjugate women and perpetuate the subordinate role assigned to them. They treat issues that deeply concern women such as childbearing, motherhood, the subordination of women to men inadequately and with bias. African novelists inherited a subalternised and domesticated image of African women from both the colonial system and the Negritude poets. Mongo Beti's *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba* (1956) and *Mission terminée* (1957) as well as Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les soleils des indépendances* (1970) dramatise traditional African women who are transformed into possessions through marriage.

In Ferdinand Oyono's *Une vie de boy* (*House boy*: 1956), Sophie, the African live-in-lover of the French engineer is merely a tool to satisfy his sexual desire. Each time a member of the white community visits the engineer, he instructs Sophie to relocate to the backyard and introduces her as his cook. Kalisia, the commandant's new house maid is portrayed as a free girl, so also is Agatha Moudio the female protagonist in Francis Bebey's *Le fils d'Agatha Moudio*. Soyinka's female characters in *Death and the king's horseman* (1975), *The trials of brother Jero* (1978) and *The interpreters* (1984) are not immune from unenthusiastic portrayal. In *The trials of brother Jero*, mother and daughter are ensnared in what could be described as a disgraceful conflict. In *Death and the king's horseman*, Elesin Oba (the king's horseman) who has just a short time to live picks a beautiful virgin as wife. According to tradition, Elesin Oba is supposed to accompany the king who has just died to the world beyond but he decides to marry a virgin before embarking on the journey. One is forced to question the rationale behind the marriage of a man who is on his way to the grave. This action on the part of Elesin Oba shows that a woman is treated as a mere object to toy with.

While examining the image of women in African literatures, Boyce Davies (1993:81), observes that Wole Soyinka dramatises typecast images of female characters

which could be grouped into one of three categories: “the foolish virgin in rural settings, the *femme fatale* in urban settings, and the masculinised matron.” According to her, characters in the latter category are given a little bit of fair treatment. As for Sharon Verba (1997:85), Soyinka’s female characters: “fill only the roles of stereotypes and symbols, possessions or trophies to be won away from Western influences by African traditions, or, more threateningly, these women are seen as dangers which can distract and destroy.” Davies recognises that although Soyinka attempts to depict women positively in few of his works, this vision is however seldom achieved. In addition, she states that “the artist has the power to create new realities;...women as neither victors nor victims but partners in struggle” p.86. Davies advocates a situation whereby female characters be portrayed in ways that elicit from the average male and female gender a positive opinion of women.

Reacting to the destructive portrayal of the female gender by male writers, Little (1980) and Adeleke (1993) concur as regards the scant depiction of professional and well placed women in works by male writers. Furthermore, Poulain de la Barre, cited by Adeleke also accentuates element of suspicion in male writers’ works on women, since the former serves as judge and party to the law suit. As the literary scene in Africa was then dominated by male writers, they used the opportunity of having access to education before women to play the role of judge and party to the law suit. This is because colonialism and traditional attitude towards female education excluded women from gaining access to western education.

The fact that some of these female writers’ works have won international awards *Une si longue lettre*, *La grève des battus*; proves that the quality of their works are not inferior as some critics claim. Literary works demands lots of sacrifice on the part of a writer, whereas most African women like their fellow women folk worldwide have experienced unequal educational opportunities (child bearing, nurturing, social and family restrictions). In spite of these restrictions, they write to make known their feminine perspective. Simone de Beauvoir (*Second sex*, 1949), is a pioneer female agent of social change as she argues that patriarchal social economic and ideological structure deprive women of the resources (material and intellectual) required to become artists in their own right. De Beauvoir echoed by Moi (1987) observes that in value and magnitude, women’s achievements in every sphere of life has been inferior to that of men owing to their traditionally and socially determined roles which confine them to an inferior position and

hinder the manifestation of their innate endowment. In her book titled, *A room of one's own*, Woolf as cited by Moi (1987) suggests:

The first thing necessary in order to be able to write is to have a room of your own, a place to which you can retreat for a few hours; a place where, without risk of interruption, you can think, write, reread what you have written, criticise what you have done, be left to yourself p.17.

Woolf stresses further that “in order to be able to achieve anything at all, you must first of all belong to nobody but yourself”. She presumes that women in the traditional setting are bereft of independence, being the possessions of their husbands and children who can demand for their attention whenever they so desire and these women cannot but attend to their requests. She also believes that women belong to the family or the group and not to themselves and that in such conditions, writing becomes, if not an impossibility, then at least a very difficult task indeed. In a comparative analysis of the opportunities made available to the male and female child, Woolf uses Shakespeare as a case study. She imagines what would have happened if instead of Shakespeare, exactly in his position, an extremely talented little girl had been born. She posits that it would have been virtually impossible for her to create anything at all. She would have stayed at home, learnt to cook and to sew, got married and had children. She concludes thus: “It is absolutely inconceivable that she would have had the education which Shakespeare had, that she would have become an actor and a playwright; she would not have been Shakespeare; she would have been a nobody” p.18.

Notwithstanding that most male writers attribute to their heroines limiting and negative roles, a handful of male sympathisers (Marxists and non-Marxists), consider women as an oppressed class whose liberation could be achieved as they assume responsibilities of agents of social change. Prominent among these writers are Sembène Ousmane, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Ayi Kwei Armah, Guillaume Oyono Mbia, and Festus Iyayi. Sembène Ousmane portrays his Marxist ideology through his various literary works as he accords prominent positions to his female characters. The female characters who are epitomes of strength and self-assertion include Penda, Ramatoulaye, Adjbidji and N'Deye Touti (*Les bouts*:1960), Rama, El hadj Abdou Kade Bèye's daughter (*Xala*:1976). In *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, Sembène Ousmane dramatises female characters as politically active, morally powerful and immense contributors to the success of the rail workers' strike. However, some of the militant women who are catalyst to the success of

the rail workers' strike are martyred in order to liberate fellow compatriots-male and female.

In addition, Sembène Ousmane raises religious, cultural and social issues that combine together to subjugate women in his country, Senegal. In particular, he launches a caustic attack on his Islamic society for its capitalism and patriarchal laws which are detrimental to the well being of women. While giving women prominent part to play as revolutionaries, the author does not neglect some groups to which he accords position of prominence: the destitute (Ramatoulaye), the outcast (Penda), the physically challenged (Maimouna) and the minor (Adjibidji) among others. His works; *O! pays mon beau peuple*, *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, *L'harmattan*, *Vehi-ciosane* among others portray the author's indictment of a society that subjugates women. It is also a direct challenge to women to take up the role of agents of social change.

Sembène Ousmane's approach is in consonance with Alice Walker and Mary Kolawole's Womanist orientation of male and female constituting a united force with the purpose of fighting for the liberation of the masses. The women in *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, who for years, have accepted their subordinate position as irreversible, seem to hear the echo of Awa Thiam's voice (1986), challenging her black sisters to speak out. As a way of response they took the bull by the horn by surpassing their husbands and male compatriots in the struggle to end the oppression of the masses. Opara (1987), affirms that Sembène's style and technique reinforce his commitment to the downtrodden in the society especially women. Among the patriarchal laws criticised is that of arranged marriage in *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, where Assitan, a prototype of the traditional African woman is married off to a man she never met.

Assitan était une épouse parfait selon les anciennes traditions africaines; docile, soumise, travailleuse,... on l'avait mariée à l'aîné des Bakayoko... ses parents s'étaient occupés de tout. Un soir, son père lui apprit que son mari se nommait Sadibou Bakayoko et deux mois après on la livrait à un homme qu'elle n'avait jamais vu... p.170

Assitan was a perfect wife according to ancient African tradition; docile, submissive, hard working,...she was married off to the oldest Bakayoko...her parents arranged everything. One evening, her father told her that her husband's name is Sadibou Bakayoko and two months later she was handed over to a man she had never set her eyes on...p.170 (Our translation)

The reference to perfection on the part of this wife is viewed along side total compliance to the dictate of patriarchal laws. This is in tandem with the assertion of Mill (2009) who considers the subjugation of women to men a worldwide custom, alleging that any contrary behaviour is regarded as an aberration. Therefore, Assitan's perfection is viewed in the light of her acceptance of the status quo until the arrival of the revolutionary women who symbolise agents of change and hope for subjugated women. In Oyono-Mbia's *Trois prétendants...un mari* (1975), the patriarchal community of Mvoutessi plans to enrich itself through the dowry of Juliette, the main female protagonist. In order to achieve this, the patriarchs led by her father and grandfather decide to marry her off to the highest bidder. The author, though a male writer, uses the heroine, Juliette as a spokeswoman and an agent of social change to reject forced marriage as well as objectification of the female gender. Sony Labou Tansi, a Marxist male writer and partisan of women's issue depicts female characters as agents of social change as he dramatises powerful female characters such as Chaidana 1 and 2 in his work *La vie et demie* (1979). These women, (mother and daughter) engage in prostitution as a means of exterminating male oppressors who are mostly high ranking government officials. In as much as Womanism is not in support of prostitution, the act of heroism exhibited by the women should not be glossed over.

In addition to the efforts of male sympathisers who depict self-assertive female protagonists in their literary works, female writers began to consider it their prerogative to tell the story of the female gender from the perspective of women. Adopting the autobiographical or semi-autobiographical style, the works which thematically and stylistically have rebellious connotation dramatise conjugal challenges such as polygamy and sterility among others. The compelling urgency to write informed the choice of the autobiographical style on the part of the writers. This style has however been subjected to criticism by male critics who consider it as tantamount to lack of mastery of the art of writing. Notwithstanding the style, one thing is of paramount importance to these writers-dramatising the life of women. This supposed "deficiency" in style has proved a potent weapon in the hands of female writers to present honest picture of women.

2.2 Women's Writing in Francophone Africa: A Depiction of Female

Characters in Literary works

Francophone Africa witnessed an epoch-making event with the publication of Thérèse Kuoh Moukoury's *Rencontres essentielles* (1969), which represents the first novel by a francophone African woman writer. Moukoury's novel, Aminata Maiga Ka's *La voie du salut* (1985) and Philomène Bassek's *La tache de sang* (1990), dramatise the fate of women who are victims of adulterous husbands. The women characters include Flo, (*Rencontres essentielles*), Mama Ida (*La tache de sang*), Rokhaya and Rabiadou (*La voie du salut*) hinge on resignation as a passive strategy for dealing with unfaithfulness on the part of their respective husbands. Although Rabiadou is educated, she and other oppressed women; her mother (Rokhaya), Moukoury's Flo and Bassek's Mama Ida could not summon courage to put up a protest. The socio-cultural approval accorded to female subjugation is highlighted by Sanusi (2004), as he affirms: "these women view submissiveness to their husbands as something admirable" p.58. The passive stance adopted by these female characters might be a ploy by the authors to initiate rebellion against patriarchal structures by starting the struggle from a non radical angle.

The fact that these women are conscious of their condition and are not happy about the situation is a pointer to the fact that the patriarchal set up in their society impedes their liberation. Ba and Rawiri dramatise female protagonists who are recipients of Western Education but are confronted with cultural practices that inhibit their liberation. Each of the oppressed women characters (Aïssatou, Ramatoulaye, Emilienne), queries patriarchal norms that endorse female subjugation while purposing to initiate positive changes in the society hinging on the education they received as vehicle for carrying out such role.

Between the 80's and 90's, male writers from Francophone Africa were busy displaying their literary prowess by dramatising the fate of post independence Africa plagued by coup d'états, abuse of authority, corruption, civil wars, and economic recession among others. About the same time, female writers were daily affirming their presence on the literary terrain with a different approach to the situation confronting the African continent. Casenave (1996) submits that while critical works were carried out on the evolution of Francophone African novel, silence characterised the presence of the Francophone African female writer. According to her, works of critics; Jacques Chevrier (1984), Séwanou Dabla (1986), Kenneth Harrow (1994) and Florence Stratton (1994), among others, reveal an insignificant number of francophone women's writings.

In classifying the novels, Chevrier (1984), devotes only two pages to Francophone women writing which he labels as rare publications. Séwanou Dabla's *Nouvelles écritures africaines* (1986), which is an appraisal of Francophone African littérature from its origin, accentuates male writers' works, while reserving a slot for one female writer-Werewere Liking with emphasis on her novel; *Elle sera de jaspe et de corail-Journal d'une Misovire* published in 1983. Equally, Kenneth Harrow's *Thresholds of change in African literature, the emergence of a tradition* (1994), accentuates the revolutionary traits in the works of female writers like Ama Ata Aidoo (Ghanian; Anglophone) and Calixthe Beyala (Cameroonian; Francophone). However, only Bessie Head had a chapter devoted to her works. Florence Stratton, author of *Contemporary African literature and the politics of gender* (1994), did not mince words as she observes the absence of female writers in critical analysis of African literature. The author insists that critics have severally ignored gender as a social and analytical category when characterising African literature, the result being a rejection of women's literary expression as part of African literature. Consequently, critics define solely male literary tradition thereby overlooking female writers and their literary production.

Casenave adjudges the reason for the scant attention accorded to female novels to their relative novelty at that era; their origin being linked to the 70's and their relative growth to the 80's. Moreover, female literary production in Africa which appeared much later after male writers' "colonialisation" of the literary world is a rejoinder to male writers' negative portrayal of the African woman. Adopting the autobiographical or semi-autobiographical style, the works which thematically and stylistically have rebellious connotation dramatise conjugal challenges such as polygamy and sterility among others. "These writers denounce the African woman's condition, her marginality and address other customs and attitudes that are designed to keep women under men's control" (Sanusi, 2015:13). Since women are at the receiving end of patriarchal oppressive policies, the writers are privileged to dramatise diverse types of oppression which the female gender is subjected to. By so doing, issues that are hitherto restricted to the private domain become the focus of the public purview.

This leads to the choice of protagonists that are marginalised by the society and the exploration of issues regarded as taboo or ignored by the society such as sexuality, passion and love. Included in the themes is the debunking of the myth of motherhood; the singular criterium for evaluating a woman's worth. Amidst the state of instability in modern Africa and the quest for solution to the social political issues

orchestrated by colonialism, is the establishment of feminine voice to challenge the authority of the male writers. This becomes inevitable since male writers exploit the privilege of acquiring Western education before the female gender to ascribe marginal roles to them. The first works were essentially characterised by reaction to male writers' marginal placement of female characters' in their literary works. These female characters are given roles that the society consider as ideal for the African woman; obedient wife, mother and home maker.

While the man is seen as representing his country and continent through his writings, the woman's work is not recognised as making any significant contribution to the country. It is on this note that female critics such as Madeleine Borgomano (*Voix et visages de femmes dans les livres écrits par des femmes en Afrique francophones*; 1989), Irène d'Almeida (*Destroying the emptiness of silence*; 1994), Sonia Lee (*Les romancières du continent noir; an anthology*; 1994), among others, aired their view on this style of writings and the long absence of female writings in literary works. Irène posits the necessity of female African critics to obliterate the futility of silence which revolves around the life of the Francophone African women writers.

In addition, she encourages the writers to recognise and exploit the advantage of their triple roles as Africans, women and writers to speak out. While focusing on autobiography and the novel in the works of Nafissatou Diallo (1975) and Ken Bugul (1983), she accentuates the autobiographical style as a weapon to denounce patriarchy and colonialism. In addition, it is observed that the compelling urgency to write informed the choice of the autobiographical style on the part of the female writers. This style has however been subjected to criticism by male critics who consider it as tantamount to lack of mastery of the art of writing. Notwithstanding the style, one thing is of paramount importance to these writers-dramatising the life of women. This supposed "deficiency" in style has proved a potent weapon in the hands of female writers to present honest picture of the women. In the words of Akorede (2011):

Women writers therefore focus on the experience of the female with conscious effort to re-write the experience of women and reflect women as they are: the brave, the bold, the intelligent, the industrious, the strong, the courageous, the good; and the evil, the weak and the stupid. p.36

Francophone African women writings which underscore patriarchy and female oppression include Nafissatou Diallo's *De tilène au plateau: une enfance dakaroise*

(1975), Aminata Sow Fall's *La grève des battus* (1979), Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* (1979) and *Un chant écarlate* (1981). Others are Werewere Likings's *Elle sera de jaspe et de corail* *Journal d'une Misovire* (1983), Angèle Rawiri's *G'amarakano* (1983) and *Fureurs et cris de femmes* (1989). In addition are Calixthe Beyala's novels: *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée* (1987), *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* (1988), *Sauf le diable le savait* (1990), *Le petit prince de Belle-ville* (1992), *Maman a un amant* (1993) and *Les honneurs perdus* (1996) among others. The contributions of these writers cannot be glossed over as they focus on correcting the distorted image of the African woman. Female subjugation in these works is rooted in patriarchal ethos, cultural and religious issues. The female characters who represent agents of social change adopt the conservative and radical approach to counteract female subordination.

O'Barr (1987), underscores three major feminist themes in the fiction of Kenyan woman writers: "how female children become women;...what marriage means for women;...where women's work fits into their lives." p.57 In addition, all the female authors analysed write from the perspective of women thus, rendering their work different from the point of view of male writers who discuss similar issues. O'Barr's style of analysis is sociological with a view to achieving a forceful illustration of the social lives of Kenya's women much more than the works of male authors will accomplish. In the view of O'Barr, Kenya's women "see themselves performing traditional roles...without traditional resources...while at the same time they are undertaking modern activities...while being denied access to modern support systems." p.69

In "Women without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa" Frank (1987), approach the female issue from the feminist perspective as she strives to place African women writers into the Western feminist category by speaking of their work as a more radical extension of the Western feminist tradition. Comparing the contemporary British or American novel with those of their African counterparts, Frank posits as regards the former: "our heroine slams the door on her domestic prison, journeys out into the great world, slays the dragon of her patriarchal society, and triumphantly discovers the grail of feminism by finding herself." p.14 As for the latter, they transcend their Western counterparts, refusing to "dabble in daydreaming about enlightened heroes or reformed, non-sexist societies." p.15 Frank presupposes that the "feminist" writers of Africa portrays women not only as taking on active and shared roles with men, but as finding "a destiny of their own...a destiny with a vengeance." p.15 The author suggests that the novels of prolific female writers like Mariama Ba, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Ama Ata

Aidoo are more militant than those of their Western counterparts. This is because women characters find only pain and degradation in their relationships with men, but while on their own and in their relationships with other women they find "female solidarity, power, independence." p.33 In spite of the consolation these women find in female solidarity which is one of the antidote to oppression, there is still hope of an ideal male/female relationship. This is dramatised in the blissful relationship between Daba, Ramatoulaye's eldest child and her husband.

Equally, the prolific female writer, Flora Nwapa, a Nigerian, dramatises the fate of oppressed women in her works while Buchi Emecheta, a radical female Nigerian writer depicts cultural norms that limit a woman in patriarchal societies. Her novels; *The slave Girl*, *The rape of savi*, *Second class citizen*, *The bride price*, *The joy of motherhood* revolve around the family in the African society. The author insists that African men are not immuned from oppression. The oppressor could be their employers (the rail workers in Sembène Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*) or persons who wield authority over them. As a retort, their wives become victims of domestic oppression and displaced aggression. Emecheta is not far from the truth since the success of the rail workers' strike beget in the women (who were hitherto docile and submissive) the spirit of self-assertion as they began to assert themselves and claim their rights at home and in the community.

The theme of serfdom or metaphor of slavery is rampant in Emecheta's works where she considers women as bound in chains. This is understandably because she is a product of parents who were once servant and slave girl consecutively. In her works the woman is portrayed as severally enslaved; by man, colonialism, capitalism and neo-colonialism. Ogunyemi (1994), might be reiterating Emecheta's theme of slavery as she refers to the six mountains on the back of the African woman.

The theme of slavery in Emecheta's works connotes domestic and marital burden. Nnu Ego in *The joy of motherhood* (1970), slaves to bring up her numerous children who all abandon her at her time of need. In *The slave girl* (1977), Ma Palagada who marries a slave owner (Pa Palagada), is also not immuned from slavery as she toils ceaselessly and even considers her husband as synonymous with her master. Many of Emecheta's male characters are immorally portrayed as a way of debunking the myth of male chauvinism as well as disproving the belief of female subordination. Some of these female characters attempt to free themselves from the "slavery" of marriage through prostitution: Adaku (*The joy of motherhood*), Nko (*Double yoke*: 1982). Emecheta's rejection of this slavery is tantamount to deserting the home. Like Bâ, Emecheta uses the technique of doubles as

representatives of the rebellious woman. In spite of the dramatisation of female who abandons their matrimonial homes as journey towards freedom, she does not however, rejects mothering as is portrayed in *The joy of motherhood*.

However, this section accentuates female literary production from francophone Africa especially works of Mariama Bâ, Angèle Rawiri, and Calixthe Beyala. Furthermore, the roles of their women characters as agents of social change would be underscored as well as the strategies they employ to counteract female oppression.

2.2.1 **Compromise; Female Characters' Responses to Patriarchal Oppression**

Compromise is the giving up of particular demands by each side in a dispute, so that an agreement may be reached which satisfies both sides to an extent. It is also a situation in which people accept something slightly different from what they really want, because of circumstances or because they are considering the wishes of other people. Female characters responses to patriarchal oppression in Francophone African women novels could be categorised as passive and active. The passive strategies are submission (Flo; *Rencontres essentielles*, Rokhaya and Rabiadou; *La voie du salut* and Mama Ida; *La tache de sang*) and compromise (Bâ's Ramatoulaye and Rawiri's Emilienne). The active strategies are divorce (Bâ's Aïssatou), infanticide (Mireille; *Un chant écarlate*) among others. Female characters in *Rencontres essentielles*, *La voie du salut* and *La tache de sang* (Flo, Rokhaya, Rabiadou and Mama Ida adopt the strategy of total submission as their responses to patriarchal oppression. Constrained by the culture which endorses polygamy and infidelity on the part of the male gender, these women do nothing to challenge their adulterous husbands.

Mariama Bâ treats the issue of female subordination in her two novels: *Une si longue lettre* (1979) and *Un chant écarlate*. With the aid of the epistolary technique, Mariama Bâ criticises her society which hinges on religion and culture especially polygamy to oppress the female gender. The novel dramatises the story of two female characters (Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou), who are childhood friends. Each of the duos becomes one after the other, a victim of polygamy and neglect by a one time loving husband as she is replaced by a younger girl. Confronted with similar problem, each of the friends adopts the strategy that appears to be the best way out. Aïssatou opts for divorce, preferring a life of marital and financial independence. Ramatoulaye decides to stay put but questions from within, the culture which encourages her subjugation. By

refusing to sue for a divorce, Ramatoulaye adopts the strategy of compromise as her reaction to female oppression.

Ramatoulaye's letter, addressed to Aïssatou, represents an outpouring from a sorrowful heart as well as a caustic critic of the condition of the African and especially the Senegalese woman in an Islamic society. Chereker (2014), suggests that by resolving to remain in her failed marriage and single handedly taking up the responsibility of her children's educational, moral and spiritual upbringing, Ramatoulaye therefore, becomes a positive role model for her children. Ramatoulaye also uses the opportunity of the marriage proposal of her late husband's elder brother to vent her anger on the patriarchal society which is the architect of her marginalisation. In a flash back, she calls to memory her school days with Aïssatou, thus symbolising the place of the western education in the emancipation of the African woman. The author advocates female bonding as way of achieving total liberation for the female gender and the inevitable co-existence of man and woman for the progress of the society. This is evident in her correspondence with her bosom friend Aïssatou and her rejection of Dauoda's marriage proposal sequel to the death of her husband, Modou Fall.

In her analysis of Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* and *Un chant écarlate*, Opara (1987), examines Bâ's journey towards utopia as she wakens the consciousness of her fellow country women. Opara highlights issues such as Islamic dogma of fatalism which impedes the psychological development and autonomy of woman, the evil machinations of mistresses and mothers-in-law, an issue that is inimical to the principle of female bonding, the quest for materialism and the reactions of women when betrayed by their husbands. She also sees an affinity between Bâ and the nineteenth century British women writers in her use of the psychological double as a literary device; considering the exploitation of this device as an element of sexual politics in Bâ novels as insanity preceeds protest. In a comparative analysis between Guillaume Oyono- Mbia's *Juliette (Trois prétendants...un mari)* and Bâ's *Binetou (Une si longue lettre)*, Oyewole (2016), depicts the latter as a willing lamb sacrificed on the altar of materialism. She insists that having received similar exposure to formal education, Binetou is expected to borrow a leaf from Oyono-Mbia's female agent of social change who rejects forced marriage, instead of marching to the abattoir without putting up a protest. Adebayo (1998), describes the role of Bâ's letters as giving of information and teaching of morals. She considers the letters written during the forty day mourning period of Ramatoulataye as an opportunity for the writer to reflect on the passage from traditionalism to modernism as

well as the sequel social problems. She insists that Bâ's mastery of the genre is demonstrated in her skillful manipulation of the different parts of her letter: tragedy, privacy, confidence, teachings, information, lyricism and satire.

Ezinwanyi (2012), identifies three perspectives of womanhood in Mariama Ba's *So long a letter*. Firstly, he gives an insight into the African expectation of a woman. Secondly, he states how and what circumstances and experiences project or portray women in the society. Lastly, he suggests how the women should view themselves, the roles they should play and the position they should occupy in the home and society without affecting the home structure. A woman is expected to love her husbands and in-laws and be submissive to them; this appears to be the attitude of Ramatoulaye as she sacrifices her belongings and gifts to her in-laws in order to win her husband's love and affection. However, the death of Modou Fall marks the beginning of self-assertion for Ramatoulaye because it is at this point that she begins to reject patriarchal tradition. A case in point is the marriage proposal from Tamsir (Modou Fall's elder brother), while the widow is in mourning. The once passive and submissive Ramatoulaye suddenly recovers her voice and vehemently rejects Tamsir's proposal. It is a direct attack on patriarchy, an opportunity to avenge the many unremunerated slavery. Akano (2014), underscores the theme of polygamy in Mariama Bâ's *So long a letter* as he denounces its devastating effects on the girl-child in a cultural context as constraints on the happiness of couples who are usually separated. He insists that women and men are guilty of polygamy as they collaborate in promoting the practice, using religious and cultural platform.

Emilienne's reaction in Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes* is also that of compromise as she sacrifices her belongings to her in-laws in order to win her husband's love and affection. She also does not challenge the patriarchal definition of the childless woman as a failure in spite of her status in the society. However, she discovers much later that her worth as a human being is not synonymous with her ability to procreate and begins to rebel against patriarchal oppression.

2.2.2 Divorce and Infanticide; Female Characters' Responses to Patriarchal Oppression

Divorce is the dissolution of a marital union as a result of infidelity or lack of communication between the partners. Oppression of either of the partners (usually the female partner), can also provokes divorce. On the other hand, infanticide is the intentional killing of a baby or infants. Aïssatou's reaction to male deception in Bâ's *Une*

si longue lettre is divorce as her husband's infidelity, orchestrated by her mother-in-law's passion for revenge eventually ousted Aïssatou from her matrimonial home. Chereker (2014), opines that by walking out on Mawdo and taking her sons with her despite society's condemnation of her action, Aïssatou spares them the trauma of being treated as undesirables since their father's family rejects them due to their link with their mother's lower caste.

In *Un chant écarlate*, Ousmane's mother (Yaye Khady) nurses a grudge against her white daughter in-law because of her refusal to lavish gifts on the older woman during the naming ceremony of her mulatto grand son. As a retort, Yaye Khady encourages Ouleymatou's affair with Ousmane for the purpose of vengeance. As for Ouleymatou's mother, she endorses her daughter's relationship with Ousmane, for the purpose of social mobility. Mawdo Bâ's mother and Ousmane's mother are also described by Oyewole (2016) as "two of a kind" in the sense that both of them are driven by a similar uncontrollable passion for revenge which eventually ousted their daughters' in-law from their matrimonial homes. Instead of positive female bonding, a type of negative female bonding seems to exist in *Un chant écarlate* which Opara (1987) describes as parasitism. To buttress this assertion, she cites the relationship between Yaye and Tante Kine where the latter exploits the former's largesse. Mireille's response to patriarchal oppression is infanticide and attempted murder of Ousmane (her husband), her own way of dissolving her union with the former.

The theme of infanticide is also reflected in Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*. Mireille and Juletane are alienated by the hostile community in which they reside, represented by Yaye Kady, (the mother-in-law in the case of Mireille) and N'deye, Mamadou's third wife, (in the case of Juletane). The two are also constrained by the language of the community being foreigners; Mireille (French) and Juletane (Caribbean). The deception by the respective husbands shatters the dreams and aspirations of the protagonists. In her analysis of the "insane" woman in Caribbean literature, O'Callaghan posits that apart from differences in historical context, sociological and racial differences, the protagonists have a similar story of rejection by either one or both parents.

On the part of Mireille, infanticide is directed against her biological son, while for Juletane, it is the poisoning of the three children of Awa, the first wife of Mamodou, her husband. The latter conceals from Juletane his earlier marriage with Awa until Juletane discovers on arriving Africa. The death of Awa's children provokes the suicide of their mother who could not conceive of life without her children. Juletane's decision to poison

Awa's children is triggered by her husband's neglect of her due to her inability to give birth to children. In addition, he marries a third wife, a fellow compatriot who makes life unbearable for Juletane. Infanticide in the two novels is therefore the protagonists' way of avenging the sufferings they are subjected to by their respective husbands.

Lionnet (1989), cited by Casenave (1996) examined pains and violence in the fictions of African writers and came up with this assertion:

...murder is generally considered to be a crime of the individual against society, in these texts, it is present as a symptom of society's crime against the female individual...The narratives thus construct each of them as a heroine who takes justice into her own hands, revealing a profound conflict of values between the dominant culture and its "weaker" membership. p.112

These ladies (Mireille and Juletane), are victims of cultural differences as well as patriarchal set up where the values of the people favour primarily the male members of the society. In addition, lack of bond among women is not only responsible for the marital challenges faced by the women but intensifies such challenges. Like Assitan (*Sembène Ousmane's Les bouts de bois de Dieu*), Awa is the perfect, submissive wife while N'deye symbolises parroting of the European culture. In her state of "insanity", Juletane avoids the joint meals taken by the family and goes out to take her bath when assured that no family member is around, thus, avoiding every opportunity of interacting with family members. Her isolation, confinement to the walls in her room and the psychiatric hospital is her symbolic way of journeying into her liberty. This enables her to use her time as she deems it fit and not to take part in household chores.

It is the theme of mixed marriage between an African (Ousmane) and a French lady (Mireille) that is prominent in *Un chant écarlate*. Mireille, like the average white woman is regarded as a threat to the bond that exists between her husband and his family. Mireille makes conscious attempts to integrate herself into Ousmane's culture and religion but not perfectly as she fails in the aspect of baptism which informs her mother-in-law's quest for vengeance. She resists the regular intrusion of her husband's friends into her home as parasitic behaviour. Bâ is not against mix marriage since she dramatises successful mix marriages represented by Lamine and his European wife. Mireille's problem is fundamentally that of living in a society that is structurally patriarchal. Female solidarity is demonstrated by empathy towards Mireille by the female informant of the adulterous life style of her husband, Ousmane. This is the message of Bâ, female

solidarity that surpasses that of race, class and religion. It is worthy of note that Juletane's rejection of Awa and Ndeye hinges symbolically on the rejection of two unacceptable ways of life: submissive Awa who considers her status quo as irreversible and Ndeye who lives a false extravagant life.

2.2.3 Biological Motherhood as an Antidote to Female Oppression

Motherhood, one of the values cherished by the African society is the major theme in Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes*, The desire by the African woman to have biological children hinges majorly on the fact that it is the criterion for a woman to be regarded as complete. Emilienne's quest for children is driven by the desire to regain the love and attention of her husband, to meet up with the demand of the African tradition which insists that an ideal home must be filled with children and to put an end to the incessant complaints of her mother in-law. Pressures from family members, in-laws as well as the society turn Joseph (Emilienne's husband), into a polygamous man. Women who are supposed to be in solidarity with her express no sympathy for her, among such is Dominique, her secretary, who eventually becomes Joseph's mistress. In addition, Dominique engages in lesbian relationship with Emilienne simply to pry into her privacy. She advises her boss:

...les hommes ne supportent pas les femmes qui remettent leur virilité en cause. Quant à la famille, elle ne vous le pardonne pas...Une femme sans enfant est comme un manchot...Toute son existence, il lui manquera cette autre vie venant d'elle et sans laquelle elle devient infirme. Toute sa vie, elle sera ridiculisée...p.100

...men do not tolerate women who question their virility. As for the family, they will not forgive you...A childless woman is like a one handed person...All through her life, she will lack that other life emanating from her and without which she becomes handicapped. All through her life, she will be ridiculed...p.100

At the culmination of her desperate quest for a child, Emilienne rejects the ideology of the childless woman as tantamount to an incomplete human being. She observes the loss of joy on the part of young mothers who, after sacrificing everything to guarantee the well being of their children are yet devoid of joy:

Les sourires n'ont pas seulement disparu des visages des femmes stériles: de nombreuses mères non plus ne savent plus rire. Connaissez-vous l'une des raisons de cette

tristesse que l'on retrouve déjà chez les enfants, et plus tard chez les adultes devenus parents? Cette tristesse généralisée peut se justifier par les problèmes et les traumatismes que connaissent les femmes en grossesse. Les enfants qui naissent à la suite de ces conditions présentent des problèmes caractériels considérables qui les affectent parfois toute leur vie. p.92

Smiles have not only disappeared from the faces of barren women: neither do a number of mothers still know how to smile. Do you know one of the reasons for this sorrow already noticed in children, and later in adults who became parents? This generalised sorrow can be justified by the problems and trauma experienced by women during pregnancy. Subsequently, children born in this condition exhibit considerable emotional problems which sometimes affect them all through their lives. p.92 (Our translation)

Rawiri and Beyala reject the notion of motherhood simply for the purpose of taking pride in one's ability to procreate as tradition demands, thus populating the world with children that are not cared for. It is on this note that the theme of spiritual/social motherhood is developed in the works of Calixthe Beyala; *Le petit prince de Belleville* and *Maman a un amant*. M'am's mothering identity is linked with that of a spiritual and not a biological mother. She is therefore valued by her qualities as a human being and not as a biological mother. In this manner, M'am can be said to be liberated from the ridicule Dominique refers to in Rawiri's African *Fureurs et cris de femmes*. The question that arises now is; should motherhood be obligatory or by choice or rather should women explore alternative means of motherhood such as artificial or spiritual?

This therefore suggests a new type of motherhood, whereby the child will be valued after being brought to the world. Calixthe Beyala's *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* is a rebellion against the debasing of the woman's body as depicted in the story of Tanga. The protagonist is rejected by her mother and subsequently compelled to prostitute. Sequel to a disappointing relationship, Tanga decides to adopt Pieds-Gâtés, who is abandoned in the streets by his parents as a way of searching for true love; a love she hopes to find through adoption. Tanga's initiative fails because Pieds-Gâtés (whose legs are saturated with blisters), does not comprehend such gestures of love. *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* is an indictment of male chauvinism and repression of the female gender. Equally condemned is women's involvement in the continuous subjugation of their gender and child abuse as portrayed in the story of Tanga. The novel accentuates female endurance and

empowerment through the ideology of sisterhood as depicted in the relationship between Tanga and Anne Claude.

2.2.4 Radical Traits in Calixthe Beyala's Women

Beyala's treatment of the relationship between a man and a woman is that of total submission. M'ammariam (*Maman a un amant*), recounts her experience of servitude, neglect and abandonment. The first of her numerous letters to her friend, introduces the reader to the genesis of oppression and suppression experienced by the female gender: "La femme est née à genou aux pieds de l'homme...Me voici soudain femme nue, abandonnée...Je cessai de pleurer, je cessai de refuser le sommeil." p.21 This quotation indicates that a woman is born primarily to serve a man. The image of the man standing or sitting majestically issuing orders, which the woman who is down on her knees must execute, connotes servitude and inequality between the genders. The author also depicts man as having an animalistic tendency deprived of any iota of sentiment. This leads to the reduction of man to parts of the body: "le tas de gras dort, un bras poilu hors du lit" (C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée; 152). "the heap of fat is asleep, a polluted arm from bed". Calixthe Beyala's novels: *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée* (1987), *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* (1988), *Sauf le diable le savait* (1990), *Le petit prince de Belle-ville* (1992), *Maman a un amant* (1993) and *Les honneurs perdus* (1996) among others depict the condition of women in a patriarchal society and constitute an attack on patriarchy and its establishment.

The main protagonists in her first three novels are adolescents or young women in their twenties: Ateba Leocadie (*C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée*) is 19, Tanga (*Tu t'appelleras Tanga*) is 17, while Megrita (*Sauf le diable le savait*) is 26. Her works set in a post-colonial African society condemn a number of social ills; poverty, decadence, injustice, prostitution, child abuse and human deprivation in African patriarchal society and urban slums. The writer frowns at the abuse of authority in a society which winks at child abuse and prostitution, a society which oppresses women and also uses them as tools to oppress their "sisters" thus provoking and perpetuating intra-gender conflict. According to Richard (1988):

Calixthe Beyala not only takes her audience into a journey of violence but also of dreams and fantasy. She uses the character of prostitutes as an instrument of political criticism. She also compels her readers to have a rethink about the world and to question the happening around in

order to attempt to remedy the nonchalance of the society.
p.26-27

Her first novel: “*C’est le soleil qui m’a brûlée*, centres on victimisation of women, poverty, sexuality, prostitution and violence. Ateba, the main female protagonist is raised up in an environment where prostitution flourishes. Her mother (Betty), her aunt (Ada) and her friend (Ekassi) are prostitutes. Moreover, her father is faceless as he is one of her mother’s numerous clients. In their radical approach to patriarchal oppression, Ada physically assaults her clients while Ateba murdered the man who sexually molested her. *Tu t’appelleras Tanga* underscores female survival and empowerment via female solidarity. Hitchcott (2006), presupposes that the novel denounces chauvinism woman-objectification, unfaithful and abusive men p.190. Women’s role in perpetuating female victimisation is not skimmed over. A caustic critic is directed at women who transform little girls into girlchild-women instead of protecting them. This is revealed in the character of Tanga’s mother who collaborated with her husband to introduce the young girl to prostitution and compels her to remain in the trade. also insists that “Through the heroine, the novel attempts to offer a solution to women’s victimisation by proposing the sharing of story” p.190. In other words, female solidarity is proposed as a strategy to counter female oppression. To this end, Fatunde, (2004), in Sanusi & Olayinka (2012), suggests that Calixthe Beyala prefers

absolute autonomy of the woman vis-à-vis the man. She is in favour of Simone de Beauvoir’s theory of the complete independence of women as the most viable alternative to their oppression. Most of Beyala’s characters desire freedom, happiness and prosperity outside all forms of marital arrangement with men. Her characters permanently distrust men. Even where there seems to be a successful matrimonial home, death comes in to destroy such as arrangement. p.288

In condemning the patriarchal society’s attitude towards women, Beyala is acting as an agent of social change as she advocates alternative attitude towards the female gender-freedom from oppression and marginalisation. On Beyala’s use of language, Thomas and Hitchcott (2006), presuppose: “By using the language of migration, Beyala stresses the cultural separation between the immigrant ghetto of Belleville and the surrounding majority ethnic space of France.” The radicality in Beyala’s women

characters' approach to patriarchal oppression is also revealed in the author's use of language which Ayeleru (2012), describes as "linguistic vulgarism/pornography.

2.2.5 Writers' Definition of the Female Body

One of the issues that female writers attempt to correct is male writers' insignificant description of the female body, which depicts the exploitative tendency of the patriarchal society in its relationship with the female gender. The female body is associated with sexuality, procreation, investment and social mobility for family members through the dowry. Juliette, Guillaume Oyono-Mbia's female protagonist, (*Trois prétendants...un mari*), is relevant to her family simply because of the huge dowry they expect to collect from her prospective suitor. In the novel, it is the prerogative of Abessolo, the patriarch to impose the dress code and diet for women in Mvoutessi. However, female writers who attempt a redefinition of female body underscore areas where the female body has been submissive to sexual manipulation; accentuating the female body in its manifestation of desire for passion. In some female writings, the body functions as signs of psychological sufferings, Mariama Bâ's *Un chant écarlate* (1981) and Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane* (1982). Depression in the two characters, provoked by the marginal treatment they received from their husbands and in-laws brought negative physical changes to their bodies. These changes transformed their once beautiful physiques into shadows of themselves through insomnia, loss of appetite, nightmares and physical deterioration provoked by unresolved internal conflict.

Casenave (1996), summarises Rawiri's treatment of the female body in three points: The transformed body, the discovered body and the suffering body. This is evident in Toula's case (*G'amarakano, au carrefour*), where the body undergoes these stages. The novel begins with the financial handicapped state of the protagonist who is also uncomfortable with her over size stature. Her friend, Ekata becomes her instructor as she gives her lectures on what it entails to maintain a figure that will guarantee her success by attracting wealthy men to her. In the first stage, her body goes through transformation-dark skinned and obese stature to light skinned and skinny figure. The second stage marks the era of her sexual discovery while the third stage symbolises her demotion as she loses everything she has earlier achieved. The author makes her position clear as she condemns the demands of the modern society on the African woman where the woman's body is subjected to a new mode of servitude. For men, beautiful ladies are synonymous with slim figures and light skin while dark skinned and robust ladies are not desired.

Consequently, girls resort to strict diet and skin toning as a way of becoming attractive to wealthy men. The use of Western criteria to measure beauty for the African woman becomes problematic, when in actual fact, it negates the concept of beauty in the African world view. Toula, the main female protagonist decides to change her look by means of strict diet and skin toning. As she succeeds in being attractive to men, she keeps two lovers; a bank worker and his boss from whom she receives numerous material and monetary gifts. With Toula's body transformation and her success with men, comes the discovery of her active sexual prowess. This is however ephemeral as she eventually loses the two lovers when her double dating becomes apparent. This is the third stage which symbolises the loss of everything she slaves to achieve (beauty, money and fame).

Considering the issue from the womanist stance, any desire on the part of the African woman to copy the white woman's agenda is tantamount to loss of identity. Since no amount of bleaching of the skin can turn a black woman into a white woman, therefore, fighting the battle against male oppression demands freedom from identity crisis as well as concerted efforts towards achieving self assertion and self-retrieval. That men and women in the novel adhere to the philosophy of beauty as dictated by the West implies that they are greatly influenced by the West. Along side the narrator's voice which associates a girl's success with the possession of light skin and slim figure, an irresistible attraction to men (especially the wealthy ones), is another divergent voice contrasting this irrationality.

The voice raises issues on the severity of the trend, questioning the adoption of the West's criteria of beauty for the African woman while neglecting the actual criteria of African beauty. The criteria set by men themselves and endorsed by women who desire to look Europeanised accords to the West the prerogative of deciding the criteria for universal beauty. On the other hand, since Francophone African countries were victims of assimilation, the desire to be "white" physically and ideologically in order to be accepted by the French, might not be unconnected with Francophone male and female's adoption of Western criteria for measuring African beauty.

In *Furrows et cris de femmes*, Rawiri also dramatises the case of a female character (Emilienne) whose body is negatively transformed by worry, weeping, crying and depression as a result of her inability to conceive; which is the cause of her oppression. Casenave (1996), considers her situation a metaphor for sterile Africa which is incapable of governing herself as a result of economic crisis. Sequel to the disintegration of Emilienne's body is rebellion and the eventual regain of her physical and

psychological freedom. She frees herself of sorrows and pains before freeing herself of sterility. In a comparative analysis between the characters of Emilienne and Toula, Casenave, considers the former a success and the latter a failure. Toula is manipulated to the end while Emilienne succeeds in retracing her steps and discovering her self esteem. The critic considers the fake skin colour Toula wears as symbolising falsehood and her eventual failure. As for Emilienne, it is the story of success-ending of centuries of oppression of the female gender.

The concept of suffering is frequently exploited in the course of the evolution of Francophone female writing. Rawiri exploits this theme to describe the emotional state a woman undergoes in the course of oppression; pains, sorrows, agony and joy among others. Although, male writers' description of female body also hinge on sufferings, however, this is related to physical sufferings caused by mothering and child rearing or illness, on the other hand, female writers treat more of psychological than physical sufferings. In Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes*, sufferings is dramatised by solitude in the midst of pains. The cause of Emilienne's sorrow is sterility and this sorrow affects her beauty and general state of health. It is the frustration of a woman whose husband takes another wife. Other female characters who experience a similar form of suffering are Ramatoulaye, Aïssatou and Juletane among others.

However, these female characters assume the responsibility of agents of social change as they confront the socio-cultural laws that orchestrate their marginalisation. They adopt the passive and active strategies to counter subjugation. Aïssatou (*Une si longue lettre*), sues for divorce (active strategy), Ramatoulaye settles for the "sharing formula" practiced in polygamy (passive strategy), only to be transformed into a radical upon the death of her husband. This is portrayed when she vent her anger on the agents of patriarchy represented by Tamsir (Modou's elder brother) and his religious delegates, when the former proposes marriage to her while still mourning her dead husband. Mireille (*Un chant écarlate*), opt for infanticide and attempted assassination of patriarchy represented by her husband, (active strategy). As for Emilienne (*Fureurs et cris de femmes*), hers was total submission (passive strategy), until she rebels against the patriarchal belief that her value as a human being is determined by her ability to give birth to biological children (active strategy). When one comes to Calixthe Beyala, the demystification of sex and sexuality (active strategy), is the female characters' strategy of dealing with oppression. This no doubt influences Ayeleru (2007), to refer to her female

protagonists' language of expression as "linguistic vulgarism/pornography." p.185 The active strategy proved successful as it begets self-assertion in the female characters.

On the role of women as agents of social change, Kolawole (1997) disagrees with the African woman's portrayal by male writers and Western feminists as voiceless and invisible. She cites examples of female writers in Africa; D'Almeida, Micere Mugo, Siga Jajne, Carole Boyce-Davies and Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie who insist that African women are not voiceless if only one cares to search for their voices in the right places such as in ceremonies and in oral presentations. Their voices are alleged to have been suppressed by colonialism and patriarchy. In the same vein, Jajne as cited by Kolawole, suggests the Senegalese concept of intruding in conversations as a panacea to making women voices known and accepted in male dominated literary circle. "Voice throwing" is therefore her proposed way for women to take up the responsibility of agents of social change. She posits:

I would like to offer an alternate reading and locate myself within the concept of "voice throwing." I believe that by "throwing" in one's voice, a disruption of discourse can take place. The act of "throwing" one's voice can create an epistemic violence to discourse that will create a space for hitherto unheard voices. The problem that will arise from such an action will be the appropriation of this voice within the particular discourse it interrupts, an act that may or may not render it mute. p.6

Kolawole concurs with women scholars who challenge the way African women's mobilisation and the question of self-assertion and empowerment are glossed over or effaced from mainstream women's theorising. Women scholars of different ideological stance propose ways through which women can take up responsibilities as agents of social change. In spite of their ideological differences, these women scholars are concerned about the condition and need of the African woman. They discuss the issue of voicelessness, marginality, oppression, and self-retrieval of African women. It is also observed that in gender discourse, the placement of the African woman could be influenced by certain variables: personal, communal and religious factors and any attempt to generalise the location of women could be problematic.

In their multiple voices, the women writers attempt to deconstruct existing distorted images or misrepresentations of African women. They also react to the claim that Western Feminism is a universal theory and attempt a redefinition of African womanhood. They identify with Womanism deriving from African values, claiming that

African women are visible, vibrant and dynamic in particular areas such as orature. Furthermore, Kolawole affirms that female writers dramatise injustices against women and attract society's attention to them as they take up the role of agents of social change. They advocate for balancing and redressing of the obscene image of the African woman on the contemporary society. They have also influenced the consciousness of the patriarchal societies to begin to see women in the light of contemporary development.

In her approach to feminist criticism, Emenyi (2005) hinges on Bakhtin's theory of dialogism as applied to the novel. According to her, the theory of dialogism was propounded in the 1920s by Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975). The critic (Emenyi), suggests that the theory seeks "to explain the polyphonic nature of the novel which... goes with a dialogic imperative that distinguishes it as a "super-genre" when compared with the epic and drama" p.13. Bakhtin condemns what he referred to as the "monologic" voice of the epic (representing the ruling class) for its "univocal and authoritative language" p.13. He insists that the epic and drama are favoured by the ruling class representing the authoritative voice while the novel which is dialogic in nature and characterised by an unofficial language is the masses' way of reacting to the authoritative voice of the ruling class. He explains further that the oppressed voice through the novel responds to the authoritative voice of the epic and drama through "carnival laughter". According to Emenyi, "carnival laughter" is a reference to the carnival festival in the middle ages, in which the masses appropriated power to themselves to elucidate the vainness of supreme power. The festival, according to her, is characterised by a celebration in which poor people play the roles of kings while kings serve as fools.

In deconstructing Bakhtin's theory, Emenyi (2005), maintains that dialogism is more appropriate on stage than in a novel that is passive in nature. She adds that dialogism is not a novel based theory but that the interaction of voices in performance situations makes drama more dialogic than the novel. In applying Bakhtin's theory of dialogism to feminist criticism, Emenyi claims that female exclusion from dominant society provoked reactions as female writers began to subvert male voice hitherto considered as absolute. These female writers reexamine the basis of male power and female alleged powerlessness. Emenyi sees the feminine voice laughing at the masculine voice's irrational hold on the negative aspect of the African culture which reinforces female oppression. In her study, she selected four plays: Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, LeRoi Jones' *Dutchman*, Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the sun* and Zulu Sofola's *The showers*. Within the framework of her study, the dominant male voice

in Black Literature is represented by Wole Soyinka and LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) while Lorraine Hansberry and Zulu Sofola belong to the new female consciousness which threatens male hegemony and engages it in a literary combat as their way of assuming the role of agents of social change.

2.3 Forms of Oppression in the Society

Oppression is a situation whereby a ruling group dominates another that is subject to its control. It is characterised by injustice meted out to the “powerless” group as well as placing constraints on its freedom. Oppression can be the result of unchallenged norms, habits, and symbol which entails the dehumanising treatment of people at the receiving end. Denial of opportunities can also be part of oppression; opportunities in the area of education, politics and other social amenities. Consequently, the visions and dreams of the group being denied are truncated.

Authors, (Abberley, 1987; Young, 2004; Hindso, 2008; Deutsch, 2016 and Head, 2017) are unanimous in their assertion that oppression is nothing but injustice meted out on a group of people by another group who belongs to the ruling class. Abberley views oppression as synonymous with disability since the oppressed group is disabled by norms that legitimatise the act of oppression meted out on it. Head identifies twelve forms of oppression; they are sexism, heterosexism, cisgenderism, classism, racism, colorism, ableism, nativism, Lookism, sizeism, Ageism and colonialism. Two of these forms of oppression that are relevant to our study will be looked into and they are sexism and classism.

Sexism: Sexism is the ideology of superiority of one sex over another and this theory influences vital areas of life such as political, economic and the social sphere. Discrimination by reason of differences in sex has denied women opportunities of enjoying privileges made available to their male counterparts. Sexism provokes men into inflicting physical, psychological or emotional violence on women probably because the former tend to be larger and have more upper body strength than the latter. According to Head, sexism tends to force women into subservient, restrictive roles that they do not want and force men into dominant, competitive roles that many men do not want. The latter statement could be true in the sense that some men who are oppressive are simply conforming to societal/cultural expectation from the male gender. A case in point is that of Aïssatou (*Une si longue lettre*) whose submission and devotion is repaid with deceit and heart break by Mawdo Bâ (her husband) and tante Nabou (her mother in-law) who

influences her son into marrying a second wife. Aïssatou's parting letter when she chooses to divorce Modou Bâ reveals that the latter is forced into a role he did not bargain for:

Les princes dominant leurs sentiment pour honorer leurs devoirs. Les autres courbent leur nuque et acceptent un sort qui les brime...Je me dépoule de ton amour. Vêtue de seul habit valable de la Dignité Je poursuit ma route. p.50

Princes master their feelings to fulfill their duties. Others bend their heads and in silence, accept a destiny that oppresses them...I am stripping myself of your love, your name. Clothed in my dignity; the only worthy garment. I go my way. p.50 (Our translation)

Inability to master his feelings turns Mawdo Bâ into a tool in the hands of his mother who manipulates him and breaks his once happy and monogamous marriage. In *Modukpè, le rêve brisé*, Freddy engages in extra marital affairs because of his desire to have more children, particularly an heir, as Modukpè is incapable of fulfilling this cultural obligation. The African society which influences his resolve to become polygamous places importance on the birth of more than one child and more especially, on male children. In *Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*, one of Hodou's reasons for acquiring wives and numerous children is the need for more work forces on his farm. In addition, Africa tradition consider polygamy as a way of measuring a man's wealth. To achieve this, he turns his wives into baby factories because of the culture he inherits from his ancestors. Soldiers in *Le crépuscule de l'homme*, hinge on the culture of sexually assaulting women during political upheavals and therefore take advantage of this "privilege" without an iota of guilt for their actions. Husbands in *L'engrenage* engage in wife-prostitution to cushion the effect of poverty at a time of political and economic crisis-a role they never bargained for.

Classism: Classism is a manifestation of partiality by a "supposed" superior group towards a "supposed" inferior group. It can also involve an organised oppression of a minor "powerless" group by a principal "powerful" group. According to Head, classism is a social situation in which wealthy or influential people oppress the less wealthy or less influential ones. It is synonymous with the exploitation of workers by the ruling class which is the focus of Marxism. Classism is a common feature in neo-colonial Africa as well as in all capitalist societies. This could be seen in the oppression of the masses by the

ruling class in Sembène Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* and Hortense Mayaba's *L'engrenage*. As a palliative, husbands in the latter novel, instruct their wives to go into prostitution as a way of preventing starvation in homes. Whereas, the clients of these married women are wealthy and influential men who have connection in government.

Young (2004), identifies five types of oppression in the society. They are violence, exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, and cultural imperialism, all of which picture the experiences of female characters in our six selected novels.

Exploitation: This is an unfair payment of labour force using capitalism as a spring board. The outcome is the creation of a system that begets and perpetuates class variance aimed at maintaining the status quo between the rich and the poor; "the rich being richer and the poor being poorer" as Mantel (2017;179) suggests. Young asserts that "the economic theory of capitalism states that people are free to exchange goods freely. Yet, whenever this happens throughout history, it creates different classes of people: wealthy and poor". According to him, Karl Marx, the father of socialism, opines that capitalism creates "haves" (those that have wealth) and "have-nots" (those that do not have wealth). Typically in a capitalistic society, the "haves" end up exploiting the "have-nots" for their hard work". The workers in Sembène Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* and Flore Hazoumé's *L'engrenage* are unfairly paid for the work they do. Ananou and co-wives (*Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*) are used as child rearing factories with no effort to care for the female goose that lay the golden eggs. The children who are born mainly to provide labour force for Hodou's farm business are made to remain permanently dependent on their father with no effort to give them personal plots of land. The fact that Mado's parents (*La vengeance de l'albinos*) release their daughter to Diallo as "wife" simply because he "saves" them from starvation is a form of exploitation of the girl-child. Married women in Hortense Mayaba's *L'engrenage* are exploited by being reduced to prostitutes because they do not want their families to die of starvation.

Marginalisation: This could be defined as confining a group of people to a subordinate position by denying them the benefit of exercising their legitimate rights. Reasons for marginalization include race, sex, religion, class and ideology among others. The idea that one group is better than another and has the right to control the other gets embedded in the institutions of the society. Abessolo, the patriarch and custodian of culture in *Trois prétendants...un mari* puts down the rules and regulations regarding acceptable dress code and diet for women. He also considers it the prerogative of his extended family to

choose a husband for Juliette, his granddaughter. Equally, Binetou's parents (*Une si longue lettre*) and Mado's (*La vengeance de l'albinos*) are typical of parents who believe they have the exclusive right to decide whom their daughters must marry. Jean Paul (Modukpè's father in *Modukpè, le rêve brisé*) takes pleasure in the quarrels among his wives who struggle regularly to occupy the first position in his heart. The best dishes are prepared for the husband while the wives and children make do with alternatives. Also, Modukpè in *Modukpè, le rêve brisé* is marginalised by the norms of the society that does nothing to protect her when she is abandoned by the architect of her pregnancy. However, when the unwanted child grows up, the law permits Robert (the architect of her pregnancy) to claim him when he attains a particular age.

Culture of Silence: This is a situation whereby an oppressed person becomes so used to his state that he believes there is nothing he could do about it, accepting it as his destiny. According to Freire as cited by Young (2004):

oppressed people become so powerless that they do not even talk about their oppression. If they reach this stage of oppression, it creates a culture wherein it is forbidden to even mention the injustices that are being committed. The oppressed are silenced. They have no voice and no will
p.4.

This group of individuals is also denied access to weapons that will enable it challenge its situation such as education and literacy. In traditional Africa, myths and legends are used to make women accept their marginalisation as the norm. Oppressed people sometimes accept the "ideology" of inferiority since it is embedded in the norms of the society. This is the case with Modukpè's mother who asserts that women are wagons pushed about by men as they wish; that is, men are perpetually in control while women obey. The consciousness of one's rights through education and literacy is therefore the only way to fight against powerlessness and the culture of silence. However, after a long period of silence, Modukpè's mother becomes conscious of her right, breaks her silence and separates herself from the harem of quarrelsome and competitive wives. Ananou (*Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*), "destroys the emptiness of silence" as D'Almeida advises, when she ceases to be one of Hodou's baby factories and lives separately from her husband and her fellow baby factories. Ananou's self-assertive character is made possible as she undergoes informal adult education classes in the market where she trades in town after separating from her husband.

Likewise, Mado in *La vengeance de l'albinos* runs away from her “matrimonial home” when death becomes imminent if she continues to cohabit with Diallo and his family members. For Emilienne (*Le crépuscule de l'homme*), she breaks her silence when she purposes to take up her real identity instead of agreeing with her husband (Bernard) to assume the identity of Claire (Bernard’s dead fiancée), all through her life. The women in *L'engrenage* also break their silence when they confront the oppressive government in power. This marks a turning point in the lives of these women who are now equipped to reject oppression in their matrimonial homes. Unfortunately, Julienne in *La vengeance de l'albinos* remains in her position of silence during the lifetime of her husband and after his death. Obeying doggedly the instruction of Mésangou (her husband), while alive and after his death, Juliette refuses to reveal Lydie’s real mother to the teenager.

Cultural Imperialism: This involves the imposition of the ruling class’s culture on the governed, using laws and legislations to establish such culture as the only recognised one. This is evident in the history of colonialism in Africa where the colonial masters accord prominent place to colonial languages like English, French, German and Portuguese while working strenuously to ensure the erosion of the native languages in the colonies. The governed are indoctrinated into believing that their culture is inferior to that of the ruling class while assimilation into the “superior culture” attracts privileges.

In all our selected novels, women are indoctrinated into the male culture of superiority over the female members of the society. They are also made to accept male’s behaviour of adultery and infidelity as evidence of maleness which a woman must not question. Modukpè is counselled by Freddy, her husband, to accept the culture promulgated by men which stipulates that, “the first wife whom she is, being worn out by the vicissitudes of time must be open minded and accept to share her husband freely with another”p.125 (Our translation). It is this same male culture that provokes the silence of the colonial government (agents of patriarchy) on the whereabouts of Tante Ngoné’s fiancé who never returned from a military expedition. Had Tante Ngoné not been considered as inferior, she would have been briefed on the situation concerning her fiancé who never returned from an assignment. The former who believes her fiancé will one day return to her, remained unmarried until her death. The same male culture which associates women with witch craft deprives Tante Ngoné of the joy of motherhood. At a time when she is supposed to reap the fruit of her labour for educating her foster son, she is tagged a witch by a diviner (a patriarch), excommunicated from her son’s immediate family and dies prematurely.

Violence: Violence is a form of oppression that involves unprovoked attacks on persons or property with the aim of causing damage, humiliation or death on the victim. It is also used as a weapon for keeping a group perpetually subjugated. Women worldwide are victims of male violence and rape especially during war. Also, some societies endorse wife battering as a punitive measure for a wife who “errs” while no one seems to recommend husband battery for the husband who errs. Mado’s union with Diallo is characterised by violence meted out on the young lady on a regular basis for daring to confess that she does not love him. Emilienne (*Le crépuscule de l’homme*) is also a victim of violence; violence through rape by several soldiers during war and violence in her marriage with Bernard. Dodji’s (*Enfant d’autrui, fille de personne*) rape experience by her uncle can also be characterised as an act of violence meted out on a teenager. Violence is also inflicted on workers fighting for improved condition of service when fully armed law enforcement agents are set against them as depicted in Sembène Ousmane’s *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* and Hortense Mayaba’s *L’engrenage*.

Akorede (2011) classifies wife battery and other forms of assault which women are subjected to by their husbands as family related violence. Females are reported to suffer from molestation and indiscriminate beatings, an experience that is said to be common with the African-American and African women. Domestic violence or spouse abuse are acts that are physically or emotionally harmful between husbands and wives or between other individuals in intimate relationships. Domestic violence is sometimes referred to as intimate violence. “It includes violence that occurs in dating and courtship, relationship between former spouses, and between gay and lesbian partners” (Gelles, 2009: p.1). The author also states that abuse between intimate partners can take many forms: emotional or verbal abuse, denial of access to resources or money, restraint of normal activities or freedom (including isolation from friends and family), sexual coercion or assault, threats to kill or to harm, and physical intimidation or attacks.

Since the term spouse abuse is gender neutral- that is, it can refer to abuse of either husband or wife and considering the fact that police and hospital records indicate that the majority of victims of domestic violence are women, some experts propose the concept of violence towards women, to refer to domestic violence. Violence directed against women in intimate relationship can also be traced to patriarchy since it encourages the domination of women by men. Beninese’s cultures and traditions like many African cultures support wife battery as a corrective measure taken against an erring wife. The

conflict between the economic and social reality of women beget the women's liberation movement known as Feminism. Zielinski (2015), believes that women are in no way inferior to men; their responsibilities surpass that of the male gender as they are encumbered both with workplace and domestic chores,

2.4 Gender Oppression as Reflected in Bénin Republic

In Bénin Republic, like in most African and third world countries, women are yet victims of traditional practices; mutilation of female genital, relegation at home and in public, polygamy and forced marriage among others. These cultural practices are also responsible for women's restriction to traditional roles; procreation, nurturing and household chores. Besides, the country is a reflection of the patriarchal system as contained in the reports of United Nations Development Programme (1998) and Social Institutions and Gender Index (2014) edition. Bénin has high levels of discrimination against women in social institutions.

The world facts book (2002) affirms that women's participation in public life is suppressed due to patriarchal ethos as regards their appropriate roles and restricted endowment. Marie-Elise Akouavi Gbedo is cited as a case study. She was said to have contested the Presidential Election in 2001 being the first female candidate to run for that high-ranking position. However, great antagonism from the men folk hindered her from making it to the final round of the election process.

In Article 8 of the constitution of Benin Republic, citizens are assured of equal rights to benefit from fundamental social amenities; health care, education, cultural information, professional training and employment. Additionally, the constitution also forbids gender discrimination, while Article 6 postulates that universal suffrage for both men and women is at the age of 18. Customary laws and norms still dominate the greater portion of women's life despite assurance of equality with their male counterparts and they are also exposed to abuse and prejudice. Among iniquitous acts that persist are inequality, discrimination and domestic violence, while polygamy and forced marriage though illegal, are still practiced being endorsed by the customary law.

Majority of Beninenses depend on agriculture for nourishment, while lodging for most of the poor ones, like in any country of the world are in rural and sub-urban areas. In the field of agriculture, women are excluded from programs that are beneficial to farmers despite the fact that most of the physical labour are done by them. Women are also negatively affected in agriculture due to traditional practices as they may be barred from

owning any land, productive land and/or larger plots of land. *The world fact book* (2002), asserts that while forced and early marriage is yet to be abrogated in Bénin especially in rural areas, girls can be forcefully given out in marriage as early as age 7, while incest, domestic violence, and rape within marriage persist.

Due to extensive poverty, some parents place their children in the homes of wealthy families as maids. This is a practice known as “vidomègon” (maid) or a system of child slavery. The child, typically a girl, is often the object of physical and even sexual abuse. “There have been instances where the abuse has led to the death of a child. In 1996, a 12-year old maid was beaten to death and there is no indication that the matter has been addressed in the legal system” (*The world fact book*, 2002: p.1-9). Beninese’s teenage girls, in point of fact, saturate homes of middle-class Nigerians where they serve as maids. The child trafficker/middle man who is normally a female Beninese, benefits more from this “business” while the “victim” and her parents make do with gifts from generous employers. “Vidomègons” and other victims of traffickers are always exposed to acts of physical and sexual violence. In the patriarchal society of Bénin Republic, female oppression is portrayed through the forms of oppression highlighted in the selected novels such as deceit, infidelity, polygamy, male violence, wife battery, rape, child abuse and wife-prostitution among others. Considering the fact that gender oppression is prevalent in Bénin Republic, it will not be out of place to consider measures put in place to combat the menace.

2.5 Women Liberation in Benin Republic

Improvement in the rights of women in the Republic of Bénin is traced to the restoration of democracy, the ratification of the Constitution, and the passage of the 2004 Personal and Family Code which led to the gradual extinction of various traditional customs that systematically treated women unequally. However, inequality and discrimination persist while polygamy and forced marriage hitherto declared illegal are still practiced. Enforcement of the law against rape (which is five years imprisonment), is impeded by corruption, ineffectiveness on the part of the police and fear of social stigma. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour (2011 and 2013) reports on 2010 and 2013 human rights violation in Bénin maintain that domestic violence which is prevalent in the Republic of Bénin attracts penalties of up to three years in prison. Furthermore, the report holds that women are not eager to report cases while authorities are unwilling to mediate in private issues.

Female genital mutilation which constitutes the vilest of all the human rights violation in Benin, is widely practiced in many regions and tribes, while the law against it is seldom enforced. Moreover, prostitution, especially child prostitution, is common, with sex tourists as their regular clients. There is prevalent account of sexual harassment, with some teachers sexually exploiting many of their female students. The misdemeanor which attracts a minimum of two years imprisonment is yet to be properly enforced. Despite the fact that women enjoy equal rights under the constitution, and also in matters related to marriage and inheritance, they still experience a great deal of social and employment discrimination owing to traditional attitudes about sex roles.

Moreover, obtaining credit is always a challenge for women and widows are deprived of the right to manage their personal assets. In rural areas, subordinate roles are ascribed to women and they are often encumbered with hard labour. These unpleasant experiences beget women groups aimed at assisting women who have been victims of discrimination or abuse such as: Women in Law and Development-Benin, the Female Jurists Association of Benin (AFJB), and the Women's Justice and Empowerment Initiative Through Care International's Empower Project. Women empowerment in the Republic of Bénin cannot be discussed without giving kudos to a number of Beninese women whose efforts at empowering women in the country cannot be glossed over; Rosine Vierra Soglo, Marie Elise Gbedo and Angélique Kidjo. Lawyers and politicians by profession, their backgrounds empowered them, to some extent, to cross traditional patriarchal limitations in their country and assist their Beninese counterparts to achieve emancipation. Rosine Vierra Soglo, is the wife of Nicephore Dieu Donné Soglo, first democratically elected president of Benin republic. During the legislative elections of 1996, she led the the most influential political party “la Renaissance du Bénin” with the largest number of female parliamentarians. Rosine Vierra Soglo introduced an amendment to the Family Code modified in 2004.

The amendment authorises women to inherit their parents' estate and in addition, widows were liberated from the cultural requirement of marrying their late husbands' sons or brothers. The new Family Code proscribed polygamy, and compelled husbands to consult their spouses before any decision concerning their family is made. Through her Non Governmental Organization (NGO) VIDOLE (children have benefits), Rosine Vierra Soglo sponsors girls' primary education and gives loans to indigent women in rural areas. The achievements of Rosine Vierra Soglo have inspired many sub-Saharan

parliamentarians who succeeded in modifying the Family Code of their countries such as neighbouring Togo, Niger, and Mali.

Between 2001 and 2006, Africa records the first African female presidential candidate; Marie Elise Gbedo. As the vice president of Beninese women lawyers Association, she collaborates with other women intellectuals to fight genital mutilation and other abuses directed at women. In addition, she offers free legal services to women who are victims of rape and all sorts of abuses. Gbedo resigned from President Mathieu Kerekou's government in 2000 after being accused of too much transparency over certain political and economic issues. Kidjo, a famous singer nicknamed "the hope of Africa" uses her songs to emphasize the qualities of Black women. Through her hits, she denounces the stumbling blocks to Africa's development as well as traditional beliefs, which in her view, maintain African women in poverty and ignorance.

Africa is witnessing an increase in the number of women occupying key positions within their countries and at international levels; Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf emerged as the first female president in Liberia and in Africa followed by Joyce Banda, first female president in Malawi and second in Africa. Others are Fatou Bensouda (from Gambia), a Chief Justice in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Nigerian minister of finance who in all likelihood, would have emerged president of the World Bank but for tradition that insists that it must be held by an American (*Amina*; 2012). A number of women in Africa also occupy key positions within their country in the academics, politics and in business. However this feat notwithstanding, the battle for women liberation is a process that is yet to attain the desired result. The next section therefore examines the literature of the Bénin Republic.

2.6 The Literature of the Republic of Bénin

The literature of the Republic of Bénin is made up of two types: Oral literature transmitted through the local languages (Fon, Goun, Mina, Yoruba, Dendi etc) and written literature of which French is the main language of expression. Without doubt, the major source of inspiration for Bénin written literature is the oral literature. This corroborates the assertion of authors (Rouch & Gerad, 1986; Huannou, 1995 & Midiohouan, 2004), who suggest that the French language was introduced in Dahomey at an era when a rich literary culture based on the oral tradition was already established.

In his critics of Bénin literature, Huannou classifies the works into four categories namely, works that attack colonialism, works that criticize the African society, works in

honour of Bénin revolution and female writings. He acknowledges the forerunners of the country's literature (Louis Hunkarin, Felix Couchoro and Paul Hazoumé) but is quick to add that they are cautious in their criticism of colonial administration.

According to him, in *L'esclavage en mauritanie* published in 1933, Louis Hunkarin did not challenge colonialism even though he condemns the complicity of the colonial administration in its continuous extension of slave trade in Mauritania. He claims that in the ideology flaunted in Felix Couchoro's novel, the author appears to be an advocate of the "civilizing mission" of France in Dahomey in particular and in Africa in general; but that his work is also a protest of the racist idea of the uncultured black man. In *Dogucimi* (1938), Paul Hazoumé uses his heroine as a spokesman to justify colonialism but at the same time, in a picture he paints of old Dahomey Kingdom, he sings the praise of pre-colonial African civilization. The next generation of writers appears to be less accommodating, as they did not mince words in their attack of the colonial administrations. Albert Tevoedjre's essay, *l'Afrique revoltée* which appeared in 1958, the eve of independence embarks on an incisive criticism of the colonial system in all ramifications while the earliest novels of Olympe Bhely Quenum (*un piège sans fin*, 1960; *Le chant du lac*, 1965 and *Liaison d'un été* 1968) reveal the damaging effects of colonialism.

The dominant feature of literary works that emerged after independence is the critic of the Dahomean society. Such are evident in the works of Olympe Bhely – Quenum and Jean Pliya. In *Le chant du lac*, Olympe Bhely-Quenum condemns inter-tribal and inter-regional struggles in Dahomey and in *L'arbre fétiche* (1971) Jean Pliya denounces inequality between the rich and the poor. Independence did more harm than good as the new African leaders revealed their inability to govern their country.

In drama, Jean Pliya, author of *La secrétaire particulière* (1970), presents a satire of the morals of neo-colonialism in Dahomey, featuring corruption, favoritism, nepotism and indiscriminate recruiting of workers among others. An essay by Guy Landry Hazoumé; *Ideologies Tribalistes et Nation en Afrique, le cas Dahomeen* is another critic of tribalism and regional conflict. Poets like Richard Dogbeh, Eustache Prudencio and Alain de Port-Novex did not spare their society in their critical works.

Sequel to the military coup-d'état of 26th October, 1972, the government invited writers, musicians and other artists to contribute their quota through their literary works to the development and success of the "revolution". The "revolution" gave birth to poems like: *Cri de liberté* (1973) by Jerome Torignon Carlos; *Echo d'une révolution* (1973) by

Severin Akando; *Debout-au service de la révolution* (1976) by Amadou Amzat and *Vive le Bénin nouveau* (1977) by Reine de Madeiros. This anthology accentuates the struggle for national liberation and democratic revolution. The same theme is developed by Severin Akando in his play (*Révolution africaine* 1975), while Eustache Prudencio expressed the same revolutionary trait in his novelette *Ailleurs...un jour...peut-être*(1983). Many other neutral works of poetry appeared such as *Couleur de rêves* (1977) by Victor Hountondji, *La part du feu* (1979) by Armand Monteiro and *l'Aube sur les Cactus* (1981) by Colette Senami Agossu Hoeto. Their themes being that of revolt, dream, nostalgia as well as independence and the struggle for national liberation.

Literary works published in the 80s are marked by a greater variety of themes than those previously tackled, as well as the success of a number of newcomers; Moudjib Djinadou, Edgar Okiki Zinsou, Dominique Titus and Albert Gandonou among others. This era also witnessed the beginning of literary renaissance among Beninese women with the publication of *Une citronnelle dans la neige* by Gisèle Hountondji (1986) which marks the appearance of the first work of a Beninese female writer on the literary scene. Thereafter, other female writers from the country followed suit such as Colette Sénami Agossou Houeto (who wrote a poetry) and Hortense Mayaba, author of *L'univers Infernal* (1997) and *L'engrenage* (2007). Other literary works by female authors are *Modukpe, le rêve Brisé* (2000), *Yemi ou le miracle de l'amour* (2000), *Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne* (2000), *Toute une vie ne suffirait pas pour en parler* (2002) and *L'oiseau messenger* (2002) by Adelaide Fassinou. Also included are Flore Hazoumé's *la vengeance de l'albinos* (2001) and *Le crépuscule de l'homme* (2002) among others. The works of three of these female writers have been chosen for analysis; they are *Modukpè, le rêve brisé* and *Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne* by Adélaïde Fassinou, *Le crépuscule de l'homme* and *La vengeance de l'albinos* by Flore Hazoumé and Hortense Mayaba's *L'univers infernal* and *Engrenage*.

In his analysis of Olympe Bhêly Quenum's *Un piège sans fin*, Guermond (1960), in Ogike (1995), comments: "L'auteur fait preuve de réelles qualités du romancier" p.116. "The author exhibits real qualities of a novelist" (Our translation), while Chevrier (1984) qualifies it as a novel that paints a pathetic picture of human's condition. Ogike (1995) considers its structure and theme as strange, especially in its narrative style. According to the author, the novel which exposes the damaging effects of colonialism and oppression of Africans has a variety of themes: philosophical life's absurdity; sociological: polygamy and racial segregation; political: colonialism; metaphysical and religion: fatality, oracle

and the vision of Christ. Ogike opines that “le piège” represent the theme that unite all other themes and gives to the novel its meaning and title. Ormerod and Volet (1994) give us an insight into Gisèle Hountondji’s *Une citronnelle dans la neige* (1986). They conclude that it is an autobiographical novel where the author relates her experience as a student in Paris and also as a victim of racism. Furthermore, it dramatises the illusion between the story her father recounts to her about Paris and the reality of Paris. Beninese female writings appear to be missing from Francophone women writers’ works earlier reviewed. The literature of the Republic of Benin reveals the appearance of a number of amazons on the literary scenes. It is therefore pertinent that we review previous studies on selected Beninese female writings.

2.7 Previous Studies on the Literary Works of Selected Beninese Women Writers

Although Adélaïde Fassinou’s works are relatively new and yet to have enjoyed remarkable critical attention, scholars (Ojo, 2007; Tachino, 2008; Ayeleru 2007, 2010 & 2011) have made attempt to analyse her works. In his analysis of ‘*Modukpè le rêve brisé*, Ayeleru (2007), describes the woman character as passive and submissive as opposed to the boldness experienced in the expression and verbal confrontation of Rama in *Xala*, Penda, Adjibidj and even N’Deye Touti in Sembène Ousmane’s *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*. He also presupposes that “unlike Penda and Ramatoulaye, in Sembène Ousmane’s novels who tackle their situations courageously and speak out, Modukpè and her mother only grumble and lick their wounds in regret, suffering in silence and pretending as if things are in order.” p.189

One cannot but disagree with Ayeleru in the sense that the main female characters in Adélaïde Fassinou’s *Modukpè le rêve brisé*, (mother and daughter) might appear passive in their approach, but the fact that Modukpè queries patriarchal laws which oppress the female gender even from within the “lion’s den” is an indication that she is not completely submissive as Ayeleru suggests. In the same vein, Modukpè’s mother’s desertion of her matrimonial home to “throw missiles” at patriarchy from “outside the fence” of the “lion’s den” reveals a level of bravado on her part. The nature of oppression in *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* are a combination of work place and domestic; workplace in the sense that the women in collaboration with male members of the society are embarking on a prolonged strike to protest against the oppressive policy of the colonial administration. It is also domestic in the sense that after winning the battle against the colonial government, the women begin to assert themselves in their matrimonial homes,

an indication that they had earlier been subjugated and repressed by their husbands, male partners and other male members of the society. The joint struggle embarked upon by these women in collaboration with male members of the society is in conformity with the Womanist ideology which does not consider men as adversaries but fellow compatriots in the struggle against global oppression.

On the other hand, the nature of oppression in *Modukpè le rêve brisé*, is purely domestic and the victims of oppression react by adopting the active and passive strategies; separation from husbands without divorcing them and questioning patriarchal laws within the patriarchal setting. Thus, the preservation of the sanctity of the home conforms to the ideology of Womanism where the struggle against gender oppression is embarked upon while taking into cognisance the peculiar experience of the African woman. Furthermore, the type of oppression in the latter case has to do with injustice meted out on the female gender by their husbands/male partners using culture as a spring board for female oppression. In either of the two cases (workplace and domestic oppression), the political and social structure already in place endorse the act of oppression meted out on the female characters. This is revealed in the attitude of Robert, Modukpè's lover who abandons her during pregnancy only to return years later to claim paternity of his son simply to satisfy his need for a male child. In putting forward his request, he did not hesitate in insisting that the law of the land supports his action since according to the law, the boy has attained the age when his father should take him in his custody.

The attitude of Robert confirms the assertion of authors who consider patriarchy as a social structure in which leadership position is the exclusive prerogative of men as well as the demonstration and establishment of male dominance over women. This is because the structure encourages Robert to claim custody of the child whom he vehemently insists on his abortion. The women in the two novels *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* and *Modukpè le rêve brisé* react to patriarchal oppression by adopting either the active or passive strategies. The act of organising protest marches and confronting the colonial police (authorised to enforce patriarchal oppressive laws), reveals that these women adopt the active strategies of reacting to colonial oppressive and stringent regulations which are more severe on women. Thus reinforcing the assertion of Lerner (1986), that patriarchy is the manifestation and institutionalisation of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general.

Ojo (2007), considers *Modukpe le rêve brisé* (2000), as an interrogation of patriarchy where the author, Adélaïde Fassinou queries the patriarchal concept of the placement of women in the society. Furthermore, Ojo presupposes that the author promotes self-empowerment as she portrays how education can liberate women from the subaltern status. He also underscores the fact that Fassinou denounces the ills of early marriage, which jeopardises girl's education, and the destiny of young girls who are forcefully married off to marry much older men. This is revealed in the character of Hodou, Ananou's husband in *Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*.

Ojo also compares the experiences of two "vidomègons" (maids), Fassinou's Yèmi in *Yèmi ou le miracle de l'amour* (2001) and Sarafato in Flore Hazoumé's *Une vie de bonne* (1999). According to him, contrary to the experience of most "vidomègons" who are subjected to all forms of abuse and exploitation, Yèmi enjoys the same rights and privileges as biological children of the family. On the other hand, Sarafato's experience is characterised by endless abuses; psychological, physical, and sexual. The author assumes that the experiences of Yèmi and Sarafato point to the fact that the employer is a decisive factor in the happiness or misfortune of a "vidomègon". He also considers both authors' works as revolving around the injurious consequence of child labor and trafficking. Besides, the author presupposes that the works represent an indictment of the wretched state of orphans and indigent children in Cotonou. As antidote to this societal ill, the authors recommend love, compassion, tolerance and greater sense of responsibility on the part of society.

Finally, he draws attention to the virtues of kindness in *Enfant d'autrui fille de personne* (2003) where Ananou adopts two abandoned orphans to whom she shows motherly care, her own way of alleviating the sufferings of the underprivileged. Ojo insists that Flore Hazoumé's *Le crépuscule de l'homme* expresses hope, especially under the new democratic dispensation. He considers the works as a portrayal of Beninese political, economic and social realities, particularly, the people's disenchantment in the post colonial state, on the one hand and hope for a better Bénin, on the other hand.

Tacchino (2008) attempts a comparative analysis of Buchi Emecheta and Adélaïde Fassinou's works which hinge on "Freedom, dignity and human rights". He suggests that these universal themes, recurrent in African literature also occur in some of the novels of these two authors. According to him, in *Yèmi ou le miracle de l'amour*, and *Enfant d'autrui fille de personne*, the novelist focuses on "vidomègons" who are treated as slaves and the works possess traits of autobiographical novels. Tacchino presumes that Buchi

Emecheta recounts her story in *Second class citizen*, using the third person narrative style; Adah, a girl whose experience is parallel with hers; discrimination in a foreign country and expatriation while *The slave girl* and *The family* are characterised by a fictive biography which reveals social conditions such as poor family who are forced to sell their children and the case of abandoned orphans.

According to Tacchino, *Modukpè, le rêve brisé* (where the heroine relates the story of her life), is auto fiction. This is because it is not the author telling the story, rather, it is the principal character. Tacchino also submits that the authors do not necessarily describe their life history but paint through their characters' lives, condition in the society, a characteristic of postcolonial writers who describe happenings in their environment. Additionally, he affirms that the styles of these authors are simple and linear in the sense that they do not use complex vocabulary since their target audience are young readers. Words in African languages are occasionally inserted in the middle of a sentence which is characteristics of post-colonial writers. Ayeleru (2010), underscores this style of writing which he describes as indigenisation of the French language and yorubanness in Fassinou's works. Despite the fact that Buchi's works are written in the 70s and that of Fassinou appeared two decades after, Tacchino concludes that there are similarities between the works of the two female authors (one Anglophone from Nigeria and the other Francophone from the Republic of Bénin).

Not much literary scholarly works have been carried out in the writings of Hortense Mayaba. However, issues treated in the two novels she published and which incidentally have been selected for this study; *L'univers infernal*; (1997) and *L'engrenage*; (2007) are female oppression and suppression, polygamy as oppression (*L'engrenage*), intra-gender conflicts and the female gender's coping strategies in the midst of oppression. In addition, mothering as a weapon to reducing the torment of female oppression occupies a prominent place in *L'univers infernal*. There seems to be a similiarity between women's struggle against patriarchal oppression in Sembène Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* and Hortense Mayaba's *L'engrenage*. In the two novels, women who are most hit by the oppressive policies of the patriarchal ruling class collaborated with the male gender to fight against the oppression of the masses in general and female oppression in particular. The effect of this feat is self assertion on the part of the women; at home and in public places. Furthermore, they became fully equipped to claim their human rights.

The nature of oppression in the six selected novels is mainly domestic; the role being to perpetuate female subjugation (physically, spiritually, emotionally, mentally and psychologically) and to condition them to accepting the archetype of the ideal woman as presented by the patriarchal society. Also, oppression which is meant to place women in a permanent state of subservience elicits responses (passive and active) from the victims. These strategies can be classified as “warfare” within the African context, since in the course of resisting oppression; they take into consideration the peculiar experience of the African woman. The female characters appear to espouse the Womanist ideology since they cherish African values such as marriage and motherhood among others, but desire that the negative aspect of the culture be reviewed.

2.8 Appraisal of Literature Reviewed

In the reviewed literature, patriarchy is acknowledged as permeating every sphere of the African society, the resultant effect being the subordinate position accorded to the female gender and the perpetuation of female subjugation. The negative portrayal of female characters in African male writers’ works provokes the objective depiction of female characters in African women writings. The late acquisition of education by the African woman makes her story to be told by someone else (European chauvinists and male African writers), where she is negatively portrayed in imaginative literature. Consequently, her eventual possession of the weapon of liberation (education), makes her purpose to rewrite her story; an objective portrayal of her gender. Little wonder that Akorede (2011) suggests that “women writers therefore focus on the experience of the female with conscious effort to rewrite the experience of women and reflect women as they are: the brave, the bold, the intelligent, the industrious, the strong, the courageous, the good; and the evil, the weak and the stupid.” p.36

Studies have divulged works of female writers from frontline Francophone African countries like Senegal and Cameroon, revealing varying degree of success with which their female protagonists have either employed the Feminist’s or Womanist’s coping strategy in dealing with male oppression. However, this review exposes areas of unexplored works of Beninese women writers (especially in regards to patriarchy and Womanist’s trends in the works), in spite of the country’s proximity to Nigeria. In this study, six novels by three female writers (two from each writer), have been purposively selected based on their thematic affinities for Womanist traits in the female protagonists. The female characters can invariably be categorised as Womanists since the coping

strategies adopted by them in response to female oppression are in tandem with the ideology of Womanism. This study therefore provides a basis for recommending the inclusion of Beninese female novels in the Nigerian school curriculum as a way of acquainting the citizens with the literature of Nigeria's close neighbour.

The study adopted Alice Walker and Mary Kolawole's versions of Womanism, which distinguishes the struggle for gender equality as embarked upon by women of colour and the peculiar experience of the African woman. Walker's Womanism concerns itself with socio-political issues like racism, sexism, classism, the family, motherhood, change, liberation and interest in cultures and people outside the American context. In addition, she advocates the collaborative efforts of the two genders towards achieving total freedom for all. Kolawole espouses the ideals of Walker's Womanism and at the same time accentuates the significance of culture in the struggle for the African woman's emancipation. The selected novels were placed side-by-side our chosen theory to enable us take a position on the ideology of the women characters in the six selected novels. Therefore, our position echoes Alice Walker's position on female emancipation which we considered from Kolawole's perspective. In addition, some areas highlighted by Kolawole; sisterly bond, culture and the collaborative effort of the gender in the struggle

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.0 Introduction

Adeniyi (2000) proposes that the function of theory in research is predicted on the felt needs establishing a cause and effect relationship between variables with the purpose of explaining and predicting phenomenon. In view of this, it has become imperative to consider the theory that is of practical application to this research since there is no single theory that can adequately capture the existing relationship among the variables being considered under this study. Therefore, Alice Walker and Mary Kolawole's versions of the Womanist theory, which is relevant to this study is appropriated to guide the analysis and understanding of the existing linkages among the variables.

3.1 Women's Mobilisations: Europe and America

History is replete with evidence of women's mobilisation worldwide to liberate women from the yoke of oppression and subjugation placed on them by the patriarchal society. The publication of Mary Woolstonecraft titled "Vindication of the Rights of Women" (1772), which advocated equal opportunities between men and women in political, social, educational and economic affairs sparked off women's mobilisation in Europe. The French revolution, with its attendant liberation of the masses from the oppression of the ruling class inspired the movement in France. Akorede (2011), argues that the French women had been motivated by the 1789 French Revolution which made the citizens conscious of their rights to freedom. In the United States of America, a group advocating for the abolition of slave trade and the activities of the Grimé sisters triggered off the movement. Akorede also insists that women mobilisations were provoked by certain issues: political, education and social.

Politically according to her, women could neither vote nor stand in for electoral posts; educationally they were denied admission into disciplines like medicine reserved exclusively for men. Courses construed as feminine; Home Economics and Religion among others were reserved for women. Additionally, Akorede posits that the first College of Medicine was established in America in 1767 but that it did not admit females until 1847 that is, 80 years after its establishment. According to her, this was because the College administration had qualms concerning the aptness of women as medical doctors. She stresses further:

The male constituted administration also doubted female ability to cope with rigorous academic work. Perhaps that is why the word doctor has gender fixtures, otherwise female doctors would have been referred to as “doctoresses” and the female “professor” would have been known as “professoress”. p.11

Subsequently, women became educationally marginalised while the educational advantage enjoyed by men earned them positions of authority in politics, the economy and the educational sector. Socially, women were excluded from ownership of landed properties because of the inferior position ascribed to them. Instead, low status job like cleaning, typing and other menial office jobs which attracts poor remuneration were reserved for them. In their matrimonial homes, they were subjected to the control of their husbands. To buttress this assertion, Woolf in de Beauvoir (1987) presumes that women in the traditional setting are bereft of liberty, claiming that they were the properties of their husbands and children. A pioneer female activist, de Beauvoir denounces the domestication of women in the society. In her work, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, (1949) she seems to see little or no difference between a prostitute and a married woman. In her analogy, the married woman has a single permanent client (her husband), while the prostitute has several male clients who pay her for the sexual services she renders. Her position is therefore summarised below:

Du point de vue économique, sa situation est symétrique à celle de la femme mariée...Pour toutes deux, l'acte sexuel est un service; la seconde est engagée à vie par un seul homme; la première a plusieurs clients qui la paient à la pièce. p.247

From the economic perspective, her situation is identical to that of the married woman...For both of them, the sexual act is a service rendered; the latter is hooked to a single man for life; the former has several clients who pay her for service rendered. p.247 (Our translation)

In the legal setor, women are reported to have received unfair judgements, the aftermath of their educational handicap. Sheila (1965:8) and Semlar (1998:21) as cited by Akorede (2011) observe that “women often had less access to the legal mechanisms that should be at their disposal and that they were victims of political and economic discrimination.” The after effect of the discrimination against women earlier discussed

begets Feminism, a movement aimed at arresting the ills perpetuated against women by the patriarchal society.

3.2 Women's Mobilisation in Africa

History records evidence of female mobilisations among African women about the same time when Feminism was birthed in Europe. These associations were aimed at opposing the colonial administration's repressive policies. Kolawole (1997) acknowledged powerful women who occupied position of authority in Africa; Queen Candace of Meroe Ethiopia in the second and third centuries, the *magajiya* (queens) in Daura, Northern Nigeria, Inkpi, a woman who ruled the Igala people of Kogi state in the 17th century and Orompoto, a regent who led the people of Oyo to fight off Nupe invaders of Oyo in southern Nigeria. Others are Yaa Asantewa of Ghana who posed a threat to the colonialists and madam Tinubu of Lagos who was a force to be reckoned with during the colonial administration just to mention a few. In addition, Akorede (2012) made reference to "...the female soldiers of Dahomey Army-the Amazons whose shape and efficiency drove the Egba male soldiers to hide." p.9 These are women whose efforts cannot be ignored in the course of the struggle against colonial invasion of Dahomey.

Kolawole also suggests that the imposition of taxes on market women in Nigeria sparked off a violent revolt against the European administration between 1927 and 1930. According to her, Nigerian women organised riots which spread to Calabar, Oron, Aba, Lagos, Abeokuta, as well as along the coast of southern Nigeria. Consequently, women's taxes were abolished and certain laws that were not beneficial to women reversed. Notwithstanding that women made considerable impact in the history of Africa as political and economic leaders, resisting the oppressive policy of the colonial administration, the number is however insignificant when compared to the population of women in general. On the whole, women continued to be victims of oppression in pre-colonial and post-colonial Africa.

Feminism came into existence primarily to fight against oppression, subjugation and repression of the female gender as well as advocates for equal opportunities for both the male and female gender. As a theory, the movement underscores issues that are germane to the well being of the female gender; violence, discrimination, sex stereotyping, sexual objectification, patriarchy and oppression. Additionally, it draws attention to women's unpleasant experiences in patriarchal societies while analysing patriarchy as an order for male domination. Akorede (2011) asserts that "in feminist

theory, textual analysis woman-centered and a critical assessment of the image of the woman in literary texts is carried out to highlight the oppression and abuse of women characters". Reinforcing her assertion, she presupposes that:

Women writers therefore focus on the experience of the female with conscious effort to re-write the experience of women and reflect women as they are: the brave, the bold, the intelligent, the industrious, the strong, the courageous, the good; and the evil, the weak and the stupid. p.36

The above focus of women writers as reiterated by Akorede suggests that women are not without shortcomings. Like their male counterparts, they also have strength and weaknesses. However, Feminist ideology advocates equal opportunities for male and female, insisting that the prerogative for enjoying certain rights and privileges should not be influenced by one's gender. Although Feminism focuses majorly on the struggle for female liberation, nonetheless, certain idiosyncrasies about the various sub-groups inform their method of struggle. In other words, there are many offshoots of Feminism; Liberal Feminism, Marxist Feminism, Socialist Feminism, Radical Feminism, Black Feminism and Psychoanalytical Feminism. There are also Eco Feminism, Post Modern Feminism and Lesbian Feminism among others. Recognising the fact that women in different cultures of the world have peculiarities, and having lost confidence in the ability of mainstream Feminism to serve as a universal theory for female liberation, the Womanist movement came into existence.

3.3 Womanism

One cannot talk about Womanism without a reference to Feminism since the former is an offshoot of the latter. Feminism is a philosophy that concerns the woman: her condition, role, status and rights in the society. Womanism likewise, stresses improvement of the condition of women. As an emancipating movement, it accentuates the transformation of the relationship between men and women. Born out of a reaction against oppression, Womanism and Feminism have political and militant features. Brands of Feminism include Liberal Feminism, Marxist Feminism, Radical Feminism and Essentialist Feminism.

Liberal Feminism as advocated by Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill ushered in transformations in institutions as they highlight female inequality and how the judicial system reinforces female oppression. They query the idea of female intellectual

inferiority and their exclusion from political, economic and scientific affairs. Liberal Feminism insists that like men, women must be recognised as human beings and not merely in connection with their husbands and children but that their desire to live independent lives should be respected. Liberal Feminism also known as Orthodox Feminism recognises the prominence of education in individual development as well as in social transformation. In addition, Liberal Feminism advocates equality in educational opportunities made available to male and female children. In so doing, equality of male and female citizens will be achieved.

Marxist Feminism opines that human history constitutes class struggle for economic power between the rich and the penniless; a struggle which will inevitably lead to a social revolution that gives power to the masses. Michèle Barrett and Tillie Olsen, leading figures in the group insist that injustice done against women is rooted in capitalism as private businesses (usually controlled by men) exploited women by paying them lower wages. Marxist Feminism also associates the family with capitalism by opining that domestic works carried out by women are not rewarded. They interrogate the idea of categorising women as consumers rather than producers, insisting that women will remain exploited until they are liberated from domestic work and child rearing. They therefore advocate the overthrow of capitalism as the only means of achieving total liberation for women.

Radical Feminism associates oppression with the patriarchal system, underscore sexuality and advocates sexual liberation of women. The group sees a nexus between female oppression and heterosexuality and concludes that since a woman has always been subjugated through sex, her liberation is only feasible through the same means. This implies liberation from reproductive functions which patriarchy has always used to oppress her. Firestone (1972), one of the proponents of the group presumes that since female oppression is rooted in the biological difference between male and female, a biological revolution is therefore inevitable for women to be emancipated. As a sequel, artificial insemination is suggested which enables children to have co-fathers and co-mothers. In this wise, individuals will be free to participate in public affairs without being hindered by family ties. In addition, the group recommends homosexuality and lesbianism as acceptable social norm.

Simone de Beauvoir (1949), proponent of Existentialist Feminism believes a woman is oppressed because patriarchy considers her as the other in the society. According to her, men are viewed as normal individuals, while women are regarded as

abnormal. Man is characterised as occupying a central position in the society while the woman is seen as an extension of that position. The former is regarded as the subject while the latter is the object. Since the former holds power while the latter is marginalised, attaining freedom for the latter is unattainable. For Beauvoir, a woman needs to surpass patriarchal definition of her gender if she is to occupy a central place in the society.

3.3.1 Alice Walker's Ideology on Womanism

African-American women's dissatisfaction with the claim of White Feminists that their agenda accommodates liberation of women worldwide begets Womanism. This is revealed in the sense that White Feminists' program is fraught with racism as literary works written by African-American women are not recognised by the former. In White Feminists' struggle against sexism, the historical experiences of African-American women such as racism and classism are ignored. As Feminism was becoming more or less applicable to the white middle class movement, it became inevitable to come up with a theory that will integrate the African-American experience. African-American women believe in collaborating with their men in the struggle against oppression in general and gender oppression in particular. Womanism, a theory which caters for the well-being of the African American community therefore laid down the structure for African-American women to pursue their struggle against racial, class and gender discrimination.

Alice Walker, the proponent of the ideology used it to distinguish the struggle for gender equality as embarked upon by women of colour. According to Kolawole (1997), the word was coined from the African-American term used to describe a mature and responsible girl. A girl with a willful, outrageous, or courageous behaviour is referred to as acting *womanish*. She assumes that Alice Walker describes Womanist as, the opposite of girlish that is frivolous, irresponsible and not serious, insisting that Womanist is a black Feminist or Feminist of colour. Hooks (2011), also identified racism in the writings of white Feminists, presupposing that the works tend to ignore black and lower class women. Alice Walker considers Womanism as an all-inclusive and all-embracing struggle which takes into consideration race, class and gender.

Womanism as an ideology is concerned about the individual and the society and focuses on the liberation of the oppressed (male and female). Through Womanism, women of colour are able to challenge patriarchal oppression as well as racism on the part of white Feminists who excluded Black women's writings from the field of literary

scholarship. Through her writings, Alice Walker succeeds in making a name for herself as she dramatises the diverse experiences of the African American community in the United States of America; an appraisal of the African American history, the era of slavery and the battle against discrimination by the white community. Prominent among these works are *The third life of Grange Copeland* and her collection of essays; *We are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For*. Her female characters have as models their female ancestors and draw strength from the oral heritage they bestowed to them. Womanism, an offshoot of Walker's writings is a political movement which laid down the structure for coloured women to pursue their struggle. Alice Walker (1983), suggests that a womanist is:

A black feminist or feminist of colour...A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women flexibility (values tears as a natural counter balance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes love individual men, and/or non-sexually, committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically for health. Traditionally Universalist; Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the folk. Loves her herself...Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender. p.31

Feminism was invented to win equality and suffrage for women until in the nineteenth century when white women refused to support the struggle of black women for their rights but instead began to oppress black women who were at the bottom of the social ladder. During their struggle for suffrage in the 19th century, Black women had no choice than to seek the support either of the black men who demanded their own rights to vote or of the white women. Supporting black men in their struggle meant postponing attainment of the rights of Black women. The disagreement between white and coloured women persisted as the white women began to do to the coloured women what they claimed white men were doing to them. Prominent African American writers and scholars underscore the racist tendency of Feminism in literary scholarship; Barbara Christian, Mary Helen Washington, Bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Gwendolyn Brooks and Toni Morrison.

Hudson-Weems' position concurs with Walker's as she considers Feminism's agenda as incapable of accommodating African-American women's reality and cultural experiences. While White Feminists' struggles are limited to sexism, African-American women are confronted with the challenge of racism, classism and sexism. Hudson-

Weems therefore proposes Africana Womanism; an ideology which she believes is conceived for all women of African origin. She also affirms that Africana Womanism is rooted in the African culture and therefore accentuates the common experiences, needs and desires of the African woman. Moreover, it takes into cognisance the conflicts between Mainstream Feminists and Black Feminist on one side and the African Womanist on the other side.

The author disassociates herself from Alice Walker's womanism because she considers it as pro-lesbian. Certain phrases used by Alice Walker such as "...a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non sexually p.21 may have informed Hudson Weems's opinion about her. For Hudson-Weems, literary works of African-American women will be evaluated against a backdrop of Africana-Womanism's assumption. In addition, she insists that Black women's definition must encompass their cultural experiences and African heritage which include communal life as well as the collaborative struggle of Black men and women to achieve emancipation. Hudson-Weems' Womanism accentuates among others the role of the home, family, respect for elders, female solidarity, motherhood and female self definition.

One major difference between Womanism and Feminism is that the Womanist writer believes in collaborating with the menfolk to achieve total emancipation. Therefore, to them, racism, classism and culture are accorded more importance than sexism. Also, family relationship, motherhood and self-definition of the woman as well as social and political issues are given priority in Womanist writings. Womanists celebrate motherhood insisting that mothers be treated with more respect while Feminism on the other hand view motherhood as placing limitations on women. Women from Africa appear to welcome Womanism because it is an ideology that defines their experience. Kolawole (1997), presupposes that the consciousness that informed Womanism is not unfamiliar to African women since it surpasses individual awareness. In addition, she surmises that Walker's endeavour to ground Black Feminist or Womanist' consciousness is a part of the growth of awareness that seeks a unique identity for African women's separate consciousness. An offshoot of Black women folk culture, Womanism draws attention to a commitment to the survival of all Black; male and female. Ogunyemi (1985), also used the term to describe the African female experience. In her words, Womanism is:

A philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black

womandom. It concerns itself as much with the Black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates blacks. p.37

Most African women writers, whether they claim to be Feminists or Womanists, the nomenclature notwithstanding, advocate collaboration between men and women in the fight against global capitalism, which oppresses Africans (Male and female) while resisting patriarchal subjugation of the African woman. They are opposed to the nonconformist racism and bourgeois concept of liberal Feminism, antagonism against men and rebuff of motherhood and marriage encouraged by radical Feminism. Among the exceptions are Calixthe Beyala's works which are beset with radical propensity (killing and mutilation) adopted by victim of men's violence as reaction to patriarchal oppression. Calixthe Beyala is portrayed as a radical Feminist especially in her use of language which Ayeleru (2007), categorise as "linguistic vulgarism." It is on this note that Ogunjide-Leslie (1994), posits the theory of "Stiwatism" a concept of Feminism in an African context:

"STIWA"... "Social Transformation Including Women of Africa"... what we want in Africa is social transformation. It's not about warring with the men, the reversal of role, or doing to men whatever women think that men have been doing for centuries, but it is trying to build a harmonious society. The transformation of African society is the responsibility of both men and women and it is also in their interest. p.1

A great number of African women do not consider men as adversaries because the continent is saddled with challenges that require a combined struggle of the two genders. Therefore, when these women advocate for better treatments, there is the interplay of variables of which gender does not always top the list. Ogunyemi's Black/African Womanism upholds the broad ideology of Womanism. However, her Womanist ideals accentuate aspects of Womanism that have more relevance to African women: In-law problems, older women oppressing co-wives/younger wives and lack of solidarity among women. Children in Africa are not ignored in her Womanism because she believes that they constitute an oppressed group. Women from Africa appear to welcome womanism as an ideology that defines their peculiar experience as African women. Ogunyemi (1985), also used the term to describe African female experience. According to her, Womanism is:

A philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womandom. It concerns itself as much with the Black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates blacks. p.37

Womanism focused more on political activism and the struggle against racism, sexism and classism in the 1970s, 1980s and during the late 1990s. However, in the first decade of 21st century, the focal point metamorphosed from excluding white Feminists into the group to allowing for the possibility of including all women, coloured or white within the span of Womanism, including men who respect women and their rights. This is due to the transformation within the white Feminists who due to the criticisms of coloured women began to see the need to recognise different races and classes in their groups. In addition to the general ideology which Womanism upholds, Kolawole underscores Womanism as it focuses on the peculiar experience of the African woman. Kolawole posits that the African woman's struggle for emancipation and the desire for change should be carried out within the African cultural context. Since our selected female authors are from Africa, their method of resistance is in agreement with the African cultural experience espoused by Mary Kolawole.

3.3.2 Mary Kolawole's Ideology on Womanism

Mary Ebum Kolawole is a literary scholar with works on Womanism to her credit, especially as regards its relevance to the African woman's peculiar experience. She introduces her Womanist ideology by carrying out a careful appraisal of the positions of Feminisms in order to situate them in the African world-view and consider their relevance or otherwise to African women. She claims that Liberal Feminism emphasises the impact of legal strictures and custom on women's subordination and advocates gender justice. But Marxist Feminists maintain that gender justice is not possible while class stratification is not eliminated. The latter according to her, blame capitalism for women's oppression. As a form of assessment of the aforementioned issues, Kolawole affirms that several factors (personal and communal) mediate the location of African women in gender discourse, insisting that it will be out of place to generalise about all women in the African continent. She considers pre-colonial and colonial African women as self-assertive but that colonialism and African tradition are responsible for silencing a number of such women. Kolawole also states that the African woman is severally oppressed as many forms of oppression exist around her simultaneously.

She opines that since political unrest, turmoil and instability are regular occurrences in a number of African countries and women are more affected as they have to contend with the feeding of starving children especially in polygamous settings, the African woman scholar should recognise these realities and act as spokesperson for women regardless of class. She considers western definition of Feminism as problematic to the African woman. A case in point is Johnson's (1985), who proposes the liberation of women for women alone, claiming that women do not have anything to do with men since the latter have taken care of themselves, concluding that lesbianism is the solution. For Kolawole, radical Feminists' proposal of sexual freedom and lesbianism is alien to the African culture where the family setting is cherished, adding that the family is a positive legacy that Blacks in the diaspora have passionately preserved. In response to some radical Feminists' call for the overthrow of patriarchy and patriarchal symbols, she insists that although a number of African woman are not oblivious of the role of patriarchy in subjugating them; nevertheless, they acknowledge the necessity of collaborating with men to resist racism and imperialism.

Kolawole's (1997), concept of Womanism as depicted by the African woman is "the totality of feminine self-expression, self-retrieval and self-assertion in positive cultural ways...the totality of giving expression to positive female and feminine bonding and collective self-expression" p.27. This is achieved by eliciting women's positive qualities, ability, self enhancement, self esteem and freedom within African cultural context. Kolawole also insists that the average African woman does not consider the expression of femaleness and the struggle for self-expression as originating from the West. This is because she is conscious of the entirety of her self-expression and self-realisation in diverse positive ways. She affirms that the consciousness that gives substance to Womanism is not unfamiliar to the African woman since it surpasses the consciousness of the individual. She believes in the African woman's need for self-definition as her experiences differ from those of the White woman. Kolawole interrogates African women's supposed invisibility while advocating communalism and integrated struggle against oppression in general and female oppression in particular. She suggests opening up of African women's area of visibility especially in the traditional context. This includes their collective actions where they constitute threats to kings and obstacles to colonial administrators.

Reinforcing the need for Womanism, Kolawole underscores the prominent place accorded to naming in the African world view as she submits that an outsider is

unqualified to name a child in the African society. Rather, the naming is influenced by divine leading and the family lineage of the child. In other words, Feminism, which is conceived while taking into consideration the White woman's background cannot accommodate the African woman's cultural peculiarities. She hypothesises that Womanism has noticeable features evolving from African values as it addresses issues that concern African women while taking into cognisance their peculiar experiences. Kolawole acknowledges African women writers who act as agents of culture and change through their literary works: Ama Ata Aidoo and Tsitsi Dangeremba among others.

The scholar underscores the significance of culture and the complimentary roles of men and women in the struggle for the African woman's emancipation. She considers Womanism as a concept popularised by Alice Walker and acknowledges its germaneness to the definition of womanhood in Africa. Kolawole recognises Alice Walker's work: *In search of our mother's gardens* (1983), as an aspect of Black women's manifesto adding that the creative works of African women writers depict inspiration from past archetypes. Trihn (1991), as cited by Kolawole accentuates the rejection of Feminism by African women scholars as a universal voice speaking for women world wide as she insists:

...a group of mighty men attributed to itself a central, dominating position vis a vis other groups, overhauled its particularities and achievements, adopted a protective attitude towards those it classified among the out-groups and wrapped itself up in its own thinking, interpreting the out-group through the in-group mode of reasoning while claiming to speak the minds of both the in-group and the out-group. p.21

Kolawole considers an aberration any suggestion that the expression of femaleness and the struggle for self-assertion stemmed from the West as women's collective action deriving from mutual interests in cultural, social, religious, economic and political issues are not uncommon to the African woman. She affirms that Walker's Womanism as opposed to Feminism is inclusive, nonetheless, African women's different experience and awareness, render unfeasible a global ideology for all Black women. Kolawole outlines the characteristics of Womanism as it applies to the African woman as she makes allusion to Okonjo Ogunyemi (1985) and Hudson Weems's (1993) depiction of Womanism and Africana Womanism respectively. The former submits that Womanism is a universal ideology for African women and encompasses racial, gender, class and cultural consciousness. As for the latter, she considers Africana Womanism an ideology

put forward for all women of African descent. Also, Hudson-Weems insists that her Africana Womanism is entrenched in the African culture and centres on the distinctive experiences, struggles, needs and desires of Africana women. In addition, her Womanism underscores the place of the family; thus inferring a close affinity among African women globally.

Kolawole asserts that there seems to be a sort of silence over African women's powerful women who resisted oppression especially during pre-colonial and colonial periods. With the awareness of third world women, African women writers are suggesting alternatives to Feminism especially as regards situating African women's struggle and self-expression within African cultural context as well as within the larger struggle of third world and Black women. African and third world women's mobilisation in pre-colonial and colonial periods are non-existent in Western Feminists' circle because it is devoid of theorising as it is done in the West, which leads to the erroneous portrayal of African women as silent, victims and invisible. For the African woman, resistance to oppression is not an exclusive affair rather it is inclusive since it is carried out in collaboration with the male gender. These women fight for their rights and that of the entire group; their resilience as well as oral literature constitute sources of inspiration for female scholars from the continent, prominent among them are Zulu Sofola, Flora Nwapa and Ama Ata Aidoo. Recognising the incapability of White Feminists to serve as their mouthpiece, these Africa scholars took the bull by the horns as they became spokesperson for their fellow black sisters.

Since African women's visibility is situated within the traditional context, Kolawole suggests accentuating these areas of strength where the women posed as threats to kings and colonial administrators. Where they as oppressed as women, they react and where oppression involves the two genders, they collaborate with their male counterparts to challenge the oppressor or oppressors as the case may be. Kolawole is not far from the truth as the continent can boast of powerful women who were a force to reckon with. Such women are also dramatised in Sembene Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*. They include Ramatoulaye, Penda and other numerous women who challenge the oppressive policy of the French colonial administration. These women's intervention led to the success of the rail workers' prolonged strike.

Kolawole insists that the African woman's conceptualisation of freedom is not the refusal to be a woman or the desire to be a man; rather, it involves the assertion of all that is positive in her feminine qualities. She suggests the dialogic approach to the process of

situating the feminine struggle within the African context, citing Ropo Sekoni's analogy of the traditional market place where negotiation is the order of the day and where a buyer/seller has the privilege of getting there through multiple routes. Since African belief of life is synonymous with the negotiation of values, African Womanist ideology therefore, derives from this type of negotiation. This assertion tallies with Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail Feminism (2018), where she underscores the snail's quality of negotiating with its environment and suggests that women endeavour to get what they desire through negotiation. According to her, the snail dialogues with its environment as it climbs over rocks, hilly terrains and obstacles with lubricated tongue without being destroyed. She counsels women to take a clue from the snail's approach since she considers our society as very patriarchal in nature where it is inevitable for women to cooperate with men in order to make progress. She insists that women need to negotiate with men if they are to have a stake in the country.

The scholar asserts that some people might consider the snail's method as too slow but that the focal point in the theory is not the sluggishness of the snail; rather, it is its intelligence to live in an environment through negotiation. Women characters in our selected novels for analysis; Modukpe and her mother in *Modukpe, le rêve brisé*, Ananou in *Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*, Mado and Julienne in *La vengeance de l'albinos*, Emilienne in *Le crépuscule de l'homme* and Female protesters in *L'engrenage* exhibit the strength associated with African women who are known to be resilient in their struggle against oppression. The approach adopted by them (active or passive) in their resistance to patriarchal oppression is in consonance with resisting oppression within the African context as proposed by Kolawole.

Kolawole asserts that change constitutes African women's literary creativity which is a part of their literary production. She also sees African women writers as acting as spokesperson for their sisters. This is done by expressing their discontent about African women's condition, the role of patriarchy and imperialism in African women's subjugation and the claim of Western Feminism to speak for women worldwide. In their role as spokeswomen, the writers also acknowledge the fact that the desired change needs to be carried out within the African cultural context. Thus, they recreate women in their works as agents of cultural change. They therefore accentuate African women's liberation, their change of consciousness and positive self perception. The desired change is not without struggle since it is carried out within a cultural context that endorses oppression of women. In addition, Kolawole insists that as much as the African woman

cherishes her Africaness and womanhood, she also rejects marginalisation. In conclusion, Kolawole proposes *Umoja*, the Swahili's concept of togetherness, unity or coalition. According to her, *Umoja* enhances and accommodates diverse attitudes to women's issues while taking into consideration their African identity. In addition, the concept accentuates harmony in diversity as it validates the African world view of negotiation of values and space.

In this study, we have therefore adopted Alice Walker and Mary Kolawole's versions of the Womanist theory because the main female protagonists' approach to oppression and subjugation by the male gender is in conformity with the ideology of Womanism as viewed by the two Womanists. Thus, the following Womanist penchant in the female characters will be highlighted: culture, sisterhood and the collaborative effort of male and female in the struggle against oppression. The women characters forced changes into their situation as they confront and challenge patriarchal African tradition. As much as they have respect for their culture, they question negative aspects of the culture like polygamy and its oppressive nature in relations to women. In addition, they initiate dialogues with their husbands and male partners as a way of achieving liberation. The female characters' struggle for emancipation is therefore carried out within the African cultural context.

3.4 Womanist Themes

The themes of Womanism; racism, sexism, classism, the family, motherhood, change, liberation and interest in cultures and people outside the American context are depicted through the numerous works of Alice Walker. Through the Pulitzer price winning novel; *The color purple* (1982), Alice Walker dramatises her commitment to social and political change. The novel exposes sexual abuses and violence in an African American community and at the same time expresses the prospect of emancipation in every sphere of life's experience. Celie, the main female protagonist in the *The color purple* is oppressed by her stepfather and her husband when she eventually marries. In the final analysis, she is victorious in spite of being a victim of gender oppression while her husband, Albert, is also liberated from racial oppression. Although, some African American men consider the work as a negative prototype of Black men in general, the novel depicts the African American women's resistance to oppression.

Walker concentrates on the hardship and struggles of the African American which she separates into three categories: the physically and psychologically abused woman, a

black woman who is torn by contrary occurrences and the new black woman who recreates herself. Celie is adjudged as the main character that is used to convey these different types of women. Although Walker denounces African American men's negative treatment of Celie, but does not totally condemn the men. This might be because, faced with racism from their white employers or land owners (in the case of sharecroppers), they vent their frustration on their families. The childhood experience of Walker in a sharecropping community influences the writing of her first novel; *The third life of Grange Copeland*. The work not only condemns gender and race relations but proffers prospect of transformation. The novel dramatises a sharecropping family of three; Grange, his wife (Mem) and their son (Brownfield). The oppressive nature of Grange's occupation made his family victims of displaced aggression as the head of the family becomes violent in his relationship with his wife and son. Grange relocates to the North without his family, his wife commits suicide and his son goes in search of him but did not succeed. Brownfield who also engages in sharecropping is jailed for killing his wife. A changed Grange returns from the North, becomes a role model to Ruth, his granddaughter whom he raises with much love. Walker who is an advocate of positive change depicts female characters who believe in change; Ruth, *The third life of Grange Copeland*, Celie (*The color purple*).

The themes in Alice Walker's work reflect the diverse experience of the African American community. She portrays her female characters as those who find strength in their female precursors and oral heritage they had bequeathed to them, a strategy for dealing with oppression. In addition, each of her works features a female protagonist evolving through the pain of gender and racial inequality. At the centre of Womanism, is the concern for women and their role in their immediate surroundings (be it family, local community or work place) and more global environment. Walker (1984), also insinuates the superiority of Womanism over Feminism in her assertion: "womanist is to feminist as purple (royal colour) to lavender", (weak purple). Stephen, Keaveny and Patton (2004) express the unpleasant race and gender discrimination the African American woman is exposed to as they posit: "In a world in which blacks are men and women are white, African American women are frequently asked to choose sides: shall they be counted as blacks or women, they cannot be both it seems". However, according to Weems (*Africana womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*), the choice was taken out of the hand of African American women by the attitudes and rhetoric of European women in the suffrage movement.

In *Meridian* (1976), the female protagonist, a student in a college for black women becomes a daring activist who is willing to sacrifice her life for the liberation of black people who are victims of injustice. The mention of black people here indicates that Womanism is an inclusive ideology unlike Feminism which is exclusive in nature. While Feminism concerns itself with the white women's agenda, Womanist's struggle encompasses the liberation of the black race. Walker's work which investigates race, gender, sexuality and class exposes a liaison between her political activism and art. These works also underscore copying strategies of marginalised and oppressed women.

3.4.1 Major Themes in Womanists' Works

In her work "Les Tendances Womanistes dans Les Oeuvres des Romancières de L'Afrique Francophone", Bestman enumerates the major themes in Womanist works as motherhood, the family, self-definition of the woman, race and socio-political critic. We shall examine her views on these issues because they are pertinent to our study.

(I) Motherhood

This is a major theme in Womanism and one of the areas in which Womanists differ from Feminists. Feminists especially the radical ones reject motherhood because they consider it as a means of oppressing the woman. As for Womanists, despite the fact that they cherish motherhood as one of African values, they are however not happy that it is one of the instruments used to oppress the African woman. In Womanist works, different aspects of motherhood are identified; biological, spiritual, single, positive and negative motherhood. African and Afro-American women cherish motherhood as one of African's heritage. Womanist ideology in the words of Bestman (2007) is "the art of mothering and nurturing" children and humanity in general. p.35 Carole Boyce Davies in Bestman (2007), reiterates the prominent place accorded to motherhood in Africa when she states: "In many African societies, motherhood defines womanhood." p.35 A woman's value is tied to her ability to procreate and she is celebrated if she gives birth to male children while the one who gives birth solely to female children is made to feel unfulfilled. It is even worse with a woman who is unable to give birth to biological children as she is tagged as incomplete. Adebayo (1996) corroborates this role of procreation that the society attributes to the woman when she declares:

African culture avers that the moment of fulfillment for a woman is childbirth. The myth of the omnipresent nurturing mother is everywhere pervasive because of the reproductive service a woman performs in the society. This view of

motherhood conforms to the conventional European view of femininity and the myths of the feminine mystique which coincide with fecundity of the earth and the assurance of the patrimony; and which imply the woman's forfeiting her family and society. (178)

Adebayo also insists: "In the Negritude literature, the mother is an object of reverence and a symbol of patience, long-suffering and fecundity, hence the term "earth-mother", "golden mother" and "sweet mother." p.178 Inability to mother a child biologically constitutes a problem in the African home and the penalty for the woman concerned is divorce as she is supplanted by another, ridiculed and made to feel worthless. Womanists believe a woman's worth should not be solely tied to her ability to procreate. Rather she can play the role of a mother in the society through her profession as a teacher, a medical doctor or through other professions where she can serve as mothers to children that are not hers. This is described by Ogunyemi as cited by Bestman as "social motherhood". In Fatou Keita's *Rebelle*, Dimikèla is *relieved* of her position in her matrimonial home because of her inability to give birth to children. Matou, Dimikèla's mother is maltreated and also sent packing as sanction for secondary infertility. In Beyala's *Maman a un amant*, M'am's husband, Abou, takes a second wife because of the former's inability to have children.

Sequel to Bestman's analysis of motherhood in male and female writings, she concludes that in the writings of the former, motherhood is portrayed from the cultural perspective where a woman's value is tied to her ability to procreate while bareness is considered a curse. She also notes that the situation of a woman is full of contradiction: she is venerated as a mother in works of Camara Laye and Leopold Sedar Senghor among others and oppressed in most other male writer's works. Female writers on the other hand attempt to debunk the theory that the value of a woman is solely tied to her ability to procreate. This is exemplified in the characters of *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa and Emilienne in *Fureurs et cri de femmes* by Rawiri among others. Emilienne, a successful career woman is seen as unsuccessful because of her inability to have another child after the death of her only child. In the course of her desperate search for a child, she comes to the realisation that her worth should not be measured by her ability to procreate. She says:

Les sourires n'ont pas seulement disparu des visages des femmes stériles: de nombreuses mères non plus ne savent plus rire. Connaissez-vous l'une des raisons de cette tristesse que l'on retrouve déjà chez les enfants, et plus tard chez les adultes devenus parents? Cette tristesse

généralisée peut se justifier par les problèmes et les traumatismes que connaissent les femmes en grossesse. Les enfants qui naissent à la suite de ces conditions présentent des problèmes caractériels considérables qui les affectent parfois toute leur vie. p.92

Smiles have not only disappeared from the faces of barren women: neither do a number of mothers still know how to smile. Do you know one of the reasons for this sorrow already noticed in children, and later in adults who became parents? This generalized sorrow can be justified by the problems and trauma experienced by women during pregnancy. Subsequently, children born in this condition exhibit considerable emotional problems which sometimes affect them all through their lives. p. 92 (Our translation)

African female writers in search of new identity for the African woman question motherhood as panacea to fulfillment in life for the woman and reject the notion as servitude. Ngcobo (1986), as cited by Casenave (1996), reiterates the symbolic value of a child in the African tradition. In her work, *Motherhood-Myth and Reality*, she posits that the position of the African woman is only linked to her role as a mother. In addition, the author suggests that cultural expectation and pressure from family members compel husbands to become polygamists or have mistresses as a solution to the absence of children in marriages. This is portrayed through Joseph (Émilienne's husband), in Rawiri's *Fureurs et cri de femmes*, Abdou, (M'am's husband), in Calixthe Beyala's *Maman a un amant* and Freddy (Modukpè's husband), in Fassinou's *Modukpè le rêve brisé*.

(a) Social / Spirirual Motherhood

Womanists believe a woman's worth should not synonymous with her ability to procreate. Rather she can play the role of a mother in the society through her profession as a teacher, a medical doctor or through other professions where she can serve as mothers to children that she did not beget biologically. A social/spiritual mother may or may not have biological children. In Beyala's *Le petit prince de Belleville* and *Maman a un amant*, M'am, Abdou's wife, could not give birth to biological children, consequently, Abdou marries Soumana who has three children for him. Since the French law does not recognise polygamy, Mariama becomes the legal mother of Abdou's three children from Soumana while Loukoum, is Abdou's son from his mistress who is a professional prostitute. M'am acts as social mother to Abdou's children by showering motherly love

on them in order to make up for the children she never had. This type of social/spiritual motherhood is also portrayed in the character of Ananou (*Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*). A mother of seven, she displays motherly love to Kèmi her maid, Dodji her niece, a nephew she adopts from her village and several indigent children.

(b) Positive Motherhood

Literature abounds as to the importance of parenting in the total development of the child; spiritual, moral, educational among others. Children who are well educated become responsible citizens while the reverse is the case for those whose parents have negative influence on them. The Holy Bible in Proverbs 22: 6 states: “Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it”. Ramatoulaye displays positive motherhood in the way she singlehandedly trains her twelve children in educational, moral and religious issues when abandoned by her husband who elopes with his daughter’s friend. When eventually Aïssatou, one of her daughters is pregnant, she corrects her in love thereby sparing her the experience commonly associated with single/girl-mothers; trauma, rejection, dejection and stigma. A similar example is found in Fassinou’s *Modukpè le rêve brisé*, where Modukpè’s mother cares for her daughter when she becomes a victim of unwanted pregnancy. The unwanted child becomes wanted by the grand mother who showers love on him. Womanists believe that mothers are to play the roles of models to her children as Walker’s female characters have as models their female ancestors and draw strength from the oral heritage they had bestowed to them.

(c) Negative Motherhood

A society is incomplete without the experience of the good, the bad and the ugly. Mothers who are role models abound in the society; those who are negative influence on their children likewise. In Beyala’s *C’est le soleil qui m’a brûlée*, Atéba, the protagonist is brought up in an environment where prostitution flourishes; her mother, her aunt Ada (who brings her up after the disappearance of her mother) and her friend (Ekassi), are prostitutes. From childhood, the women Atéba has as role models are prostitutes:

Enfant, Atéba voulait ressembler à Betty. Elle portait ses pagnes et ses chaussures trop grandes pour ses petits pieds. Devant la glace, elle se maquillait de son fard. Elle s’observait. Elle était femme. Elle était Betty. Elle lui ressemblait physiquement et elle se plaisait à imaginer que sa vie n’était qu’un prolongement de celle de Betty. Comme Betty, elle sortait dans la rue, elle esquissait

quelques pas, elle regardait les yeux qu'elle croisait pour s'assurer qu'ils faisaient ses éloges. p.82

As a child, Atéba wanted to resemble Betty. She wore her wrappers and put on her shoes that were too big for her little feet. In front of the mirror, she wore makeup. She took a look at herself. She was a woman. She was Betty. Physically she looked like her and she enjoyed imagining that her life was just a continuation of Betty's. Like Betty, she went into the street, she took some steps, looked at the eyes that crossed hers to be sure they were admiring her. p.82 (Our translation)

As a child, Atéba is already seeing herself as a prospective prostitute and only an insignificant number of children with her background end up living decent lives. She pictures herself like Betty's (her mother) her dressing, makeup and her steppings when she moves into the street wooing prospective clients. The act of putting on her mother's apparel reveals that the child is a victim of mental and emotional abuse; putting on of Betty's shoes "that were too big for her little feet" implies that the child is attempting to enter a profession that does not suit her, a profession that holds nothing but bleak future for her. The expression or metaphor "She was Betty" shows that the little girl is already mentally a prostitute since her mother is the epitome of prostitution.

Tanga's mother in Beyala's *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* is another example of a mother who negatively influences her daughter. She compels her daughter to go into prostitution and uses manipulation to hinder her from withdrawing from the trade. Subsequently the young girl becomes bitter towards her mother. The attitude of Dame Belle-mère in Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* is also that of a bad mother. She sacrifices the happiness of her daughter by compelling her to marry a rich old man simply because she desires social advancement. She turns her teenage daughter (Binetou) into merchandise in exchange for a villa, a pilgrimage to Mecca and regular momentary gifts. This category of mothers are opposed to Walker's notion of motherhood as portrayed in her several works.

(2) Sterility

As earlier discussed, the African society places much importance on children and this is the reason for the negative treatment meted out on women who are unable to give birth to biological children as they are made to feel incomplete. This societal attitude towards women provokes desperate search for the much coveted children. This is seen in the characters of Emilienne and Modukpè who suffer from secondary infertility, Efuru

and M'am who are victims of primary infertility among others. Female writers question the aspect of the African culture that attaches importance to children, at the same time oppresses such children. These children are not given enough attention as one expects as many of them are victims of poverty and malnourishment. This is exemplified in several African female writers' works among which are Rawiri, Beyala and Fassinou. Casenave (1996), declares concerning these children :

Qui se chargera d'un tel fardeau? Et la même réponse revient: la femme, bien sûr, ce à quoi Beyala et Rawiri dissent non: non, il faut savoir refuser une maternité devant ce monde inhospitalier sans avenir pour les enfants de demain. p.195

Who is responsible for such burden? And the same response is given: the woman, of course, this is what Beyala and Rawiri are saying no to: no, one must learn to reject motherhood in the midst of this inhospitable world without future for tomorrow's children. p. 195
(Our translation)

(3) Single Parenting

The passion for children in the African culture notwithstanding, the African society frowns at single parenthood. Little wonder that girls who become pregnant go as far as dumping such children in pit toilets, refuse dumps or on the streets. The irony of life is that the absence or presence of children constitutes a reason for sorrow for the sterile woman and the single parent respectively; for the former, her inability to have biological children constitutes the bane of her life while for the latter, the baby is unwanted. It is unwanted because it is either disowned by the future father or it arrives at a time when the immature expectant parents are not prepared for it. Such examples include Modukpè in Fassinou's *Modukpè le rêve brisé*, Aïssatou (Ramatoulaye's daughter) in *Une si longue lettre* and Soukey in Mariama Ndoeye's *Soukey* among others. In Nigeria today, such single mothers or expectant teenage mothers are exploited by some baby factories where they are deceived into receiving financial and material aids in exchange for the sale of their babies to ritualists.

(4) The Family

The first family was instituted in the Garden of Eden: "And the Lord God said, it is not good that man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. (Gen 2:18). There are two types of families; nuclear and the extended family. The nuclear family consists of the father, mother and children while the extended family is made up of

several generations descending from the same ancestral lineage. The family is also made up of monogamous and polygamous families. Womanists consider polygamy as one of the strategies for oppressing the woman. Another important issue in the family is the in-law syndrome where in-laws (most especially mothers and sisters-in-laws) constitute instrument of oppression of the wife. This type of oppression could be described as “generational” in the sense that the oppressed wife becomes an oppressive mother-in-law in future. Furthermore, the sister-in-law oppressing her brother’s wife is also being oppressed in her husband’s house by her own mother-in-law and sisters-in-law.

(5) Woman’s Self-Definition

Over the years, the Black woman has been defined by Western Feminists and by Black men. Bestman (2007), maintains that the African woman was treated as a Beast of Burden and a sexual object during the Slave Trade, in traditional Africa she was oppressed by patriarchy and not immune from multiple oppression during the colonial era. This experience of the African woman elicits the desire for re-definition. Kolawole (1997) disagrees with the African woman’s portrayal by male writers and Western Feminists as voiceless and invisible. According to her, female African continental writers like D’Almeida, Micere Mugo, Siga Jajne, Carole Boyce-Davies, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie believe that African women are not voiceless if only one cares to search for their voices in the right places such as in ceremonies and in oral presentations, for their voices have only been suppressed by colonialism and patriarchy. Kolawole also adds that the African woman did not learn self-assertion from the West citing the example of her grandmother who is her first example of self-assertion. According to her, her grandmother neither heard of Feminism or other “isms” during her life time but she was simply an epitome of self-assertion. Moreover, Kolawole’s view of Womanism as depicted by African women is the totality of feminine self-expression, self-retrieval, and self-assertion in positive cultural ways.

(6) Racism

This is an important theme in Womanism. The Black race has been unjustly treated by the White race from the era of slave trade to the present period. During the slave trade she was subjected to inhuman treatment, exploited during the colonial period and presently, she is not free from financial oppression. The African woman can be said to be the most hit by the effect of the International Monetary Fund and other International creditors since she is always burdened with the feeding of numerous children. It is on this

note that Womanism advocates the necessity for the emancipation of the Black race as a panacea for the total emancipation of the African woman.

(7) Socio-Political Issues

In spite of the fact that Womanists are concerned with the struggle for emancipation of the female gender, they are also not unconcerned with societal problems. Africa is confronted with a lot of social and political problems among which is poverty, wars, corruption, unemployment, child trafficking and terrorism among others. In Nigeria today, apart from the vices enumerated above, kidnapping, armed robbery and terrorism are regular vices in the society. In addition, baby factories abound where young girls are encouraged to get pregnant and made to part with their babies in exchange for money after delivery. These are issues that Womanists are concerned with.

Finally, in her critic of Womanism, Bestman points out the fact that Womanists tend to give secondary place to female oppression while giving prominent place to the struggle against racial and economic oppression. According to her, the struggle for the emancipation of women does not necessarily affect the struggle for the emancipation of the human race. One tends to agree with the author in the sense that the popular adage “Charity begins at home” readily applies to the issue at stake. It is pertinent for an individual to begin and win the battle at home before embarking on the battle outside. However the effort of the group is commendable for proposing a theory and an ideology that is truly African in the struggle for the emancipation of the female gender in particular and the African race in general. Women mobilisation world wide is therefore a response to female oppression and its attendant theories aimed at identifying the basis for women’s subordination to men. The ideological and cultural diversities of the proponents led to the emergence of variants of the movement and the theory that best suit the proponents hence, the birth of Womanism; the theory that addresses the concern of the African woman. The theory underscores themes such as culture, motherhood, the family, self definition of the woman, race and socio-political issues.

The choice of theory in this study is Alice Walker and Mary Kolawole’s versions of Womanism, which distinguishes the struggle for gender equality as embarked upon by women of colour and the peculiar experience of the African woman. This is influenced by the fact that the antidotes to patriarchal oppression and suppression adopted by the female characters (querying patriarchal laws that perpetuate female subjugation, revolt, empowerment through education, self assertion, public protest, forgiveness, sisterhood, making positive impact in the society, compromise and mothering) are in line with

Walker and Kolawole's ideology of Womanism. In addition, female characters cherish their cultural values like marriage and motherhood but do not endorse the use of these values to subjugate them. In subsequent chapters, works of three selected Beninese female writers (two from each author) are examined. The significance of culture, sisterhood and the complimentary roles of men and women in the struggle for the African woman's emancipation are also highlighted in the chapters. The forms of oppression analysed in the novels are male deception, objectification of women and child marriage, polygamy as oppression, marital violence, wife battery, rape, female characters copying strategies in the midst of oppression as well as mothering as tranquiliser to easing the effect of oppression. Alice Walker and Kolawole's Womanist theory therefore served as spring board in identifying Womanist traits in the women characters' reaction to male oppression. .

CHAPTER FOUR

PATRIARCHAL OPPRESSION IN SELECTED NOVELS OF BENINISE WOMEN WRITERS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter encompasses the analysis of selected novels of Beninise women writers; Adélaïde Fassinou's *Modukpè le rêve brisé* (2000) and *Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne* (2003), Flore Hazoumé's *La vengeance de l'albinos* (1996) and *Le crépuscule de l'homme* (2002) and Hortense Mayaba's *L'univers infernal* (1997) and *Engrenage* (2007). The texts were examined against a backdrop of the Womanist assumptions of Alice Walker and Mary Kolawole in order to determine the extent to which they are reflected. In the course of the investigation, the assertion that patriarchal norms are responsible for female oppression in the Beninese's society was established while Womanist trends in the works were also highlighted to demonstrate the assertion. To this end the following areas in the novels were focused on: male deception and egocentrism, polygamy, objectification of women, child abuse, wife battery, rape, intra-gender conflict and wife-prostitution. The social context of the selected novels is post independence Republic of Bénin, a Francophone West African country. The characters have defined roles and relationships as husband and wife, father and daughter, mother and daughter, father-in-law and daughter-in-law, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and lovers.

This binary relationship engenders the aforementioned forms of oppression. The act of oppression meted out on the female characters is evident in the male characters' uncaring attitudes towards the well-being of their partners and their use of language. Culture is also used by men as a spring board to reinforcing female oppression as some features of the tradition such as female inferiority and polygamy are used to oppress the female gender. The female characters' portrayal of their experience is depicted through the use of literary devices such as metaphors, similies and flashback among others. Kolawole's position (1992), that "culture shapes literature as much as socio political background" p.93 is germane in this context as Fassinou is influenced by her socio-political and cultural milieu in her depiction of female oppression and subjugation in a patriarchal society. The female characters pursue their struggle for emancipation within the African cultural context as they cherish the positive aspects of their culture but seek to change the features that are detrimental to their well-being. In so doing, they reinforce Kolawole's position of the

significance of culture in the emancipation of the African woman. Thus, this study is re-echoing Walker's view especially from Kolawole's perspective. Walker accentuates racism, sexism, classism, the family, motherhood, liberation and interests in cultures and people outside the American context. Kolawole highlights the significance of culture and the complimentary role of men and women in the struggle to emancipate Africans in general and African women in particular. Therefore, the struggle for emancipation of women in the novels is carried out within the framework of the African culture.

4.1 Male Deception in Adélaïde Fassinou's *Modukpè, le rêve brisé*

Male deception is the act of hiding the truth from one's wife or female partner in order to take advantage of her. This involves deceiving a naïve girl by having an affair with her, impregnating and abandoning her, lying to one's partner in order to deceive her into marriage and infidelity among others. Adélaïde Fassinou's *Modukpè, le rêve brisé*, focuses on the rectification of the patriarchal society's negative positioning of women. It is a mixture of indiscernible and apparent revolt against an arrangement which appears to skim over the feelings of the female gender in the society while according prominent place to the concern of their male counterparts. In the novel, Fassinou dramatises the plight of Modukpè, the subaltern, whose ambition of becoming a lawyer is aborted when her teacher (a symbol of patriarchy) deceives her into having an affair with him, impregnates her and thereafter abandons her. Modukpè's mother is also deceived by her husband, Jean Paul (another representative of patriarchy) into becoming a second wife. Notwithstanding the fact that mother and daughter are displeased with their predicaments, Modukpè's mother appears to resign to her fate while her daughter queries man's recourse to the African culture to reinforce female oppression. This is evident in her rejection of the sociological position of African women and the patriarchal norms that reinforce their subjugation. The significance of culture in the emancipation of the African woman as proposed by Kolawole is pertinent here as the culture used to oppress women needs to be metamorphosed for African women's liberation to be accomplished. The autobiographical narrative structure employed in the work is a ploy by Fassinou to bring about positive cultural, social and political changes in the society.

In *Private selves and public spaces: autobiography and the African woman writer*, Davies (1990), observes the unique attributes of the autobiographical style among female African writers as she infers that the female African writer has long been construed as publicly silenced. Davies considers writing among these women as political,

emphasising that the individual story in their work is more or less the society's story. This is because in the process of narrating her story, the female writer narrates her agony, as regards her union. A good example is seen in Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* where Ramatoulaye, the main female protagonist writes to Aïssatou, her bosom friend during the forty day mourning period of her late husband.

An autobiographical novel is a style of writing in which a technique known as autofiction is adopted. Uwah (1993) and Hitchcott (2000) agree that it is a novel that is centred on the life of the writer and in which autobiographical and fictive components are fused together. They also suggest that the fact that the literary technique has an aspect of fiction distinguishes it from a diary, a biography or a true life story written by the person on whom the story is centred. Furthermore, Hitchcott presupposes that for a novel to qualify as semi-fiction, fictional names, characters, events and locations are inserted into the work and the story is reconstructed without losing its close connection to that of the author's real life story. She adds that novels depicting locations and/or circumstances with which the author is acquainted are not necessarily autobiographical. Neither are novels that include aspects drawn from the author's life as minor plot details. The main characteristic of an autobiographical novel is the presence of a protagonist who is an archetype of the author and a dominant plotline that describes events in his or her life; it could be a smoke screen portrayal of the author's life. When a novel partly fulfils the aforementioned requirements, it could be described as semi-autobiographical.

Autobiographical novels are either written in the first person, to help the writer achieve the objective of eliciting sympathy from the audience or in the third person to help the author achieve the objective of separating himself or herself from the events related in the story. Prominent among autobiographical themes are personal, family issues and events that the author tends to shy away from when writing a true biography. In an interview which this researcher conducted in 2011, Adélaïde Fassinou claims that her mother exercised much influence over her just like the case of Modukpè and her mother. In addition, according to Fassinou, she has a tendency to be a radical if not for the regular caution on the part of her mother. In response to the question on whether her novel, *Modukpè, le rêve brisé* is autobiographical, she insists:

...Il y a beaucoup de moi dans Modukpè ...Ma mère est la représentation de la mère de Modukpè. Selon, elle, tout doit être accepté. Ma mère a beaucoup d'influence sur ma vie. C'est elle qui réussit à m'apaiser parce que j'ai la tendance d'être rebelle.

...There is much of my personality in Modukpè...My mother is a portrayal of Modukpè's mother. According to her, everything must be accepted. My mother has a lot of influence on me. She succeeds in pacifying me because I have the tendency to be rebellious (Our translation).

The autobiographical novel enables the reader identify with the characters, sympathise with their feelings and thoughts and share their views and perspective of life in the story. The technique allows the reader to fully know the character, understand his or her motives and encourages the narrator to inject personality and emotion in the course of telling the story. This style which male critics consider as tantamount to lack of mastery of the art of writing, has proved a potent weapon in the hands of female writers to present honest picture of the women as Akorede (2011) suggests.

Adebayo (1995) posits that the autobiographical style combined with the fictional letter (epistolary genre) is a combination of recounting of story, intimate diary and autobiography which Bâ exploits with dexterity. Moreover, the critic argues that Bâ attempts to incorporate her work into the tradition of the epistolary genre which belongs to the European literary culture. Adebayo traces the tradition of fictional letters in Western European literature to Horace and Ovide's epistles written in stanzas during the Middle Ages. The former according to her, treats moral and philosophical issues while the latter addresses fictional letters by ladies to their lovers. She also adds that African novelists who adopt the method are driven by the desire to create reality and the need to penetrate fully into the intimacy of the reader.

Further commenting on the function of Mariama Bâ's epistolary style in *Une si longue lettre*, Adebayo suggests that it serves among others as source of information and the teaching of morals. As regards its function as source of information, she cites Ramatoulaye's solemn announcement to Aïssatou (her bosom friend who is incidentally the recipient of her letter): "Modou est mort" 'Modou is dead". In the teaching of morals, Adebayo draws attention to Bâ's comments on some aspects of the Islamic laws and African tradition which have negative impacts on the well being of the African woman. She reinforces her assertion by citing some of Ramatoulaye's comments:

Pour être acceptée, la femme sacrifie ses biens en cadeaux à sa belle famille et pis encore, outre ses biens, elle s'ampute de sa personnalité, de sa dignité, devenant une chose aux services de l'homme qui l'épouse, du grand-père, de la grand-mère, du père, de la mère, du frère, de la soeur, de l'oncle, de la tante, des cousins, des cousines,

des amis de cet homme (Mariama Bâ, *Une si longue lettre*. p.5).

To be accepted, the woman sacrifices her properties as gifts to her family in-law and worse again, above her properties, she strips herself of her personality, her dignity, becoming an object in the service of the man whom she married, his grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, male and female cousins and his friends. p. 5 (Our translation)

There is a relationship between the styles in Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* and Fassinou's *Modukpè, le rêve brisé*. In the former, the author adopts the epistolary style from the beginning to the end of the novel while in the latter a three and a half page letter is inserted inside the novel especially towards the concluding part of the work. The letter is written by Modukpè to Robert informing him of her resolve to forgive him and completely hand over the son she has for him:

Cher Robert,

...tu dois regarder devant, oublier le passé...C'est ce que j'ai décidé de faire en t'envoyant ton fils pour toujours. Oui, tu as bien lu ce que j'ai écrit: ton fils, je te le laisse pour toujours. (p.97-98)

Dear Robert,

...you must look forward, forget the past...That is what I have decided to do by sending your son to you for good. Yes, you read well what I wrote: I am handing over your son to you for ever. (p.97-98; our translation)

The quotation above indicates Robert's desire to ascertain whether he actually understands an aspect of the letter that has to do with having custody of his son or rather he seems not to believe his ears that his son will one day be handed over to him completely; hence the statement: "Oui, tu as bien lu ce que j'ai écrit". Modukpè's resolve to hand over Sèdolo to Robert reveals the Womanist trait in her which include forgiveness and compromise. She also exhibits a belief in the complimentary roles of men and women in the struggle for the African woman's emancipation as proposed by Alice Walker and Mary Kolawole. Rejecting the option of inflicting injury on Robert like the case of Beyala's female characters, Modukpè chooses to forgive and settle for a peaceful resolution.

A similar work where letters are inserted in the midst of a novel is that of Calixthe Beyala's *Maman a un amant*. There are two narrators in the novel; Loukoum (the main

narrator) a 14 year old boy and M' ammaryam (fondly called Mam) his stepmother whose intervention in the narration is felt through her several letters to one "l'Amie" to create in the reader an illusion of reality. Loukoum's letters, coming up after the concluding part of each story are addressed to one Lolita, and they serve as source of information about happenings in his family as well as comments from his adolescent's perspective. Like Ramatoulaye's letters, Mam's several letters written to her friend identified simply as 'l'Amie' serve a threefold purpose: information on her experience in her matrimonial home, moral instruction on the African culture that favours the male members of the African society and a tranquilliser for healing the pains in her heart. Mam attacks the laws which endorse female oppression while purposing to remain married. In one of her letters, an explanation for female oppression is thus given: "La femme est née à genou aux pieds de l'homme." p.21 "Woman is born kneeling at the man's feet.to serve man." p.21 (Our translation)

The image of the man standing or sitting majestically issuing orders which the woman who is down on her knees must execute connotes servitude and inequality between the genders. Despite the fact that the society preaches the equality of the sexes, women are yet to achieve a hundred percent result. On the other hand, Loukoum's letters are addressed to his female friend, Lolita. These letters are however not posted rather they belong to the autobiographical literary style. Like Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*, Modukpè's autobiographical style serves among others as source of information and teaching of morals. Information on the unpleasant experiences of the main female protagonists in the hands of their husbands (Modukpè and mother) and lover (Modukpè) and by extension the experiences of most women in the Beninese's society. It also serves as moral instruction in the condemnation of patriarchal endorsement of male excesses and oppression in the relationship between the sexes and the accordance of preference to the male gender. The narrator in *Modukpè, le rêve brisé*, recounts the female experiences of abandonment, treachery, disgrace and hurt from the male partner after being impregnated.

The reader's sympathy is elicited as Modukpè relates her humiliating experiences on three occasions: when Robert openly rejects her unborn baby while relating the "good news" to him in his residence, when Robert denies responsibility of her pregnancy before a "committee" made up of her mother, aunt, sister and friend as well as when he rapes her as a device for terminating the pregnancy. Male egocentrism is revealed where Dukpè informs Robert that she is carrying his baby and reminds him of their marriage plans. The latter's subsequent response is shocking: "-Quel mariage! Mais de quoi parle-tu? T'ai-je

jamais dit que j'étais malheureux tel que je suis, c'est-à-dire sans une femme sous mon toit"? "–What marriage! But what the hell are you talking about? Have I ever told you that I was in a miserable state, that is without a woman under my roof"? (48) More shocking is his next utterance: "Tu vas me faire le plaisir de sauter rapidement cette grossesse" "You have to get rid of that pregnancy fast" "In a bid to ascertain the architect of Dukpè's pregnancy, her mother invites Robert to her house for a discussion but the result is more humiliation for Dukpè and her mother as Robert callously describes the mother of his unborn child thus:

...fille dévoyée, qui ne pensait qu'à s'envoyer en l'air....ne prenait pas ses études au sérieux et donnait l'impression d'avoir découvert un mari tout fait qui s'occupera plus tard d'elle et la fera vivre une vie de bourgeoisie oisive...p.71

...a delinquent whose only thought is idling away...who never thought of taking her studies seriously and gave the impression of having found a ready made husband who will later take care of her and make her live an idle bourgeois life...p.71 (Our translation)

Too shocked to take in the insult, Modukpè embarks on an imaginary journey to a completely different planet. She declares: "Tout le temps que durèrent les discussions, j'eus l'impression d'être transportée sur une autre planète, d'assister à un entretien qui ne me concernait pas ;..."p.71. "Throughout the discussion, I had the impression of being transported to another planet, to attend a meeting that had nothing to do with me. ..." p.71 (Translation is ours). This public rejection of Modukpè's pregnancy is a manifestation of patriarchal deceit, bestiality and heartlessness. One may not be completely wrong in assuming that the image of being transported to another planet, to attend a meeting that has nothing to do with her, connotes temporal insanity. Without doubt, Modukpè has a "taste" of Jacqueline (Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*), Mireille (Bâ's *Un chant écarlate*) and Juletane's (Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*) psychiatric problem. This assumption is confirmed when Yabo, Modukpè's younger sister curses Robert and his descendants for humiliating her sister and the girl receives a resounding slap in return, a manifestation of male violence. It is also a demonstration of unrepentant attitude for an evil done to a fellow human being and taking undue advantage of three vulnerable female characters (Modukpè, her mother and her younger sister). On impulse, Modukpè who is yet to return from the journey to "another planet", picks the little stool she is sitting on and hits Robert

on the head. Picking a weapon and wanting to hit back, Robert notices that the adversary is Modukpè, he drops the weapon and walks away thus ending the humiliating meeting.

Inviting Robert to discuss Modukpè's pregnancy reveals Womanist tendency in the older woman. The purpose of the invitation is to ascertain the architect of the pregnancy and take a position on the way forward; marriage or assuming responsibility over the pregnant woman and her unborn child. While Modukpè's mother is seen as a success for initiating peaceful resolution of an apparent conflict, Robert is portrayed as a failure as he abandons the girl he impregnates. Modukpè abandons her studies as a law student, experiences psychological trauma and financial stress in the course of abandonment. Another case in point, which elicits the reader's sympathy, is Robert's return seven years later to claim paternity of Sèdolo, merely because his marriage to his French wife is devoid of a male child, making the once unwanted child desirable. In the words of Modukpè: "Il a fini par se rapprocher de lui, parce que sa ménopause de femme ne pouvait plus lui donner d'héritier". Besides, he did not cease to lean on the culture of the land to support his patrilineal right over the child.

Modukpè becomes a tool in the hands of Robert; firstly to satisfy his sexual urge and secondly, to satisfy his patriarchal pride of fathering a male child. Robert claims that he needs his son because he has attained the age when the Law authorises him (the father) to claim the boy. Fassinou draws attention to some aspects of the African tradition which have negative impacts on the well being of the African woman. Patriarchal law gives prominence to male children and Modukpè who feels cheated by Robert and the Law of the land that gives preference to the male gender retorts:

Tu le voulais auprès de toi, car la loi t'y autorise à cet âge, m'avais-tu fait comprendre. La loi! La loi! est-ce que tu lui as raconté un peu notre histoire, à cette loi dont tu réclames le secours aujourd'hui? Lui as-tu signifié qu'elle ne fait rien en faveur des jeunes filles abandonnées en état de grossesse. p.99

You made me understand that you wanted him around you, because he had attained the age in which the law authorises you to claim him. The law! The law! Did you tell it a little about us, that is that law in which you seek refuge today? Did you make known to the law that it does nothing on behalf of girls abandoned during pregnancy. p.99 (Our translation)

This is an indictment of a culture that gives prominent place to the male gender while according an inferior status to the female gender. Modukpe becomes an agent of change as proposed by Walker and Kolawole as she queries the law (culture) used to subjugate women. An indictment of the negative feature of a culture is the beginning of change in that element of the culture. An indictment of the patriarchal society is revealed through the enactment of laws that benefit the male gender. The law provides no punishment for Robert who impregnates and deceives his student, an innocent first year undergraduate by offering to give her additional couching after school hours, promising her marriage and dumping her when she becomes pregnant for him. He seems to be above the law when he publicly ridicules the girl by claiming that “...il n’a été question d’enfant ou de projet d’enfant entre nous” Levant (2010) assumes that “in patriarchal societies, children and wives are often labeled in ways that indicate the patrilineage in which they are born or married, respectively”. This might account for the reason why Robert demands custody of the son Modukpe has for him in order to place him into his rightful lineage... The day Modukpè is rejected by Robert before her family members is described as “le vendredi noir, le vendredi de la honte,” “black Friday, the Friday of shame:

Les larmes que je versai à la suite de notre discussion me permirent d’exhumer un peu la douleur qui s’était amassée là, dans le coin gauche de ma poitrine. Certains moments, je massais cette partie quand la douleur devenait trop forte que je ne pouvais rien dire...(p.70)

The tears I shed after our discussion allowed me exhume a little the sorrow that had gathered there, in the left corner of my heart. At times, I massaged that part when the pain became so severe that I couldn’t say anything...p.70 (Our translation)

Shedding tears is an outward manifestation of sadness or joy. Tears of joy can be described as positive tears and when they are shed they connote among others, signs of achievements and celebrations. On the other hand, tears of sorrow denote sadness, hopelessness and despair. Shedding tears also has therapeutic or soothing effect on the affected victim and it is this experience that is summarised in the above quotation. Modukpè’s initial responses to her experience of pains and hurt is similar to that of Mam, the female protagonist in Calixthe Beyala’s *Maman a un amant* until she proposes to cease weeping. This is revealed in one of Mam’s letters to her friend. “Je cessai de pleurer, je cessai de refuser le sommeil” p.21 “I ceased weeping, I ceased denying myself sleep”.

The natural reaction to physical, emotional or mental hurt is to hate the architect of the injury and desire retaliation like Calixthe Beyala's female characters. Massaging the heart as a therapeutic measure reveals the wickedness and heartlessness of the man in Dukpè's life. The experience may beget the development of a negative mind set about men and abhorrence of marriage. On the other hand, time has the ability to heal hurts and this is the experience of Modukpè as she purposes to give marriage a trial when she meets Freddy. The decision symbolises the Womanist's penchant towards the promotion of healthy family units as a basis for the structuring of wholesome societies.

At the peak of her despair, Dukpè laments: "Robert m'abandonna comme une serviette mouille sur une corde lorsque je lui appris qu'au lieu de mon passage en deuxième année de sciences juridiques, je lui ferais un enfant pour l'année prochaine" p.47. The manner in which Robert abandons the heroine is portrayed through the image of a wet towel that is hanging on a line, undesired, used and dumped after serving a particular purpose; to satisfy the sexual desires of Robert whose French's wife is in France. The unpleasant experience of Modukpè makes her describe love as a curse; something that connotes evil, sorrow and ill luck. This description of love is informed by the fact that instead of being rewarded for passionately loving someone, she receives what is synonymous with a curse that attracts sorrow: "...comme une malediction qui détruit tout sur son passage et fait beaucoup souffrir" p.32. "...like a curse which destroys every thing on its way and curses much suffering." Love relationship is an experience that should be enjoyed rather than being a curse. This description of love by the main female protagonist confirms the aforementioned negative mindset that she is likely to have concerning men because of her unpleasant experiences with the male gender.

Deception and heartbreak characterise the heroine's experience with her two male partners; Robert, father of her son and Fréddy, her husband. While describing her love affair with Robert and her premature involvement in the sexual act which culminates into pregnancy, she claims to have: "consommé le fruit défendu" "consumed the forbidden fruit" a metaphor for the sexual act. She also describes love as "sentiment étrange qui obscurcit votre esprit et vous empêche de voir plus loin que le bout de votre nez". "a strange feeling, which blinds your spirit, and hinders you from seeing beyond the tip of your nose." The imagery of blindness used here implies that when a person is head over heels in love with another person, his/her attitude is not different from that of a blind person. This statement is true of Modukpè who is supposed to back out of the

relationship when Robert's occasional comments connotes that she is dealing with a playboy, rather, she prefers to be deceived.

When Dukpè finally hands over her son to his father, (Robert), she writes him a letter suggesting that Robert is forgiven: "...I have forgiven the *humiliation* and the *betrayal*. I have forgiven the *rape* and the *spittle*. I have forgiven all for the love of my son...I have *exhumed* my *grief*; I am forever *healed*. (Translation is ours). Modukpè's experiences sequel to her abandonment by Robert when she becomes pregnant for him are summarised as *humiliation*, *betrayal*, *rape*, *grief* and *spittle*. The decision to forgive Robert is invariably the Womanist attitude to deceit or hurt by male partners instead of considering them as adversaries. Womanists are of the opinion that forgiveness is one important virtue necessary to enable one make progress in life. Robert's plea for forgiveness portrays him as a Womanist as he is repentant and portrays an understanding of the complimentary roles of the genders in the struggle for the African woman's emancipation.

Womanists neither encourage Modukpè's naivety nor Robert's egocentric exploitation of such attribute. However, they still believe that in spite of the shortcomings of the male gender, they are still needed to help correct the patriarchal placement of women in the society, whereas Feminists especially the lesbians advocate a woman's world where women do not have anything to do with men. An African mother will not want to deprive her child of having access to his father especially when such a child so desires the company of the father who realises his folly and desires a reconciliation. The Womanist seems to agree with this aspect of the African woman's belief as a way of saying both genders are still relevant in the upbringing of a child. The fact that Robert takes Sèdolo to France to integrate him into his family qualifies him as a Womanist since the family is regarded by Womanists as a basis for structuring wholesome societies.

Modukpè and her mother are always at loggerheads over the position of a woman in the society. Although the latter dislikes patriarchal norms that place women in a subordinated position, she however assumes that this arrangement is irreversible. As for the former who constitutes an agent of cultural change, she opines that the status quo must be reversed and the negative elements of the African culture reviewed. In the words of Modukpè's mother: "...Nous ne sommes que des wagons que les hommes poussent selon leur bon vouloir". "We are just wagons pushed about by men as they so wish". The description of women by Dukpè's mother as wagons controlled by men and cattles attached to such wagons is significant of the place of women in the traditional society.

The metaphor of the wagon here is a pointer to the fact that men are in control of affairs and women have no choice than to follow. But Modukpè tries to educate her mother on the reason why she disagrees with the older woman's submission:

Je n'était pas d'accord avec cette vision des choses...mais comment faire comprendre à cette vieille femme que, si elle a été un wagon arrimé à un train qui la poussait, aujourd'hui moi, je suis le train ou plutôt le wagon de tête qui pousse ma vie. Comment lui faire accepter l'idée que, aujourd'hui, nous les femmes ne voulons plus être des wagons qu'on pousse, ni du bétail qu'on y entrepose.
p. 104

I disagreed with that philosophy... But how do I make this old woman understand that, if she has been a wagon stowed to a train that drove it, today, I am the train or rather the principal wagon driving my life. How can I bring her to come to terms with the fact that, today, women neither want to be wagons driven by people any longer, nor cattle kept therein. p.104 (Our translation)

Modukpè and her mother belong to two different generations; one illiterate and the other educationally empowered. Modukpè's mother experiences oppression because she is economically dependent on her husband and she is also illiterate. Education enables the daughter to challenge negative tradition and reject patriarchal laws that are detrimental to her well being. Kolawole proposes change that takes into cognizance the cultural peculiarities of the women being subjugated. In as much as Modukpè rejects cultural norms that oppress her and her mother, she still has respect for some other aspects of the African culture like marriage and motherhood. Today's women are rejecting subservient positions accorded to the African woman by patriarchal laws and customs; saying "NO" to being wagons stowed to trains that drove them, rather they are the principal wagons driving their lives; this is undeviatingly the Womanist stance. By rejecting subservient positions accorded to the African woman by patriarchal laws and customs, Modukpè seems to take a clue from Celie, Ruth and Meridian (Alice Walker's self-assertive protagonists), as well as Mary Kolawole's self-assertive pre-colonial women whose courage earned them victory in their confrontation with patriarchal laws and European racist policies.

When Modukpè consults her mother for counsel sequel to her awareness of Freddy's adulterous lifestyle, the older woman advises her: "Toi seule décidera de la voie à suivre devant cette forêt qui t'environne." p.116 "You are to single-handedly decide the

way out of this forest that surrounds you”. A forest is a place where one can easily miss one’s way, a place where decisions need to be taken to get out of a mess. At her period of helplessness, Dukpè must take a decision whether to sue for a divorce like Aïssatou or accept polygamy like Ramatoulaye (*Une si longue lettre*). Like a Womanist, Modukpè’s mother is teaching her daughter to be self-assertive as she counsels her “to single-handedly look for a way out of this forest that surrounds” her.

While making allusion to her sorrowful state and probably universalising sorrow as a way of dousing the pains in her heart, Dukpè claims that as long as we are on earth, we are menaced by sorrow which she metaphorically describes as a plague (61): “...le Malheur est une donnée collective...personne n’est armé contre ce “fléau.” “...Sorrow is a collective problem...nobody is immuned from this “plague. Modukpè’s mother also experiences the pain of seeing her daughter suffer what she earlier suffered in the hand of a man-deceit. In addition, Robert’s rejection of her Modukpè’s pregnancy causes heartbreak for the older woman.

Depuis que Robert était venu lui dire en face, qu’il ne se sentait responsable de la grossesse que je portais, une ride supplémentaire s’était ajoutée à celle qui se logeaient déjà sur son visage. p.70

Since the day Robert came to tell it to her face that he is not responsible for the pregnancy I was carrying, an additional wrinkle was added to the one that was already on her face. p.70 (Our translation)

This mother is doubly afflicted: pain of deception by her husband and a turbulent marriage as well as pained by the fact that her daughter takes after her negatively. Modukpè’s mother is tricked in a polygamous relationship. She tells her daughter that if her father confesses to her from the onset that he is already married, she will put a great distance between them... ‘il ne m’avait pas dit qu’il était marié! S’il avait avoué dès le départ,... je n’aurais été sa seconde épouse”. p.13 “...he never told me that he was married! If he had confessed to me right from the beginning,... I would never had been his second wife.” p.13 (Our translation) In the autobiographical novel, a firsthand account of events is narrated through the eyes of a single (the main) character. In this case, since all thoughts and observations are limited to that same person without contribution from an outside observer, one can therefore not rule out subjectivity on the part of the author since the reader is only exposed to the narrator’s version of the story. For example, the naivety on the part of Modukpè is underplayed by the fact that she is too credulous. Robert’s

utterances before the pregnancy are enough signals for her to realise that she is into a relationship with a play boy, a “casanova” per excellence. Each time Robert returns from a visit to friends with little kids, he complains to Modukpè about the untidy state of their living rooms claiming that he cannot stand such disorderliness. Modukpè explains to him that each time mothers of these children tidy the house, the kids make the place dirty and that it will take a woman to clean several times a day to achieve such objective since these mothers are also working class women. In a response to the question whether Robert will disallow their children from playing in the living room, he throws a bombshell: “On verra bien...On verra bien si tu m’en donneras des gosses!” p.82 “We shall see...We shall see if you will give me kids!” p.82

This enigmatic statement is comprehensive enough for Modukpè to come to the realisation that she is dealing with a “Casanova”; and in the words of her mother: “... j’aurais mis beaucoup de distance entre nous,... (13) “...I would have put a great distance between us,... However, her naivety and credulity becloud her sense of judgement and she pays dearly for it. Modukpè sacrifices her dream of becoming a lawyer because of the unwanted pregnancy. Proceeds from her mother’s cooked rice’s trade are used to take care of her and her unborn baby. Taking up the responsibility of caring for her daughter while in pregnancy reveals that Modukpè’s mother is a Womanist as she ensures that the child is born and raised in a family centred environment. Unwilling to live with the trauma of having an unwanted pregnancy, Modukpè visits Roberts in his house, pleads with him to accept paternity of her pregnancy, appeals to his conscience and seduces him when the latter proves too difficult. Instead of expressing a repentant attitude for the evil already done, Robert rapes her with the aim of aborting the pregnancy. Humiliating her further, he orders her: “Envoie-moi par ta soeur la facture des soins que t’aura coûté l’avortement, comme ça je verrai si elle est aussi bonne que toi au lit” (87). “Send me the bill for the post-abortion care through your sister so I can ascertain whether she is also as good as you are on bed”.

Robert’s setting of a trap for Modukpè is a form of oppression and the fact that the latter falls into the trap reveals naivety on her part, which is an evidence of lack of exposure to sex education. Sex education, if taught at her primary and secondary schools will help her avoid the trap set for her by Robert. Also, one expects her to be on her guard when accepting the tempting offers of Robert; she does not raise queries on the fact that the offer of additional coaching classes is not extended to other colleagues in the class (male and female), since she is not the only student in the class. In addition, one expects

Modukpè to be cautious before starting a love relationship with Robert since she is not ignorant of her mother's heartbreaking experience of male deception.

Although, one cannot help but sympathise with Modukpè, however, she is the architect of her rape experience for going as far as seducing Robert all in an attempt to compel him to accept paternity of her pregnancy. Cultural norms and laws formulated, supervised and perpetuated mostly by men are given as reasons why Dukpè must release to Robert the son she has for him. Among these norms is the belief that a child needs to be trained by both parents and especially that male children need to be handled by their fathers. This is reiterated by Modukpè's mother when she insists: "Un garçon a besoin de son père...un enfant a besoin de ses deux parents...mais un garçon à surtout besoin de son père pour l'initier à sa vie d'homme." p.95-9 "A boy needs his father...a child needs both parents...but a boy especially needs his father, to initiate him into a man's life" (translation is ours). Encouraging Modukpè to release the son she has for Robert is a sign of Womanist trait on the part of her mother who believes in peaceful resolution of conflicts. Modukpè's willingness to forgive Robert and release his son to him also portrays her as a Womanist.

Women's rights are suppressed in divorce situations; patrilineal law stipulates that in the case of divorce or when children are born outside wedlock, a man takes custody of such children when they attain a particular age. This is the law Robert is referring to when he requests for the custody of Sèdolo. It is quite unfortunate that there is no law that stipulates punishment for men who abandon girls after impregnating them. Such girls are made to face the trauma of carrying unwanted pregnancies, humiliation, treated like harlots, outcasts and having their dreams aborted. One expects a similar stigma to be placed on a man who impregnates a girl but this is not the case; the girl is humiliated while the man goes about a free man. The enactment and enforcement of the aforementioned law is a portrayal of partiality to the detriment of women. However, when the children grow up, the law which is silent on the sufferings and humiliation of the girls concerned supports the release of such children. Among reasons why the children are easily released by their mothers is the fact that they may not be financially empowered to cater for the children and consider it a relief when fathers of such children make a turn around and are willing to contribute financially to their upkeep. Another reason is the fact that no African woman will want her child to be branded a bastard; therefore the financially empowered young mothers still desire that the fathers of these children show up one day to claim paternity of their children. The significance of culture as posited by

Kolawole is reiterated here as Africans believe in bringing up their children in a family setting.

Even Modukpè's mother, an epitome of passivity, rebels in her later years against patriarchal control. Hitherto, the type of female protagonists like Flo (*Rencontres essentielles*), Mama Ida (*La tache de sang*), Rokhaya and Rabiatou (*La voie du salut*), who suffer silently and lack the courage to challenge male authority, Modukpè's mother endure oppression in her matrimonial home. Her position as regards the place of women in the society is similar to that of the aforementioned female protagonists who "...sacrifice their lives for their husbands...and view submissiveness to their husbands as admirable (Sanusi, 2004:58). However, unable to cope with simultaneous multiple oppression, she abandons her matrimonial home to be free from a high handed husband, intimidation and co-wives' rivalry. Patriarchal norms muffle her voice and distort her vision of herself and others. However, when she can no longer cope, she begins to "speak out" as Awa Thiam (1986), suggests to her black sisters. According to Adebayo (1996), this rejection of patriarchal norms is the tearing of "the veil of invisibility". While relating to her children her reason for abandoning her matrimonial home, Modukpè's mother declares:

C'est la vie qui m'a changé, mes enfants. J'ai tout enduré pendant des années, sans qu'un mot ne s'échappait de ma bouche. Mais lorsque j'en ai eu assez, j'ai décidé de dire haut et fort ce que je pense et depuis je n'arrête pas p.12

It is life that changed me, my children. I have endured everything for years, without uttering a word. But when I have had enough, I decided to express myself loud and clear and ever since, I have not ceased to speak p.12
(Our translation)

Fassinou depicts here the image of a caged and imprisoned woman who is forced to accept all sorts of unpleasant treatments without complaining because it is the norm to do so. The author condemns male chauvinism as her character tolerates oppression for the sake of her children since leaving them in the custody of co-wives has the tendency of jeopardising their future. Passivity, tolerance and forgiveness are among the strategies earlier adopted by Modukpè's mother to cope with oppression until the strategies lose their efficacy. Modukpè's mother is simply telling us that there is a limit to which one can endure oppression and suppression, thereafter, reactions will follow which might be violent or non violent. Womanist tendency is evident in the way Modukpè's mother

handles co-wives rivalries with maturity while still in Jean Paul's house. The resolve not to engage in co-wives rivalry is a sign of sisterly bond which she attempts to initiate through her peaceful co-existence with her co-wives. Ramatoulaye (Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*) "endured everything for years" until the death of Modou Fall and the eventual marriage proposal of Tamsir which makes her vituperate the bottled anger. Likewise, Emilienne (Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes*), "endured everything for years" until she realises that her value as a human being is not synonymous with her procreative ability.

Alice Walker depicts Womanist themes; racism, sexism, classism, the family, motherhood, change, liberation and interest in cultures and people outside the American context through her numerous works; *Meridian* (1976), *The color purple* (1982) and *The third life of Grange Copeland* among others. Similarly, Fassinou dramatises Womanist themes through her chosen novels, *Modukpe, le rêve brisé* and *Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*. Fassinou like Walker expresses her commitment to social and political change through these works. Walker exposes racism, classism, sexual abuses and violence in an African American community. She equally expresses the prospect of emancipation in every sphere of life's experience through her female protagonists; Celie, Ruth and Meridian who represent the African American women's resistance of oppression. The themes in Alice Walker's work reflect the diverse experience of the African American community. She portrays her female characters as those who find strength in their female precursors and oral heritage bequeathed to them, a strategy for dealing with oppression. In addition, each of her works features a female protagonist evolving through the pain of gender and racial inequality. At the centre of Womanism, is the concern for women and their role in their immediate surroundings (be it family, local community or work place) and more global environment. Walker's work which investigates race, gender, sexuality and class exposes a liaison between her political activism and art. These works also underscore coping strategies of marginalised and oppressed women.

In the same vein, Fassinou features her female protagonists as evolving through the pain of gender inequality; male deception, objectification of the female gender, polygamy and the use of culture as a spring board to reinforcing female oppression. This is portrayed through the female characters as they evolved from a passive awareness to questioning retrogressive culture which eventually leads to their emancipation. Modukpe, her mother, Ananou, Cica and Emma accept women's plight at first but eventually rebelled. In addition, Modukpe derives strength from her mother's counsels, a strategy for

dealing with oppression. Fassinou's works express concern for women and their role in their immediate surroundings (be it family, local community or work place) and this is also reflected in an interview conducted with her by this researcher. Walker's work which investigates race, gender, sexuality and class exposes a liaison between her political activism and art. Fassinou works like Walker's also underscore copying strategies of marginalised and oppressed women. Like Walker, Fassinou also highlights the issue of race in *Modukpe, le rêve brisé* where Robert's wife refuses to inhabit Africa because of her claim of the presence of flies, cochroaches...As Walker introduces elements of spiritual dimension into her Womanism, so also does Modukpe as she is spiritually attached to her mother during the latter's life-time and after her death.

4.2 Objectification of Women and Child Marriage

Objectification is the act of degrading a woman to the status of a mere object. A person is objectified when he or she receives the treatment commonly reserved for objects or animals. It can also involve treating an individual like a commodity or a possession, while in the case of sexual objectification, the victim who is usually a woman, merely becomes an object of sexual desire. Child marriage connotes giving out in marriage a child that is yet a minor or below the age that is commonly accepted by the civil law. In Hodou Rogatien's polygamous home, objectification of women is in the form of hard field and reproductive labour imposed on the woman. The patriarch in the novel has five wives and Ananou is the first and eldest of them all. Hard labour in the farm and numerous deliveries make Ananou lose her beauty and shapely figure. In the words of the narrator: 'Son corps, on le sait avait été maltraité par ses nombreux accouchements et les durs travaux des champs...p.11. "Evidently, her body had been brutalised by numerous deliveries and strenuous farm work..." p.11 (Our translation).

Hodou's wives are objectified as they are converted into baby "factories" through the delivery of numerous children who serve as manpower in the farm. One can therefore liken Hodou's wives to cows and sheep that a shepherd tends mainly for commercial purpose; *beasts of burden*. This is an attack on patriarchal traditional societies where men value their wives simply for their procreative abilities. Similarly, turning a wife into a baby factory and an unpaid farm labourer can create hatred and dissatisfaction in her but Hodou's women seem to accept their lot as dictated by the patriarchal society. The image of Ananou's body being *brutalised* indicates lack of care for the "goose that lays the

golden eggs” and the outcome is malnutrition. Little wonder that when she stops the “baby factory” business and leaves for town, she regains her youthful beauty and shape.

The women in Hodou’s harem experience double-fold oppression; they are used as baby factories and unpaid labourers in the farm; engaging in hard labour.

Lorsqu’au septième accouchement elle eut enfin sa fille Cica, elle... décréta en son for intérieur que son mari ne verrait plus la rondeur de ses cuisses, et ne goûterait plus à cette chaleur particulière de leur intimité profonde. p.11

When she finally had her daughter Cica after her seventh delivery, she...decreed in her inner mind that her husband would no longer see the roundness of her thighs, and would no longer taste that particular warmth of their deep intimacy p.11 (Our translation)

One of Ananou’s ways of reacting to oppression is saying ‘NO’ to the position of an animal (cow, sheep, goat or chicken) useful only for the purpose of producing young ones. The idea of not seeing *the roundness of her thighs* and not tasting *that particular warmth of their deep intimacy* are images that denote the withdrawal of Ananou’s sexual services which are taken for granted and not remunerated. Little wonder that Simone de Beauvoir (*Le deuxième sexe*; 1949), insists that the treatment meted out on a married woman in the traditional setting is similar to that of a prostitute. Sherifa (El Saadawi’s *Women at point zero*), seems to be echoing de Beauvoir’s view when she asserts that all women are prostitutes. Hodou also derives satisfaction from having numerous women satisfying his sexual desires: “Elle confirma les dires de Hodou, affirmant qu’à son âge, elle ne “s’adonnait plus à ces jeux de jeunesse”. “She confirmed the utterances of Hodou that at her age, she no longer “indulged in these youthful plays”. p.14 (Our translation)

The metaphors; “*youthful play*,” in the above quotation connotes sexual relations between a couple. As the quotation implies, one of the reasons for Hodou’s several marriages is the belief that as a woman grows older, she loses interest in the sexual act. The fact that Ananou’s losses interest in “youthful plays” may not be unconnected with her husband’s approach. He needs her primarily for the production of male children who are unpaid farm labourers and secondly to satisfy his sexual desires. Having five wives also connotes the institution of the “turn system” where a time-table is drawn indicating the time when the husband is to meet with each of his wives. This is portrayed in Ousmane’s *Le mandat*, *Xala*, *Bâ’s Une si longue lettre* and Sow-Fall’s *La grève des*

battus, among others. Ananou's husband uses his wealth as a weapon of oppression by keeping a harem of wives especially from indigent families, using his wealth to lure parents whose daughters have attained the age of puberty. Little wonder that the narrator observes: "Sa fortune attirait les pères ayant des filles pubères, comme l'urine du diabétique attire les mouches" p. 33. "Fathers with pubescent girls are attracted to Hodou's wealth like flies are attracted to diabetic's urine" p.33 (Our translation)

The imagery of flies being attracted to the urine of a diabetic is a reference to the fact that even fathers (agents of patriarchy), initiate marriage alliance between their daughters and Hodou, thereby trading their daughters for Hodou's wealth. Possibly after the "enormous" bride price Hodou pays to each of his wives' fathers, evidence of his wealth is not seen in the appearance of the women. Little wonder that the narrator says concerning Ananou: "her body had been *brutalised* by her numerous deliveries and strenuous farm work..." Just like a merchant care less about his product after selling and collecting money from a buyer for the sales, the fathers of these *girl wives* seem not to bother about their daughters' well-being after giving them away in marriage and receiving mouth-watering dowry.

The theme of arranged marriages is also depicted in several novels written by male and female African writers: Ousmane (*Les bouts de bois de Dieu*), Badian (*Sous l'orage*), Oyono-Mbia (*Trois prétendants...un mari*), Keita (*Rebelle*), Lyn (*Toiles d'araigné*) and Maiga- Ka (*La voie du salut*) among others. The youngest of Ananou's co-wife is described thus: "Sa co-épouse avait en effet l'âge de son fils cadet; c'est une manie chez les hommes de fricoter avec des femmes très jeune; plus ils vieillissent, plus ils sont exigeants sur la verdeur du fruit; cela enflame leurs sens..." This is oppression of young girls by old men represented by their parents who exchange them for money and gifts and by their husbands who use them to satisfy their sexual urge and probably increase their life span. The girls in Hodou's harem, Ousmane's Assitan and Bâ's Binetou did not oppose their parents' marriage plan for them by reason of illiteracy and respect for tradition (Assitan and Hodou's girl-wives) or the desire for social mobility (Binetou and Hodou's girl-wives). Oppression of minors does not exclude incestuous relationships. A case in point is the tortuous experience of Dodji, Ananou's niece, an orphan living under the custody of her grandmother before Ananou adopts her.

...C'était son oncle qui l'avait dépucelée, le frère de son père...la viola quand elle avait à peine douze ans. Il arrivait de la ville à chaque fin de mois, pour apporter quelques maigres provisions à sa grand-mère. Il la fit

promettre de n'en rien dire à personne et qu'à chacun de ses séjours, il la couvrirait de cadeaux. Il continua d'aller à l'assaut de cette jeune citadelle,...Dodji tomba enceinte. Elle n'avait que quatorze ans. p.163

...It was her uncle/father's brother who disvirgined her, the uncle raped her when she was barely 12 years old. He arrived from the town at the end of every month, to bring her grandmother some meager provisions. He made her promise not to reveal the incident to anyone and that in each of his stay in the village; he would lavish gifts on her. He continued to assault the young girl,...Dodji became pregnant. She was just 14. p.163 (Our translation).

Dodji's case is another example of female objectification; her uncle objectifies her sexually as he turns her into an object of sexual desire. This is a critic of male bestiality which Ramatoulaye questions as she does not cease to wonder at the power of attraction in Binetou that makes her irresistible to Modou Fall. Sexually assaulting a minor to whom Dodji's uncle is supposed to play the role of a father is nothing other than the peak of heartlessness and wickedness. When a teenager is prematurely introduced to the sexual act, there is the tendency of exposure to a life of immorality and on the other hand, the memories may create in the girl hatred for the male gender. Being raped is a bad experience on its own and being raped by an uncle is even worse. The uncle succeeds in turning his niece into a prostitute regularly assaulting her during his monthly visits to his mother and paying for the service probably with ridiculous gifts like biscuits, candy and beggarly sum of money. This is evident in the sense that what he offers his mother monthly is described as "meager". Sequel to the death of Dodji's grandmother, Ananou adopts her in order to avoid a repeat of her once unpleasant and tortuous experience. Ananou exhibits the trait of a Womanist as she rehabilitates Dodji while the uncle who exploits the minor is portrayed as a failure. Closely related to the arranged marriages in Hodou's case and the teenagers he admits into his harem is the experience of Assitan in Sembène Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* where her marriage is arranged by her parents:

Assitan était une épouse parfaite selon les anciennes traditions africaines docile, soumise, travailleuse,...Neuf ans auparavant, on l'avait mariée à l'aîné des Bakayoko. Sans même le consulter, ses parents s'étaient occupés de tout. Un soir, son père lui apprit que son mari se nommait Sadibou Bakayoko et deux mois après on la livrait à un homme qu'elle n'avait jamais vu...p.170

Assitan was a perfect wife according to ancient African traditions docile, submissive, hardworking...Nine years earlier, she was married off to the eldest of the Bakayokos. His parents arranged everything without even consulting him. One evening, her father told her that her husband's name was Sadibou Bakayoko and two months later she was handed over to a man she had never set her eyes on... p.170 (Our translation)

It is this type of arranged marriage that takes place between Hodou and fathers of young girls who earnestly desire their daughters' entrance into his harem. It is said concerning Assitan, *Son lot à elle, son lot de femme était d'accepter et de se taire, ainsi qu'on le lui avait enseigné.*" p.171 *Her fate as a woman was to accept everything and be quiet, so was she taught.*" p.171 One of the ways in which a woman is oppressed in a patriarchal system is by socialising her into accepting a subordinate position without putting up a protest. Ananou proposes that Cica (her daughter), receives a balanced education; education required for financial empowerment, mental and emotional soundness, as well as good home management. As a way of preparing Cica for womanhood, Ananou teaches her what it takes to satisfy her husband and keep her home:

Un homme, c'est le ventre et le bas-ventre. Quels que soient tes diplômes ma fille, ton mari t'échappera si tu ne lui prépares pas des mets appétissants pour lui donner des forces, et si ton corps ne dégage pas une odeur envoûtante de goyave mûre. p. 37

Man is tummy conscious. My daughter, in spite of your educational achievements, you will lose your husband if you do not prepare appetising food that gives him strength, and if your body does not emit bewitching fragrance of a ripe guava p.37 (Our translation)

The metaphor *tummy* and *below the tummy* implies that in her matrimonial home, Cica must not fail to prepare good and regular food for her husband, make herself enticing to him and satisfy him sexually. Cica begins to query her mother's theory when she remembers how her father treats her in spite of the fact that she excels in the aforementioned responsibilities:

...Elle ne sait où se trouve la vérité; malgré les repas, malgré l'odeur de goyave, son père avait relégué sa mère au loin et n'arrêtait pas de remplacer ses favorites. Alors est-ce cela vaut vraiment la peine de se donner tant de mal pour un homme? p. 37

....She does not know where the truth lies; inspite of the meals, in spite of the betwitching guava fragrance, her father had relegated her mother to the background and had not ceased to replace her with his favourites. So, is it really worth the trouble, sacrificing so much for a man? p.37
(Our translation)

Witnessing her mother's unpleasant experience in marriage despite her sacrifice, makes Cica question the essence of sacrifice in a union. The above quotation reveals that Ananou is a success in the way she makes efforts to satisfy her husband, thus avoiding a disintegration of her home and this makes her a Womanist. In guarding against her daughter's becoming a victim of *grotto* or *sugar daddy*, she ensures that the girl's needs are met. The metaphor *grotto* or *sugar daddy* refers to men who engage in illicit relationship with girls who are of the same age with their daughters or granddaughters. This is an indictment of patriarchs who claim to uphold the sanctity of tradition but are busy defiling the future mothers. They introduce these girls to sex prematurely, transform them into "baby-mothers" and by extension perpetuate female illiteracy and oppression. When these girl-mothers are expelled from school, only an insignificant number continue their education after having weaned their children. Since these men are nothing but plagues or viruses that must be avoided at all cost, Ananou is not ready to take chances while warning her daughter to avoid them.

Ananou is no different from Assitan until the day she decides to change her endurance strategy. All that Ananou's husband (*Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*) appreciates in a woman is her ability to give birth to numerous male children who will serve as labourers in the family's faming business. A woman's value is solely tied to her ability to produce labourers that will expand the business empire of the patriarch: "Ainsi dès que l'enfant quittait le sein de sa mère, il avait sa place aux champs: on trouvait toujours une occupation pour chaque tranche d'âge, et la famille avait bâti sa richesse à la force de ses bras" (p.11). "Thus, the moment the child is weaned, he had his portion in the farm: There was always work for each age grade, and the family had acquired its wealth from the strength of its manpower." (translation is ours)

Her father in-law even states that he is strongly assured that Ananou's womb will increase the family's wealth: "Son beau-père était convaincu qu'on pourrait arracher de ses entrailles une douzaine de gosses. On comptait sur elle pour agrandir le clan; le vieux était donc assuré de rentrer dans ses fonds par cet investissements." (p.10) "Her father-in-law was convinced that a dozen children could come from her womb. She was dependent

on to enlarge the clan; the old man was therefore assured of making money through this investment.” (Translation is ours) Therefore while preparing for marriage; Ananou’s father-in-law warns her that her continual stay in her matrimonial home is dependent on her ability to produce male children. This confirms the notion that a woman is valued only for her reproductive function in a patriarchal society. In the words of Ananou’s father in law:

Rien que des mâles,...Tu nous feras la fille lorsque je t’en donnerai l’ordre. Si tu as la malchance de ne fabriquer que des femelles à mon enfant, je te renverrai comme une mal propre. p.11

Nothing but male children,...You will give us a female child only when I order you to do so. If you are unlucky to give my child only female children, I will send you packing. p.11 (Our translation)

Ignorance on the part of Ananou’s father-in-law is hereby exhibited as the old man believes he has the power to command a woman to either give birth to a male or female child. Giving birth solely to female children is considered as ill luck and Ananou is being threatened with divorce even before marriage, this is a language that denotes oppression. Mothering is a major theme in Womanism and one of the areas in which the Womanists differ from the Feminists. Feminists especially the radical ones reject motherhood because they consider it a means of oppressing the woman. As for Womanists, despite the fact that they cherish motherhood as one of African values, they are however not happy that it is one of the instruments used to oppress the African woman. African and Afro-American women cherish motherhood as one of African’s heritage. Ananou therefore challenges this aspect of the African culture when she withdraws her sexual services to her husband. In so doing, she becomes an agent of cultural change as proposed by Walker and Kolawole.

Davies (1990), accentuates the prominent place accorded to motherhood in Africa when she states: “In many African societies, motherhood defines womanhood”. Bestman (2007) equally observes the place of motherhood in Womanism as she posits: Womanist ideology being “the art of mothering and nurturing” children and humanity in general. A woman’s value is tied to her ability to procreate and she is celebrated if she gives birth to male children, while the one who gives birth to female children only is made to feel unfulfilled. It is even worse with a woman who is unable to give birth to biological children as she is seen as an incomplete woman. The assertion of Ananou’s father-in-law

reveals ignorance as well as the chauvinistic attitude of the male members of the patriarchal society. The knowledge of science reveals that a man is the decisive factor as regards the sex of a baby.

Ananou therefore leaves the village for Cotonou to be free from co-wives rivalry and to enable Cica her daughter acquire post secondary education. She engages in textile business and becomes economically independent thus emancipating herself from objectification. She becomes an epitome of self-assertion because she succeeds in attaining the peak of her career in the midst of a polygamous marriage and in spite of her husband's (the representative of patriarchy) *laissez faire* attitude to his family's welfare. Through Ananou's efforts, Cica is able to receive both qualitative traditional and formal education and also to realise her ambition of becoming a mid-wife. The effort of the older woman in equipping her daughter with the weapon of emancipation qualifies her as a Womanist. By residing in her husband's house in town, Ananou maintains the sisterly bond she initiates with her co-wives and this makes her a Womanist. Becoming financially empowered and self-assertive qualifies Ananou as a Womanist as she adopts several street children whom she empowers.

The third person narrative structure or omniscient narrative technique is employed in the work. This is a narrative mode in which the narrator is aware of occurrences within the world of the story including what each of the characters is thinking and feeling. One of the merits is objectivity, "suited to telling huge, sweeping, epic stories and/or complicated stories involving numerous characters". One major shortcoming is the distance between the audience and the story. The reader's ability to identify with or sympathise with the characters is reduced to a minimal level. The choice of a female protagonist is a common style with Womanist writers, where the individual who is marginalised by the society is used as a spokeswoman to correct certain ills in the society. These female characters question their placement in the society as well as the shortcomings of firmly established social attitudes. These characters are in a privileged position to criticise the society that is the architect of their marginalisation. Female members who are collaborators of patriarchy; Binétou's mother and Tante Nabou (*Une si longue lettre*) and Mireille's mother-in-law (*Un chant écarlate*) are also not spared in the course of female writers' criticism.

In this novel, husbands (represented by Ananou's husband) and fathers (who marry off their teenage daughters to Houdou Rogatien in exchange for money) are patriarchal agents of oppression. The forms of oppression are converting women into baby factories,

girl-marriage and rape of minor. Patriarchy, the architect of female oppression uses the African culture as spring board to reinforce the oppression of the female gender. While analysing Kolawole's *Womanism and African consciousness* Nwajiaku (2010), suggests that the work proffers deep insight into the historical, contextual and theoretical basis of the Womanist theory, highlighting its affinity and relevance to the definition of womanhood in Africa. As Kolawole insists:

As far as the ordinary African woman is concerned, the expression of femaleness and the struggle for self-assertion did not come from the West. She is aware of her womanism as the totality of her self-expression and self-realisation in diverse positive ways. This involves eliciting women's positive qualities...and freedom within African cultural context. p.27

Ananou does not have contact with the West when she purposes in the village to end her baby factory function. Being an illiterate does not prevent her from recognising her Womanism as the totality of her self-expression and self-realisation in diverse positive ways. She succeeds in eliciting her qualities (business acumen) and her freedom within African cultural context as she also becomes a success like most powerful pre-colonial and colonial African women. Although, marital relationships are underscored in Fassinou's works, the homes depicted cannot be described as the ideal since they are characterised by oppression of women and children. Womanists believe in the promotion of healthy family units as a basis for the structuring of wholesome societies. Using her female protagonists as spokeswomen, affords Fassinou the opportunity to query laws that favour men but encourage the oppression of women.

Womanism frowns at child marriage, sexual assault of minors and resorting to women as source of manpower through the delivery of numerous children. This is the position of Ananou as she frowns at the unwillingness of her husband to grant independence to her numerous sons who are already fathers of children. Ananou, like Walker's female protagonists; Celie, Ruth, becomes victorious at the end of the novel. She becomes liberated by freeing herself from numerous child deliveries and as Celie orchestrated the liberation of Albert, her husband, she likewise advocates the liberation of her adult male children who are still dependence on their father. Ananou is therefore an epitome of Womanism.

4.3 Polygamy in Adélaïde Fassinou Selected Novels

This is a common theme in Fassinou's works as well as in the works of most African writers (male and female) whose works portray female oppression. These are the works of Chinua Achebe (*Things fall apart*), Sembène Ousmane (*Xala, Le mandat*), Guillaume Ôyono Mbia (*Trois prétendants...un mari*). Mariama Bâ (*Une si longue lettre* and *Un chant écarlate*) Calixthe Beyala (*Le petit prince de Belleville, Maman a un amant*) and in some of Fassinou's works; *Modukpè, le rêve brisé, Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne* and *Jeté en pâture* among others.

Polygamy is a system of marriage where a man marries more than one wife or the custom of marrying multiple spouses. When a man is married to more than one wife at a time, it is referred to as polygyny. On the other hand, when a woman is married to more than one husband at a time, it is called polyandry. In this study, polygamy is the practice of having more than one wife at the same time. It is quite a common practice in many African communities. The system constitutes one of the ways through which women and children are oppressed as they are expected to play subservient roles in the relationship. Polygamy which encourages male dominance over woman is also one of the sources of intra-gender conflicts where a particular wife is preferred to the others or where co-wives are involved in unhealthy rivalry with one another in an attempt to win the love of their jointly shared husband. In a polygamous setting, the husband is the representative of patriarchy and patriarchal attitude is manifested through his control of his wives and children as well as his desire to be venerated. Most of the time, polygamy favours the husband because he has several wives at his disposal. In addition, some religions endorse polygamy as an acceptable way of life while in the traditional African culture a man's wealth is measured by the enormosity of his household.

Women in traditional setting endorse polygamy because they are socialised to accept it as the norm. In polygamous settings, wives cohabit in the same residence with their husband. However, in modern times, they either cohabit with their husband or live in separate residence probably to avoid co-wives' rivalries. Jean Paul who is semiliterate cohabits with his wives who are uneducated. Women and children are victims in polygamous setting because their interests are not taken into consideration in the actions and decisions taken by the father/husband.

In *Modukpèle rêve brisé*, the main female protagonist paints a portrait of her father's place in his household:

Nos pères étaient de véritables roitelets au sein de la famille...Il tiraient avantage des rivalités entre les épouses qui, toutes, entendaient mériter la première place dans leur coeur. C'est ainsi que les plus gros morceaux de viande échouaient dans le plat de mon père et nous, nous devrions nous contenter de quelques fibres et peaux de poulet...p. 25

Our fathers were real petty kings within the family...They took advantage of the rivalries among the wives who intended to occupy the first position in their hearts. That is how the biggest pieces of meat got lost in my father's dish and we the children had to settle for few chicken fiber and skin...p.25 (Our translation)

It will be interesting to take a look at the use of language in the above quotation: *kings, taking advantage of rivalries among wives, desiring to occupy the first position in their hearts*, children settling for *chicken fiber and skin*. The description of the average polygamous home in the above quotation, paints the picture of a ruler who rules over an empire made of of women and children. He so much occupies the position of a deity that his *subjects* struggle to please him. He even makes mockery of the women by the fact that he enjoys their quarrels; this is a sarcastic attack on polygamy. His diet is given much attention than that of the women who need balanced diet to replace the loss of energy during childbirth and children who need protein for their growth.

The narrator does not spare the women who do not consider it embarrassing fighting over a single man, rather they choose to be mocked by agents of patriarchy who place them in harems. Like vassal kings paying royalty to an emperor in return for acceptance and protection, the women neglect the care of their children who are supposed to be well fed and stuff their husband with quality food meant for growing children. One might not blame these women for the malnourishment of their children in the sense that being illiterates, they might not be knowledgeable in what balanced diet entails. Little wonder that Modukpè's mother (*Modukpè, le rêve brisé*) and Ananou (*Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*), decide to live separately from their husbands and spare themselves the trouble of co-wives' rivalries.

One can see in the portrait of Dukpè's mother a near perfect character, in the sense that she is an epitome of goodness. In his analysis of Amadi's work, Palmer (1968), as quoted by Taiwo (1981) insists that the creation of perfect or near-perfect characters is a task of considerable difficulty, which Amadi has undertaken with great success. To a large extent, a similar creation applies to the character of Modukpè's mother. She is

described as a rare beauty and someone who easily forgives offenses. Little wonder that she is able to survive in the midst of animosity, intimidation and co-wives rivalry which characterise Jean Paul's household. The heroine describes her mother as goodness personified: "Ma mère était la bonté personifiée et je ne comprenais pas pourquoi aucun homme n'avait pu la garder définitivement pour la rendre heureuse dans un ménage." p.32. "My mother was goodness personified and I could not understand why no man could keep her permanently in marriage and make her happy." The near perfect character of Modukpè's mother could be the reason why she is able to remain in the marriage before getting to her wits' ends. Her packing out of her matrimonial home is because she does not want to engage in unhealthy rivalry which is a regular practice in Jean-Paul's home. Modukpè mother's ability to cope with her co-wives shows the trait of Womanism in her as she encourages sisterly bond through her resolve not to engage in co-wives' rivalry.

One of the woman's earlier survival strategies is passivity; she decides to remain in her unhappy marriage enduring rather than enjoying the union until the passive strategy loses its potency. When she flees her matrimonial home, her children become victims of displaced aggression as they receive curses from their father on a regular basis and are encumbered with house hold chores by their stepmothers. According to Modukpè:

...mes marâtres étaient très heureuses de se débarrasser des corvées domestiques sur la petite adolescente que j'étais alors. Ainsi, je devais, de retour au collège à midi, apprêter le repas pour la maisonnée avant de reprendre le chemin des classes de l'après-midi. p.23

...my stepmothers were very happy to rid themselves of domestic chores which they laid on the then little teenager that I was. Thus, I must, on return from college at noon, prepare meal for the household before returning for afternoon classes. p.23 (Our translation)

The use of the word *corvée* represents forced labour and this connotes compulsion in whatever these women are doing in the home. Children whose mothers die or move away from the harem become targets of oppression by stepmothers, which is the experience of Modukpè and her siblings; the reason why women choose to remain in their matrimonial home even in the midst of oppression. Psychologically, children in polygamous homes are rejected, unloved and develop low self-esteem. The desire to be loved may be one of the reasons why Modukpè falls for the deceit of Robert. This desire

is expressed by the heroine when she escapes from her father's house to live with her mother in Cotonou:

A Kotonou,... j'étais heureuse. Je me promenais à travers les rues et j'étais heureuse. J'allais à l'école toujours à pied, mais j'étais heureuse. Je regardais ma jeune sœur vivre et j'étais heureuse. Je n'avais pas plus d'argent de poche qu'avant et j'étais néanmoins heureuse... parce qu'autour de moi, il n'y avait qu'amour. p.34

At Kotonou,...I was happy. I used to stroll along the streets and I was happy. I was always walking to school, but I was happy. I watched my younger sister grow and was happy. I did not have more pocket money than before nevertheless, I was happy ...because there was just love around me. p.34 (Our translation)

The several repetition of "*I was happy*" implies that mothers and their children are not happy in most polygamous settings. Modukpè's new environment is devoid of oppression of wives, co-wives' rivalry and neglect of children, no wonder that the only way to express her feeling is by repeating the statement "I was happy". Modukpè is experiencing love for the first time in her life and she is drunk in that love. Polygamy also gives birth to intra-gender conflict. Ogunsina (1985) maintains that, "the theme of rivalry, envy, malignity, malice, suspicion and ill will is conspicuously present...sometimes, it is the husband's affection, partiality and or devotion to the most junior wife that leads to jealousy and malignity. p.61 Akorede, (2011) opines that "intra-gender conflict is a struggle or disagreement within a group which may or may not be gender specific". She also insists that "the use of hostility and enmity within the women group is an example of intra-gender conflict which many African writers have explored to depict the bitter rivalry that exists between and among women." p.61

The critic considers the relationship between and among women in many oral and written literatures of Africa as depicting a basic pattern of violent and non-violent conflict. She also insists that women, especially co-wives, mother-in-laws and their daughter-in-laws are usually believed to be antagonists because of the conflict that exists among them. These conflicts are prevalent in Sembène Ousmane's *Xala* (1976), Buchi Emecheta's *Joys of motherhood* (1979), Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* and *Un chant écarlate* (1979 and 1981) among others. In her own opinion, Hortense Mayaba, author of *L'engrenage* and *L'univers infernal*, two of our chosen novels, advocates solidarity and tolerance among women claiming that problematic mothers' in-law must bear in mind the

fact that they also have married daughters. Also, difficult and saucy daughters' in-law must also remember that they constitute tomorrow's mothers in-law. This is no doubt the Womanist's method of advocating sisterhood as antidote to intra-gender conflicts.

Modukpè's highhanded father treats his numerous children like servants and on one occasion, one of his daring children makes attempt to change this attitude by using his father's special cup and tasting his wine. Infuriated that one of his children dares use his cup, he screams: "Qui a touché à mon goblet?" p.25 "Who touched my cup? The special cup owned by Dukpè's father is personified as being "enthroned" on his dining table. That is, the cup is so much respected that it is given the attributes of a king seated on a throne: "Mon père possédait un gobelet en faïence bleu-ciel qui trônait sur sa table à manger et que nul n'était autorisé à utiliser à par lui". It is not surprising that a man who is venerated by several women will also have every of his property occupy the same position. Moments of high tensions are attained during the power tussle between "Jean-Paul" (Dukpè's father) and "Satanik" (Dukpè's elder brother) because the latter used the former's cup and drank his wine. The patriarch's special cup is described thus by the narrator:

Mon père possédait un gobelet en faïence bleu-ciel qui trônait sur sa table à manger et que nul n'était autorisé à utiliser à part lui. C'était dans ce gobelet qu'il aimait boire sa boisson favorite...Même quand on avait à peine de quoi manger à la maison, le vieux veillait toujours à sa provision de vin...p.25

My father had a sky-blue earthenware cup enthroned on his dining table and which nobody except himself was authorised to use. He loved to drink his favourite wine with this cup... Even when there was hardly food in the house, the old man always ensured that he had his regular supply of wine. p.25 (Our translation)

This father's attitude of ensuring that he had his regular supply of wine while his household starves negates the objectives of Womanism which seeks the wellbeing of the genders. However, when none of his children owns up to drinking his wine, Jean-Paul gives Dukpè's younger brother (the yet to be proved suspect), a resounding slap which throws the lad to the other end of the room. Unable to bear the assault on his younger brother, Satanik confronts his father and with a furious look confesses: "I drank your wine, for I had been craving for it as much as you, father!". The father screams at Satanik for daring to challenge his authority. Much tension is created here that the reader expects

the worst to happen. It is a confrontation of giants, a David and a Goliath, the father armed with a bludgeon and the son armed with youthful boldness. After a period of suspense the father brings down the weapon he earlier raised up with the intent of hitting Satanik and walks away from the scene. This confrontation is symbolic: it exposes child abuse, conflict between the old and the new, between tradition and modernity as well as direct challenge of patriarchal authority and highhandedness. Culture which places fathers in the position of autocrats is hereby challenged by a child who is a victim of oppression.

The scene between “Satanik” and Jean Paul appears to be partly successful but still lack some high level of artistic success. The relative success seems to be attributed to the courageous declaration of Satanik that he used his father’s cup and drank his wine. This reveals to the audience the identity of the culprit and exonerates the boy who is wrongly and brutally punished. It may end up a complete success if the reader is told the reason why Jean- Paul’s attempted assault on Satanik is aborted. One may infer that the dopping of the weapon is a defensive strategy employed by the father in the sense that Satanic’s display of courage calls for caution. The young man may decide to strike back if his father uses the weapon on him or his reaction may be violent. Wives and children do not normally challenge a patriarch’s authority and therefore the young man’s display of courage is a violation of the norm which put a stop to child abuse. The fact that Satanic is neither fearful nor apologetic shows that rebellion is his own reaction to oppression through patriarchal laws. By challenging the aspect of the African culture that places children in subordinated positions, Satanic therefore succeeds in emancipating himself and his siblings.

Child abuse can also make a child hardened and become nonchalant to discipline like the case of “Satanik”. Jean-Paul once attempts to hit Modukpè with a club for daring to visit a friend and returning home at about 8pm. This makes the latter take refuge in the home of her mother’s relative from where she thereafter joins her mother in Cotonou where the latter resides after separating from her husband. Modukpè’s mother regularly recounts to her children her experience in a polygamous marriage full of quarrel, jealousy and animosities among others. Modukpè’s mother seeks emancipation within the African cultural context by separating from her husband without divorcing him. Separation is her own way of resolving co-wives rivalries. Thus, she portrays her inclination towards the promotion of healthy family units as a basis for the structuring of wholesome societies.

As for Freddy, Modukpè's husband, he resorts to polygamy because his wife has an only child (a girl-child) for him. Information from the grapevine exposes Freddy's infidelity, lies and lack of consideration for his wife's feeling. The day Modukpè gets wind of her husband's infidelity, the latter returns from the office, greets her lovingly and reminds her of his unflinching love for her. Modukpè burst into tears because of her husband hypocritical attitude and she reveals the fact that she is aware of his double dealing. Like Robert, Freddy also succeeds in causing depression and disappointment for Modukpè who queries her husband's infidelity: "Pourquoi tu ne m'as rien dit, chéri? Pourquoi as-tu laissé la rue m'informer..." Freddy's response paints the picture of a smart character:

Je remercie la rue qui te l'a dit...J'attendais l'opportunité pour te mettre au courant. Je te connais ma chérie; je connais la femme que j'ai épousé par amour...L'autre a voulu des enfants de moi...Je t'aime et je t'aimerai toujours. p.117

I thank the street that informed you...I had been waiting for the opportunity to inform you. I know you my darling; I know the woman I married for love...The other one wanted children from me ...I love you and I will always love you. p.117 (Our translation)

The statement, *I know the woman I married for love...the other wanted children from me...* reveals the extent to which women are turned to tools in the hands of men. If sincere love is at the foundation of the first marriage, then the fact that the marriage produces an only child should not be the reason for a second marriage. Also there is an irony in the statement: "the other wanted children from me..." It is Freddy's dissatisfaction with a single child that leads to his search for more children in a second marriage; it is not the other woman who approaches him, requesting to have children from him. Moreover, the attitude of Freddy in engaging in extra-marital affairs is pure deceit because by getting intimately involved with Mélanie, he succeeds in breaking his marital vow and treating his wife with disrespect. Instead of owning up to his fault, he gives prominent place to gossips, claiming to be appreciative to the "street" for helping him inform his wife of his disrespect for her and his double standard way of life. It is through such gossips that Mireille (Mariama Bâ's *Un chant écarlate*) gets wind of her husband's double dealings. The import of the "street" in the above quotation is that male deception is exposed, the victim is unhappy especially getting the information through gossips.

Modukpè reacts to her Freddy's infidelity by questioning his attitude. This shows that although she does not want to sue for a divorce (Womanist's inclination), she wants him to acknowledge and correct his wrongdoing. By so doing, Modukpè seeks emancipation within the African culture without suing for divorce. Freddy's claim of undivided love for Dukpè is latter put to test towards the end of the novel when he continues to stay away from home just to be with Mélanie. Modukpè is no doubt in conflict with Mélanie for stealing her husband from her. Although unhappy with the situation, she accepts to come to terms with polygamy:

Il avait éloigné de moi, car il était toujours fourré chez l'autre. Mélanie bien sûr...Maintenant, il avait instauré le système de tours comme cela se pratique dans les foyers musulmans polygames. Mais nous n'étions pas musulmans, Freddy, Mélanie et moi ; pourtant, il m'avait fait comprendre que de plus en plus, cela se passe ainsi dans plusieurs ménages de nos jours. Et puis la première épouse, usée par les vicissitudes du temps comme je l'étais, devait faire preuve d'ouverture d'esprit et accepter de partager plus ouvertement son époux avec une autre. p. 125

He had stayed away from me, for he always stuck to the other's place, Mélanie of course...Now, he had instituted the turns system as practised in polygamous Muslim homes. But we were not Muslims, Freddy, Mélanie and I; nevertheless, he had made me understand that, it is often the practice nowadays in several homes. And besides, the first wife worn out by the vicissitudes of time as I was had to be open minded and accept to share her husband freely with another. p.125 (Our translation)

This is one of the ways in which patriarchal laws do not favour the female gender. In a polygamous setting, women are meant to satisfy men and they are replaced by younger girls as they grow older. When a woman is advanced in age, she finds it difficult to get a suitable marriage partner when she separates from or divorces her husband and if she gets a partner, she does not seem to earn any respect from the patriarchal society. Unhappy with the lot that befalls her in a patriarchal society, Modukpè does not cease to question cultural practices used as a spring board to oppress her and her *sisters*. By the statement: "...he had made me understand that it is often the practice nowadays in several homes", Freddy is making it categorically clear to Modukpè that there is nothing she could do about his adulterous life style because "every man does it" or rather "you better accept your destiny as a woman and quit complaining". Freddy's counsel to his wife to be open minded and accept to share her husband freely with another is the language of

oppression, which is also an attack on polygamy and male infidelity. Freddy's position will be welcomed by agents of patriarchy as well as the patriarchal society but a wife who dares counsel her husband to be open minded and accept to share his wife freely with another will definitely incur the wrath of the society.

Freddy's justification for his infidelity is endorsed in the African cultural context where a couple is expected to have children especially male children who are needed to perpetuate the family's name. Having a single child for Freddy is insufficient when it is viewed from the African context moreso that the only child is female. Freddy's unwillingness to reveal to his wife the existence of his sons born out of wedlock is an indication of his unwillingness to hurt the latter. Another justification for Freddy's establishment of a parallel home appears to be influenced by his assertion that: "the first wife is worn out by the vicissitudes of time" and probably no longer as sexually active as she used to be when she was much younger. Thus, the counsel to accept to share her husband with a much younger one who will satisfy him sexually. The establishment of a parallel home shows that Freddy's type of polygamy is different from that of Jean-Paul and Hodou where wives cohabit with their husband. Freddy does not cohabit with his wives because he is educated (a medical practitioner) but his education notwithstanding, he is still influenced by his cultural milieu. Modukpè could be said to be experiencing abandonment for the second time: firstly, when Robert impregnates her and denies responsibility of the pregnancy and secondly when Freddy takes another wife and stays away from his matrimonial home to live almost permanently with Mélanie. Modukpè's experience with polygamy is almost similar to that of Ramatoulaye who is abandoned by her husband Modou Fall when he marries a second wife, the teenage Binetou. The difference between Modukpè and Ramatoulaye's experience is that the former's husband visits her home occasionally while for the latter, it is complete abandonment as his wife and twelve children did not set their eyes on him until his death.

Although Modukpè does not conceal the fact that she is not favorably disposed to polygamy, unlike Aïssatou, she rejects the option of divorce and like Ramatoulaye (*Une si longue lettre*), adopts the conciliatory method by accepting to share her husband with a co-wife. She laments: "A mon âge, où irai – je encore.... Je suis chez moi, et l'autre habite là où Freddy l'a mise... p.117 "At my age where will I go... I am in my own house and the other lives where Freddy placed her" (translation is ours) In other words, the question Modukpè is asking is, "who will marry me at my age? Will I not be ridiculed by the society (whose laws are propagated by the same people oppressing and humiliating me)

for wanting to play the old harlot?" Women are therefore constrained in a patriarchal society from taking certain steps that appear too daring or taboo. This is more or less an indictment on the African culture where a woman is compelled to reevaluate her worth or relevance within the society if she attempts to leave her matrimonial home. The society is quick to explain extra marital activities on the part of a man while a woman who engages in such act is treated like an outcast and sent packing. Modukpè seems to belong to the same school of thought as Ramatoulaye as refuses the option of divorce; her own coping strategy:

Je suis de celles qui ne peuvent se réaliser et s'épanouir que dans le couple. Je n'ai jamais conçu le bonheur hors du couple, tout en te comprenant tout en respectant le choix des femmes libres. p.108

I am one of those who can realise themselves fully and bloom only in marriage. Even though I understand, even though I respect the choice of liberated women, I have never conceived of happiness outside marriage p.108 (Our translation)

Modukpè's resolve may appear like a defeatist stance to the radical Feminist, but to the Womanist, concerted effort must be made by all to ensure that the family is always knit together. Womanist advocate cooperation between men and women in the fight against global capitalism, which oppresses Africans (male and female) and at the same time do not tolerate patriarchal subjugation of the African woman. They are opposed to individualistic racism and bourgeois vision of liberal Feminism, hostility against men, rejection of motherhood and marriage advocated by radical Feminism. Womanists also advocate sisterly love among women as an antidote to intra-gender conflicts. Ramatoulaye (*Une si longue lettre*) rejects Daouda's marriage proposal sequel to the death of her husband because she does not want to break the heart of a fellow *sister*-this is the Womanist attitude to polygamy.

Polygamy as oppression in this section is reflected through African cultural endorsement of the practice for the purpose of recruiting manpower as well as producing male children to carry on the family's name. It is also reflected in the fact that most African traditions endorse the acquisition of wives by a man but frowns at a woman who engages in extra marital affairs. Members of a given society are expected to enjoy equal rights and privileges; therefore, what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Modukpè's strength is demonstrated in her resolve to adopt Freddy's children from his

clandestine marriage and nurture them together with her only child for Freddy. She therefore becomes a spiritual mother to these children who are not the architect of Freddy's infidelity, thus revealing the Womanist penchant in her. This resolve could also be Modukpè's way of conforming to the cultural expectation of having male children carry on the family's name. This is similar to the position of Ma'am (Calixthe Beyala's *Maman a un amant*), who adopts all the children from Abu's mistresses in order to make up for her inability to procreate. The effect of polygamy on the wives in Jean Paul's household is wrangling as they compete for his attention while the children whose mothers separate from their father are usually maltreated by their stepmothers. The husband also has his dose of problems as he is regularly weighed down with conflict resolution. However, Jean Paul appears to enjoy the rivalry in his household as it affords him the opportunity of enjoying sumptuous meal from women who want to occupy the position of the most preferred wife.

In *Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*, Ananou leaves the village for town because of her daughter's desire to acquire post secondary education and her own resolve to break away from a polygamous marriage and co-wives rivalries. Ananou's stay in town exposes her to teachings on health and nutrition and the application of this knowledge makes her regain her beauty and youthfulness earlier lost as a result of several maternities: "... elle avait retrouvé un peu de sa jeunesse et sa fraîcheur d'antan. Les gens au village ne cessaient de lui faire des compliments à chacun de ses passages". "...she had regained a little of her youthful beauty and former freshness. The villagers did not cease to pass commentaries on her each time she visits the village".

Ananou is still seen as a threat by her by co-wives especially the youngest who is of the same age with her daughter : "La plus jeune femme de son mari est allée jusqu' à lui dire, qu'elle risquait désormais de leur arracher leur mari commun, puisque celui-ci ne voulait plus quitter sa chambre dès qu'elle mettait les pieds à Gandji". "Her husband's youngest wife went as far as telling her that she almost took away their joint husband, since the latter no longer wanted to leave her room the moment she set foot in Gandji". One cannot but notice a subtle jealousy in the above statement by Ananou's youngest co-wife. However, Ananou who ceases to struggle with several women over a single man, replies her co-wife: "...Mais non, ma fille! Je le regarde à peine". "...But no, my daughter! I hardly notice him" (13). Ananou's address of her youngest co-wife as "...ma fille!" "...my daughter!" is sarcastic as it is a subtle critic of child-marriage as well as an indictment of men who take as wives girls who belong to the age bracket of their

daughters and granddaughters. Nevertheless, Hodou's practice of marrying young girls appears to be culturally acceptable since in traditional settings, girls are married off when they attain the age of puberty.

Ananou's youngest co-wife's remarks (although jokingly made), is an insinuation of unhealthy relationships existing among Hodou's wives. There is therefore no doubt that this is a subtle complaint by the girl-wife. In a polygamous setting, it is only the emotion of the husband that matters; whatever feelings the wives have is immaterial, they have no choice than to suppress their own feelings which include the desire to be with their joint husband whenever they so desire. Child abuse as one of the effects of polygamy is manifested through the attitude of Hodou, Ananou's husband. Hodou builds his wealth on the strength of his numerous children and uses the wealth to increase the inmates of his harem, bringing in from time to time younger ones to replace a *fairly old* one. In fact, the children produced in the marriage are destined mainly for the farm work:

ainsi dès que l'enfant quittait le sein de sa mère, il avait sa place aux champs: on trouvait toujours une occupation pour chaque tranche d'âge, et la famille avait bâti sa richesse à force de ses bras. p.11

As soon as the child is weaned, his portion of farm work is reserved for him: there was always work for each age group, and the family had built its wealth by dint of its arms. p.11 (Our translation)

There is no doubt that these children are born primarily to be used as labour force, little wonder that even before being weaned, there is always a portion reserved for them in the family land. When married, these children continue to work for their father and there is no attempt to share to each of them portions of land as personal properties. Unhappy with this arrangement, Ananou suggests that the married ones be given plots of land to make them independent of their father. Hodou, her husband, considers this suggestion as unheard of:

A son dernier passage, Ananou avait émis l'idée de responsabiliser un peu plus les garçons, afin qu'ils commencent à se sentir moins dépendants de lui. Son époux l'avait regardé d'un air ahuri en lui demandant: Responsabiliser!...Tu crois qu'ils ne sont pas responsables tes fils? Regarde Codjo ton cadet, il vient de prendre sa troisième femme et il en est à son sixième gosse. Ce n'est pas une responsabilité ça! Ce n'est pas ma faute si ton aîné Bossou est incapable de se démettre de l'influence

trop grande d'Ablawa son épouse qui, d'ailleurs ne lui donne que des filles! p.12

During her last visit, Ananou had opined that the boys be made more responsible so that they can become less dependent on their father. Her husband, astounded by the suggestion retorted: Make them responsible!...Do you think your sons are not responsible? Look at your younger son Codjo, he has just married his third wife and a sixth child is now added to his family. Is that not being responsible! It is not my fault if your eldest son Bossou is incapable of freeing himself from the strong grip of Ablawa his wife, who only gives birth to girls! p.12 (Our translation)

Hodou's understanding of responsibility is the maintenance of a polygamous marriage as well as giving birth to numerous male children. Giving birth solely to female children implies that the "culprit" (wife) loses her place in her matrimonial home. Failure by the husband to send such a wife packing connotes weakness on the part of the former. Hodou even accuses his wife of trying to send him to an early grave by her counsel which the patriarch considers a sacrilege:

Hodou Rogatien avait appelé à témoin tous les dieux de la collectivité, en disant que sa femme voulait hâter sa mort, puisqu'elle préconisait le partage du patrimoine ancestral de son vivant. Pour Hodou Rogatien, il n'était pas question de libérer son troupeau de mâles sur lequel il veillait, comme un bon patriarche surveille sa descendance p.12

Hodou Rogatien called upon all the gods of the community as witnesses, declaring that his wife wanted to hasten his death, since she recommended the sharing of the ancestral heritage in his life time. For Hodou Rogatien, there was no point liberating his male herd which he watched over, like a good Patriarch watches over his descendants. p.12 (Our translation)

The metaphor *herd* denotes the leadership role that Hodou plays in his family. His children are never independent; after marrying and having children of their own, they are still treated like little children under the dominance of a patriarch. A herd of flocks is devoid of direction and is therefore perpetually under the guidance of a shepherd. In the same vein, Hodou's children, including the married ones are still expected to take instruction from him. It is not surprising that Hodou's father threatens Ananou with divorce if she dares give birth solely to female children; bearing of female children is

supposed to be only with the permission of the patriarch. Giving permission to a woman to give birth to a particular gender seems to place the patriarch in the position of God the creator who decides the gender of a child. The idea of not willing to liberate his male herd connotes a sort of slavery; apart from dominating the women, the patriarch also dominates the children including the married ones. The women are severally oppressed in the sense that apart from being oppressed by their husbands, they are also oppressed by other patriarchs in the family especially their father in-law.

However, from the cultural point of view, Hodou's vast plots of land inherited from his father is supposed to be jointly cultivated by the patriarch and his male children. Allocating individual plots to them occurs only when he ceases to be the patriarch of the family through death. Also, from the cultural point of view, Hodou's marriage to several wives is endorsed by the norm since it is the traditional African way of "recruiting" manpower for farm work. In addition, OGuyemi (1985), presupposes that polygamy enables older wives to be free from matrimonial obligations such as domestic work and sexual responsibility. This appears to be one of the reasons why Ananou "decreed in her inner mind that her husband will no longer see the roundness of her thighs and will no longer taste that particular warmth of their deep intimacy" p.11. Parents who struggle to get their daughters settled in Hodou's home, seem to be motivated by poverty, since by so doing, the girls are guaranteed of comfort to an extent.

Polygamy/Intra-gender conflicts could be minimised if not totally eradicated through female bonding, awareness and empowerment via education. Ramatoulaye exhibits female bonding when she refuses Daouda's marriage proposal after the death of her husband. Fatima, her friend considers unfathomable Ramatoulaye's rejection of such offer from a sincere suitor. However, Ramatoulaye's rejection of the proposal hinges on revolt against patriarchy, and advocating female solidarity. Why break the heart of Daouda's wife, a *sister*, by becoming her co-wife? If all women could have the heart of Ramatoulaye, polygamy/intra-gender conflict if not totally eradicated would at least be drastically reduced.

4.4 Patriarchal Oppression in Selected Novels of Flore Hazoumé

This section encompasses the analysis of selected novels of Flore Hazoumé (*La vengeance de l'albinos and le crépuscule de l'homme*). Patriarchal oppression is shown in the novels through the male characters' use of derogatory language in addressing their

wives, male violence, wife battery and intra gender conflicts provoked by men. Also, the characters have defined roles and relationships as husband and wife, father and daughter, mother and daughter, sisters-in-law, and lovers. This binary relationship engenders the aforementioned forms of oppression while the female characters' portrayal of their experience is depicted through the use of literary devices such as metaphors, similes and flashback among others.

4.4.1 Wife Battery in Flore Hazoumé's *La vengeance de l'albinos*

Apart from conjugal deception, women are also victims of physical and psychological violence as many female characters in Francophone African women's novels express their disapproval of patriarchy through their resistance to oppression. Wife battery is the unlawful infliction of personal violence on one's wife or a behaviour exhibited by a man with the intention of physically hurting his wife. The reason is to perpetuate male dominance over women as well as female subjugation. This is portrayed in Flore Hazoumé's *La vengeance de l'albinos*. The story begins with the third person narrative technique with the announcement of the death of Mésangou, his family's reaction, the arrival of Mado cohabit with the family and her eventual departure. The narration however switches from third to first person when Lydie begins to read the diary presented to her by Mado as a gift. In the diary is the account of the earlier relationship between Mado and Mésangou which could not culminate into marriage because the latter is poor and incapable of helping Mado's starving parents. Also in the diary is the account of the *marriage* between Mado and Diallo who though not rich provides daily sustenance for her starving parents. Finally is the resolve of Mésangou to get rich at all cost by engaging in human sacrifice, his life of wealth, politics, marriage to the president's niece, Mado's escape from a brutal *husband*, her reconciliation with Mésangou, and the latter's revenge mission (making her his mistress with the aim of oppressing her).

Violence and objectification of the female character through the use of the language of oppression is portrayed in the relationship between Mado and Diallo. By offering money and food to an impoverished family, Diallo demands in return sexual and later marital relationship with their daughter. Mado, the main female protagonist offers herself willingly to Diallo as a sacrificial lamb in order to prevent her parents from starving. An example of Diallo's use of language is expressed in the quotation below:

Je vais te tuer! Après tout ce que j'ai dépensé pour toi! Je t'ai habillée, je vous ai nourries toi et ta famille; après tout

ce que j'ai fait pour toi? Tiens, prends ça sur ta belle petite gueule!...Tu vas venir avec moi, dans mon pays et tu verras comme on dresse des chiennes comme toi chez moi! p. 51-53

I am going to kill you! After all I have spent on you! I clothed you, I nourished you and your family; after all I have done for you? Here, take this on your little beautiful mouth!...You are coming with me, to my country and you will see how dogs like you are treated in my country
p. 51-53 (Our translation)

Mado's sincere assertion to Diallo that she does not love him, provokes the latter, who assaults her, presents her with unprintable words as *wedding gifts* and threatens her with murder. The expression: *Hurler en me secouant, Il me gifla, ta petite gueule, Prendre par le cou, I have bought you so you must obey me, You are SOLD*, are treatments meted out to a criminal and Diallo's use of language is not appropriate for a human being not to talk of a wife. The metaphor 'dog' is the image of an animal that can be killed without being questioned; it also connotes something that is filthy and the action of holding Mado by the neck is an indication that Diallo is ready to strangle Mado at the slightest provocation. In spite of the assaults on her, Mado categorically insists that she is not in love with Diallo. Hazoumé thus reveals a Womanist's consciousness as she relates gender problems to that of class.

Diallo's assertion that Mado has no choice than to concede to his sexual demands because he provides for her parents' up-keep is making a prostitute of the young lady. The statement: *Après tout ce que j'ai dépensé* is making a merchandise out of a human being. "...Tu es à moi,...tu m'obéis, tu n'as rien à dire. Tu es à moi je t'ai achetée. Tes parents t'ont *vendue*, ma chère, *VENDUE*, tu comprends ça! p. 60." "... You are mine,...you have to obey me, you have no say. You are mine, I have bought you. Your parents have *sold* you to me, my dear, *SOLD*, do you understand that!" p.60. In this context, the choice of the word "my dear" is sarcastic in the sense that a person so dear to another is treated like a valued possession; the way a jewel of inestimable value is treasured and not like a dog in the case of Diallo and Mado. On getting to his country, Diallo places Mado in a common room where family members sleep together on mats and he leaves afterwards for another business trip while the beating and humiliation continues each time he returns from a trip. Female members of Diallo's family who are supposed to welcome the innocent girl and integrate her into their culture treat her with suspicion probably because of the language barrier between them.

Mado's parents are comparable with Juliette's (*Trois prétendants...un mari*) and Binetou's (*Une si longue lettre*) who prefer to sacrifice their daughters' happiness on the altar of materialism. Without doubt, poverty is responsible for these parents' "exchange of their daughters for material benefits. Diallo's sisters do not exhibit Womanist's traits as they collaborate with the former to oppress his wife by making her their subject of regular gossip and mockery; an indication that some women are agents of male oppression. This is known as intra-gender conflict. These women act contrary to Womanists position of the complimentary roles of men and women in the struggle for the African woman's liberation. Binetou's mother, Tante Nabou (*Une si longue lettre*), Juliette's mother, grandmother, female cousin, (*Trois prétendants...un mari*) as well as the numerous traditional and modern women who wish to maintain the status quo of giving out a girl in marriage to the highest bidder appear to be patriarchal agents of oppression. Womanists do not encourage the actions of this group of women, rather, they insist on female bonding as a panacea to intra-gender conflicts.

While consenting to Diallo's request to take Mado along with him to his country, the latter's greedy father counsels: "-Vraiment mon fils, tu es bon,... si tu veux, frappe-là, tue-là, elle est à toi, fais-en ce que tu veux." "-My son, you are really good,... you can beat her up, kill her if you so wish, she is all yours, do to her as you so wish". The counsel of Mado's father, which is tantamount to male's oppressive use of language, is only a pointer to the patriarchal placement of a woman in some traditional African societies. Assaulting one's wife is used as a punitive measure taken against a supposed "erring" wife. This echoes the ideology of Abesolo, the patriarch, (*Trois prétendants...un mari*) when counseling the male members of his extended family: "Je vous le répète, battez vos femmes!...Même chose pour vos filles...les filles ne sont rien" (Acts 1&5) "I repeat, beat-up your wives!... Likewise your daughters...girls are nothing." Authorising a man to beat up one's daughter and even kill her is a dangerous signal for the girl-child. If a child means nothing to the man who fathered her, then of what value will she be to the "stranger" to whom she is being handed over? This is related to the pathetic story of teenage girls who are sold into prostitution. A case in point is the story in Ed Pilkington's article (*Half the Sky: How the Trafficking of Women Today is the Greatest Moral Outrage of Our Century 2010.*) where Srey Neth and Momm are among girls from Bangladesh sold to a brothel owner. As for Srey Neth, the beneficiary of the sale is her own cousin.

The Holy Bible gives the following counsel in the book of Deuteronomy 16:19 as regards the influence of gifts: "...for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the

words of the righteous.” If it is possible to manipulate a wise and a righteous person with gifts, how much more will it be possible to influence unwise parents like Mado’s to lose their sense of judgement; for no wise father will endorse the physical assault or murder of his daughter. Although Mado loves Mésangou passionately, but like Binétou (*Une si longue lettre*), Diallo’s gifts, although not given in love, blinds her eyes and pervert her sense of judgment; she releases herself as a lamb to be slaughtered. Mado claims she does not have the right to go against her family’s wish, even if her decision to obey her family is detrimental to her well-being. One expects her to assert herself by refusing to enter into an intimate relationship with someone she does not love.

Juliette, the main female protagonist in Guillaume Oyono’s *Trois prétendants...un mari* has a different view of the issue. She refuses categorically to be sold by her parents and clan who are depending on her for enrichment by planning to trade her in marriage to the highest of three bidders. Juliette is able to achieve this because of her acquisition of Western education and the consciousness of her right as a human being. Thus, Juliette succeeds in emancipation herself within African cultural context as she marries the man of her heart desires and yet receives the approval of her family and her clan. Despite the fact that Mado is not an illiterate, she concurs with her parents’ decision probably because of the benefits she hopes to receive from the marriage; regular food. Moreover, she justifies the offer of herself as a sacrificial lamb:

Comment expliquer à mon père, à ma mère, que je n’aimais pas Diallo? Comment expliquer cela à des gens dont la seule préoccupation était: “Que mangerons nous demain? “Diallo était le messie, le saviour: grâce à lui, ma famille faisait bombance tous les jours. p. 55

How do I explain to my father, to my mother that I did not love Diallo? How do I explain that to people whose sole preoccupation was: “What are we eating tomorrow? “Diallo was the messiah, the saviour: through him, my family was assured of daily provision. p.55 (Our translation).

However, the messaic function ascribed to Diallo has hypocritical connotation; it is oppressive and possessive in nature for it ceases immediately he takes Mado to his country and out of the reach of her parents. While Mado is being tortured by Diallo (in his country), her parents are starving to death because Diallo discontinues his *messianic* function. Womanism frowns at this type of sacrifice because it is not different from prostituting for material things (except that this time around, the act of prostitution is with

one man), and the acceptance of the myth of male chauvinism. Prostituting for one man echoes the description of women by Simone de Beauvoir (1949), when she asserts that the treatment a married woman receives from her husband is not different from that of a prostitute. The difference according to her is that, a prostitute has numerous clients while a married woman has just one client. The position of de Beauvoir is reiterated by Sherifa, professional mentor of Fidaus, ElSaadami's protagonist in *Women at point zero*, when she presupposes that women are all prostitutes because they sold themselves at varying prices.

Womanists advocate self-assertion on the part of the female member of the society and this is reflected in Juliette's rejection of her family's plan to marry her off to the highest bidder. Sequel to her experience of torture in Diallo's house, Mado begins to assert herself via protests as she begins to rebel against a life of torture. She also attempts to initiate female bonding with her sisters-in-law by preparing one of her country's dishes. Self-assertion and initiating sisterhood qualifies her as a Womanist. With the aid of gestures, she attempts to explain the recipe to her sisters-in-law and this incurs the wrath of Awa, Diallo's elder sister. Unaware to Mado, it is a taboo for a younger person to teach an elder, more especially if that younger person is a foreigner like Mado. This "sin", inadvertently committed, is the source of her affliction via a terrible skin disease which disfigures her appearance and almost takes her life:

Le droit d'aïnesse régissait tous les actes de la vie. Plus jeune qu'Awa, et de sucroït étrangère, il était indécent que je lui enseigne quoi que ce soit; bien au contraire, je devais m'informer et apprendre auprès d'elle. p.73

The right of seniority governed all actions of life. Being younger than Awa, and of foreign descent, it was not decent for me to teach her anything; on the contrary, I must learn from her. p.73 (Our translation)

Diallo's sisters are supposed to welcome Mado into their family, orientate her into the culture of their land which is quite different from Mado's and put a stop to the objectification of the female gender orchestrated by men. But they welcomed their sister-in-law with warfare, possibly regarding her as a rival with a mission to "monopolise" their brother's "wealth". Culture is accentuated here as Mado's affliction by her sisters-in-law is influenced by their suspicion of her behaviour since she is from a different culture. Juletane (Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*), receives a warm reception (as she arrives her husband's country), from her in-laws who are eager to teach her the language and

culture of the land. However, the knowledge that her husband deceives her into nuptials (while in her country), makes her cut off every contact with her in-laws. Womanist discourage intra-gender conflict and advocate sisterhood insisting that women love one another and quit being accomplice in the oppression of their gender.

Diallo returns from a business trip, discovers his wife's predicament and treats her with disdain: "Je t'ai achetée pour ta beauté, à quoi tu me sers maintenant?... Quand je pense que j'étais venu pour me reposer"! p. 76. "I bought you because of your beauty, of what use are you to me now? When I thought I had come to rest"! p.76 (Our translation). In the perspective of Diallo, Mado is a mere object of art, useful only for its aesthetic value; she no longer serves the purpose for which she is bought and she is now discarded or rather left to die at the witch doctor's "clinic" hence the statement:...à quoi tu me sers maintenant?...of what use are you to me now? After taking Mado to the native doctor, Diallo abandons her in her critical state and leaves for another business trip leaving behind a letter informing her of his proposed return in six months time: Below is the letter from Diallo to Mado:

Mado,

Je te laisse aux bons soins du guérisseur. Je viendrai te chercher dans six mois. La vie au village t'apprendra à respecter les traditions et les aînées

Diallo (p.77).

Mado,

I leave you in the care of the healer. I will come for you in six months' time. Life in the village will teach you to respect traditions and elders.

Diallo (p.77)

(Translation is ours).

The taunting remark about "respecting traditions and elders" has to do with an innuendo alleging that African traditions are used as oppressive tools against the female gender. Who decides what respect for elders implies? How does teaching a sister-in-law how to prepare food from a culture different from hers imply disrespect for traditions and elders? It is as if ignorance is no excuse for *disrespecting traditions and elders* in Diallo's culture. It is a fact that Diallo and his extended family are aware that Mado is from a different culture and neither understands their language nor their traditions. If eventually there is an infringement on the traditions of the elders, is the punishment supposed to be something close to slow death? As Walker's Womanism undercores "interest in cultures

and people outside the American context”, Mado’s effort at integration into Diallo’s culture appears inadequate as she learns the culture in an unpleasant manner. Mado recovers, discovers a missionary hospital where she engages in a menial job before Diallo returns for her. By taking up a job in a missionary hospital, Mado becomes economically independent, thus continuing the journey of self assertion. Subsequently, she escapes from imminent death by returning to her country.

On her arrival, Mado reconciles with Mésangou. The latter’s decision to renew his relationship with the former is simply for the purpose of revenge. He purchases a building in his former slum, pulls it down and replaces it with a luxury villa which he offers to Mado as a gift. The construction of the villa particularly for Mado is done before the reunion of the former lovers because of Mésangou’s belief that Mado will reappear in his life. After their relationship is renewed, Mado complains of being abandoned by Mésangou.

...Claquemurée dans ma luxueuse cage, je me traînais de pièce en pièce toute la journée en espérant les visites de l’homme que j’avais tant bafoué. Que voulait il réellement? L’amour, la tendresse?... p.110

...Shut up in my luxurious cage, I dragged myself from room to room throughout the day expecting the visits of the man I had so much ridiculed. What did he actually want from me? Love, affection?... p.110 (Our translation)

The metaphor luxueuse cage refers to Mado’s lifestyle after her reunion with Mésangou. A cage is a type of prison reserved for preys and connotes limitation. As the movement of a prey is limited to the four walls of the cage so is the life of Mado limited to the four walls of her villa. Although, a luxury villa, it has everything that should make a woman comfortable but it also serves the function of a cage because while living in the villa, Mado is completely cut off from friendship with men, earlier abandoned by Diallo and later by Mésangou. Mado is indeed an animal trapped in a cage; caged by her society which fails in its responsibility of making provisions available for starving citizens and caged by her parents who insist that she sacrifices her future marital bliss in order to keep them from starving. She is also caged by Diallo who marries her only to possess her and by Mésangou who renews his relationship with her for the purpose of revenge. Mado’s cage experience is somehow similar to that of Juletane who becomes confined to her room when she resolves to cut off her contact with her husband’s immediate and extended family.

On one of Mésangou's infrequent visits, Mado announces that she is pregnant. The response of Mésangou is humiliating: "Un enfant avec toi, Mado, tu veux rire! Autant le faire avec la première jument venue! p.110" "A child from you, Mado, you make me laugh! One can do likewise with any available mare! p.110. (Our translation). Mado is now reduced to the level of a sex worker, an object, whom Mésangou now uses the wealth he acquires from blood sacrifice to oppress. Not oblivious of Mado's state of destitution sequel to her escape from Diallo's country, Mésangou could have offered her a job, being the second most important personality in the country. He vows not to visit her again until she delivers but promises to send all that she needs for her upkeep and the baby's. When crisis erupts in the country, he plans an escape with his family to Europe. Before his departure, he visits Mado, notices she just delivers a two week old baby and takes the baby from her to join his fleeing household. Every attempt to plead with him to release her baby falls on deaf ears. Like a wolf deprived of his little ones she pleads:

Mésangou, je t'en supplie, ne fais pas ça,...c'est ma fille,
Je l'ai portée, j'ai souffert...Si tu veux, nous disparaîtrons,
mon enfant et moi...reprends tout ce que tu m'a donné,...
s'il le faut, je me prostituerai. p.116

Please Mésangou, don't do that to me,..., that is my
daughter, I carried her, I suffered...If you wish, I and my
baby will disappear,...take back all you gave me,...if it is
necessary, I will prostitute. p.116 (Our translation)

Mésangou goes away with the baby with the following parting statement: "que feras-tu seule, sans mon argent avec mon enfant?...C'est pour cela, Mado, que je prends ma fille" p.116. "what will you do alone, without my money and having custody of my daughter?...It is for this reason that I am taking my daughter from you" p.116. Mado's experience of oppression is summed up in the fact that she becomes a tool to be possessed by the two men in her life; Diallo for sexual purpose and Mésangou as an act of vengeance. Mado's desperate plea to Mésangou to allow her custody of her two-week old baby elicits sympathy from the reader. Mésangou keeps the baby from Mado until he (Mésangou) dies. After Mésangou's death, and Mado is invited by Juliette (Mésangou's wife) to stay in the family house. Her request that the identity of Lydie's mother be revealed to the twelve year old girl results in a violent argument that sends Mado out of the family house. Mado's desire to remarry after an earlier calamitous experience reveals her belief in the family and Womanist's penchant in her. However, one expects her to explore other

avenues of financial empowerment, believing that she will eventually remarry instead of accepting Mésangou's offer of reunion and accepting the status of a mistress.

Juliette, Mésangou's wife and the president's niece does not argue with her husband when the latter oppresses her. When her husband informs her of his desire to renew his relationship with Mado (who earlier jilts him), she considers the idea incomprehensible but rather chooses not to put up an argument. In the words of Mésangou:

Julienne n'insista pas...Elle n'insistait jamais...Julienne se contentait de mes réponses en souriant doucement. Était-ce une preuve d'amour, de confiance, de soumission ou tout simplement le prix de la tranquillité? p.108

Julienne did not insist...She never insisted on having her way...She gave me a gentle smile as a sign of satisfaction. Is it a proof of love, confidence, submission or simply the price of maintaining peace? p.108 (Our translation)

One does not cease to wonder why Juliette obeys her husband without questioning his actions. After the demise of Mésangou, Julienne's respect for the former's instruction makes her refuse categorically to reveal the true identity of Lydie's mother when she invites Mado to live with the family. Her husband is also quick to notice the attribute of submissiveness in his wife as pointed out in the above quotation. Maintaining silence and being in agreement with her husband whether he is right or wrong implies that Juliette is an epitome of patriarchal oppression. The *price of maintaining peace* is invariably the reason for Julienne's silence, implying that all women (illiterate and educationally empowered) are victims of oppression. However, the educationally empowered ones may choose not to behave like Ramtoulaye whose voice becomes muffled and her vision of herself distorted until the death of her husband when she regains her lost voice and rejects oppression.

One may also argue that Juliette's emancipation is revealed through her silence as she spares herself the trouble of being argumentative and probably becoming a victim of wife battery. The place of culture is highlighted here as she refuses to be confrontational like the traditional African woman who accepts to share her husband with other women. However, Julienne's complete emancipation is associated with the death of her husband as she becomes economically empowered and initiates sisterly bond with her husband's mistress. Julienne becomes a Womanist as she provides a home for Mado, thereby integrating her into her family. Womanism advocates self assertion on the part of the

African woman as a way of rebelling against retrogressive cultural norms and culture. This is invariably a suitable response to the menace of wife battery treated in this section

4.4.2. Male Violence and Rape in Flore Hazoumé's *Le crépuscule de l'homme*

Male violence is a behaviour exhibited by a man with the intention of hurting or intimidating his wife. On the other hand, rape is a type of sexual assault usually involving sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual penetration carried out against a person and without the person's consent. Female oppression in this novel is apparent in the beastly treatment of women during the period of political upheaval as well as in the marital relationship between Bernard and Emilienne Gassana. Emilienne, relates to her daughter, Edith, the circumstances surrounding the birth of the younger lady and the violence meted on Emilienne and her own mother (Edith's grandmother), through rape. The horrible experience of Emilienne and her mother who are ruthlessly raped by a group of soldiers in a period of political crisis leads to the death of Emilienne's mother and for the former, it results in pregnancy and the birth of her daughter Edith, whom she describes as having a "mosaic and faceless" father. The language used by the writer to describe the rape paints a picture of horror and disgust. While dying of illness, Emilienne recounts to Edith the circumstances surrounding her birth as well as the former's painful experience of rape:

Et je vis ma mère se faire prendre comme une bête par ces hommes qui, à tour de rôle, abusèrent d'elle. Et j'entends ma mère hurler de douleur et de honte. Elle supplie Dieu et en réponse ne reçut que les rires et les gémissements de ces hommes transformés en fauves. Lorsqu'ils eurent fini avec elle, ils l'abandonnèrent comme un chiffon usé et souillé. p.151

And, I saw my mother taken like a beast by these men who sexually abused her in turns. And I hear my mother scream in pain and shame. She beseeches God and only received laughter and groaning in response from these men turned beasts. When they were done with her, they abandoned her like a dirty and worn-out rag. p.151 (Our translation)

A careful look at the use of language here reveals evidence of male violence, bestiality and heartlessness as expressed by the narrator. The words include among others: *se faire prendre, à tour de rôle, abusèrent d'elle, hurler de douleur et de honte, Elle supplie Dieu et en réponse ne reçut que les rires et les gémissements de ses hommes*

transformés en fauves, ils l'abandonnèrent comme *un chiffon usé et souillé*. A woman is overpowered by a group of soldiers who derive great pleasure in turning her into a sex slave. She helplessly surrenders her body to these men who possess the advantage of strength and number; hence the expression *se faire prendre*. As if the woman becomes a horse that people ride on for pleasure, the men take turns to ride on her. Screams of pain and shame emanating from her which connote physical and emotional pain are ignored by the soldiers. The cry of shame is the lamentation of a mother who instead of being treated with respect is turned into an unwilling prostitute in the presence of her daughter. Her prayers to God to come to her aid attract mockeries from the soldiers who regard themselves as custodian of power and immune from the wrath of God.

The description *comme une bête*, a similie that likens the manner Emilienne's mother is raped to the way in which a cow taken to an abattoir is being treated reveals traits of male violence, bestiality and heartlessness on the part of the perpetrators of wickedness. The image of a beast pouncing on its prey is also evident in the narration. The woman is a prey, the beast are the men; beast in size, power and in animalistic and heartless behaviour. The characteristic of a beast is to devour with murderous hatred and this is exactly the attitude of the group of soldiers towards mother and daughter. The screams of Emilienne and her mother's represent physical, emotional, psychological pains and agony. Physical for being raped by several men, emotional and psychological for being reduced to a rag that is being mocked and ridiculed for daring to plead for mercy. In the perspective of Emilienne, the result of the rape is summarised thus: "saccagé mon existence" "destroyed my existence".

The peak of the wicked act perpetuated by the soldiers on whose shoulders lie the responsibility of defending the nation and its citizens is described in the following words: "les rires et le gémissements de ses hommes transformés en fauves" Rejoicing and enjoying the cry and plea of a woman who is raped to a state of stupor is another act of bestiality. The narrator, unable to find the appropriate words to describe the men paints the picture of human beings who lose every quality that makes them human and now have the qualities of beasts. In the eyes of Emilienne, these soldiers are wicked and heartless devourers who tear into pieces and discard the left over for the vultures to complete the unfinished task. Little wonder that Emilienne's mother commits suicide by jumping into a pit at the sight of another group of soldiers whom she erroneously believes are coming to her with the intention of finishing the worn out-rag left over by the previous group of soldiers. Not satisfied with the assault on Emilienne's mother, the rapists turn to her:

Tous...par le même désir bestial, se tournèrent vers moi...Pendant des heures interminables, je fus l'objet de plaisir, l'esclave sexuelle de ces dizaines d'hommes. L'un après l'autre, ils abusèrent de moi...pendant que les autres en spectateurs dénaturés, tapaient en cadence des mains et des pieds au rythme des reins de leurs compagnons. Une fois repus, ils me repoussèrent du pied, sortirent de la maison. p.151

All of them...overtaken with the same beastly desire, turned to me...For endless hours, I was the object of pleasure, the sexual slave of these men who were about ten in number. One after the other, they sexually molested me....while the others turned themselves into unnatural spectators, tapping their hands and feet to the rythme of their colleagues' loins. When they were satisfied, they pushed me back with their feet and left the house. p.151(Our translation)

The adjective *beastly desire* reiterates the earlier assertion that these men are no longer human; their sexual urge transcends that of mortals and is only comparable with that of wolves. Sexual abuse of mother and daughter is also spiced with mockery and ridicule as the soldiers watch while each of them take turns on their victims, clap their hands and rejoice while the victim's plea for mercy is greeted with mockery. The victim is only released after being reduced to a dirty and worn out-rag. |Mother and daughter are turned into object of man's sexual desire and these are reduced to sexual slaves. The imagery of the worn-out rag, wrecked body and existence used to describe the treatment of Emilienne by the soldiers becomes the picture of her future life. These men devalue her life, her mother's and that of her unborn baby. Hazoumé divulges a Womanist's consciousness as she relates gender problems to the larger issues of class and race; effects of colonialism and neo-colonialism on the African continent. This is because wars and bad governance in Africa are offshoot of the imperialistic inclination of the Europeans. Alice Walker's and Kolawole's Womanism seek emancipation for Blacks in the diaspora and Africans who are plagued with such crisis.

Worldwide, whenever there is violence in a country, community or village men consider it as an opportunity to devalue the female gender. Baker (2014), asserts that men (patriarchs) are responsible for war because, according to her, war begins and ends with them. In addition, she did not mince words in her assertion that masculine culture rooted in violence has historically devalued women. Groups that use rape to debase women include among others ISIS and Boko Haram who justify wartime rape through twisted

interpretations of religious doctrine. Many victims of rape during war are suffering from fistula disease and HIV; an example is Mwamini who is raped in her village by armed men. Baker (2014), also narrates the story of Mary who is forced to watch while several men raped her 10 year-old daughter Nyalaat to death; thereafter the men take turns to rape her.

Victims of rape who escape to refugee camps are again raped by soldiers who are able to slip into the camp through gaps in the fence and rape whichever women they could catch. In the words of one of the victims: “It happened to all of us: little girls, grandmothers. They didn’t care; the rules are simple...If you calm down when they are raping you they won’t beat you. But if you resist, they will beat you, even so much to use gun in you”. Instead of the perpetrators of rape being stigmatised, it is the victim that is treated with disdain. Little wonder that Fabien Mwira (Baker’s article, 2014), abandons his wife Judith Niraneza when he discovers that she has a child through rape. Pressure from his family makes him return but he treats the child with abhorrence. When Niraneza asks for money to feed the little girl or buy her clothes, she is beaten in return and is asked to present the request to the child’s father. It is also reported by the same author that in Eastern Congo, not less than 50,000 children are the fruits of rape and this record spread over the last two decades.

This seems to be the reason why Bernard (Flore Hazoumé’s *Le crépuscule de l’homme*) treats his wife (Emilienne) with disrespect. Her marriage is saturated with “worn out-rag” treatment meted out to her by Bernard, the soldier who marries her in return for protection in a time of crisis. The child who is the fruit of the rape is a victim of identity crisis and is described by her mother as having a “faceless father” “Ton père n’a pas de nom, ton père n’a pas de visage” “Your father is nameless, your father is faceless”. p.155 (Our translation)

Having a faceless father implies that her father is non-existent. Little wonder that she ends up studying what people consider a strange course (the only student of medicine specialising in autopsy). The interest appears to be connected with the fact that she is conceived in the period of war, bloodshed and death. Benard, a soldier whose fiancée dies of rape offers protection and marriage to her mother (Emilienne) on condition that she accepts the identity of Claire (Bernard’s dead fiancée). Emilienne accepts the offer but begins to experience oppression in her marriage the moment she decides to be self-assertive and reject the identity of a dead person:

Il se contentait de m'appeler Claire...Pendant des années, j'ai acceptée de jouer cette comédie, j'ai accepté de me mettre dans la peau d'une morte qu'il avait intensivement aimée. Jusqu'au jour où je me suis révoltée, ...tu sais comment il me traite...p.154

He took delight in calling me Claire...For years, I accepted to play that role, I accepted to put myself in the skin of a dead person whom he had loved dearly. Until the day I revolted,...you know how he treats me...p.154 (Our translation)

The condition which Bernard gives to Emilienne (insisting that she takes the identity of a dead person) as prerequisite for his offer of marriage and protection during political crisis is oppressive in nature. Refusal to allow the woman take up her true identity years later is also a form of oppression. The resemblance between Claire (Bernard's fiancée) and Emilienne is remarkable and this informs Bernard's decision to use her as a substitute. Emilienne obliges to the condition which appears harmless to a vulnerable woman in times of war. Edith is aware that her mother does not have a happy home and is doing everything to hide the reality from her daughter and acquaintances. Every effort by Edith to find out the genesis of her parents' love relationship and the reason for their strained relationship usually meets with a brick wall.

However, trouble begins the moment Emilienne seeks self-definition, self-valuation and self-retrieval as proposed by Walker and Kolawole. She insists on her true identity as the living Emilienne as opposed to the dead Claire. Consequently, her marriage with Bernard becomes saturated with oppression, humiliation and physical assault: "Son mari la maintenait fermement le dos plié et répétait comme une litanie: -Tu n'es rien d'autre que Claire, as-tu compris, tu n'as pas de choix."-Her husband held her firmly, with bent back and repeated like a litany:-You are no other than Claire, do you understand, you don't have a choice." " - ...je veux être moi-même, je suis Emilienne, je ne suis pas morte, je suis vivante, entends-tu criait-elle en tentant de se relever" p. 181. "...I want to be myself, I am Emilienne, I am not dead, I am alive, do you hear me she screamed attempting to stand up". " -Tu es Claire et tu resteras Claire" p.181. "-You are Claire and will remain Claire". Insisting that Emilienne continues to take up the identity of a dead woman, is reminding her daily of her tortuous experience in the hands of the soldiers who "destroyed her existence" and caused the death of her mother. Instead of offering his wife protection, Bernard daily tortures her, putting a knife in the wound that is yet to be healed. In a flash back, Edith remembers when as a child she overhears her mother's

screams. She remembers her indiscretion when driven by curiosity and frightened by her mother's screams, she spies her parents through the hole of the lock.

Making Emilienne cry daily on purpose is Benard's way of oppressing his wife and her experience of torture is not hidden from her daughter. Every attempt by Edith to unmask her mother who is definitely living a life of falsehood meets with disappointment. Emilienne uses make-up and dark glasses to cover up her problems: "Edith avait constaté que, pour sa mère, le parfum et les lunettes de soleil avaient la même fonction. Les lunettes noires lui permettaient de dissimuler ses yeux au beurre noir, et son parfum les bleus de son âme meurtrie" p.46. "Edith had noticed that, for her mother, parfum and sun shades had similar function. Black sun shades enabled her conceal the black scar in her eyes and for her parfum, the bruises of her dying soul" p. 46 (Our translation)

Being the wife of the Supreme Court judge does not guarantee Emilienne immunity from oppression. Her experience of sorrow is similar to that of Jacqueline (*Une si longue lettre*), Mireille (*Un chant écarlate*), Juletane (*Juletane*) and Emilienne (*Furreurs et cris de femmes*). Although the aforementioned women did not experience physical male violence but they are victims of male psychological violence. The scar in Emilienne's eyes reveals evidence of physical assault by her husband while the bruises of a dying soul reveal the loss of the desire to live. Instead of offering protection and marriage to Emilienne, Bernard only succeeds in joining affinity with "these soldiers who, after haven raped my mother, wrecked my body and my entire existence."

The self-assertive stance of Emilienne towards the latter part of her life is commendable as she purposes to take up her true identity. This implies that she becomes victorious at the end as she put on a fighting spirit like Alice Walker's self-assertive women protagonists and Mary Kolawole's powerful pre-colonial and post-colonial women. On the other hand, Edith refuses to assert herself in response to the oppressive attitude of Pascal. The relationship between Edith and Pascal (her boy friend) is no different from that of master and servant. Pascal and Edith are students of the same university, the former an arts student and an activist while the latter is a student of medicine. Pascal is supposed to be from a humble background since he lives in one of the most miserable slums in town while Edith, daughter of a minister in the cabinet of the president lives in a mansion and rides an expensive car. Every day, Pascal takes a bus to a part of the town where Edith gives him a ride to the campus as a way of saving cost. A study of their conversation reveals that Pascal, like a military man, issues instruction to

Edith while the latter obeys without questions. Below is an extract of one of their conversations:

-Mets la radio, la chaîne une, ordonna-t-il. Elle s'exécuta de mauvaise grâce. Elle détestait ce ton péremptoire, mais malgré tout, elle obéit. La voix nasillarde du journaliste lui écorcha les oreilles. Edith éclata de rire et s'écria: -Il serait mieux dans la presse écrite avec sa voix de canard, celui-là. -Tais-toi, écoute un peu! p. 28

-Switch on the radio, the first channel, he ordered her. She carried out the order with bad grace. She hated this peremptory tone, but despite that, she obeys. The journalist's whiny voice grated on her ears. Edith burst out laughing and exclaimed: He would have been better off in the written press with his duck's voice.-Shut up, listen a little! p.28 (Our translation)

On one occasion, Edith pays Pascal a surprise visit wanting to ascertain whether the latter loves her: "M'aime-tu? Do you love me? Pascal answers: "-Si je te responds oui, me croirais-tu? "Will you believe me if my answer to you is yes?" When leaving his place, the young man makes no attempt to see Edith off. Since there is no evidence to prove that Pascal loves Edith, the latter begins to have a feeling that Pascal is interested in her for some reasons known to him alone. The origin of her birth probably attracted her to the activist; the daughter of a number of soldiers who raped her mother. Pascal who is also from a mysterious background needs a relationship with a lady who is the seed of war, hatred, rebellion and bloodshed. Pascal leads riots in the university where he claims to be a student in the faculty of arts, but in reality, he is an impostor. He initiates and leads a revolution in the country only to disappear mysteriously when it culminates in bloodbath. Edith tolerates the master servant relationship between her and Pascal due to dearth of male admirers, unlike her friend Evelyn (a colleague in the school of medicine and daughter of Rachael a minister in the cabinet of the president) whose beauty attracts men to her.

A period of anarchy sets in and children take over government while weapons that are the prerogative of trained military officials find their way into the custody of these children. Consequently, lawlessness becomes the order of the day. This is a Womanist indictment on a society which fails in its responsibility of protecting its citizens especially the young ones. The future leaders who are supposed to receive proper leadership training are abandoned to take over leadership position which they are not matured to occupy. Karim, a male character, exhibits Womanist inclination as he assumes responsibility of

scouting about for food to feed starving refugees. In addition, as Womanism is concerned about the liberation of male and female members of the society, prominence is given to the creation of refugee camps, a place of refuge and rehabilitation for victims of war. Hazoumé reiterates a Womanist consciousness as she relates gender problems to the larger issues of class and race; colonialism and post-colonialism. The war that begets anarchy is orchestrated by the former European administrators whose imposed president is unacceptable to the unfavoured tribe.

Rachael Marwama, a minister in the cabinet of the president is another victim of female oppression. An orphan from a disadvantaged tribe, she receives western education solely by being sexually abused by her teachers and a wealthy Lebanese trader:

Elle sentit sur son corps et dans son corps les doigts immondes de cet instituteur Tsatu qui en échange des cours d'orthographe et de mathématiques lui demandait d'offrir son corps à ses caresses. Elle n'avait que onze ans. A treize ans, elle écrivait et lisait aussi bien qu'un enfant Tsatu. A cet âge, elle ne pouvait plus compter le nombre d'amants-instituteurs qu'elle avait dû subir pour atteindre ce niveau d'instruction. p.79

She felt on and in her body the vile fingers of that Tsatu teacher who in exchange for lessons in orthography and Mathematics demanded that she offers her body to be caressed. She was only eleven years old then. At age thirteen, she was able to write and read as well as a Tsatu child. At that age, she could no longer count the number of teachers she kept as lovers to attain that level of education. p.79 (Our translation)

Rachael's hatred for the teacher who sexually assaults her, is expressed in her description of the latter's vile and dirty fingers; an outpour of extreme disgust. As a little girl, she is compelled to do what she detests because the society places her at the mercy of men who are agents of patriarchy. Male teachers who are supposed to offer assistance to the little girl convert her into a prostitute to the extent that as at age thirteen, she loses count of the number of male teachers who sexually abused her. At age fifteen, a wealthy Lebanese trader whose size is described as being as fat as his bank account joins the group of men who molests the teenager in her bid to fund her education:

A quinze ans, orpheline dorénavant, elle accepta d'être prise en main par un gros commerçant libanais aussi gras que son compte en banque. Son plus grand plaisir était de la prendre sur des sacs de riz de cinquante kilos avec des rôles de porc qu'on mène à l'abattoir. Elle échange de ces

ébats, il payait à Rachael des cours de steno-dactylo. p. 79-80

Orphaned as from age fifteen, she accepted to give her body to a stocky Lebanese trader who is as fat as his bank account. His greatest pleasure was to have sex with her on fifty kilos of bags of rice, groaning like a pig being led to an abattoir. In exchange for these fun and frolics, he sponsored Rachael's courses in stenography. p.79-80 (Our translation)

The metaphor *râles de porc groanings of a pig* is used to describe the animalistic attitude of the Lebanese trader as he transforms Rachael into an object of sexual desire and pleasure; this is nothing but the objectification of the female gender. The Lebanese whose bank account is compared to his large physical size has the option of offering the girl a job in exchange for school fees and her teachers could choose to offer free lessons to the teenager instead of mocking and humiliating her-this is oppression and abuse of power. Nobody seems to care for the little orphan whose desire is to evolve from her state of poverty and become a success in life; rather the men she approaches for help turn her into a prostitute. The metaphor or image of a pig used in the quotation connotes the filthy behaviour and mentality of the Lebanese trader; who is indeed not different from a pig. Rachael's experiences with men while in search of sponsorship for her education hunt her ceaselessly and bring shame. The experience is described as "les souvenirs honteux qui ne cessaient de la harceler" "Shameful memories which hunt her ceaselessly" The thoughts give birth to sorrow and punctuate every success she records in life.

Although Womanism does not encourage Rachael's fund raising style in a bid to receiving formal education, however, the fighting spirit in her which births an aspiration to attain the higher echelons of society through education must not be glossed over. Rachael's struggle to be educated is not without a price as she considers education as a means of self-realisation. It also shows a meeting point of economic and gender problems. Almost all men in this novel appear to be negatively portrayed for their part in female oppression as well as their abuse of power except for few ones like Karim, leader of the refugee camp. Karim is conferred with the responsibility of providing food and security for starving refugees and this is what Womanists advocate-liberation of the genders (male and female). Female oppression in this section is depicted through wife battery, rape and male violence.

4.4.3 Polygamy as Oppression in Flore Hazoumé's Works

Polygamy as oppression is depicted in Flore Hazoumé's *La vengeance de l'albinos* where Mésangou establishes a parallel union with Mado. Although Julienne, Mésangou's wife is not happy with the trend of event, she grudgingly accepts her fate. On one of Mésangou's visits to Mado, Julienne complains to her daughter Sakia, about her father's extra marital affairs: "-Il va encore la rejoindre, il ne rentrera pas avant plusieurs jours,..." "-He is going to meet her again, only to return after many days, ..." The latter furiously retorts: "...Regarde comme il te fait du mal ainsi. p.10 "...Look at the manner in which he afflicts you. p.10 One can extrapolate from the above quotation that Juliette is unhappy with the idea of sharing her husband with another woman even though her husband spends fewer times with Mado. Sakia's response symbolises rebellion and the call for self-assertion on the part of the older woman. Thus, Sakia exhibits Womanist's inclination as she encourages her mother to liberate herself from oppression.

At the news of the death of Mésangou, Julienne offers Mado (Mésangou's mistress), lodging in her residence. Welcoming Mado to her apartment, Juliette reassures her of a peaceful co-existence between them: "-Mado, celui pour lequel nous nous battions n'est plus, faisons la paix. -Mado, the architect of our quarrel is no more; let us reconcile our differences. The above statement of Julienne implies that there exists intra-gender conflict between the two women. The rivals co-habit for a while until Mado requests that her identity as Lydie's biological mother be revealed to the girl. Julienne's respect for Mésangou's wish makes her refuse categorically to reveal the true identity of Lydie's mother. A quarrel ensued and Mado is sent packing. Accomodating Mado reveals Julienne's resolve to initiate sisterly bond with her rival; a penchant for Womanism where emphasis is placed on sisterhood as a means of liberating the female gender. However, this attempt at conflict resolution is temporal due to Mado's insistence that she be introduced to Lydie as her biological mother because the adolescent is her only possession. Julienne who considers the request as selfish retorts :

Tu es dans cette maison parce que tu as été expulsé de l'appartement que Mésangou te payait, et tu ne sais où aller. Tu n'as plus rien, plus un sou. Je te nourris, j'élève ta nièce Lisa...Et bien, je suis celle sans qui tu crèverais de faim!
p.19

You are in this house because you have been sent packing from the apartment Mésangou rented for you, and you have nowhere to go to. You no longer have anything on you, not a single dime. I feed you, I train Lisa your

niece...And, I am the one without whom you would starve! p. 19 (Our translation)

The quarrel assumes a new dimension as Mado attempts to prove that she is the preferred one saying...*Mésangou ne t'aimait plus, je vais te dire ce qu'il disait de toi...*" "*Mésangou no longer loved you; i am going to tell you what he used to say about you...*" Juliette interrupts her with her own revelation:

-Non!...c'est moi qui vais t'apprendre ce qu'il disait de toi ...Mado, c'est une poule, elle appartient à tout le monde et à personne; Mado, c'est un sexe et un portefeuille qui ne demandent qu'à être remplis. p.19

-No!...I am in a better position to tell you what he used to say about you...Mado is a hen, she belongs to everyone and to nobody; Mado is a sex organ and a suitcase that only require to be filled up p.19 (Our translation)

The metaphor of a *hen*, *sex organ* and *suitcase* is *Mésangou's* description of Mado as one who goes with any one who is ready to supply her daily needs. This is in reference to Mado's choice of Diallo instead of *Mésangou* and the fact that on her escape from Diallo's country, she still accepts *Mésangou's* offer for the renewal of their broken relationship. It is not surprising that as a form of revenge, *Mésangou* constructs a villa for her in the slum the duo earlier inhabit to remind her of their past relationship where they usually meet in the slum. It is equally to pass a message to Mado that the wealthy and powerful man she now desires is the same man she earlier rejects because he is a product of a slum. This shocking revelation about *Mésangou's* description of Mado as reported by *Julienne* earns her two violent slaps. As a response to the assault, *Julienne* gives Mado two days' notice to leave the house adding that *Lisa*, her niece could stay behind since she is innocent of all that transpired between them. On the day of her departure, Mado gives *Lydie* a secret parting gift; a box housing a diary, the story of her life...The cause of the animosity between these women is the fact that they are sharing the same man (husband to one and concubine to the other). Agents of patriarchy (men) are either directly responsible for the oppression of women or indirectly responsible by setting them against each other through polygamous marriage that gives birth to intra gender conflict.

The point about polygamy expressed here is that although *Julienne* and Mado live in separate apartments, they are unhappy with the idea that each of them shares the love and affection of the same man. Mado feels she has more right to *Mésangou* because she happens to be in relationship with the latter before *Julienne*. On the other hand, *Julienne*

believes she has more right than Mado because she is legally married to Mésangou. In this section, polygamy as oppression is reflected in the act of infidelity against Julienne (Mésangou's first wife) and the infrequent appearance of Mésangou in Mado's apartment. Since the man chooses to *acquire* the two women, he should be able to give each of them equal attention. Failure to do this is tantamount to exhibiting an abuse of power, an act that should not in any way be encouraged.

Polygamy in this novel as in any other novel where it is depicted favours only the male gender. Whereas, for the female gender, it provokes co-wives' rivalries which is the genesis of intra gender conflicts. Julienne exhibits Womanist traits by adopting the daughter Mado has for Mésangou. Also, her resolve to invite Mado to live in the family house is a sign of forgiveness for Mado's action of sharing Mésangou with her as well as initiating sisterhood. In addition, asking Lisa (Julienne's niece) to remain in the house after the eviction of her aunt reveals Julienne's resolve to play the role of spiritual mother to the young girl.

4.5 Patriarchal Oppression in Selected Novels of Hortense Mayaba

This section covers the analysis of *L'engrenage* and *L'univers infernal*, (selected novels of Hortense Mayaba). Patriarchal oppression depicted in the novels include wife prostitution and intra gender conflicts. Defined roles and relationships of the characters are husband and wife, father and daughter, mother and daughter, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. This binary relationship engenders the aforementioned forms of oppression while the female characters' portrayal of their experience is depicted through the use of literary devices such as metaphors and allusions among others.

4.5.1 Wife-Prostitution in Hortense Mayaba's *L'engrenage*

Wife prostitution is a sexual act by a married woman for financial reward. A number of wives who engage in prostitution use it as a last resort to take care of family obligations. Some married women who engage in prostitution have the consent of their husbands as they consider it as an alternative to starvation. Like in the previous novels already analysed, evidences of female oppression abound also in Hortense Mayaba's *L'engrenage*. Hortense Mayaba relates gender problems to the larger issues of class and race; colonialism and neo-colonialism. This is manifested during the political crisis experienced by the target country in the novel (The Republic of Benin). Women suffer more because they are the ones on whose shoulders lay the burden of feeding hungry children. In addition, they become victims of displaced aggression as the economic

recession hits their husbands. As a way of response, their husbands instruct them to engage in prostitution in order to provide food for the family. According to the narrator: “C’est ainsi que dans le souci de maintenir les leurs en vie, des hommes envoyèrent leur épouses faire le trottoir” p.135. “Thus, in their concern to keep their families alive, men sent their wives to prostitute”. In so doing, a woman is reduced to an object that is sold in the market. Her body, which is supposed to be sacred and treated with great honour, is now dishonoured with her permission and that of her husband whose responsibility is to ensure that her sacredness is preserved. This is an indictment of neo-colonialism where African leaders fail in their promise to emancipate their citizens from poverty and oppression.

This phenomenon brings to mind the existence of a curse upon a land. This is revealed in the warning God gives to the Israelites when he places before them blessings and curses in the book of Deuteronomy 28. Obedience to his commandments attracts blessings while disobedience attracts curses: “Thou shalt betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her...” King Solomon, a king described by the Holy Bible as the wisest man on earth in his days advises against such attitude in the book of proverbs: “Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well...Let them be only thine own, and not strangers with thee. Let thy fountain be blessed and rejoice with the wife of thy youth” Proverbs 5:15-18. In other words, a man’s wife belongs to him alone and not to be shared with another for financial or material benefits.

The political and economic situation of the country which made wives prostitutes is thus described by the author: “Douze années d’indépendance et plus d’une dizaine de gouvernements!...Quelques hommes politiques faisaient de cet état une table de ping-pong”. “Twelve years of independence and more than ten different governments!...Some politicians turned that country into a table tennis board” p.12. The men who patronise these wives turned prostitutes are either the oppressive men in government or wealthy business men who have connection in government. These clients are opportunists who exhibit abuse of power through their sexual molestation of vulnerable women. This group of privileged ones fights relentlessly to ensure that the masses are not freed from oppression. They consider women as tool and go out of their way to ensure that this “right” to use women as sex slave is not taken away from them. In return for sexually molesting other men’s wives, they release money to them in crumbs. The use of the female gender by family members as prostitutes to solve the problem of poverty in the family is evident in Calixthe Beyala’s *Tu t’appelleras Tanga*. Tanga, the main female

protagonist is compelled by her parents to go into prostitution in order to solve their economic problem.

An almost similar story is in Flore Hazoumé's *La vengeance de l'albinos*, where Mado, the main female protagonist is turned into a sex slave by Diallo, a male opportunist who provides subsistence for her poverty stricken family. In exchange for providing food for her family, Diallo treats her like his slave and subjects her to physical torture. Another close example is that of Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* where a couple marries off their daughter to her friend's father as a ticket for the family's social mobility into the bourgeois family. In as much as Womanists want liberation for men and women they are however not in support of this type of alternative-prostitution.

Women in *L'engrenage* become fed up with the degradation of women folk and therefore react by staging a protest against the administration. This is similar to women's protest in Sembène Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, where militant women like Ramatoulaye and Penda among others support the male members of the society to protest against the oppressive policy of the colonial administrators (the French government). They organise protest marches and confront the police when provoked. On the other hand, Mayaba's women employ some African women's traditional crude method of protest-posing naked to confront an adversary. In as much as Womanists are not in support of female oppression in whatsoever manner, they are nevertheless not in support of any form of female mobilisation where women have to go naked as a weapon against oppression. The act of stripping themselves naked is another way of concurring with the oppressors by exposing and dishonouring what is supposed to be treated as sacred.

The last straw that breaks the female camels' backs is the government's refusal to pay striking workers' salaries. The strike is a reaction to government official's mismanagement of the national treasury. In the course of women's mobilisation to confront the authority, one of the women retorts: “-six mois déjà que nos maris n'ont plus de salaires. Six bons mois sans argent et sans rien...Si nous n'y prenons garde, nous finirons par vendre nos biens pour manger” p.35 “It's already six months that our husbands no longer receive salaries. Six good months without money and with nothing...If we do not take steps, we will end up selling our properties for food” p.35 (Our translation). As the government does nothing to cushion the effect of the economic crisis, many women end up selling not just their properties but their bodies for food.

Female oppression is evident in the women's placement at home, no thanks to the tradition of the elders as well as the oppressive rule of the government in power. Like *Les*

bouts de bois de Dieu, the public appearance of women to confront the government is a reaction to a long history of female oppression. The success of the women's public protest beget self-assertion at home and in public places. The conscription of women into the army in *L'engrenage* also enables them make mockery of the old tradition (the tradition of the ancestors) which confines women to the home, a tradition which is now gradually being eroded:

Les femmes apprirent à porter la culotte... Il était grand temps, pensèrent celles-ci, de respirer l'air de la liberté à la face du monde, mais surtout au foyer... Un bon coup de pied dans la tradition ancestral. Un autre coup de pied dans la sagesse de ces vieillards qui se prévalaient du savoir des aïeux. Eux qui avaient laissé croire que la femme n'était femme qu'en portant un pagne. p.15-16

Women learnt to put on knickers... They felt it was high time for them to breathe in the air of liberty before the whole world, but most especially in the home... A good kick at ancestral tradition. Another good kick at the wisdom of these old ones who insisted on ancestral wisdom. They made people believe that a woman was only synonymous with dressing in wrappers. p.15-16 (Our translation)

Reference is made to *culotte-knickers*, which, exclusively reserved for men, is now worn by women. In other words, rights and privileges hitherto the prerogative of men are now made available to women who won for themselves a number of rights and privileges in the course of the struggle for female emancipation. The expression: *respirer l'air de la liberté-breathing the air of liberty* also refers to putting an end to a number of oppressive policies at home and in public places. This reveals traits of Womanism in these amazons who succeed in asserting themselves in their homes and in public places. Liberty connotes the fact that a person in slavery, bondage or in chains is coming out of that situation. Women have been in this situation for ages; oppression at home and in the society. Reference is also made to giving a good kick at ancestral tradition and another good kick at the wisdom of these old ones who insist on ancestral wisdom. Old age is associated with wisdom but the wisdom of the old referred to here only succeeds in enacting oppressive laws that subjugate and oppress the female members of the society.

The reference to a woman being synonymous with wrappers could be linked to the assertion of Abessolo, the patriarch in Guillaume Oyono's *Trois prétendants...un mari* who insists on dress code and diet for women. Any attempt to break these laws incurs the

wrath of the old man who is the custodian of tradition in his community. Unfortunately, women having been subjected to mental and psychological oppression concur with these laws and this is the case with old Bella (the matriarch and wife of Abessolo) and a number of other women who are yet to be aware of their rights through education and female mobilisation.

The struggle of the women in *L'engrenage* against oppression in general and female oppression in particular is not an all female affair. Rather, it is done in conjunction with the support of their husbands and other male members of the society. This is the objective of Womanism as opposed to radical Feminism where men are considered as adversaries. Alice Walker and Mary Kolawole's Womanism underscores the significance of culture and the complimentary roles of men and women in the struggle for the African-American and African woman's emancipation. Female oppression in this section is therefore manifested through subjugating women at home and in the public as well as wife-prostitution, welcomed by families as an antidote to starvation.

4.5.2 Intra-Gender Conflict in Hortense Mayaba's *L'univers infernal*

Intra-gender conflict is a struggle or disagreement within a group which may or may not be gender specific. It also refers to the struggle or disagreement among individuals of the same gender. Akorede (2011), posits that hostility and enmity within the women group is an example of intra-gender conflict which many African writers have explored to depict the bitter rivalry that exists between and among women. Intra-gender conflict also includes rivalries among co-wives and among in-laws, most especially mother and daughter-in-law and wife and sisters-in-law. Intra-gender conflict in *L'univers Infernal* is the conflict between Tante N'Goné (Alioune's aunt and foster mother) and her daughter-in-law. Tante N'Goné waits endlessly for the return of her fiancé who travels abroad to represent his country in a military expedition during the Second World War. Nobody explains to her whether her fiancé dies during the war or elopes with another woman. The colonial masters who refuse to volunteer information about the whereabouts of one of their soldiers succeed in putting the woman into a state of depression. This is the situation of many women whose spouses or sons embark on official military expedition during the period of war. According to the narrator:

Tante Ngoné n'était pas mariée. On disait dans les coulisses qu'elle attendait son fiancé parti à la 2^{ème} guerre mondiale. Puis, au fil des ans, elle avait dû comprendre qu'il n'en

reviendrait peut être jamais. Vivant ou mort, elle n'en savait rien. p.20

Aunt Ngoné was not married. Reports from the gravevine had it that she was expecting her fiancé who left for the Second World War. Then, over the years, she had to come to terms with the understanding that perhaps he would never return. She could not ascertain whether he was dead or alive. p.20 (Our translation)

Several of these women are miserable because of the loss of their fiancés, husbands and sons. In the situation of death, these women are neglected because the benefits of their husbands are not paid to them, rather, the benefits are shared among the people in authority and it is not unlikely that, this is the reason why the authority refuses to give any information regarding the whereabouts of Tante N'Goné's fiancé. In the course of the endless wait saturated with sorrow and depression, she adopts Alioume, her sister's son whose parents die in an auto crash. As a tranquiliser for the pain caused by the non appearance of her fiancé and unfulfilled plans to start a home, she does all kind of menial jobs to ensure that her adopted son receives qualitative and quantitative education which eventually earns him admission into one of the tertiary institutions in Europe. Adopting Alioume is Tante Ngoné way of integrating her nephew into a family setting which qualifies her as a Womanist. This attitude is in tandem with Alice Walker and Mary Kolawole's Womanism which accentuates the promotion of healthy family units as a basis for the structuring of wholesome societies.

When rejoicing that she now has a family, a diviner (Mnmtpa) sows a seed of discord into the family by accusing her of being the architect of Alioume's illness. She becomes heartbroken, deserted by Alioume and his nuclear family especially Mariam, his wife who initiates the family's rupture with Tante Ngoné. However, the older woman finds a place in her heart to forgive her "son" for the sake of her love for him. In her state of desertion and depression, she is brutally murdered by Mariam because the diviner insists that it is only her death that will guarantee healing for the "son" whom she is accused of bewitching. In the words of the diviner:

Une femme de teint bronzé dans ta famille veut te manger
Je la vois d'ici brandissant sur toi son coutelas...Elle t'a
flanqué une maladie pour masquer son crime. De son
pouvoir surnaturel, elle a rempli ta vessie de lézards, de
crapauds, de souris...La médecine n'y peut rien et il serait
suicidaire de tenter d'être sauvé par une intervention
chirurgicale. p.18

A bronze-skin woman in your family wants to eat you up. I can see her from here brandishing her cutlass on you...She flanked you with ill health as a way of concealing her crime. With her supernatural powers, she filled your bladder with lizards, toads, mice...Medical intervention can't help you and it would be suicidal to attempt being resuced through surgery. p.18 (Our translation)

Is there a relationship between women and witchcraft? Why does the diviner not identify a man as being responsible for Alioume's illness in the course of his divination? Tante Ngoné is severally oppressed; oppressed by a fiancé who keeps her waiting and never returned from a journey, oppressed by a government who refuses to volunteer information on the whereabouts of its *citizen* sent on military expedition, oppressed by a diviner who succeeds in worsening her state of depression by accusing her of witchcraft and her adopted nephew who disowns her in her old age. The reaction of Tante Ngoné when Alioume accuses her of bewitching him is heart breaking. She collapses, weeps profusely and in the words of the narrator: "screaming like a baby". The idea of screaming like a baby connotes helplessness, defenselessness and vulnerability on the part of Tante Ngoné:

Elle pleura vivement et, tout à coup, elle se jeta à genoux à mes pieds...Tu oses me traiter de ce nom-là? Moi qui ai tout accepté, tout souffert pour ta survie..., si je ne voulais pas de ton bien, pourquoi n'avoir par refusé ta garde après le décès de ma soeur? p.33

She wept bitterly and, suddenly, she fell on her knees at my feet... You dare call me that name? I that accepted everything, that suffered to make sure you survived..., if I were not concerned about your well being, why have I not refused to take you into my custody after the death of my sister? p.33 (Our translation)

Weeping is synonymous with this woman's expression of sorrow and helplessness. When she feels her state of helplessness and hopelessness is over, an agent of patriarchy revives the sorrowful state by sowing a seed of discord in her family as she is faced with rejection. Instead of receiving his healing after the death of Tante Ngoné, Alioume's state of health deteriorates while Mariam ends up in prison. It is not unlikely that the source of Alioume's illness is the diviner who inflicts the deadly disease on him and initiates intra-gender conflict among the women in his life (wife and mother). The truism of this insinuation is revealed in the sense that Alioume's health continues to deteriorate after the

death of his aunt and in addition, Alioume is shocked when he notices Mnmpta at Tante Ngoné's funeral:

Je ne m'aperçus pas au sortir du cimetière, d'une silhouette courbée qui me suivit... Cette étrange présence était celle du devin Mnmpta... il parvint à me chuchoter tout bas: "et pourtant Alioume" p.45

I did not notice a bent silhouette following me at the exit of the cemetery... That strange presence was that of Mnmpta the diviner... he managed to whisper silently to me: "and yet Alioume" p.45 (Our translation).

The words which the diviner whispered to Alioume at his mother's funeral service is nothing but a mockery of a family of which he succeeds in triggering the death of their matriarch. The point in this novel is an indictment of intra-gender conflict provoked by the diviner which culminates in the destruction of a once happy family. Tante Ngoné manifests a Womanist trait by adopting Alioume and equipping him with qualitative and quantitative education. Her resolve to forgive Alioume and his wife sequel to the accusation levelled against her is invariably Womanist. While alive, she initiates sisterly bond (as proposed by Womanism), with Alioume's wife, a bond that only death succeeds in breaking.

4.5.3 Polygamy as oppression in Hortense Mayaba's Works

In Hortense Mayaba's *L'engrenage*, polygamy as oppression is a theme that is not as developed as it is in Fassinou's novels. A reference is made to Nguème, a polygamous man who has three wives and nine children but is desperately desirous of an additional wife; Zahima, a young lady who is already engaged to Bouma, a medical doctor. Bouma studies medicine abroad but on return to the country, he is welcomed with joblessness and decides to settle in his village to practice his profession. He is also the younger brother of Masola, an activist who organises the rally against the government and is rewarded with a jail term saturated with torture. Bouma's fiancée is coveted by the polygamous Nguème:

Nguème, un polygame ayant sous son toit trois épouses et neuf gosses, se mit à convoiter profondément Zahima, sa promise... envoya chez ses parents griots sur griot pour vanter sa richesse et saluer la beauté de la jeune fille. Celle-ci déclina sèchement son offer. p.109

Nguème, a polygamous man, having three wives under his roof and nine children began to deeply covet Zahima, his fiancée...he sent praise-singers to her parents to boast of his wealth and to flatter the young girl for her beauty. The latter coldly declined his offer. p.109 (Our translation).

The verb, *covet* and the adverb, *deeply* connote a negative desire in the sense that Nguème's desire for Zahima is mainly to increase his empire of wives and children. One may not be far from the truth as to insinuate that each of Nguème three wives were either once as beautiful as Zahima or even more beautiful than the girl. They are no doubt being replaced when they loose their beauty through several maternities and insufficient fund to care for them or whenever their husband deems it necessary to replace them. Little wonder that Freddy (Modukpè's husband) counsels her: "...la première épouse, usée par les vicissitudes du temps comme je l'étais, devait faire prevue d'ouverture d'esprit et accepter de patager plus ouvertement son épouse avec une autre" p.125 "...the first wife worn out by the vicissitudes of time like I was must be open minded and accept to share her husband freely with another" p. 125.

Nguème's wives no doubt do not need Freddy's counsel because they are already conditioned or compelled to be open minded and are always ready to share their husband freely with several other women. This rich man is supposed to exhibit Womanist's traits by helping to improve the lot of his fellow villagers via the donation of a building and medical equipment. By so doing, the young doctor becomes equipped to provide better medical care for the villagers; rather the polygamous man prefers to covet the young doctor's fiancée. Bouma (the young doctor) is qualified to be categorised as a Womanist since his establishment of a clinic in his village is a response to the dearth of medical services in his village. Although not stated in this novel, it is our belief that intra-gender conflict exists in Nguème's home because it is one of the traits of polygamous settings. Since it is impossible for a man to love three women equally, there is bound to be a favourite among the wives which will provoke reaction from other less favoured ones.

Polygamy, a form of oppression is also a source of intra-gender conflicts among women in such marriages as the women struggle to occupy the first position in the heart of their husband. Zahima's rejection of Nguème's marriage proposal and the seeming benefits associated with the union reveals Womanist traits in the young girl. She asserts herself by refusing to be numbered among the several wives in a polygamous setting and to be a tool in the in the hand of a macho. Although, Zahima lives in the village and in a

milieu where polygamy is accepted, Western education enables her reject oppression through polygamy. Womanism disassociates itself from any form of female oppression and since not all women in polygamous setting are forced into such unions, women should avoid being used as toys by men through polygamous marriages.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 FEMALE CHARACTERS' COPING STRATEGIES UNDER PATRIARCHAL OPPRESSION IN THE SELECTED NOVELS

This chapter encompasses female characters' reaction to oppression in the patriarchal society. It also accentuates female self definition as Womanist's ideology view literature as an effective way of portraying African woman's refusal to be subjugated. The women characters' determination to survive in the midst of patriarchal oppression is underscored as it reveals their inner strength and Womanist traits. These women express Womanist tendencies by responding courageously to challenges and determining their future and destiny. Their resilience especially in times of trial is the feature of Womanism found in them. In addition, the significance of culture and the complimentary roles of men and women in the struggle for the African woman's emancipation is also highlighted.

5.1 Female Characters' Coping Strategies in the Midst of Patriarchal Oppression in Adélaïde Fassinou's Selected Novels

Modukpè's mother, in *Modukpè, le rêve brisé*, an epitome of passivity, rebels in her later years against patriarchal control. Abandoning her matrimonial home to be free from a high handed husband, intimidation and co-wives' rivalry is her own way of redefining herself. Patriarchal norms muffled her voice and distort her vision of herself and others. However, unable to cope any longer, she begins to "speak out" as Awa Thiam (1986), suggests to her black sisters. According to Adebayo (1996), this rejection of patriarchal norms is the tearing of "the veil of invisibility". Modukpè's mother endures oppression for the sake of her children since quitting the marriage exposes the latter to maltreatments by their stepmothers. She therefore deems it expedient to "take a bow when the ovation is loudest", thus evolving through the pains of gender inequality and adorning herself with the "ornament" of self-assertion which Walker and Kolawole's Womanism advocates.

Thus, the once passive wife finds her lost voice and begins to reject patriarchal laws that muffle her voice. She also engages in small scale business in order to be economically independent; her own way of solving the problem of financial dependence on a joint husband as well as distraction from co-wives' rivalry. For this woman, economic liberation is a way of asserting herself and making herself relevant in the

community, an invariably Womanist trait. Modukpè is unhappy with polygamy but belong to a society which endorses it. She desires a change and like her mother she is cautious of traditional constraints and is unwilling to disobey tradition. In spite of her hatred of polygamy, she chooses to accept it. Educationally empowered, she throws missiles on patriarchal laws that oppress women as she resolves not to sue for a divorce. Another is her resolve to forgive Robert (the architect of her unwanted pregnancy) because of her love for her son (Sèdolo). The choice of forgiveness is also one of the traits of Womanism where compromise is necessary because men are also needed to help combat the battle against female oppression. Modukpè rebels against a cultural norm which favours the interest of the male members of the society, a type of rebellion Accad (1996) refers to in her study of the evolution of writing among female Arabs. According to her:

Characters discover that they are not rebelling merely against a single custom, particular oppressor, but are facing the complex and total inter relationship between their own beings and the society that has shaped them.
p.271

Therefore, female characters' responses to oppression in this novel include rebellion against cultural norms that oppress the female gender and separation from the husband (as a way of ending co-wives rivalries). Others are forgiveness, compromise and launching attacks on patriarchal norms that oppress the female gender while purposing to remain in the "lion's den". As regards the cultural norms used to reinforce female oppression, the scriptural passage from the Holy Bible sums it all: "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath..." Mark 2:27. By implication the law is supposed to be of benefit to members of the society, rather, the individuals should not be slaves to the law.

In *Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*, the author portrays in the character of Ananou, an epitome of self-assertion. After seven children, she resolves not to have any more children and to leave the village for town accompanied by her last child who needs higher education in the capital. She considers it unreasonable being in competition with several women seeking the attention of a single man. One of Ananou's ways of rebelling against patriarchal oppression is putting a stop to procreation. Hence, her resolve: "... her husband will no longer taste that particular warmth of their deep intimacy" connotes the termination of sexual intercourse between her and her husband. To achieve financial independence, she engages in textile business using the proceeds from her farm and

eventually becomes a force to be reckoned with in the textile business. Each time she visits the village, she always comes up with good counsel aimed at improving the lot of her family. This earns her the admiration of her husband, thus improving the status of a woman whose value is solely associated with her ability to procreate. On one of such visits, she insists her husband (Hodou) allocate plots of land to his married sons as a way of making them less dependent on him. By so doing, Ananou initiates liberation for her male children and this is an attribute of Walker and Kolawole's Womanism which advocates liberation for men and women alike. Unlike other counsels that increase the investments of Hodou, this counsel is selfishly regarded as a sacrilege because the patriarch does not want to release his *flock* (a metaphor for his children who are perpetually dependent on him). However, he does not cease to marvel at Anannou's ingenuity for suggesting investments that bring him much gain:

Le vieux Hodou en était tout renversé. Il ne reconnaissait plus la petite villageoise sortie de la plus misérable des huttes du coin que son père lui avait donnée en mariage, il y a une trentaine d'années maintenant. Elle avait subie des métamorphoses non seulement physiques, mais aussi psychologiques. Quand ils discutaient, son raisonnement était logique, profond et riche...Elle osa même lui recommander des investissements qui, à la longue, avaient porté des fruits. p.23-24

Old Hodou was completely flabbergasted. He no longer recognised the little village girl from the most wretched hut whom her father had given him in marriage about thirty years ago. She had undergone not only physical but also psychological transformations. When they discussed, her reasoning was logical, deep and enriching...She dared suggest investments to him which had eventually yielded dividend. p.23-24 (Our translation)

Ananou's involvement in business empowers her economically and she demonstrates Womanist characteristics by ensuring that her family members are empowered including her husband who demonstrates a "laissez faire" attitude towards his family's welfare. Her business centre in the market represents her *school* where all sorts of teachings are carried out: family planning, nutrition, investment among others and the knowledge gained affects her reasoning and general world view. When she eventually constructs a mansion of her own, her husband questions the source of her wealth. In the opinion of Hodou, Ananou is simply associating with women of easy virtue and she only succeeds in constructing such a magnificent building because she receives financial

assistance from lovers. The old man's assumption is informed by the fact that Ananou regains her youthful beauty through financial empowerment, the consciousness of hygiene and balanced diet. The once oppressed and humiliated village girl is now economically influential. The woman no longer occupies a limiting and marginal position but a central one. Unlike her husband whose wealth is his weapon of oppression (multiplying wives, dominating and using them as baby factories with little or no remuneration), Ananou uses her wealth to assist the less privileged, a type of informal NGO. One of her ways of reacting to patriarchal oppression is by being a positive mother to her children and caring for several abandoned children as well as the less privileged. Womanists consider Ananou as a spiritual/social mother who is not only a biological mother to her seven children but also spiritual mother to several abandoned children whom she adopts. Helping to improve the living condition of individuals in the society also qualifies Ananou to be categorised as Walker and Kolawole's Womanist which concerns itself with the well being of individuals in the society.

As for Cica, Ananou's daughter, her method of reacting to patriarchal oppression is by adopting the strategy of sisterhood through peaceful resolution with her rival. Ananou's daughter is involved in a relationship with Koko (a medical student who is from her village) and the relationship is endorsed by her family and Koko's. While in the village, the duos are attracted to each other because of their brilliant performance in their respective classes. Koko being in a higher class visits Cica's home to help the teenager with her assignments. The relationship continues when the "couple" relocates to town to pursue higher education. Based on the counsel of Ananou, the duo purpose to maintain a relationship devoid of sex since Cica is still pursuing her "baccalauréat". In addition, Ananou wants her daughter to preserve her virginity until she marries, thus accentuating the place of culture in the girl's upbringing. Koko, whose other name is Venance, is also involved in an intimate relationship with Emma, a colleague in the medical school and Cica becomes devastated when she gets wind of the affair. An attempt by Venance to break his relationship with Emma leads to the latter's suicide attempt and eventual hospitalisation. Cica visits her rival in the hospital as a way of initiating a relationship of sisterhood:

Je ne me considère plus comme ta rivale à partir d'aujourd'hui; toi et moi ne sommes que de pauvres pions que le destin a mis entre les mains d'un homme, pions qu'il déplace à volonté. Nous avons toutes les deux souffert, toi plus que moi, mais c'est fini: nous ne devons

plus souffrir à cause de vengeance, ni d'aucun autre homme; ils ne méritent guère qu'on ait de la peine pour eux jusqu'à sacrifier sa vie...Mère, fille, une vie de femme, un destin de femmes...p. 136-138

Henceforth, I no longer consider you as my rival; you and I are nothing but poor pawns that destiny has placed in the hands of a man which he toys with as he wishes. You and I have suffered, especially you, but it is all over: we must no longer suffer because of Venance, neither because of any other man; they do not merit going through a lot for them to the extent of sacrificing one's life...Mother, daughter, a woman's life, women's destiny...p. 136-138 (Our translation)

One cannot but question the assertion of Cica that she and her erstwhile rival “are nothing but pawns that destiny has placed in the hands of a man to toy with as he wishes” It is possible that Cica and Koko's parents orchestrate the relationship between the lovers in order to prevent their children from entering into inter tribal marriages thus highlighting the place of culture in the arrangement. As for Emma, her relationship with Koko is born out of mutual consent and not a case of compulsion. Cica is insinuating here that men cause suffering for women by toiling with their emotions. She extends her hands of fellowship to Emma, insisting that neither of them should allow a man to toy with their emotions in future. The statement “Mother, daughter, a woman's life, women's destiny...” implies that women generally whether as a mother or daughter usually have a dose of oppression in the hands of men folks. Concurring with the assertion of the former, Emma begins to consider using her medical training to help the poor. Death through suicide will truncate her destiny and that of the people she is destined to “deliver”. She asserts:

Tu as raison ma chère; je pensais à tout ceci depuis votre départ hier. Je me suis comporté comme une idiote, ...Pourquoi ce geste de désespoir? Est-ce la fin du monde si un homme vous rejette? Alors que j'ai toute ma famille qui compte sur moi pour sortir de la misère. p. 136

You are right my dear; I ruminated on all this since your departure yesterday. I behaved foolishly...Why the deperate gesture? If a man rejects you, is it the end of the world? While my entire family counts on me to deliver them from misery. p.136 (Our translation)

This is a Womanist approach to the oppression of these two ladies; the desire to live and not die and being useful for one's generation is more profitable than taking one's life

because one experiences a broken relationship. Adélaïde Fassinou's female characters who are victims of male deception, polygamy and female objectification react via the active and passive strategies. The active strategy involves separation from their husbands while still believing in the sanctity of the home and also ceasing to be tools in the hands of men to perpetuate female oppression. As African ladies, Cica and Emma desire marriage but not slavery and therefore become mentally, emotionally and physically emancipated. On the other hand, the strategy which appears passive; launching attacks on patriarchal laws through male deception while remaining in the patriarchal setting (marriage), could still be considered as active. The idea of remaining in the marriage implies respecting the African culture which places value on the family setting. It is an active strategy because while attacking patriarchal oppressive norms and tradition, the women are seeking for redress. Also, proposing to be useful to one's generation instead of being at loggerheads with a "sister" over the love of a single man could still be regarded as active since by so doing the victim rejects patriarchal oppression. The female characters' manner of reacting to male oppression is in tandem with the Womanist approach where men are not regarded as adversaries rather it is the structure created by men and perpetuated by their agents (which includes men and women) that is the target of attack.

Most of Fassinou's male characters in her novels selected for this study are negatively portrayed. In *Modukpè le rêve brisé*, Modukpè's father, Robert (her lover) and Freddy (her husband) are negatively portrayed as male chauvinists characterised by egocentrism. However, her elder brother is positively portrayed for waging war on child abuse as he confronts his high-handed father. In *Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*, male characters are depicted as egocentric; Ananou's father-in-law, her husband, the uncle who sexually assaults his teenage niece and parents who marry off their teenage daughters for financial gain. However, Ananou's eldest son is positively portrayed as compassionate. When his mother broke her limbs sequel to an accident, he leaves the village to attend to her, thereby, ensuring that Cica's education is not disrupted. In so doing, Ananou's eldest son collaborates with his younger sister to ensure that the latter acquires the instrument of emancipation-education and this qualifies him as a Womanist. Like Mariama Bâ sympathises with Binetou whose future is sacrificed on the altar of materialism through her marriage to Modou Fall, Fassinou also sympathises with the teenage girls whose father marry off to Ananou's husband for material purpose.

Ananou's position appears to be Womanist as she encourages marriage, the family and self-assertion on the part of women. Not only is she interested in female emancipation, she also attacks child abuse. This is dramatised through the adoption of several abandoned and abused children in her household. She also insists on the liberation of her male children who are married with children yet still economically dependent on their father. Since Womanism accentuates the liberation of men and women from all forms of oppression, Ananou's insistence on the liberation of her biological and spiritual male and female children reveals the Womanist trait in her.

5.2 Female Characters' Responses to Male Oppression in Flore Hazoumé's Selected Novels

The active and passive strategies constitute female characters' reactions to patriarchal oppression in Flore Hazoumé selected novels. Prominent among the passive strategies are refusal to challenge male authority, adopting the therapy of forgiveness and ending intra-gender conflict through the strategy of sisterhood as advocated by Womanism. On the other hand, the active strategy constitutes challenging patriarchal authority without suing for a divorce and total desertion of the marriage as a way of escape from threats to life.

In *La vengeance de l'albinos*, the responses of the two female protagonists (Mado and Juliette) to male oppression are submission, forgiveness, rebellion and total desertion of the home. Mado's earlier reaction to oppression while in Diallo's home is submission; submission to her husband and his family. Mado's effort to initiate sisterly bond between her and her sisters' in-law (which reveals the Womanist trait in her) is not reciprocated by the latter. In spite of her total submission, she still resists her husband's assaults by telling him categorically that she is not in love with him. Submission to one's husband and his family is one of the virtues a woman is expected to exhibit in the African culture. Kolawole's Womanism accentuates the struggle against oppression taking into cognisance the peculiarity of the African culture. Mado's method of resistance to oppression via initiating sisterly bond between her and her sisters-in-law reveals the exhibition of elements of Womanism. While recuperating in the herbalist's place and awaiting the return of Diallo, Mado's resolve to take up a job in a missionary hospital empowers her economically. Financially empowered, she is able to sponsor a return trip to her country and escape imminence of death. Juliette's way of coping with patriarchal oppression is through total submission to her husband. This strategy is effective as she

experiences peace in her matrimonial home. Her offer of shelter to the destitute Mado is her own way of expressing her Womanist trait of forgiveness to Mado who shares her husband with her after escaping from a violent marriage.

In *Le crépuscule de l'homme*, the strategies adopted by the main female protagonists to cope with patriarchal oppression include rebellion while remaining in the marriage as portrayed by Emilienne (active approach) and refusal to challenge male authority as depicted by Edith (the passive method). Emilienne and Edith (mother and daughter), though educationally empowered, react differently to the negative treatments they receive from their husband and boyfriend respectively. For a long period of time, Emilienne accepts the status quo (obeying sheepishly and accepting the identity of a dead person), only to rebel and refuse to continue to be a substitute for a dead fiancée. Her insistence on her real identity reveals a reevaluation of her worth and the regain of a muffled voice; this is self-assertion which Womanists advocate. Emilienne's earlier strategy of total submission pays as she experiences relative peace in her home. The latter strategy of asserting herself is not without a price as she is frequently assaulted by her husband.

One expects Edith who belongs to the younger generation to exhibit traits of radicalism in her rejection of male oppression. Rather, she continues to tolerate the excesses of Pascal (her boyfriend). Even though she is a daughter of a minister in the president's cabinet, she neither confronts her high handed boyfriend who resides in a slum, nor break her relationship with him until a civil war erupts which leads to his mysterious disappearance from the scene. One wonders why Edith who constantly rebukes her mother for accepting to be maltreated by her 'father' accepts a similar treatment from her boyfriend. The reason is not far fetched: her physical appearance is unattractive to men, unlike her friend Evelyn whose beauty earns her several male fans. Therefore, complete submission enables Edith cope with the oppressive attitude of Pascal. The strategies employed by female characters to counteract male oppression in this section are successful; for the passive strategy, the women are able to enjoy relative peace in the home and in the relationship while for the active strategy, they are able to assert themselves and claim their rights.

5.3 Reaction of Mayaba's Female protagonists to Patriarchal Oppression

Female characters' responses to patriarchal oppression as portrayed in Hortense Mayaba's *L'engrenage and L'univers infernal* are characterised under the passive and

active strategies. They are forgiveness and ending intra-gender conflict through the strategy of sisterhood, public protest and self assertion at home. In *L'engrenage*, poverty begets wife-prostitution, endorsed by husbands as an antidote to starvation. Discontent with the occurrence, women decide to “take the bull by the horn” as they organise protest marches against the government, an active strategy earlier adopted by Sembène Ousmane’s women in *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*. Like Ousmane’s Amazons, Mayaba’s women react against their government’s oppressive policy. The former confront the colonial administrators while the latter’s oppressors are agents of neo-colonialism. Ramatoulaye and Penda among others reinforce the efforts of their husbands on industrial action as they organise protest marches and confront the police when provoked. On the other hand, Mayaba’s women employ some African women’s traditional crude method of protest-posing naked to confront an adversary. In as much as Womanists resent oppression in general and female oppression in particular, they disassociate themselves from any form of female mobilisation where nudity is considered a weapon against oppression.

In addition, like the Amazons in *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* whose impressive feat beget self-assertion in their homes and community, Mayaba’s women begin to reject patriarchal norms (ancestral tradition) used to oppress their grandmothers, their mothers and they themselves. The struggle of these women against oppression in general and female oppression in particular is not done alone; rather, it is in conjunction with their husbands and other male members, which is the objective of Womanists as opposed to radical Feminists who tag men as adversaries. Sequel to the feat, the women “remain committed to an integrative approach that seeks wholesome rather than combatorial resolutions of the issues that confront not just women but all of the people in their society” (Nwajiaku, 2010:12). As the Womanist ideology maintains that the African female is interested in and committed to the survival of her society, these women likewise, products of different levels of awareness are concerned about the survival of their society. Like in Sembène Ousmane’s *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, they constitute illiterate and educated women. However, one thing is common to all of them; they are opposed to the oppression of the genders (male and female); it is therefore not out of place to label them as Womanists.

In *L'univers infernal*, an endless wait for the return of her fiancé who represents the colonial administration during the Second World causes Tante N’Goné to adopt Alioume, whose mother (her sister), and father die in an auto crash. She does all kind of menial

jobs to ensure that her 'son' receives qualitative and quantitative education which eventually earns him admission into one of the tertiary institutions in Europe. This is reiterated by Alioume as he recalls the contribution of Tante N'Goné to his success: "Je la revoyais se donnant du mal pour me rendre la vie décente. Elle m'inscrivit à l'école Ce fut elle encore qui paya mes études et m'envoya à l'étranger les parfaire." p.21 "I saw her going through difficulties repeatedly to enable me live a decent life. She enrolled me in school. She also sponsored my education and sent me abroad to complete my studies." p. 21 (Our translation)

This act of kindness qualifies Tante N'Goné to be categorised as a Womanist. Tante N'Goné derives joy from having Alioume with her; he becomes a sort of consolation for her all through her life time. When indirectly accused by the male diviner of being the architect of Alioume's illness, she becomes heartbroken as her nephew deserts her. Desertion by her adopted son in whom she slaves to bring up is one way in which Tante Ngoné experiences oppression. However, she finds a place in her heart to forgive her "son" for the sake of her love for him. Forgiveness is one of this aunt's strategies of dealing with oppression orchestrated by the male diviner. In addition, tante N'Goné initiates and maintains sisterly bond with her daughter-in-law. When Alioume and his wife rejects and abandons her, she purposes to solve the problem of intra-gender conflict between her and Alioume's wife by choosing to forgive the latter.

Wagging war against neo-colonialism, wife-prostitution and ancestral culture that subjugate the female gender enables women in *L'engrenage* assert themselves (active strategy) while Tante N'Goné in *L'univers Infernal* opts for forgiveness as a passive strategy to dealing with patriarchal oppression.

5.4 Mothering: Tranquilliser for Female Oppression in Adélaïde Fassinou's Selected Novels

Mothering, one of the African values cherished by Womanists, is considered by radical Feminists as a vital instrument used to oppress the African woman. As for the oppressed female characters in our chosen novels, it an antidote for the challenges they face as oppressed women. It is observed that exhibiting mothering traits is one of the ways through which the oppressed female characters relieve themselves of the effect of male oppression/marital violence. It is also the strategy employed by their mothers to help them out of the agony of male deception and marital violence. Modukpè's mother supports her daughter during the latter's trying period; she accepts and nurtures the

expectant mother and the unclaimed pregnancy until the birth of the baby. When Modukpè experiences marital deception after her eventual marriage to Freddy, her mother's frequent advice serves as "balm of Gilead" or tranquilliser to soothe her pains. Unlike Ramatoulaye who uses letter writing to soothe the pains caused by her abandonment and subsequent death of her husband, Modukpè forgives Freddy (one of the traits of Womanism) and adopts his children from outside wedlock.

When Freddy finally brings his three sons home from his extra-marital relationship, he uses this "popular statement" as a spring board to integrating them into Modukpè's home: "Un enfant, un garçon surtout, a besoin de grandir sous l'aile protectrice de son père...". A child, a boy especially needs to be raised under the protective roof of his father..." Modukpè ends up playing the role of mother to these children, thus qualifying her as a social/spiritual mother. In addition, her love for her daughter (her only child for Freddy), gives her strength to cope with her newly turned polygamous husband. In so doing, she adopts the Womanist attitude of compromise.

Two types of motherhood can be identified in Adélaïde Fassinou's chosen novels: biological and social/spiritual motherhood. In each case, positive motherhood is exhibited by the mothers in question. Modukpè's mother (*Modukpè le rêve brisé*), exhibits "the art of mothering and nurturing" (Bestman, 2007), as regards the germane role she plays in rehabilitating her daughter sequel to her experience of unwanted pregnancy. "Dukpè ma fille, je suis avec toi; dans cette épreuve dis-toi que tu n'es pas seule, ton enfant naîtra avec ou sans père, mais il aura deux mères et ne seras pas malheureux" p.64). "Dupe my daughter, I am with you; be rest assured that you are not alone in this ordeal, your child will be born with or without a father, but he will certainly have two mothers and will not be miserable" p.64 (Our translation) The statement: "I am with you" implies that Modukpè's mother identifies with her daughter, feels her pains and goes through the trauma with the young lady.

The assertion that Modukpè's child will have two mothers connotes that while the younger lady serves as mother the older one will definitely play the role of a father. With these words of assurance, Dupe is able to go through her period of trial. In her marriage with Freddy, she temporarily suffers secondary infertility before she eventually gives birth to a girl. Her experience with infertility is not as turbulent as that of Dimikèla in Fatou Kéita's *Rebelle* who is divorced due to bareness, while her mother is physically assaulted for suffering from secondary infertility. In Angèle Rawiri's *Furreurs et cris de femmes*, sterility reduces Emilienne, a successful career lady to an object of ridicule. However,

Ogunyemi (1994) emphasises the idea of “social motherhood”-a situation whereby a biologically sterile woman can be useful in the society as a teacher, medical doctor, an activist and a politician among others.

Dukpè takes delight in describing the birth of her son: “Lorsqu’on me l’arracha des entrailles et qu’on le déposa sur ma poitrine, nu comme un ver, encore couvert de toute la crasse qu’il a dû ramasser là-bas dans son royaume originel...” (p.67-68). The similitude, “nu comme un ver” “naked as worm” represent the weight of the child since a worm is of little size, the expression also infers that the child is completely unclothed and at the same time innocent. The metaphor *Royaume originel* denotes a child’s abode before birth, that is, the mother’s womb. Describing her deliverance from death during childbirth, she says: “En m’arrachant aux affres de la mort, je venais de sauver par ricochet ce petit bonhomme que j’avais choisi d’amener à la vie” p.68. “By liberating myself from death, I had just saved on the rebound this little chap whom I had chosen to bring to life” p.68. By implication, Modukpè is claiming that keeping the pregnancy at the period of abandonment is a personal choice; after all the architect of the pregnancy advises her to abort the pregnancy and even sexually assaults her as a way of inducing the abortion.

Her delight in describing her experience of childbirth is her own way of dousing the sorrow she experiences during her period of abandonment. The irony here is, while in the womb, the rejected child constitutes a source of sorrow, trauma and shame but his appearance into the world translates into untold joy. This experience makes Dupe esteem mothers as sacred: “Oh! Maman, tu avais raison lorsque tu répétais à tes filles qu’une mère est sacrée, du simple fait qu’elle a été mère. Je promet de ne plus jamais te blesser, toi, mère bénie entre toutes les femmes”! “Oh! Mother, you were right when you kept on repeating to your daughters that a mother is sacred, for the mere fact that she has been a mother. I promise never to hurt you again, mother blessed among women.” p.68 (Our translation) The relationship between Modukpè and her mother has a measure of spiritual connotation. As if Modukpè’s mother has the premonition that her daughter is going to take after her by becoming a victim of male deception, she painstakingly tells her story to the latter:

While relating her experience of untold oppression in her matrimonial home, Modukpè’s mother explains to her daughter where she misses it; her marriage with Jean Paul, Modukpè’s father. This is a way of sharing her problem with someone; emptying the heaviness in her heart. Relating her experience to her daughter is also a way of cautioning the young lady and ensuring that she does not fall into the wrong hands. In addition,

sharing her unpleasant experience with her children has a soothing effect for Modukpè's mother. The arrival of Sèdolo (Dukpè's baby) is symbolic in the sense that it signifies joy, the future, hope for the female gender, the dawn of a new day and a new beginning. It is also an experience which makes her forget the pains of abandonment.

One expects the heroine to give birth to a baby girl but the message is invariably Womanist in nature. Man is still needed to effect the desired social change since he is the architect of the negative patriarchal laws. This detailed description of Dukpè's experience during pregnancy and childbirth impacts realism on the characterisation of Fassinou. Therefore, having a good mother enables Modukpè deal with her experience of emotional trauma. As for Modukpè's mother, the presence of her children provides the needed strength to weather her "tempestuous" experience. The description of the way Dukpè's mother handles the news of her daughter's unwanted pregnancy reveals a lot of maturity on the part of the former. Dukpè returns home during her mother's meal-time. A look at her daughter reveals that something is wrong. The mother asks if schools are on holiday, a question that brings about uncontrollable tears. The detailed description of the mother's meal-time is imaginatively handled, for it gives her enough time to do some thinking before offering any counsel to her daughter "...elle continua le même geste qui consistait à enfermer de la pâte de maïs dans ses doigts, tremper la boule ainsi saisie dans la sauce gluante et l'envoyer au fond de son palais" p55. "She continued the same gesture of wrapping maize's paste in her fingers, dipping the ball so grabbed in the sticky soup and sending it down her palate." p. 55 (Our translation)

At the end of the "ceremony", she asks her daughter if she cares for some food, to which the latter gives a negative response by way of gestures. Unsatisfied, the mother goes ahead to offer food to her daughter, adding that discussion will follow thereafter. Modukpè also comments on her mother's prompt reaction to her situation." A voir la promptitude avec laquelle, elle avait réagi à mon problème, c'est à croire qu'elle s'attendait à ce que Robert me déçoive de la sorte. Ce qu'elle me confirma plus tard, bien plus tard, quelques semaines après mon départ de la maison" p.51. "Considering her prompt reaction to my problem, it was as if she foresaw deception in my relationship with Robert. She later confirmed this some weeks after my departure from the house." p.51

Armed with this premonition, one expects Modukpè's mother to insist on a break in the relationship between her daughter and Robert. However, the young lady who is naively in love prefers to believe the deceptive assurances of her lover rather than heed to her mother's counsel. The older woman takes a trip down memory lane to recall her own

experience with Dukpè's father and how unbearable hardship forces her into leaving her matrimonial home. The technique of flash back is employed here to recount the mother's experience which is similar to her daughter's. Modukpè's mother is probably saying "I expect you to learn from my own experience"; however, she encourages her daughter on the need to be positively disposed towards having the unborn child. Modukpè's mother is so caring and understanding to the extent that a natural bond exists between mother and daughter. Modukpè is experiencing what her mother experiences earlier: oppression and deception. For the mother, she is deceived into a polygamous marriage and in the case of the daughter; she is a victim of unwanted/unclaimed pregnancy and abandonment. Having a good mother greatly helped Modukpè to bear the yoke of patriarchal oppression.

When one comes to *Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*, Ananou is portrayed as a positive mother. She ensures that Cica receives a balanced education; education required for financial empowerment, mental and emotional soundness, as well as good home management. With educational empowerment, Cica becomes mentally liberated and equipped to fight against patriarchal oppression. She does not delay in supplying her daughter's needs because according to her: "elle ne voulait pas que sa fille tombe entre les pattes d'un *grotto* quelconque qui gâcherait son avenir, par une grossesse non désirée" p.39. Ananou does not want her daughter to fall into the trap of a *sugar daddy* (another form of patriarchal oppression of minors). In addition, Ananou teaches her daughter how to become a good wife in future; this in the Womanist approach whereby in spite of the girl-child educational attainment, marriage is desired. Before leaving the village for the city, the presence of Ananou's seven children gives her joy and strength to cope with patriarchal oppression.

When eventually Ananou moves to the city, the presence of Cica around her also encourages her to cope with her high-handed husband. Ananou, who is economically empowered, adopts indigent children and becomes a spiritual mother to them; empowering and equipping them to reject patriarchal oppression. Among these children are Kèmi, her maid, a street child whom she delivers from becoming a victim of male violence through rape and Dodji, her niece, a victim of male violence through rape. She assists in rehabilitating the latter, helping her come out of psychological trauma, and to live a decent life; this is spiritual motherhood. Becoming a mother to indigent children is one of Ananou's way of coping with male oppression.

5.5 Mothering as a Tranquilliser to Female Oppression in Flore Hazoumé Selected Novels

In *La vengeance de l'albinos*, Julienne's offer of shelter to Mado as a sequel to Mésangou's death facilitates Mado's reunion with Lydie her daughter, who is forcefully taken from her while yet a baby. As a tranquilliser for the love she did not experience in her relationship with her former husband (Diallo) and Mésangou (her first lover and second husband respectively), she devotes her attention to Lydie. She assists the girl with her assignments, takes her along each time she strolls in the neighbourhood and answers all her childish questions. Thus, Mado succeeds in filling every vacuum in the life of Lydie caused by the death of her father. In return, Mado also receives from Lydie, the love she is deprived of by Mésangou when she reappears in his life; this is soothing. The twelve year old girl derives joy from sharing every minute of her time after school with "tante Mado" with little or no premonition that she is interrelating with her biological mother.

Before her reunion with her daughter, Mado derives joy from the knowledge that her only child is alive and lives with her father and step-mother. Coming to stay with Julienne gives her the opportunity to be with the child she is deprived of from two weeks old. Helping the child to do what others refrain from doing for her gives her great joy. Lydie also prefers "tante Mado" to her "mother" who is actually her step-mother. However, the joy experienced by mother and daughter is short lived due to a quarrel between the former and her hostess as Mado is sent packing from the family house. The source of the quarrel is Mado's requests that her identity as Lydie's biological mother be revealed to the girl. The refusal of Julienne to heed to this request makes Mado retort by claiming that "she is all I have". Lydie is her sole consolation, no husband, no home, no money... Instead of agreeing to Mado's claim to have a right over her only *hope*, Julienne considers her request as selfish. For Julienne, her children are also her source of joy. The eldest of the two, Sakia identifies and feels with her as she questions regularly her father's adulterous life.

When one comes to *Le crépuscule de l'homme*, Emilienne is deprived of love by Bernard (her husband) but finds solace in her love for Édith, her only child. As a result of her love for her daughter, she refuses to answer her probing questions as regards the genesis of the "civil war" in her marriage until she is on her death bed. Édith's father is not Bernard; her father is one of the several male soldiers who rape Emilienne during a political upheaval. Bernard marries Emilienne as a replacement for his fiancée, a victim

of rape who dies during the same crisis. The implication of answering Édith's questions connotes evoking memories of sorrow; her rape experience, the death of her mother provoked by rape and the birth of Édith, fathered by a personality with a mosaic face. Emilienne's love for her daughter and the idea of not wanting to break her heart makes her conceal the story of the girl's birth from her; this is positive motherhood. In spite of these experiences, having her daughter as a companion is a sort of consolation for her sorrowful heart.

5.6 Mothering as an Antidote to Female Oppression in Hortense Mayaba's Selected Novels

As for mothering as palliative for lack of marital love, the women in *L'engrenage* find consolation in the presence of their children around them and are therefore able to weather the storm of deprivation, oppression through ancestral tradition and wife-prostitution as a last resort to battling with starvation. For the numerous wives in Nguème's polygamous setting, their children take the place of their husband as his love and attention is jointly coveted by several women. To Tante N'Goné, adopting her nephew Alioume, is a source of consolation for her as she chooses mothering as palliative for her inability to get married. Little wonder that she invests her life and income on his education. When accused of witchcraft, she chooses the option of forgiveness for the love she has for her son. Mothering is without doubt another germane passive strategy which cannot be glossed over in the two novels.

CHAPTER SIX

6.1

CONCLUSION

Extensive studies on patriarchy and oppression of the female gender in Francophone African female writings have focused on Francophone countries like Senegal and Cameroon, with little attention paid to the Republic of Bénin. Patriarchy and oppression of female characters in selected Beninese women's novels were examined with a view to establishing the nature, role and consequences of patriarchal oppression and the strategies adopted by the female characters to counter it. Oppression is depicted in the work through characterisation, setting, male deception, infidelity, polygamy, male use of derogatory language and acts of violence meted out on the female gender. Others are wife battery, rape, wife-prostitution and intra-gender conflicts orchestrated by men. The experiences of female characters which could be classified as domestic are expressed via literary devices such as metaphors, similies and flashback among others. Power relations existing between the genders show that men are oppressors and women the oppressed.

The study adopted Alice Walker and Mary Kolawole's versions of Womanism, which distinguishes the struggle for gender equality as embarked upon by women of colour and the peculiar experience of the African woman. Six post-independence Beninese novels by three female writers were purposively selected based on their converging motifs, that is, their thematic affinities for Womanist traits in the female protagonists. These were *Modukpè le rêve brisé* (MLRB) and *Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne* (EDFP) by Adélaïde Fassinou, *La vengeance de l'albinos* (LVDL) and *Le crépuscule de l'homme* (LCDL) by Flore Hazoumé, *L'engrenage* (LE) and *L'univers infernal* (LUI) by Hortense Mayaba. Texts of selected authors were subjected to close reading and textual analysis. In this chapter, a summary of the findings and conclusions drawn from the study were presented. Recommendations were proffered and submission for further studies made.

The characters have defined roles and relationships as husband and wife, father and daughter, mother and daughter, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and lovers. This binary relationship engenders various forms of oppression such as child abuse, infidelity, polygamy, wife battery, rape, and wife-prostitution among others. In order to cope with male oppression, the female characters adopted passive and active strategies. The passive strategies constitute submission, mothering, sisterhood and forgiveness, while the active strategies involve questioning of patriarchal laws, divorce and public protest. The passive

strategies are portrayed by Julienne's refusal to challenge male authority as reflected in LVDL and Ngoné's forgiving strategy as portrayed in LUI. Mothering is another passive strategy whereby female characters invested all their love on their children as a palliative for lack of marital love. Cica and Emma, rivals in EDFP, ended their intra-gender conflict by adopting the strategy of sisterhood. Female characters who adopted the active strategies separated physically from their husbands without divorcing them, as portrayed in the case of Modukpè's mother in MLRB and that of Ananou in EDFP. Emilienne, in LCDL and Modukpè in MLRB from within query patriarchal laws that encourage female subjugation. Mado's case in LVDL is a total desertion of her home. Women in LE confronted patriarchal institution through public protest. In all the texts, the active strategies proved more successful in combating patriarchal oppression as the female protagonists were able to assert themselves and claim their rights.

The novels show that the nature of patriarchy and oppression of the female gender is domestic, perpetuates female subjugation and consequently elicits reactions from the women. Female characters use strategies which enabled them to counteract oppression, assert themselves and claim their rights. The characters: Modukpè, her mother, Ananou, Cica, Emma, women in LE are aware of their oppression and ready to resist it. Armed with western education and the consciousness of emancipation, they question the *status quo* and confront tradition by enforcing changes in their lives. However, the positive aspects of tradition like marriage and mothering are respected and preserved by the women. Kolawole counsels to African women is relevant here as she underscores the need to reject myths, theories and any reality that threatens their humanity and hinder them from acting as agents of culture and change. This is because they "cannot remain the same within traditions that undermine them..." p.204. Women writers are to persist in their responsibility of recreating new myths and archetypes that enhance positive depictions of women who transcends gender, race, cultural, ethnic and class borders. As for men, they are to collaborate with women in the struggle towards gender, class and racial emancipation.

Sequel to the findings of this study, the following are considered as its contribution to knowledge. The study focused on novels by female authors from the Republic of Bénin which to the best of our knowledge seemed to have attracted little attention from literary critics. Available critical works on Adélaïde Fassinou's writings accentuate her use of language and status of vidomègons (maids/child slaves). Flore Hazoumé's dramatisation of tortured maids has also been acknowledged by few authors, while to the best of our

knowledge, Hortense Mayaba's work is yet to be accorded adequate publicity. This study has succeeded in bringing to the limelight the works of these amazons who are so close yet far from the Nigerian reading public, underscoring the coping strategies of their female characters in response to male oppression. The coping strategies reveal the Womanist attributes of the female characters and by extension the inner strength of the average Beninese woman. The study has also shown that in Bénin Republic just as in almost every part of Africa, patriarchy is identified with the oppression of the female gender and the children. Moreover, the works represent the authors' probing of their culture, society as well as women's lives.

Also the continent is confronted with issues that a particular gender is incapable of combating. These are neo-colonialism, civil wars, poverty, societal deprivation, rape, terrorism, kidnapping, juvenile delinquency and economic recession among others. Each of the genders has a part to play in the combat against the ills directed at the continent; therefore the cooperation of the genders as advocated by Womanists is the beginning of emancipation for the continent as a whole. In an interview with the selected authors, they denied being either Feminists or Womanists but simply that women's issue are their area of concern. The female writers are unanimous in their assertion that women are marginalised in Africa. As members of a given society, they believe it is their responsibility to portray happenings in their society as a way of effecting the desired change. That they portray women characters who adopt the Womanist strategy in dealing with patriarchal oppression, one can conclude that their women characters are Womanists.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered which will contribute immensely to the literature of Benin Republic:

Critics should be encouraged to delve in Beninese's female literary works in order to help publicise the works as well as improve their quality.

Further research into Beninese's female literature could include translating the works into English language in order to benefit the Anglophone audience especially Nigeria which shares a common boundary with the country.

Since Adélaïde Fassinou is from the Yoruba speaking part of the Republic of Bénin, the possibility of translating her works into Yoruba language could also be explored since Yoruba words are intentionally inserted into most of her writings. Translating the novels into English and Yoruba languages respectively is a way of opening up Beninese literature to Anglophone readership and literary research.

Nigerian publishers should also explore the possibility of publishing these works when translated into English and Yoruba languages respectively.

Further research into Beninese women's writings could also focus on intra-gender conflicts in the selected novels.

REFERENCES

- Abberley, P. 1987. The concept of oppression and the development of a social model of disability. *Disability, Handicap and Society*, 2: 1,p.5-19
- Accad, E. 1984. The prostitute in Arab and North African fiction. The image of the prostitute in modern literature. L.H. Pierre and M.B. Pringle. Eds. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co, 63-75.
- Achebe, C. 1958. *Things fall apart*. London: Heinemann.
- 1960. *No longer at ease*. New York: Random.
- Achebe, C. 1981. Continuities, change and challenges: women's role in Nigerian society. *Présence Africaine*, 120, 4th Quaterly, p.3-16.
- Adebayo A. 1995. Une si long lettre de Mariama Bâ et la tradition des lettres fictives. *RENEF*, Vol. 1, No 3, March, p.104-114.
- 1996a. The African mother: her changing perceptions in West African fiction. *Feminism and black women's creative writing: theory practice criticism*. A. Adebayo. Ed. Ibadan: AMD Publishers. p. 178-193.
- 1996b. Tearing the veil of invisibility: the roles of West African female writers in contemporary times. *Feminism and black women's creative writing: theory practice criticism*. A. Adebayo. Ed. Ibadan: AMD Publishers. p.37-56.
- 1998a. The language of contemporary Francophone African literary works. *The French language and literary expression*. Proceedings of the maiden conference of NUFTA held at the University of Jos- November 4-7. Aire, V. O. Ed. Jos. p. 246.
- 1998b. Feminism and its implications for the Nigerian society. Keynote address presented to the Yoruba Studies Association of Nigeria (YSAN) on November 24 by Dr. Aduke Adebayo.
- 2000. Disalienating the French language in the contemporary Francophone African novels. *Ibadan Journal of European Studies*. p. 72-80.
- 2008. *Attending to style in scholarly writing and publications*.
- 2010. *The nature and functions of literature: the comparatist's Perspective*: An inaugural lecture delivered at the University of Ibadan. Ibadan University Press.
- Adeleke, J. 1993. La création littéraire des écrivaines Africaine. *RENEF* 1(1), p. 39-51.

-1996. *Feminism black feminism and the dialectics of womanism. Feminism and black women's creative writing*. A. Adebayo. Ed. Ibadan: AMD Publishers. p. 21-36.
- Adeniyi, E.O. 2000. Participatory management, job satisfaction and commitment among secondary school teachers in Ogun State, Nigeria. Ph.D Thesis, Dept. Teacher Education. University of Ibadan.
- Aina, I. 1998. Women, culture and society. *Nigerian women in society and development*. A. Sesay and A. Odebiyi. Eds. Ibadan: Dokun Publishing House.
- Akachi E. 2017. Snail feminism. *Nigerian Newspapers Today*. January 27: 11.
- Akando, S. 1973. *Écho d'uner Révolution*. Cotonou, Éd. A.B.M.
-1975. *Révolution Africaine*. Cotonou: Éd. Typo-Press
- Akano, R. 2014. So long a letter: understanding the missionary narrative of a polygamy victim. *IOSR, Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol 19, Issue 8, Aug. p. 22-27.
- Akorede, V. 2012. Women in the development of Africa. *Gender theories and Dialectics*. Akorede, Y. Ed. Porto-Novo: Édition Sonou D' Afrique.
- Akorede, Y. 2011. *Feminism and literature: womanism and the intra-gender conflict theory*. Porto-Novo: Édition Sonou D' Afrique.
- Amzat, A. 1976. *Debout-au service de la révolution*. Cotonou: ONEPI.
- Anon. 2010. Female oppression in Africa. <http://library.thinkquest.org/07aug/01443/fo-region-african.html? tqi-iframe>. *Female mutilation Benin's main human rights problem*". *Afrol News*. Retrieved 11/1/ 2013.
- Appiah, K. and Gates, H. 2005. *Africans: the encyclopedia of the African and American experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Asiyanbola, R. 2005. Patriarchy, male dominance, the role and women empowerment in Nigeria. Paper submitted for presentation as poster at the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP/ UIESP) XXV International population Conference Tours, France.
- Ayeleru, B. 2007. African feminist expression: between linguistic realism and linguistic vulgarism. *Journal of English Studies*, Vol 4. p. 182-197.
-2010a. Language, literature and criticism: essays in honour of Professor Aduke Adebayo. E. Kwofie and B. Ayeleru. Eds. p. 18-26

-2010b. Indigenizing sexuality through language in Adelaïde Fassinou's Modukpè, Le rêve brisé and enfant d'autrui, fille de personne in *AGORA Journal of Foreign Language Studies*, No 4. p. 29-49.
-2010c. Indigenizing the French language in Adelaïde Fassinou's toute une Vie ne suffirait pas pour en parler in *Tales, tellers and tale making: critical studies on literary stylistics and narrative styles in contemporary African literature*. Makokha, J.K.S., Remmy B. and Adeyemi D. Eds. p. 38-46
-2010d. Yorubanness in the language of selected works of Adelaïde Fassinou and Abimbola Adunni Adelokun. *Yorùbá: Journal of Yorùbá Studies Association of Nigeria*. p. 50-68.
-2011 Linguistic Innovation in the New West African European novel: between interlanguage and indigenization in *lin' gwis tik California linguistic Notes*. Volume xxxvi No. p. 1-32
- Ayi Kwei, A. 1969. *The beautiful ones are not yet born*. New York: Heinemann
-1973. *Two thousand seasons*. New York: Heinemann
- Bâ, M. 1979. *Une si longue lettre*. Dakar : NEA.
- 1981. *Un chant écarlate*. Dakar: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines.
- Bachofen, J. 1968. *Myth, religion and mother-right: selections of bachofen's writing including das mutter- recht*. London: Routledge and Kegan.
- Badian, S. 1963. *Sous l'orage*. Paris: Présence Africaine.
- Baker, A. 2014. First day they shot her husband. <http://www.time.com/war-and-rape/>
Retrieved 22/1/2017
- Bakhtin, M. 1981. *The dialogic imagination*. Austin: University of Texas.
- Barnard and Burges 1996. *Sociology explained*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Barret, M. 1986. *Women's oppression today: problems in Marxist feminist analysis*. London: Verso.
- Barton, R. 1995. *A comparison and construct of womanist and feminist theology and experience*. Prissilla Papers.
- Bassek, P. 1990. *La tâche de sang*. Paris : L'Harmattan.
- Bebey, F. 1980. *Le fils d'Agatha Moudio*. Yaoundé: Edition CLE.
- Berger, I. 2008. Feminism, patriarchy and African women's history. *Journal of Women's History (JOWL)*, p. 130-135.

- Bestman, R. 2007. Les tendances womanistes dans les oeuvres des romancières de l'Afrique Francophone. Phd Thesis. Dept. of Foreign Languages. University of Ife. x + 238.
- Beti, M. 1956. *Le pauvre christ de bomba*. Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont.
-1957. *Mission terminée*. Paris: Buchet.
- Beyala C.1987. *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée*. Paris: Stock.
-1988. *Tu t'appelleras tanga*. Paris: Stock.
-1992. *Le petit prince de belleville*. Paris: Albin Michel.
-1993. *Maman a un amant*. Paris: Albin Michel.
- Bhêly-Quenum, O. 1960. *Un piège sans fin*. Paris: Stock.
-1965. *Le chant du lac*. Présence Africaine.
-1968. *Liaison d'un été*. Ed. Sagerep, L'Afrique Actuelle.
- Bjomson, R. 1988. Post-colonial writers: a bio-bibliographical source book. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearbon Publishers.
- Bobia, R and Staunton, C. 1991. Aminata Sow-Fall and the Centre Africain d'animation et d'échanges culturels in Senegal. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3.
- Borgomano, M. 1989. Voix et visages de femmes dans les livres écrits par des femmes en Afrique Francophone. Abidjan: CEDA.
- Brownmiller, S. 1975. Against our will: men, women and rape. Columbia: Fawcett.
- Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour. 2011. 2010 country reports on human rights practices. Retrieved May, 3/2018, from <https://www.state.gov>drl>rls>hrrpt>
-2013. Country reports on human rights practices for 2013. Retrieved May, 3/2018, from <https://www.state.gov>organization>.
- Burton, N. 2012. The Battle of the sexes. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved Oct. 6/2014, from m.psychologytoday.com/blog/hide-a.
- Butler, J. 1990. Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity. New York : Routledge.
- Carlos, J. 1973. *Cri de la liberté*. Cotonou. Éd. A.B.M.
- Casenave O. 1996. *Femmes rebelles: naissance d'un nouveau roman Africain au féminin*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

- Cherekar, J. 2014. Female solidarity in Mariama Bâ's so long a letter. *Online, International Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, Vol. iv, Issue 11, March-April, p.3-13.
- Chevrier, J.1984. *Littérature nègre*. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Chukukere, G. 1995. *Gender voices and choices:redefining women in contemporary African fiction*. Enugu: Fourth Demension.
- Collins, N. 2012. Men and women have distinct personalities. *Telegraph*, Jan. 5. Retrieved May, 2/2018, from <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/science-news>.
- Couchoro, F.1929. *L'esclave*. Paris: Éd. De la Dépêche Africaine.
- D'Ameida, I. 1994.*Francophone African Women writers: destroying the emptiness of silence*.Grainesville: University of Florida Press.
- Dabla, S. 1986. *Nouvelles écritures africaines: romancières de la seconde generation*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Davies, C.and Graves, A. Eds.1986. Introduction: feminist consciousness and African literary criticism.*Ngambika: studies of women in African literature*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
-1990. *Private selves and public spaces: autobiography and the Africanwoman writer,crisscrossing boundaries*. Kenneth H., Jonathan N. and Clarisse Z., Eds.p.109-127.
-1993.Maidens, mistresses and matrons: feminine images in selected Soyinka's works.*Création Littéraire des écrivaines Africaines, la revue Nigériane d' études Françaises*. Vol 1 no 1, p.75-88.
- D'Enerville, A. 1985. *La situation de la femme écrivain en Afrique*. Dietrich:Verlag
- De Beauvoir, S. 1949. *Prostituée et hetaires: le deuxième sexe*.Vol. 11. Paris:Gallimard.
-1987. Women and creativity. *French Feminist Thought*. T. Moi. Ed. New York: Basil Blackwell.
- Diop, C. 1987. *Black Africa*.Tretton: Lawrence Hills.
- Dogo, S. 2014. The Nigerian patriarchy: when and how. *Journal of Cultural and Religious Studies*. Vol. 2, No. 5, p. 263-275.
- Deutsh, M. 2016. *Forms of oppression: the conflict information consortium*. Colorado: University of Colorado.
- Ekwensi, C. 1975. *Jagua nana*.London: Heinemann.
- El Saadawi, N. 1983. *Women at point zero*. Winnipeg: Zed Books Ltd.
- Emecheta, B. 1975. *Second class citizen*. New York: George Brailier.

- 1976. *The bride*. London: Allison and Busby Ltd.
- 1977. *The slave girl*. London: Allison and Busby Ltd.
-1979. *The joys of motherhood*. London: Heinemann.
-1982. *Double yoke*. Enugu: Ogwugwu Afor Co.
-1985. *Rape of Shavi*. New York: George Brailier.
- Emenyi, I. 2005. *Intersection of gendered voices*. Lagos: Concept Publications Ltd.
- Eustace, P. 1970. *An Introduction to the African Novel*. London: Idu
- Ezinwanyi, A. 2012. African womanism and the home: the three perspectives of womanhood in Mariama Bâ's *so long a letter*. *Gender Issues: International Journal of the Feminist/Womanist Theorists*. Vol. 4 March. p.76-92.
- Fassinou, A. 2000. *Modukpè, le rêve brisé*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
-2000. *Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
-2002. *Jeté en pâture*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Fatunde, T. 2004. Calixthe Beyala rebels against female oppression. *New women's writing in African literature*. E.N. Emenyonu. Ed. Oxford: African World Press. p.69-76.
- Firestone, S. 1972. *The dialectics of sex*. London: The Women's Press.
- Francis, B. 2002. Relativism, realism, and feminism: an analysis of some theoretical tensions. *Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 11, No.1
- Frank, K. 1987. Women without men: the feminist novel in Africa. *African Literature Today*. 15, p.14-34.
- Freire, P. 2000. *Pedagogy of freedom: ethics, democracy and civic courage*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- Gadjigo, S. 1989. Social vision in Aminata Sow-Fall's literary work. *World Literature Today*. Vol 63, No 3.
- Garika, C. 2015. Origins and oppression of African women. <http://allafrican.com/stories/201508280448.html>
- Geetha. 2002. *Gender- theorising feminism*. Stree: Calcutta.
- Gelles, R. 2009. Domestic violence. Microsoft Encarta, 2009
- Glick, P. and Fiske, S. 2000. Gender power dynamics. *Revisioning gender*. M. Ferree and J. Lorber. Eds. Alta: Mira press.
- Goodman, L. et al. Eds. 1996. *Literature and gender*. London: Routledge.
- Guermond, Y. 1960. France forum: une nouvelle interprétation. *Renef: La Revue Nigériane d' Études Françaises*, vol. 1 No 3, March, p. 115-121.

- Harrow, K.W. 1994. *Thresholds of change in African literature: the emergence of tradition*. London: Heinemann.
- Hazoumé, F. 2001. *La vengeance de l'albinos*. Abidjan: Edilis.
2002. *Le crépuscule de l'homme*. Abidjan: CEDA.
- Hazoumé, P. 1938. *Dogucimi*. Paris: Larose.
- Head, T. 2017. *12 Types of social oppression*. <https://www.thou...> Retrieved 7th April.
- Heidi, H. 1979. The unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism. *Capital and Class*, No 8 (Summer).
- Hinson, S. 2008. *Faces of oppression*.<http://strategic...> Retrieved 13th February, 2017.
- Hitchcott, N. 2000. Women writers in Francophone Africa. Retrieved March, 10/2018, from <https://www.questna.com>library.wom>
- Holy Bible, 2009. *Authorised King James version*. Oxford: Printcorp.
- Hooks, B. 1996. Feminist theory: a radical agenda. *Multicultural experiences, multicultural theories*. M. Rogers. Ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, p.56-73.
- Houeto, C. 1981. *L'aube sur les cactus*. Porto-Novo:INFRE.
- Huannou, A.1995. Approche générale et historique de la littérature Béninoise. *Notre Librairie*. No 24. p. 10-21.
- Hudson-Weems, C. 1993. *Africana womanism: reclaiming ourselves*. Michigan: Bedford.
- Human Rights Violations in Benin. *Alternative report to the united nations committee against torture*. Retrieved 11/1/ 2013.
- Humm, M. 1995. *The Dictionary of feminist theory*. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice
- Hountondji, V. 1977. *Coleurs de rêve*. Cotonou: La Pensée Universelle.
- Hountondji, G.1986.*Une citronnelle dans la neige*. Lomé:Nouvelles Éditions Africaines.
- Iyayi, F.1979.*Violence*.London: Longman.
1982. *The contract*.London: Longman.
 ----- 1986. *Heros*.London: Longman.
- Jagne,S. and Parekh Pushpa. 1998. *Postcolonial African writers: a bio-bibliographical critical sourcebook*. London: Greenwood.
- Johnson, J. 1985. *Feminist dictionary*.C. Kramarae and P. Treichler Eds. London: Unwin.
- Jones, L. 1971. *Contemporary black drama*. C. Oliver and S. Sills. Eds. New York: Charles Scribner.
- Jordan,T. 2010. Feminist theory: gender oppression. Retrieved 8/5/2017, from www.allvoices.com/.../3652833.
- Jule, A. 2006. *Language and gender*. Clevedon : Multilingual Matters, p.7

- Ka, M.1985. *La voix du salut (suivit de) le miroir de la vie*.Dakar: Presence Africaine.
- Keita, F.1998.*Rebelles*. Abidjan: Nouvelles Éditions Ivoiriennes.
- Kirby, M. et al, 2000. *Sociology in perspective*. Oxford: Heinemann.
- Kolawole, M. 1992. Mariama Bâ and Nawal El Saadawi...varying approaches to feminism.*Journal of English Studies*. Vol.V1.p.92-97.
-1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. African World Press, Inc.
- Komath, J. 2013. Religion as a barrier in women's empowerment. Retrieved 22/03/2014, from www.thehindu.com/books/books-reviews/religion-as-a-barrier-in-womensempowerment/article_5364865ece
- Kourouma Ahmadou. (1970) *Les soleils des indépendences*. Seuil.
- Kramarae, C. 1992. The condition of patriarchy. *The knowledge explosion: generation of feminist scholarship*.C. Kramarae and D. Spender. Eds. London: Teachers College Press.
- Kuoh-Moukouri, T. 1969.*Rencontres essentielle*. Paris : Imprimerie Edgar.
- Labou Tansi, S.1979. *La vie et demie*. Paris: Éditions Seuil.
- Laye, C.1953.*L'enfant noir*. Guinea: Plon.
- Lee, S. 1994. *Les romancières du continent noir: an anthology telecharger, lire*.Paris: Hatier.
- Lerner, G. 1986. *The creation of patriarchy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lesure, M. 2012. Joyce Banda; deuxième femme à la tête d'un pays Africain en six ans! *Amina*.No. 507, p.16.
- Levant, R.F. et al 2010. Evaluation of the factor, structure and construct validity of scores on the male role norms inventory. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, vol 11:1, p.25-37.
- Lionnet, F. 1989. *Autobiographical voices:race, gender, self-portraiture*.NY : Cornell University Press.
-Inscriptions of exile: the body's knowledge and the myth of authenticity.*Callaloo* 15.1 (Winter 92): 30-40.
- Little, K. 1980.*A sociology of urban women's image in African literature*. London: Macmillian Press.
- Ly, I. 1985. *Toiles d'araignée*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Madeiras, R. 1977. *Vive le Bénin nouveau*. Cotonou: Éd. du Bénin.
- Mantel, R. 2017. Exploitation of labour. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 45:3, p.179
- Marx, K. 1976. *The condition of working class in England*. London: Capital

- Mayaba, H. 1997. *L'univers infernal*. Cotonou: Les Editions Aziza.
-2007. *L'engrenage*. Cotonou: Star Editions.
- Mclean, P. 2003. How Buchi Emecheta's joy of motherhood resists feminist and nationalist reading. Retrieved Oct. 5/2017, from www.otago.ac.nz/deepsouth/200301/motherhood/html/
- Mernissi, F. 1975. *Beyond the veil: male-female dynamics in modern muslim society*. London: Alsaq Books
- Merriam-Webster, 2014a. [i.word.com/dictionary/self-assertion](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/self-assertion).
-2014b. Retrieved Oct. 5/2017 from www.yourdictionary.com/self-assertion.
- Midiohouan, G. 2004. Le phénomène des littératures nationales en Afrique. *Peuples Noirs Peuples Africains*.27, p. 57-70.
- Mill, J.S. 2009. *The subjection of women*. Indianapolis: Hackette Publishing Co.
- Millet, K. 1977. *Sexual politics*. London: Shere.
- Mittal, T. 2018. To be is to be : Jean-Paul Sartre on existentialism and freedom. Retrieved March, 13/2018, from <https://yourstory.com/.../jean-paul-sartre-philosophy-existentialism-freedom/>
- Moi, T. 1987. *French feminist thought*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell.
-1999. *What is a woman?* Oxford: Oxford University Press
-2002. *Sexual/textual politics: feminist literary theory*. New York: Routledge.
- Monteiro, A. 1979. *La part du feu*. Cotonou: ONEPI.
- Morgan, L. 1877. *Ancient society*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Moukoury, K. 1969. *Rencontres essentielles*: Paris: L'Harmattan
- Mugo, M. 1992. *Gender, politics and African cultural production*. Being a paper presented at the Africana Studies and Research Center, Cornell University, March.
- Mustapha, A. 2010. Trends in gender and language theories. *Gender Theories and Polemics*. Y.O.O. Akorede and A.A. Asinyanbola. Eds. Porto-Novo: Imprimerie Sonou. p.76.
- Ndeye, S. 1999. Abidjan: Les Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes.
- Ngcobo, L. 1986. African motherhood -myth and reality. *Criticism and ideology*. K. H. Peterson. Ed. Uddevalla : Nordiska Africainstitutet.
- Nicki, H. 2006. *Calixthe Beyala: performance of migration*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

- Notre Librairie. 1995. *Littérature Béninoise*. Paris : l'Harmattan.
- Nwajiaku, I. 2010. In search of an African gender ideology: Kolawole's *womanism and African consciousness* and Acholonu's motherist alternative. *Gender theories and polemics*. Y.O.O. Akorede and A.A. Asinyanbola. Eds. Porto-Novo: Éditions Sonou d'Afrique. p. 1-22
- Nwapa, F. 1966. *Efuru*. London: Heinemann.
-1970. *Idu*. London: Heinemann.
-1975. *Never again*. Enugu: Nwamife Publishers.
-1992. *One is enough* London: Heinemann.
- O'Barr, J. 1987. Feminist issues in the fiction of Kenya's women. *African Literature Today*. 55-70.
- O' Callaghan, E. 1990. Interior schisms dramatised: the treatment of the "mad" woman in the work of some female novelists. *Out of the kumbla*. C. Boyce-Davies and S. F. Elaine. Eds. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press: p.89-109.
- Odinye, I.E. 2010. Feminism and self assertion of female characters in Buchi Emecheta's second class citizens and Zaynab Alkali's the stillborn. *Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol 11 (1) Retrieved Oct. 13/2014, from [www.ajol.info](http://www.ajol.info/index.php/ujah/issue/view/66306/54023) index.php/ujah/issue/view/66306/54023.
- Ogike, U. 1995. Le piège dans un piège sans fin d'olympie Bhely-Quenum: une nouvelle interprétation. *Renef: La Revue Nigériane d' Études Françaises*. Vol. 1 No. 03, March. p. 115 – 121.
- Ogini, E. 1996. Feminism and womanism: a historical perspective. *Feminism and black women's creative writing: theory, practice and criticism*. A. Adebayo. Ed. Ibadan: AMD.
- Ogundipe-Leslie. 1994. *Re-creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformation*. Trenton, N.J: African World Press.
- Ogunsina, B. 1985. Co-wife tales and the problems of discipline in the society. Proceedings of the 4th annual congress of the Nigerian Folklore Society, Univ. of Ife, p.375-387.
- Ogunyemi, C. 1985. Womanism: The Dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in english. *Sign* 11:1, p.63-80.
- Ojo, P. 2007. Rewriting identities in contemporary Beninese literature. *Gboungboun, The Ponal Magazine*. Retrieved August, 15 2010. From <http://projectponal.com/newsletter/invisible/invisible-b.html>.

- Okeh, P. 1999. La politique africaine de l'engagement dans mon rêve, poème du Béninois Jérôme Tovignon-Carlos. *Nigerian University French Teachers Association (NUFTA)* p. 56 – 67.
- Omvedt, G. 1990. Violence against women: new movements and new theories in India. Retrieved January, 27/ 2017. From <http://www.poline.org/mode/379902>.
- Opera, C. 1987. Towards utopia: womanhood in the fiction of selected West African writers. Ph.D thesis submitted to the Dept. of English, University of Ibadan. x + 351pp.
- Ormerod, O. and Volet, J. 1994. *Romancières africaines d'expression française, le sud du Sahara*, Paris: l'Harmattan.
- Ousmane, S. 1960. *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*. Paris: Bussière.
-1962. *Lettres de France. Voltaïque*. Paris: Présence Africaine.
- 1968. *Le mandat*. Paris : Jacques et Demontrand.
- 1976. *Xala*. Paris : Presence Africaine.
- Oyewole, C. 2016. Sacrificed on the altar of materialism : a critical look at the reactions of two francophone female protagonists to female objectification. *Issues and concerns in education for national security and development*. F.O. Afolabi and A.B. Loto. Eds. Ondo : Masterprints Publishers, p.1-12.
- Two of a kind : a study of the characters of Yaye Khady and Tante Nabou as portrayed in Mariama Bâ's *une si longue lettre* and *un chant écarlate*. *New direction in socio-economic reform and sustainable development*. G. Ikuejugbe, E.O. Ayeyemi and S. Akinwumi. Eds. Ibadan : Alafas Nigerian Co., p.222-232.
- Oyono, F. 1956. *Une vie de boy*. Paris: René Julliard.
- Oyono-Mbia, G. 1975. *Trois prétendants... un mari*. Yaoundé: Editions Sainte Paul
- Palmer, E. 1968. Elechi Amadi: the concubine and Flora Nwapa Efuru. *African Literature Today*, 2, p.56-58.
- Parpart, J . 2017. *Gender, patriarchy and development in Africa: the Zimbabwean case*: Oxford:Oxford University Press.
- Patil, V. 2013. *From patriarchy to intersectionality: theorizing power, empowering theory*. Chicago: University of Press.
- Père B. 1995. *Sept ans en Afrique occidentale: la côte des esclaves et le Dahomey*. Paris: l'Harmattan.

- Philby, Charlotte. 2013. Asylum seekers forced into prostitution by support system failures. Retrieved 22/01/2017, from www.independent.co.uk
- Pilcher, J. and Whelehan, I. 2004. Fifty key concepts in gender studies. London:Sage Publication.
- Pilkington, Ed. 2010. Half the sky: how trafficking of women today is on a par with genocide. Retrieved 22/01/2017, from www.halftheskymovement.org/
- Phillips, L.2007.The womanist reader: *Journal of Pan African Studies*.Vol 2 no1
- Pliya, J. 1971. *L'Arbre Fétiche*. Yaoundé : CLE.
-1973. *La secrétaire particulière*. Yaoundé: CLE.
- Prudencio, E. 1983. *Ailleurs...un jour...peut-être*. Cotonou:Éd. ONEPI.
- Rawiri,N. 1989. *Fureurs et cris de femmes*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Redmond, W. A. 2006. *Feminism*. Microsoft Encarta. Microsoft Corporation.
- Rosbech, M. 2013. What is patriarchy? Retrieved April, 30/2018 from <http://www.slideshare.net/judyhubbard>.
- Rouch, A. & Gérard C. 1986. Bénin in *littératures nationales d'écritures française : fistoire et anthologie*. Paris : Bordas.p. 9-26.
- Sandy, P. 1981.*Female power and male dominance: sexual inequality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
-1998. Matriarchy as a socio cultural form. Paper Presented at the Congress of the Indo Pacific Prehistory Association, Melaka, Malay.Retrieved April 28/2018, from <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/psanday/matri.html>
-2002. *Women at the centre: life in a modern matriarchy*. London: I.T.press.
- Sanusi, R. 2004. Representations of sub-saharan African women in colonial and post-colonial novels in French. Ph.D Thesis. Dept of Romance Language: University of Oregon.
-2015. *Portrayals and gender palaver in francophone African writings*. Ibadan: Graduke Publishers, p.13.
- Sanusi, R. and Olayinka, W. 2012. Religio-cultural and poetic constructions of the subaltern African women. *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies*. Nos 21 & 22. p. 273-293.
- Sapiro, V. 1986. *Women in American society. an introduction to women's studies*. Palo Alto: Mayfield Publishing.
- Sekoni, R. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. Cheltenham: African World Press, Inc., p.5.

- Semlar, V. et al (Eds) 1998. *Rights of women*. New York: International Women's Tribune Centre.
- Sharma, I. 2015. Violence against women: where are solutions? *Index Journal of Psychology*. Retrieved April 30/2018. From <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles>
- Sheila, R. 1980. *Issues in feminism: a first course in women's studies*: Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.
- Siga, J. 1995. *African women and the Category 'woman' in feminist theory*, a paper presented at the annual conference of the African Literature Association in Columbus, Ohio.
- Social Institutions and Gender Index. 2014. *Bénin gender index report: 2014 edition*. Retrieved May 2, 2018 from <https://www.wikigender.org/countries>.
- Sotunsa, M. 2009. *Feminism and gender discourse. the African experience*. Sagamu: Ojoko- Biri Kate Press.
- Sow-Fall, A. 1976. *Le revenant*. Dakar : Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines.
-1979. *La greve de Battu*. Dakar : Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines.
-1982. *L'appel des arenes*. Dakar : Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines.
-1987. *Ex pere de la nation*. Paris : L'Harmattan.
-1993. *Le jujubier du patriarce*. Dakar : Éditions Ikhoudia.
- Soyinka, W. 1975. *Death and the king's horseman*. London: Methuen and Group.
-1978. *The trials of brother Jero and the strong breed*. New York: Dramatists Play Service.
-1984. *The interpreters*. New York: Heinemann.
- Stacey, J. 1993. Untangling feminist. *Introducing women's studies: feminist theory and practice*. D. Richardson and V. Robinson. Eds. London: Macmillian.
- Stephen, R.J., Keaveny, M. and Patton, V.K. 2002. Come colour my rainbow: themes of Africana womanism in the poetic vision of Audrey Kathryn Bullett. *Journal of Black Studies*, vol 32:4, p.464-497.
- Stratton, F. 1994. The shallow grave: archetypes of female experience in African fiction *RAL* (Print 88): p.142-169.
-Contemporary African literature and the politics of gender. New York: Routledge.
- Strobel, M. 1995. Women in the Religious and secular Ideology. *African women south of the Sahara*. J. Hay and S. Stither. Eds. New York: Longman

- Tacchino, E. 2008. Liberté, dignité, et droits de l'homme chez Buchi Emecheta et Adelaïde Fassinou. *AFROEUROPA*.
- Taiwo, O 1981 The women novelists of West Africa. *In West African studies in modern language teaching and research*. The Modern Language Centre, Federal Ministry of Education. p.198-211.
- Tansi, L. S. 1979. *La vie et demie*. Paris: Seuil.
- The Global Gender Gap Report. 2013. World Economic Forum. p. 12–13.
- The Multiple Jeopardy of Being an African Woman. 2012. MSAFROPOLITAN Retrieved March 10/ 2018, from <http://www.msafropolitan>.
- The University of Chicago. 2016. Fostering gender balance in religion. *Journal of Solidarity and Sustainability*. Vol.12 :9, Sept.
- The University of Western Australia, 2017. African writing since 1960s. Retrieved March 10/2018, from <http://afflit.artz.uwa.edu.au/FEMEC/home.EN.html>.
- The World Fact book, 2002. *Women's economic, social and cultural rights in Bénin*. Retrieved Oct 12/ 2017, from <http://www.umn.edu/humanrts/iwraw/publications/countries/Bénin.htm>.
- Thiam, A. 1986. *Black sisters speak out*. London: Pluto Press.
- Thomas, D. and Hitchcott, N. 2006. *Calixthe Beyala: performances of migration*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Trinh, M. 1991. *Women, native, other*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press
- Tsalor, J. 2005. Gender politics in Tiv narratives. PhD Thesis. Department of English, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.
- Udousoro, I. 2013. Aminata Sow-Fall's works: a compendium of development-oriented issues. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*. Vol. 4, No 6, July.
- United Nations Development Programme. 1998. *Women and human development in Bénin*. Retrieved May 2, 2018, from <http://www.bj.undp.org/>
- Uwah, G.O. 1993. African books collective introduction to Francophone African literature. Retrieved March 14, 2018. From <https://journals.lib.unbi.ca>
- Uwandu, E. 2018. Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail feminism. *The Guardian*:4th March, p.11.
- Verba, S. 1997. *Feminist and womanist criticism of African literature: a bibliography*. London: Heinemann.
- Wa Thiongo, N. 1964. *Weep not child*. London: Heinemann
 1965. *The river between*. London: Heinemann

- Walby, S. 1997. *Theorizing patriarchy*. Cambridge: Polity Press
- Walker, A. 1970. *The third life of Grange Copeland*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovic.
-1976. *Meridian*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovic
-1983. *The colour purple*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovic
- 1984. *In search of our mother's garden*. San Diego: Harcourt.
- Warner-Vieyra, M. 1982. *Juletane*. Paris: Présence Africaine
- Whisler, V, 2001. *Continuing gender discrimination: the journey to female evolution*. Retrieved March 10/2018, from <http://wmich.edi/dialogues/themes/africawoman.html>.
- Wollstonecraft, M.A. 1793. *A vindication of rights of woman*. New York: Harcourt Bryte Press.
- Woolf, V. 1987. *Woman and writing*: London: Woman Press
- Young, I. 2004. *Five faces of oppression*. Boston: Mccraw Hill.
- Zielinski, C. August 14,2015. Why women are still the property of men. *Daily Telegraph*. Retrieved April, 30/2018, from <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au>.

APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW D'ADÉLAÏDE FASSINO, LE 15 MARS, 2010 A COTONOU, REPUBLIQUE DU BÉNIN

Chercheuse: Je m'appelle madame Charity Oyewole, Professeur de français au collège Fédéral d'Éducation, Abeokuta et étudiante de doctorat à l'Université d'Ibadan, Ibadan toujours au Nigéria; vous pouvez vous présenter madame?

Adélaïde Fassinou: Je m'appelle Adélaïde Fassinou, épouse d'Alagbada. Je suis professeur certifié de lettres et écrivain

Chercheuse: Dans nos établissements scolaires, les études littéraires couvrent des auteurs francophones de l'Afrique de l'Ouest. Cependant, quoique très proche du Nigéria, les auteurs Béninois semble d'être oubliés surtout les femmes; voilà donc la genèse de la présente étude.

Adélaïde Fassinou: Très bien. C'est bien d'avoir pensé aux femmes.

Chercheuse: Vous êtes écrivain à plein temps?

Adélaïde Fassinou: Non, je suis enseignante. Je suis chargée des cours à l'Université et aux écoles professionnelles. Donc, je ne suis pas écrivain à plein temps.

Chercheuse: Où, quand, pourquoi et pour qui écrivez-vous?

Adélaïde Fassinou: J'écris à tout moment; le jour, la nuit, à la maison même quand je suis assise au milieu des gens. J'ai toujours un bloc-notes dans mon sac et quand j'ai une inspiration, j'écris. J'ai des temps favoris quand même, surtout la nuit quand tout est calme, quand tout le monde dort. C'était le temps quand j'avais de bons yeux. Mais maintenant que les yeux commencent à faiblir, je quitte carrément le pays pour aller à Lomé. Je prends une chambre dans un hôtel ou au campus et j'y reste pour une semaine. C'est ce que je fais. J'ai des amis au village du Bénin. J'écris parce que j'ai un message à transmettre.

Chercheuse: Vos œuvres, sont-elles autobiographiques?

Adélaïde Fassinou: Pas forcément. Beaucoup de fictions, un peu de réaliste et beaucoup d'imaginations. Il y a beaucoup de moi dans Modukpè comme c'était mon premier livre. Mais ce n'est pas autobiographique, pas entièrement en tout cas.

Chercheuse: Quels sont les genres littéraires qui vous intéressent beaucoup?

Adélaïde Fassinou: J'ai écrit un peu de tout; nouvelle, roman, je viens de sortir mon premier recueil de poème et le titre est *poème d'amour et de ronces*. Je suis en train de parcourir tous les genres.

Chercheuse: Dans quel mesure les béninoises ont-elles été influencées par vos œuvres?

Adélaïde Fassinou: Les femmes aiment beaucoup lire ce que j'écris. Je parle de la réalité. Les femmes se retrouvent entièrement dans ce que j'écris. Par exemple, dans *Yemi ou le miracle de l'amour*, j'ai éduqué les parents qu'il faut intégrer les vidomègons (les enfants placés dans les maisons des riches) dans les familles. Les enfants placés est un phénomène dans les familles. Après avoir lu Yemi, les familles ont décidé d'envoyer leurs vidomègons à l'école. Donc, il y a les effets positifs de mes écrits sur un grand nombre de personnes, surtout les femmes; grâce à mes livres, j'interviens.

Chercheuse: Quels sont les thèmes qui vous intéressent tout en particulier?

Adélaïde Fassinou: Tous les thèmes qui reflètent la réalité quotidienne; la vie, la souffrance, l'éducation des filles, l'amour, beaucoup d'amour. Avec l'amour on peut tout réaliser dans la vie. Moi, je parle des choses de tous les jours, la responsabilité des hommes vis-à-vis de leur famille, la responsabilité du pays vis-à-vis des citoyens. Les événements socio-culturels sont l'élément central de mes œuvres.

Chercheuse: Dans quel mesure votre cercle familial a-t-il été affecté par les changements qui ont pris place en Afrique depuis l'indépendance?

Adélaïde Fassinou: Chaque famille s'évolue selon la situation des différents membres de la famille. Certaines ont resté dans la terre. Ce n'est pas égalité pour tous. L'indépendance n'a pas apporté la joie pour tout le monde.

Chercheuse: Vous vous servez d'Ananou, une femme qui adopte les enfants abandonnés, (*Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*) comme modèle pour prêcher l'amour d'autrui.

Adélaïde Fassinou: Exactement! Avec l'amour, on peut tout réaliser.

Chercheuse: L'oppression de la femme; est-elle l'image de votre milieu culturel?

Adélaïde Fassinou: Les femmes souffrent énormément. Mais la situation de la femme avait beaucoup changé. Je ne me ressemble pas à ma mère et sa génération. Aujourd'hui, les femmes sont combatives. Elle veut aller en avant, se retrouver dans tous les cercles de la décision. Elle veut décider pour elle, pour ses semblables. Il y a des femmes qui sont des modèles pour les autres. Notre société a beaucoup évolué sur ce plan.

Chercheuse: Êtes-vous membre du Féminisme?

Adélaïde Fassinou: Non, je ne suis pas membre. Il y a des femmes qui me prennent pour modèle, pour leur leader, qui veulent que je parle à leur nom. Je suis leader d'opinion malgré moi. Quand j'ai l'opportunité de parler au nom des femmes, je vois les femmes derrière moi. Elles me disent: "toi qui écris tous ces livres, va leur dire que c'est comme ça que ça doit être".

Chercheuse: Qu'est-ce que vous pensez du mouvement?

Adélaïde Fassinou: Ici, les femmes sont très dures et radicales. Il y en a d'autres qui sont douces mais qui réussissent à faire changer des choses malgré leurs douceurs. Moi, je ne sais pas à quelle catégorie je peux me situer. Certains disent que je suis Féministe alors que d'autres affirment que je suis conciliante. Mais une chose est certaine; quand il s'agit de parler au nom de la femme marginalisée dans notre pays, c'est dans ce plan que je me retrouve.

Chercheuse: Dans quel courant littéraire, peut-t-on classer vos œuvres?

Adélaïde Fassinou: Réaliste.

Chercheuse: Modukpè et sa mère sont victimes de la polygamie et on constate que vous les servez comme porte parole pour condamner la pratique.

Adélaïde Fassinou: Je suis victime de la polygamie. Mon père est polygame et c'est une situation que j'ai vécue et qui m'avait marquée négativement.

Chercheuse: À votre avis, cette pratique subsitera-t-elle à jamais?

Adélaïde Fassinou: Les hommes sont égoïstes. C'est ça la réalité, ils ne sont jamais contents avec une femme. Il y a même les grands personnages en Europe qui ont des maîtresses et des enfants en dehors du foyer.

Chercheuse: Certaines de vos œuvres révèlent que vous êtes contre l'usage des méthodes agressives et radicales pour revendiquer la liberté de la femme africaine surtout lorsqu'un considère le personnage de Modukpè.

Adélaïde Fassinou: Ma mère a été comme ça; c'est elle qui me conditionne. Ma mère est la représentation de la mère de Modukpè. Selon elle, tout doit être accepté. C'est seulement pour montrer qu'on subisse l'influence de sa mère. L'image de la mère de Modukpè, c'est ma mère. Elle a voulu conditionner sa fille à son image. C'est pour montrer que la fille subisse l'influence de la mère. Autour de moi, il y a les femmes qui souffrent de la polygame et de l'irresponsabilité des hommes. Je veux être la voix de celles-ci.

Chercheuse: Avez-vous eu de la peine à trouver une maison d'édition d'accord de publier vos œuvres?

Adélaïde Fassinou: Le problème des écrivains c'est la maison d'édition; la plupart de mes œuvres sont publiées en Europe où la distribution se fait correctement, mais ici, c'est différent, on insiste d'abord sur le paiement et si tu vends ou pas, cela ne les concerne pas; la condition ici n'est pas favorable.

Chercheuse: Vos œuvres, sont-elles acceptées au Bénin?

Adélaïde Fassinou: Oui.

Chercheuse: Quels sont les autres pays où vos œuvres sont acceptées?

Adélaïde Fassinou: Un peu partout dans le monde; En France, au Canada et en Afrique.

Chercheuse: La réaction des femmes opprimées dans vos œuvres, est-ce que c'est une image de votre milieu socio-culturel.

Adélaïde Fassinou: Les femmes souffrent énormément à cause de la polygamie et l'irresponsabilité de la part des maris et des pères. Elles sont marginalisées, c'est pourquoi je me sers de leurs porte-parole. A travers mes œuvres, j'expose des situations qui ne laissent pas les gens indifférents mais qui les poussent d'agir et d'amener des changements.

Chercheuse: Quels sont les facteurs qui déterminent votre choix de titre?

Adélaïde Fassinou: Le choix de titre est influencé par le thème. Cependant, un titre doit capter l'attention du lecteur si bien que lorsqu'il commence la lecture du roman il doit aller jusqu'à la fin.

Chercheuse: Y a-t-il quelqu'un de votre entourage qui vous ait particulièrement marquée depuis votre enfance?

Adélaïde Fassinou: Ma mère a beaucoup d'influence sur ma vie. C'est elle qui réussit à m'apaiser parce que j'ai la tendance d'être rebelle et radicale.

Chercheuse: Qu'est-ce qui vous a poussée à avoir une vie professionnelle hors de votre foyer?

Adélaïde Fassinou: Quand on a un diplôme, c'est de travailler avec.

Chercheuse: Pensez-vous que le fait d'être une femme vous ait handicapée dans votre carrière d'écrivain?

Adélaïde Fassinou: J'ai trois grands garçons. J'ai eu mes enfants très jeunes et le dernier est à l'Université. Maintenant, je suis libre et je dispose de mon temps pour faire ce que je veux. Je n'ai pas de contraintes; avec mon mari ça va très bien, il est très évolué, il est journaliste et il est heureux pour moi. La semaine prochaine je serai en Espagne et puis en France pour y aller parler des problèmes des femmes.

Chercheuse: Quelles sont les réactions des critiques masculins par rapport à vos œuvres?

Adélaïde Fassinou: Mes œuvres leurs intéressent beaucoup. Ils lisent selon le goût de chacun.

Chercheuse: Avez-vous encore des manuscrits non-publiés?

Adélaïde Fassinou: Oui, mon troisième recueil de poème. J'ai aussi un roman et un poème qui doivent être publiés d'ici juin.

Chercheuse: Qu'est-ce qui vous semble le plus important dans votre vie, en ce moment?

Adélaïde Fassinou: À ce moment, c'est ma santé car je suis souvent malade. Quand j'apprend qu'un écrivain est mort à 90 ans, je commence à penser si je pourrai achever tous mes manuscrits avant d'atteindre cet âge.

Chercheuse: Avez-vous des projets d'avenir?

Adélaïde Fassinou: Oui. Quand je serai à la retraite, la seule chose que je fais c'est d'écrire. Dans cinq ans je prends ma retraite et tout ce que je ferai c'est écrire.

APPENDIX II

INTERVIEW SESSION WITH ADELAIDE FASSINOU ON 15TH MARCH, 2010 AT COTONOU, THE REPUBLIC OF BÉNIN

Researcher: My name is Mrs. Charity Omoleegho Oyewole, a French teacher at the Federal College of Education, Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria and a doctoral student at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, also in Nigeria. Could you please introduce yourself madam?

Adélaïde Fassinou: My name is Adelaide Fassinou, wife of Alagbada.

Researcher: In our institutions of learning, literary studies cover Francophone authors from West Africa. However, in spite of the Republic of Bénin's proximity to Nigeria, Beninese authors seem to be neglected especially women. This is the genesis of the present research.

Fassinou: It is good to know that you are working on issues that concern women.

Researcher: Are you a full-time writer?

Fassinou: No, I am a teacher. I teach at the National University, Calavi.

Researcher: Where, when, why do you write and who are your audience?

Fassinou: I write all the time, in the day, at night, I write whenever I have the time and whenever I am inspired to write. I write anywhere, at home, when I am in the midst of people, but mostly at night when all is quiet. But now that my eyes are getting weaker with age, I no longer write at night. At times, I leave the country for Lomé, lodge in a hotel for days, just to have enough time and quietness to enable me write. I write because I have a message to pass to all.

Researcher: Are your works autobiographical?

Fassinou: Partially. A writer is not divorced from his work because the work is actually part of him. In my works, there is a little bit of realism and lots of fiction. In fact, there is much of my person in *Modukpè, le rêve brisé*. Modukpè's mother is actually a picture of my mother. However, it is not completely autobiographical.

Researcher: What is your favourite literary genre?

Fassinou: All the genres. In fact my works cover all the genres: novel, novelette, children's story, and poem. My latest work is a collection of poems published in December, 2009, titled *Poèmes d'amour et de ronces*.

Researcher: In what ways have your works influenced Beninese women?

Fassinou: Our women enjoy reading my works because they deal with reality and women are at the centre of my works. For example, in *Yèmi ou le miracle de l'amour*, children taken from the village to serve as maids in town in the homes of comfortable families are maltreated and this is a societal phenomenon. Through *Yèmi ou le miracle de l'amour*, I had to educate the concerned parents that such underprivileged children should be integrated into such homes and accorded the same rights and privileges enjoyed by children born in such rich homes. Maids are not to be maltreated but shown love. After reading *Yèmi ou le miracle de l'amour*, some parents with maids had to send their maids to school. So my works have positive impact on a number of women. I believe that with love, one can achieve all things. My works centre on daily happenings: love, sufferings, misery, girl-child education, responsibility of men vis-à-vis their family, the country, etc.

Researcher: You seem to be pointing to Ananou (*Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*) as an example of a woman who showered on her maid and adopted children the type of love she showered on her biological children.

Fassinou: Exactly! With love you can achieve all things.

Researcher: How has the family circle been affected by changes in Bénin since independence?

Fassinou: Every family evolves based on the status of the different members of the family. There are enlightened families as well as uneducated ones who remain in the village. There is inequality. Some of the families in the rural areas leave for town thinking that all will be rosy for them when they get to the town, but the reverse is the case. Independence has not brought joy to all. Peasants work hard and what they receive as reward does not correlate with the labour they put into their work.

Researcher: In what ways has the place of women in your society changed in the last twenty years?

Fassinou: The place of women has actually changed. Today, women want education. Beninese women are combative; they want to take decisions for themselves unlike in the past when decision making was the prerogative of husbands and fathers. It is different from the days of our mothers. The society has actually evolved.

Researcher: What are the themes that are of particular interest to you?

Fassinou: Themes that reflect life, love, reality and happenings around me.

Researcher: Are you a Feminist?

Fassinou: I am not but I write about women issues and I know that there are women who see me as a model.

Researcher: What is your opinion about the movement?

Fassinou: Today's woman wants equality in all domains. She wants to decide for herself and her group. I know that there are women who are radical in their approach and those who are meek but succeed in effecting positive changes around them in spite of their meekness. There are times when people describe me as a radical Feminist while some say I am not. It is a fact that women are marginalised. I don't actually know where to place myself but one thing is certain, whenever there is the need to take a stand on behalf of women, I do not hesitate to do it. Women see me as a model. They tell me: you that have written all these books go ahead and tell people what we want. So each time I write or speak, I see women behind me.

Researcher: In what literary trend can one place your work?

Fassinou: Complete realist.

Researcher: Modukpé, her mother and Ananou (*Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*) are victims of polygamy and you used them as spokeswomen to expose the ills of polygamy. In your opinion, will this tradition continue to exist?

Fassinou: Men are selfish. They are just not satisfied with one woman. Even in Europe where monogamy is said to be practised, men including the influential ones have mistresses. I am a product of polygamy and it affected me negatively. My father was a polygamist and we were many in the house.

Researcher: Do you have difficulties getting your works published?

Fassinou: Most of my works are published in France because over there, I am sure of getting a good result. The publishers in France do take it upon themselves to distribute the books which are not done here. The condition here is not encouraging.

Researcher: Are your works accepted in Bénin?

Fassinou: Yes.

Researcher: Could you mention other countries where your works are accepted?

Fassinou: France, Canada.

Researcher: Is the reaction of oppressed women in your works a reflection of your socio-cultural milieu?

Fassinou: Women suffer as a result of polygamy and irresponsibility on the part of husbands and fathers. I want to be the voice of these oppressed women.

Researcher: What are the factors that determine your choice of titles?

Fassinou: It is what I want to write that determines my choice of title. However, a title must be able to capture the attention of the reader, so that when the reader picks a book, he should desire to get to the end of the story.

Researcher: Is there an event or an individual that influenced you when you were young?

Fassinou: My mother. She had a lot of influence on me just like the case of Modukpe's mother who had a lot of influence on her daughter and made her submissive. Like Modukpe, I had the tendency to be rebellious and aggressive but my mother succeeded in calming me. She had me after having four sons but contrary to the idea of naming Modukpe after her mother's late sister, my own mother's late sister was Alake and not Modukpe. My mother died in 2006. She was from Ile-Ife. In fact, people call me mama Modukpe, mama Yemi (the names of some of the characters in my works).

Researcher: There is this book "*La petite fille des eaux*" where you have about ten authors writing a book. Each of the authors writes a chapter and the next author continues the story where the previous one ends. What do you intend to achieve through the book?

Fassinou: The objective of the work is to expose child trafficking where children are transported from Bénin to Gabon to serve as maids. The book is written by an association of writers known as "Le Scribe Noir" Each writer writes a chapter and the next person continues that story where the previous chapter ends. Child trafficking is an evidence of lack of love.

Researcher: What inspired you to pursue a professional career?

Fassinou: When one is educated, the certificate is not to be dumped in the kitchen. That is why I am into professional life. I actually wanted to venture into singing but my father who was high handed would not hear of it.

Researcher: Does your career give you time for your family?

Fassinou: Yes, of course. I have three grown-up sons. The last is a second year law student in the University, while the first two are graduates and are working. If I want to be away from home for a long time, it is alright by them. My husband is also very understanding. I have enough time for my profession. I started having children early in life. My husband is a source of inspiration for me. He is a journalist.

Researcher: Are there things you still wish to accomplish in the society through your works?

Fassinou: The message I wish to pass across to people is to expose problems and situations which will lead them to questions such situations around them and desire to effect changes.

Researcher: What do you consider as most important to you at the moment?

Fassinou: My health, writing, writing and writing. When I heard that a writer died at 90, I begin to wonder if I would be able to write as much books as I desire to write before I become 90. Presently, I am writing a poem on Haiti.

Researcher: Do you have unpublished manuscripts?

Fassinou: Yes. I am writing a poem on Haiti.

Researcher: Do you have future projects?

Fassinou: Yes. In the next five years I will be retiring from active service. Thereafter, I will write and write until I get to the grave.

APPENDIX III

INTERVIEW D'HORTENSE MAYABA, LE 16 MARS, 2010 A CALAVI, REPUBLIQUE DU BÉNIN

Chercheuse: Je m'appelle madame Charity Oyewole, Professeur de français au collège Fédéral d'Éducation, Abeokuta et étudiante de doctorat à l'Université d'Ibadan Ibadan toujours au Nigéria; vous pouvez vous présenter madame?

Hortense Mayaba: Je m'appelle Hortense Mayaba (née Sallan).

Chercheuse: Dans nos établissements scolaires, les études littéraires couvrent des auteurs francophones de l'Afrique de l'Ouest. Cependant, quoique très proche du Nigéria, les auteurs Béninois semble d'être oubliés surtout les femmes; voilà donc la genèse de la présente étude.

Hortense Mayaba: Très bien.

Chercheuse: Vous êtes écrivain à plein temps?

Hortense Mayaba: Oui. J'étais fonctionnaire, mais puisque je suis maintenant à la retraite, j'écris et je m'engage dans les affaires.

Chercheuse: Quels sont les genres littéraires qui vous intéressent beaucoup?

Hortense Mayaba: Littérature pour enfants.

Chercheuse: Où et quand écrivez-vous?

Hortense Mayaba: J'écris tout le temps surtout quand je suis à la maison.

Chercheuse: Quels sont les thèmes qui vous intéressent tout en particulier?

Hortense Mayaba: Les thèmes qui reflètent la joie, la vie, la mort, l'amour, mais tout en particulier la politique. Moi, je ne fais pas la politique, je suis observatrice. Je vis la politique, j'observe et je soulève à ma manière les points sensibles. Quelques parts je suis engagée.

Chercheuse: Vos œuvres, sont-elles autobiographiques?

Hortense Mayaba: Cela peut arriver, mais pas souvent.

Chercheuse: Dans quel mesure les béninoise ont-été influencées par vos œuvres?

Hortense Mayaba: C'est difficile de quantifier, puisque les gens d'ici ne lisent pas souvent. Toutefois, je reçois des commentaires de la part de mes collègues qui lisent

Chercheuse: Qui sont vos auteurs préférés?

Hortense Mayaba: C'est tellement difficile à dire. Chez nous il y a des grands classiques mais en dehors de chez moi, il y a Hampaté Bâ

Chercheuse: Est-ce que la place de la femme a changé depuis les vingt dernières années?

Hortense Mayaba: Certainement! Les femmes sont vraiment évoluées et à Dantokpa (le grand marché), elles sont maintenant financièrement indépendantes. Mais tout n'est pas encore rose, il existe encore des pratiques culturelles qui ont des effets négatifs sur le bien être de la fille; l'excision existe toujours, c'est un combat de tous les jours.

Chercheuse: Êtes-vous membre du Féminisme?

Hortense Mayaba: Non! Je ne veux pas être étiqueter Féministe. Je suis pour l'émancipation de la femme, mais je ne doit pas être Feminist pour participer à la lutte pour émanciper la femme opprimée. Je ne considère pas les hommes comme ennemis des femmes puisque j'ai des enfants masculins et féminins. On ne doit pas forcément être du group pour prendre part à la revendication des droits de la femme.

Chercheuse: Qu'est-ce que vous pensez du mouvement?

Hortense Mayaba: Je l'aime. J'ai vécu dans les environnements où les femmes souffrent beaucoup. Mais je préfère le bon combat; le combat fait en collaboration avec les autres, le combat effectué par les deux sexes contre l'oppression..

Chercheuse: Je vois une sorte de ressemblance entre *l'engrenage* et *les bouts de bois de Dieu* où les femmes se joignent à leurs maris pour lutter contre l'oppression.

Hortense Mayaba: Exactement! L'histoire dans *engrenage* est la réalité. Les femmes se joignent à leurs maris pour exprimer leurs mécontentment contre le système oppressif du gouvernement au pouvoir.

Chercheuse: Êtes-vous directement ou indirectement pour le Womanisme?

Hortense Mayaba: Ce n'est pas mon objectif d'être étiqueter Feminist ou Womaniste. Je lutte pour les deux sexes; hommes et femmes. Malheureusement, les femmes ne sont pas bien représentées. Je crois que les femmes sont des personnes honnêtes.

Chercheuse: Je vous considère comme optimiste dans *engrenage*. L''histoire s'articule autour d'un peuple qui souffre de l'effet des mauvais dirigeants; coup d'états incessant, détournements de fonds, arrêt fait au hasard et emprisonnements des critiques du gouvernement entre autres. En fin de compte, le président invite les citoyens à une conférence pour trouver solution au problème Parmi les invités, il y a les intellectuelles, les marchandes et les femmes du foyer. En fin de compte, le problème est résolu et tout le monde est heureux. Est-ce que dans cette

histoire vous-vous servez comme prophétesse, celle qui conço un meilleur futur suite à une situation défavorable, un optimiste?

Hortense Mayaba: L'histoire de *L'engrenage* est une réalité que j'ai vécu. Il y avait des coups d'états incessants au Bénin. Il y a même un individu qui prend le pouvoir mais avant d'être officiellement proclamé président, un autre coup d'état l'a remplacé. J'habitais près du camp militaire à Cotonou et j'ai tout témoigné. Tout le monde connaît le 'Timonier'

Chercheuse: L'histoire, Alioune, c'est l'histoire de quelqu'un de votre entourage?

Hortense Mayaba: Il s'agit simplement d'une réalité quotidienne, un phénomène social.

Chercheuse: On constate que les femmes sont souvent peintes des sorcières, comme dans *L'Univers Infernal*, mais pourquoi?

Hortense Mayaba: La réalité est que les femmes sont spirituellement puissantes.

Lorsqu'un considère la population des femmes qui fréquentent l'église, la mosquée et qui pratiquent la religion traditionnelle, c'est plus nombreuse que celle des hommes. Les femmes jouent un rôle dominant dans la pratique de la sorcellerie.

Chercheuse: Dans l'histoire, la tante d'Alioune est décrite comme le seul membre de sa famille suite à la mort de ses parents lorsqu'il était très jeune. Est-ce que c'est possible en Afrique pour un individu d'avoir un seul membre de famille, sans d'autres membres de famille proches ou éloignés?

Hortense Mayaba: Oui, c'est possible. La tante d'Alioune est le seul membre de sa famille en ville. Cela peut arriver quand tous les membres de la famille habitent au village.

Chercheuse: Qu'est-ce qui vous a poussée sur la voie d'une activité professionnelle?

Hortense Mayaba: Comme je vous ai déjà déclaré, j'étais fonctionnaire. Cependant, j'ai un esprit d'artiste et les artistes ne veulent pas être emprisonnés. Il y a aussi le foyer que je doit m'en occuper, ce n'est pas une tâche facile..

Chercheuse: Vos œuvres, sont-elles acceptées au Bénin?

Hortense Mayaba: Oui. Je reçois de temps en temps des commentaires de mes collègues.

Chercheuse: Quels sont les autres pays francophones où vos œuvres sont acceptées

Hortense Mayaba: La Côte d'Ivoire et le Lomé

Chercheuse: Avez-vous eu de la peine à trouver une maison d'édition d'accord de publier vos œuvres?

Hortense Mayaba: Je ne suis pas satisfaite avec les maisons d'édition de chez nous et je cherche ailleurs. A présent, la relation qui doit exister entre écrivain et maisons d'édition est absent.

Chercheuse: Y a-t-il quelqu'un de votre entourage qui vous ait particulièrement marquée depuis votre enfance?

Hortense Mayaba: Oui, mon père

Chercheuse: Qu'est-ce qui vous semble le plus important dans votre vie, en ce moment?

Hortense Mayaba: Ecrire, faire du progrès, prie que Dieu me bénisse avec une longue vie pour accomplir la publication de tous mes manuscrits et trouver une maison d'édition acceptable.

Chercheuse: Quel message désirez-vous transmettre à travers vos futures œuvres?

Hortense Mayaba: Condamner les phénomènes négatifs de la société et les corriger.

Chercheuse: Quels conseils avez-vous pour les femmes?

Hortense Mayaba: Les femmes doivent faire du progrès et se tolérer. Ce sont les femmes qui sont leurs ennemis et non les hommes; la belle-mère, la belle-sœur et la belle-fille. La belle-fille d'aujourd'hui deviendra belle-mère un jour, et la belle-mère a aussi des filles; les femmes doivent s'aimer et se tolérer.

APPENDIX IV

INTERVIEW SESSION WITH HORTENSE MAYABA ON 16TH MARCH, 2010 AT CALAVI, THE REPUBLIC OF BÉNIN

Researcher: My name is Mrs. Charity Oyewole, a French teacher at the Federal College of Education, Abeokuta, Nigeria, and a doctoral student at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan also in Nigeria. Could you please introduce yourself madam.

Mayaba: My name is Hortense Mayaba (nee Sallan).

Researcher: In our institutions of learning, literary studies cover Francophone authors from West Africa. However, in spite of the Republic of Bénin's proximity to Nigeria, Beninese's authors appear to be forgotten, especially the women. This is the genesis of the present study.

Researcher: Are you a full-time writer?

Mayaba: Yes I am. I was a civil servant but I am presently into full-time writing and business.

Researcher: What are the literary genres that are of interest to you?

Mayaba: Children literature.

Researcher: When do you write?

Mayaba: I write all the time especially when I am at home.

Researcher: What are your preferred themes?

Mayaba: Politics, joy, life, death, love, social happenings.

Researcher: In what ways are Beninese' women influenced by your works?

Mayaba: Since the tradition here is that most people don't read, it is difficult to evaluate the effect of my works on women. However, I can only speak of some of my colleagues who read. I normally receive feedback from this group of people.

Researcher: Who are your preferred authors?

Mayaba: It is difficult to say. There are many of them, classical writers. One of them is Hampâte' Bâ.

Researcher: Has the place of women in your society changed in the last 20 years?

Mayaba: I believe there have been a lot of changes since independence. Women had begun to get emancipated. At Dantokpa market, you see women who are economically independent unlike before independence. They contribute to the up keep of the family. They are now autonomous. However, it is not all rosy because there are still

cultural practices that are anti-women like excision which has negative consequences on the girl-child.

Researcher: Are you a Feminist?

Mayaba: No I don't want to be tagged a Feminist. I believe in the struggle for the emancipation of women but I don't need to be a Feminist to be involved in women's issues. I do not consider men as women's enemies since I have male and female children. There are different ways of fighting for women's right without necessarily belonging to the Feminist group.

Researcher: What is your opinion about the movement?

Mayaba: I love the movement. I have lived in an environment where women suffer a lot but I believe in a good fight. The good type of fight is done in collaboration with others. I believe in the two sexes fighting against oppression.

Researcher: I see a resemblance between *l'engrerage* and *les bouts de bois de Dieu* where women joined their husbands to protest against the bad governance of the leaders.

Mayaba: Exactly. The story in *l'engrerage* is real. Women fought alongside their husbands to express their discontent, support the men and confront the president.

Researcher: Are you directly or indirectly an advocate of Womanism?

Mayaba: It is not my aim to be tagged a Feminist or Womanist. I am fighting for both men and women. Women are powerful but unfortunately they are not well represented. I believe women are honest people.

Researcher: In *l'engrenage*, I see you as an optimist. In the story, the country suffered from bad governance, misappropriation of public fund, incessant arrest, brutality and imprisonment of people who dared criticize the government. When the situation got to the peak, the president invited the populace to a conference to give counsel that will help save the country's situation. Among those invited were intellectuals, market women, house wives etc. At the end, there was peace, everything went on well and the people were happy. Are you acting like a prophetess here, seeing a bright future after a chaotic situation, an optimistic?

Mayaba: The story in *L'engrenage* is real but I just do not want to use real names. There was this incessant coup d'état in Bénin and there was the case of a president who was never sworn in before another coup d'état replaced him. It all happened in Benin. I was brought up in Cotonou and I witnessed the revolution. Since I lived near the army barracks, I saw it all. We all know le "Timonier".

Researcher: Is the story of Alioune, (*L'univers infernal*), the story of someone you know?

Mayaba: It has to do with happenings around us. It is a social phenomenon.

Researcher: Why is it that women are always tagged witches, like the story in *L'univers infernal*?

Mayaba: In actual fact, women are spiritually powerful. The population of women in churches, mosques, traditional religion is more than that of men, so women are spiritually powerful. Also in witchcraft practices, they play a leading role.

Researcher: Alioune's aunt (*L'univers infernal*) is reported to be the only family member he has since he lost his parents when he was very young. Is it possible in Africa, for an individual to have just a family member, no parents, brothers, sisters, close or distant relations? It is very much possible when every member of the family resides in the village.

Researcher: What prompted you to venture into professional career?

Mayaba: As I said earlier, I was a civil servant. I have an artistic spirit in me and artists don't want to be imprisoned. There is the home to take care of which is not an easy task and I am also involved in business.

Researcher: What literary trend are you inclined to?

Mayaba: Social

Researcher: Are your works accepted in Benin?

Mayaba: Yes, I get to know through comments from colleagues, people and the press.

Researcher: What are the other Francophone countries where your works are accepted?

Mayaba: Ivory Coast, and Lomé.

Researcher: Do you have difficulties getting a publishing house to publish your works?

Mayaba: I am not satisfied with publishers around; I am looking for publishers elsewhere probably in Nigeria. The relationship that should exist between a writer and publisher is nonexistent here.

Researcher: What do you consider very important in your life at the moment?

Mayaba: Write, make progress, pray that God gives me many more years to enable me complete the manuscripts before me and to find a good publishing house.

Researcher: What do you still intend to accomplish through your works?

Mayaba: Condemn negative happenings in the society and correct them.

Researcher: What are your future projects?

Mayaba: Publish books. I still have lots of manuscripts and five completed novels.

Researcher: What advice do you have for women?

Mayaba: Women should endeavour to make progress, love and tolerate one another. Women are their own enemies; they are the ones undoing themselves, the mother-in-law, sister-in-law, daughter-in-law, etc. Every daughter-in-law will end up becoming a mother-in-law some day. The mother-in-law too has daughters. Women should love and tolerate one another.

APPENDIX V

INTERVIEW EN LIGNE DE FLORE HAZOUMÉ, LE 23 MAI, 2017

Chercheuse: Je m'appelle madame Charity Omoleegho Oyewole, Professeur de français au Collège Fédéral d'Éducation, Abeokuta, Nigéria et étudiante de doctorat à l'Université d'Ibadan, Ibadan, au Nigéria. Dans nos établissements scolaires, les études littéraires favorisent des écrivaines francophones de l'Afrique de l'Ouest. Cependant, quoique très proche du Nigéria, les écrivains béninois semblent d'être oubliés surtout les femmes; voilà donc la genèse de la présente étude qui porte sur entre autres romans des femmes béninoises étudiés, deux de vos romans: *La vengeance de l'albinos* et *Le crépuscule de l'homme*. Vous êtes écrivain à plein temps?

Flore Hazoumé: Non, j'ai travaillé pendant des années aux Nations-Unies. Actuellement, je suis rédactrice en chef d'un magazine féminin et je donne des cours de littérature et société dans un établissement dans un lycée français à Abidjan. Comme vous le savez très peu d'écrivains dans le monde peuvent vivre de leur plume, malheureusement.

Chercheuse: Où, quand, pourquoi et pour qui écrivez-vous?

Flore Hazoumé: Pour écrire, je n'ai pas d'endroit particulier ni d'heures particuliers. Quand j'ai commencé à écrire, j'avais un enfant en bas-âge, j'étais encore étudiante et j'ai toujours travaillé, je saisis la moindre occasion pour trouver le temps d'écrire.

Chercheuse: Votre grand-père, l'écrivain célèbre, Paul Hazoumé, a sans doute influencé votre amour pour l'écrit; dans quel mesure êtes-vous influencées par ses œuvres?

Flore Hazoumé: Vous savez je n'ai pas grandi au Bénin. Donc je ne pense pas avoir été influencée par ses livres mais je suis extrêmement fière de faire partie de cette illustre famille.

Chercheuse: Comme Béninoise qui habite en Côte d'Ivoire, est-ce qu'il y a l'influence de l'aspect socio-culturel du Bénin représenté dans vos romans surtout *La vengeance de l'albinos* et *Le crépuscule de l'homme*?

Flore Hazoumé: Je pense que les thèmes que j'aborde dans *Le crépuscule de l'homme* et dans *La vengeance de l'albinos* sont des thématiques africaines et qui peuvent parler à tout Africain

Chercheuse: Quels sont les thèmes qui vous intéressent tout en particulier?

Flore Hazoumé: Au fil du temps, je suis de plus en plus influencée par les événements qui bousculent l’Afrique et le monde. Les thématiques que j’aborde dépendent souvent de ce que j’entends, de ce qui se passe autour de moi. Il m’est arrivé d’écrire des livres complètement étranger à ce qui se passe dans le monde et en Afrique, mais je me sens vraiment de plus en plus concernée et perméable aux événements douloureux qui touchent notre continent.

Chercheuse: Le Féminisme est un mouvement qui lutte pour la libération des femmes qui sont victimes de l’oppression de la société patriarcale. Le groupe radical du mouvement rejette le mariage et la maternité, déclarant que ce sont des moyens pour opprimer la femme. Certains d’entre eux recommandent d’être lesbiennes ou un monde de femmes qui n’ont rien à faire avec les hommes. De l’autre part, le Womanisme favorise le mariage et la maternité, mais dirige leur lutte contre les lois patriarcales qui oppriment la femme tout en rendant compte de l’expérience particulière de la femme africaine. En plus, il désire aussi la collaboration des deux genres pour lutter contre l’oppression de la race noire. Qu’est-ce que vous pensez des deux mouvements?

Flore Hazoumé: J’ai l’habitude de dire que je ne suis pas une Féministe énervée dans le sens où l’homme n’est pas notre ennemi. Un monde sans homme serait une véritable folie. Nous avons besoin de vivre ensemble. Par contre, les lois qui oppriment les femmes doivent être combattues, cela va de soi, mais je pense qu’il n’est pas nécessaire de faire disparaître l’homme pour construire un monde meilleur pour les femmes. Je pense que l’accès à l’éducation pour toutes les filles et les femmes est le meilleur moyen pour faire évoluer la société.

Chercheuse: On constate que vos personnages féminins sont de celles qui ne peuvent se réaliser et s’épanouir que dans le couple. Celles qui n’ont jamais conçu le bonheur hors du couple (les caractéristiques du mouvement Womanisme). Par exemple, Mado était victime de violence chez Diallo d’où elle s’échappe belle. Malgré cette expérience douloureuse, elle désire toujours le mariage et se réconcilie avec Mésangou pour devenir soit son deuxième femme ou sa maîtresse. Aussi, Julienne ne divorce pas son mari (Mésangou), qui réconcilie avec Mado son ancienne fiancée et le garde comme maîtresse jusqu’à sa mort. Qu’est-ce que vous prêchez là? Est-ce que c’est votre manière de favoriser le Womanisme, le groupe qui lutte pour la libération de la femme opprimée tout en rendant compte des valeurs positives africaines telle le mariage?

Flore Hazoumé: Dans ce livre, j'ai juste voulu raconter une histoire. Je n'ai pas voulu passer un message sur la condition féminine, mais je laisse au lecteur et c'est là sa liberté de voir ces personnages Féminins sous le prisme qui lui convient.

Chercheuse: Il paraît que les hommes considèrent toujours les périodes de guerres ou de bouleversements socio-politiques comme occasion pour violer les femmes et les filles. Qu'en pensez vous?

Flore Hazoumé: Il est bien connu que les femmes et les enfants sont les premières victimes des horreurs de la guerre et le viol est devenu, malheureusement, une arme de guerre. En détruisant les femmes par le viol, on détruit une société et un pays .

Chercheuse: Est-ce que *La vengeance de l'albinos* est une mise en accusation des vices de la société patriarcale?

Flore Hazoumé: Pour moi *La vengeance de l'albinos* est surtout une histoire d'ambition et de revanche sur la vie et la fin de l'histoire est une morale qui stipule que l'on est toujours rattrapé par les actes que l'on pose.

Chercheuse: Le roman, *Le crépuscule de l'homme*, représente-il l'impuissance du gouvernement?

Flore Hazoumé: L'impuissance des politiciens obsédés par leur course au pouvoir et le manque d'humanité de l'être humain.

Chercheuse: Avec-vous des rapports avec des écrivains béninois?

Flore Hazoumé: Pas énormément, mais nous nous rencontrons dans différentes manifestations culturelles.

Chercheuse: Rendez-vous des visites constantes au Bénin?

Flore Hazoumé: Oui.

Chercheuse: Que pensez-vous de la place de la femme béninoise?

Flore Hazoumé: Je pense que la femme béninoise comme la femme africaine en général se bat pour pendre la place qui lui revient dans la société.

Chercheuse: Considérez-vous des femmes béninoises comme militantes ou passives dans la revendication de leurs droits dans la société patriarcale?

Chercheuse: Pour moi la femme béninoise est une femme forte et qui sait faire avancer les choses.

Chercheuse: Dans quel courant littéraire, peut-on classer vos œuvres?

Flore Hazoumé: Je ne sais pas. Je laisse cette appréciation aux critiques littéraires.

Chercheuse: Avez-vous eu de la peine à trouver une maison d'édition d'accord de publier vos œuvres?

Flore Hazoumé: Non. J'ai eu beaucoup de chance.

Chercheuse: Vos œuvres, sont-elles connues et acceptées au Bénin?

Flore Hazoumé: Oui, mes livres sont lus au Bénin.

Chercheuse: Quels sont les autres pays où vos œuvres sont acceptées?

Flore Hazoumé: Dans la majorité des pays africains de la sous-région, je crois.

Chercheuse: Quels sont les facteurs qui déterminent votre choix de titre?

Flore Hazoumé: Cela vient spontanément.

Chercheuse: Y a-t-il quelqu'un de votre entourage qui vous ait particulièrement marquée depuis votre enfance ?

Flore Hazoumé: Ma mère.

Chercheuse: Qu'est-ce qui vous a poussée à avoir une vie professionnelle hors de votre foyer?

Flore Hazoumé: Il est important de nos jours qu'une femme travaille.

Chercheuse: Quelles sont les réactions des critiques masculins par rapport à vos œuvres?

Flore Hazoumé: Les lecteurs masculins ou féminins sont des lecteurs tout simplement, il n'y a pas de critiques dites masculines par rapport à mes œuvres.

Chercheuse: Avez-vous encore des manuscrits non-publiés?

Flore Hazoumé: Non.

Chercheuse: Qu'est-ce qui vous semble le plus important dans votre vie, en ce moment?

Flore Hazoumé: Mes enfants, ma famille, mes livres et mon travail.

Chercheuse: Avez-vous des projets d'avenir?

Flore Hazoumé: Ecrire et encore écrire et voyager.

APPENDIX VI

ONLINE INTERVIEW WITH FLORE HAZOUMÉ ON 23RD MAY, 2017

Researcher: My name is Mrs. Charity Omoleegho Oyewole, a French teacher at the Federal College of Education, Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria and a doctoral student at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. In our institutions of learning, literary studies cover francophone authors from West Africa. However, in spite of the Republic of Bénin's proximity to Nigeria, Beninese authors seem to be neglected especially women. This is the genesis of the present research which focuses on selected Beninese women's novels among which are two of your novels: *La vengeance de l'albinos* et *Le crépuscule de l'homme*. Are you a full-time writer?

Flore Hazoumé: No, I have worked for years at the United Nations. At the moment, I am the chief editor of a women's magazine and I also take courses in literature and society in a French High School in Abidjan. Unfortunately, as you are aware, very few writers in the world can afford to live by their pen.

Researcher: Where, when, why do you write and who are your audience?

Flore Hazoumé: I neither have special places nor hours when I want to write. When I started writing I had a young child, I was still a student and I always worked, I made use of the slightest opportunity to write.

Chercheuse: Your grandfather, Paul Hazoumé, the famous Beninese writer must have undoubtedly influenced your love for writing; in what ways were you influenced by his writings?

Flore Hazoumé: As you are aware, I was not brought up in Bénin. So I don't think I was influenced by his writings, but I am extremely proud to belong to that renowned family.

Researcher: As a Beninese who live in Ivory Coast, do your novels portray the socio-cultural aspect of Bénin especially *La Vengeance de L'Albinos* and *Le crépuscule de L'Homme*?

Flore Hazoumé: I believe the themes I treat in *Le crépuscule de l'homme* and *La vengeance de l'albinos* are themes that are African in nature and can appeal to every African.

Researcher: What themes do you have special interest in?

Flore Hazoumé: With the passing days, I am becoming more influenced by events which overturn Africa and the world. The themes I treat always depend on what I hear and happenings around me. I have even written books that are completely alien to happenings in the world and in Africa, but I really feel more and more concerned about the painful happenings in our continent.

Researcher: Feminism is a movement which focuses on the struggle for the liberation of women who are victims of oppression in the patriarchal society. The radical group rejects marriage and mothering, claiming that they are means of oppressing the woman. Some even recommend lesbianism or a woman's world where women will have nothing to do with men. Womanism cherishes marriage and mothering but direct the struggle at patriarchal laws which oppress the woman while taking into cognizance the peculiar experience of the African woman. In addition, the movement advocates a collaboration of the genders to fight against oppression of the Black race. What is your opinion of the two movements?

Flore Hazoumé: I have the habit of saying that I am not an enervated feminist in the sense that man is not our enemy. A world without men should be complete madness. We need to cohabit. On the other hand, attacks should be launched only at laws that oppress women but I feel it is not necessary to do away with men in order to build a better world for women. I believe giving every girl and woman access to education is the best way to develop the society.

Researcher: One notices that your female characters belong to the group of women who can realize themselves fully and bloom only when form part of a couple. Those who have never conceived of happiness outside marriage (womanist traits). For example, Mado is a victim of male violence when in Diallo's house where she finally escapes. In spite of this painful experience she still desires marriage and reconciles with Mésangou (her former fiancée) to become his second wife/mistress. Also, Julienne does not divorce her husband when he reconciles with his former fiancée until his death. What are you preaching here? Is it your manner of advocating the womanist ideology, the group which fights for the liberation of the oppressed woman while taking into cognizance the peculiar experience of the African woman and preserving positive African values such as marriage?

Flore Hazoumé: In this book, I simply wanted to relate a story. I never wanted to pass a message on the condition of the woman. However, i give the reader the liberty to place the female characters as they so wish.

Researcher:It seems men consider wartime and periods of socio-political upheavals as opportunity to rape women and girls. What do you think?

Flore Hazoumé:It is a known fact that women and children are primary victims of wartime. Unfortunately, horrors and rape have become weapons of war. Destroying women through rape implies destroying the society and country.

Researcher:Is *La vengeance de l'albinos* a critique of patriarchal societal vice?

Flore Hazoumé: As for me, *La vengeance de l'albinos* is mainly a story of ambition and revenge and the story ends with a moral lesson which stipulates that one will always get caught by ones negative actions.

Flore Hazoumé: Does the novel, *Le crépuscule de l'homme*, represent government's powerlessness ?

Flore Hazoumé:The powerlessness of politicians' who are obsessed by their race for power and lack of human feeling.

Researcher:Do you have dealings with Beninese writers?

Flore Hazoumé:Not much, but we meet at different cultural events.

Researcher: Do you visit Bénin Republic on a regular basis?

Flore Hazoumé: Yes.

Researcher:What is your opinion of the status of Beninese women?

Flore Hazoumé: I feel the Beninese woman like the African woman in general is struggling to take her rightful place in the society.

Researcher: Do you consider Beninese women as militants or passive women in the struggle to claim their human rights?

Flore Hazoumé: For me, the Beninese woman is strong and knows how to make headway.

Researcher: In what literary trend can one place your work?

Flore Hazoumé: I don't know. I rather leave the literary appreciation to critics.

Researcher:Do you have difficulties finding a publisher for your works?

Flore Hazoumé: No. I am always lucky in that area.

Researcher: Are your works known and accepted in Bénin?

Flore Hazoumé:Yes my books are well read in Bénin.

Researcher: What other countries where your works are accepted?

Flore Hazoumé:I believe in most sub region African countries.

Researcher:What determines your choice of title?

Flore Hazoumé:It comes spontaneously.

Researcher:Is there an individual that influenced you when you were young?

Flore Hazoumé:My mother. .

Researcher: What inspired you to pursue a professional career?

Flore Hazoumé:It is germane today for a woman to work.

Researcher: How do male critics react to your works?

Flore Hazoumé:Male and female readers are simply readers. As pertaining to my works, there are no clearly defined male critics.

Researcher: Do you have unpublished manuscripts?

Flore Hazoumé:No.

Researcher:What do you consider as most important to you at the moment?

Flore Hazoumé:My children, my family, my books and my work.

Researcher: Do you have future projects?

Flore Hazoumé:Write and write again and travel.