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# Writing as a cultural negotiation: a study of Mariama Bâ, Marie NDiaye and Ama Ata Aidoo

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WRITING AS A CULTURAL NEGOTIATION: A STUDY OF MARIAMA BÂ,  
MARIE NDIAYE AND AMA ATA AIDOO

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
In partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

In

The Department of French Studies

By  
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BA., Université Laval, 1993  
M.A., Université Laval, 1999  
May 2006

To Mom and Dad, Thank you for sowing the seed.

To Don, you know what we have been through. Thank you

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## ABSTRACT

Critical review of the existing literature on African women writers clearly shows that nowhere is the question of writing as a cultural negotiation posed, discussed or much less addressed. This is a lacuna that this dissertation addresses for the first time by proposing a re-reading of the selected works of Ama Ata Aidoo, Mariama Bâ and Marie NDiaye through the new prism of writing as part of cultural negotiation. In doing so, the dissertation goes beyond the paradigm of binary oppositions that undergirds the critical literature on writing by Sub-Saharan women in favor of the innovative concept of negotiation. In addressing women's issues such as marriage and polygamy, motherhood and witchcraft, this study makes the powerful case that Mariama Bâ, Ama Ata Aidoo and Marie NDiaye have negotiated a space of creativity for themselves through writing, hitherto the preserve of men, and from which they pose, discuss and address through negotiation, those cultural issues affecting them.

Chapter One, with brief biographical sketches of the writers and a summary of their texts, deals with the theoretical framework for the study by providing the critical overview of Sub-Saharan women writers and in-depth analyses of the concepts of writing, negotiation and culture in order to explain how these women writers are able to negotiate their respective cultures in their writing. In Chapter Two, hybridity and its perils are discussed specifically in relation to the colonizer/colonized binary model. Through this binary, displacement of authority is engendered by means of a series of mimetic identifications with the colonizer by the colonized in an ambivalent hybridized cultural space. We discuss interracial and inter-caste polygamy and their role in the victimization of women

in Chapter Three. Chapter Four questions the notion that motherhood is the equivalent of men's reproductive labor and a source of oppression suggests that empowerment can be derived from surrogacy and freedom of choice. Chapter Five explores modern day beliefs in witchcraft and its cultural impact on women. From the feminist theoretical perspective, the study suggests that witchcraft, if reclaimed by women, is a powerful negotiating tool.

## INTRODUCTION

From Bessie Head to Buchi Emecheta to Mariama Bâ, many African Women Writers like to declare that they are not feminists (Code, 2000); however, nothing could be more feminist than the forceful articulation in their writings of deep preoccupations for, and attempts at explaining the experiences and fates of women in patriarchal African societies. Moreover, given the conceptual framework within which African feminism operates, it is not paradoxical that African Women Writers should want to distance themselves from Western feminism. Postcolonial feminist critics, like their American women of color counterparts, have attacked in their engagement with the issue of representation, both the idea of universal “woman” as well as the reification of the so-called “Third World” difference that produces the monolithic “Third World woman,” insisting instead on the specificities of race, class, nationality, religion and sexualities that intersect with gender, and on the socio-economic hierarchies that exist among women. While postcolonial feminists have called upon their First World feminist counterparts to recognize differences, acknowledge historical specificity of women in other places and times, and to abandon their unexamined ethnocentric thought which underlines a certain attitude of easy benevolence towards Third World women as victims, First World Feminists have contended that while it is true that colonial history has taken advantage of African traditions to locate the place of women in a subservient role, it is also true that the trend has not changed even after independence. As such the transfer of power to national elites merely ensured the continuation of colonial structures benefiting the male national elite.

In postcolonial thought, two factors have worked hand in hand against women: religious fundamentalism and cultural nationalism. As a result, postcolonial feminists have had to contend with two obvious realities: the women's respect for, and obedience to their communities' traditional demands and subservience to the dictates of fundamentalist religious rules. An African woman's commitment to community, nationalistic sentiments and fundamentalist religious rules has more complex causes than the simplistic cultural "backwardness". The answer, as proposed by a significant body of postcolonial literary works, lies in the negotiated space between the emancipatory goals of feminism and agendas of nationalism and communalism. In these works, that means positions ranging from total rejection of feminism in favor of solidarity with collective "national" or community goals, and also a direct opposition to colonial modernity. Nowhere is this wide-ranging positioning more significant than in the Nigerian critic Chikwenye Ogunyemi's "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English" (1985), in which she contrasts "womanist" with "feminist" because she sees the former to designate women committed to the entire people of Africa and in the Diaspora. What Ogunyemi's proposal means, in effect, is that Western white feminists and black African women are fighting two different battles, but the same war: while Western White feminists are battling sexism, black women are battling inequality across social and economic lines. For Ogunyemi, therefore, the womanist vision is, by contrast, racially conscious in its underscoring of the positive aspects of black life, but unique and more complex in its racial-sexual ramifications than its white counterpart. Womanism, she asserts, addresses more directly the need for an equitable distribution of the world's wealth and power among all races and between the sexes. So Western feminist literary

works, in her view, underscore and trivialize black subordination, a stance that black women do not share since the common black heritage of subjugation by westerners has in its prescription, added another layer to the nature of modern black life. Ogunyemi's response to the prescribed notion of inferior black life, is to write stories appropriate and instructive enough to empower the black man rendered impotent by a western patriarchal and racist culture. In other words, the womanist cannot be the natural ally the western feminist pretends to court as long as the political and economic fortunes of the black race as a whole do not improve.

Amadiume Ifi disagrees with Ogunyemi's underlying assertion that all black cultures are the same. In *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (1987), Amadiume Ifi refers to the dual-sex social systems among the Igbos in Nigeria long before colonization by the British. The duality of the society, she observes, does not need empowering the black man. This observation, based on the fact that Igbo culture in pre-colonial times did not distinguish between male and female solely in biological terms, leads her to dispute the conclusion that sexual asymmetry is a universal fact of human life. The Igbo gender construction distinguished between gender and biological sex. This fact is borne out linguistically by the neuter gender in the Igbo language. Gender in this context is also role specific. Hence daughters performing male roles are considered males. In religious rites, for example, female and male roles may be interchangeable since gender does not mediate sexual dualism. From the Igbo woman's standpoint, therefore, the gender systems of the West are constraining in their role identification. In Igbo systems, it is not unseemly to view or reclassify women wielding power as manly or man-like. For Amadiume Ifi, therefore, there is no place for the term

“womanism” in the gender systems of the Igbo. From the above examples, it is clear that postcolonial African women feminists have, out of necessity, to negotiate their relationship not only with Western feminism, but also with such other contending imperatives as political, historical and cultural specificities, an endeavor that is fraught with political pitfalls and theoretical quicksand.

Feminism, in the African context, is largely a reaction to specific historical legacies—colonization and pre-colonial traditions—upon whose foundations its modern political, social and economic structures have been built, and from which the African feminist strives to emancipate both men and women. Specifically in the case of Sub-Saharan women writers, emancipation will be achieved, as Cixous would put it, through the symbolic act of writing from woman toward woman. According to her, it is through this act of communication and in which she accepts the challenge of the discourse, that woman will affirm woman somewhere other than in silence, the place reserved for her. Writing, defined in this study as the preserve mainly of men, has provided African women the opportunity to make their voices heard. As a tool of communication, African women writers in particular have used writing to bring to the attention of their own people and, by extension, to a wider readership aspects of culture that have not been addressed at all or insufficiently but which are of most concern to women. Culture is defined broadly in this study as all aspects of human enterprise such as the artistic, social, ideological and religious patterns of behavior and the techniques for mastering the environment. As used in this study, culture refers to those mores, attitudes, practices, beliefs and mindsets specific to the African and Sub-Saharan regions of the world. Dissatisfied with the representations of culture by their male counterparts as it affects

women issues, African women writers have also learned to use writing to make their voices heard and on their own terms.

Sub-Saharan women's writings provide the literary spaces where these questions are posed, discussed, and, in some cases, answered. To understand fully the literature written by Sub-Saharan women in terms of their representation of African women and their worldview, it is important not to separate it from its historical and cultural contexts. Moreover, the task of exploring works in cultures suppressed, in the African case, by dominant male and western cultures, necessarily has to be approached from an interdisciplinary perspective including an examination of the literature's historicity and social significance, and an understanding of the writer's commitment to reflect and often to reform the culture that the literature represents.

What the critical review of the existing literature on African women writers in general clearly shows is that nowhere is the question of writing as a cultural negotiation posed, discussed or much less addressed. This is a lacuna that this dissertation seeks to address for the first time by proposing a re-reading of the selected works of Ama Ata Aidoo, Mariama Bâ and Marie NDiaye through the new prism of writing as part of cultural negotiation. In doing so, the dissertation goes beyond the paradigm of binary oppositions that undergirds the critical literature on writing by Sub-Saharan women in favor of the innovative concept of negotiation.

The primary focus of this study is therefore to conceptualize an alternative critical methodology that would complement generally accepted approaches ascribed to postcolonial women writers like ethnocentricity and its attendant preconceived notions of racism, patriarchy, afro-centrism and euro-centrism, metropolis and periphery within the

innovative context of cultural negotiation. It is therefore necessary to use an overarching cultural analysis approach that would explore hybridity in writing, so central to Sub-Saharan women writers, as an effective and efficient tool for cultural negotiation. As the study of African women's literature within the postcolonial critical paradigm creates room for multifaceted comparisons, two foundational parameters for this study have been set. Linguistically, this study focuses on women novelists and playwrights in Sub-Saharan Africa within its Francophone and Anglophone areas of cultural influence. Generically, the study focuses on the novel and the play.

The text selection includes prose and theatre, the two most popular genres in post-colonial literatures, to show that the issues discussed transcend genres, language, cultural specificities as well as geographical space. The plays are: Ama Ata Aidoo – *Anowa* (1970), *No Sweetness here* (1970) and *Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965); and Marie NDiaye - *Papa doit manger* (2003) and *Hilda* (1999); and the novels are: Ama Ata Aidoo - *Changes-A Love Story* (1993) Mariama Bâ *Une si longue lettre* (1979); *Un chant écarlate* (1982) and Marie NDiaye *Autoportrait en vert* (2005), *La sorcière* (1996), *En famille* (1990) and *La femme changée en bûche* (1989).

Bâ (1929-1980) was Wolof, Senegalese and Francophone. Aidoo (1942-) is Fante, Ghanaian and Anglophone; and NDiaye (1967-) of French mother, Senegalese father, is French/Francophone. If we understand a generation to be the average span of time between the birth of parents and that of their offspring, then Bâ and Aidoo belong to the same generation while NDiaye will occupy the next step on the time continuum. However, the geographical space from which they write makes it impossible to talk about a complete generational shift because generation implies similar geographical, linguistic

and cultural space producing a particular worldview. Within the texts of the three authors, however, there are clearly demarcated generational shifts – Ramatoulaye and daughters in *Une si longue lettre*, Mireille and parents in *Un chant écarlate*, Lucie’s twin daughters, Lucie and her mother in *La sorcière* and Anowa and her mother in *Anowa*. That is why what we see between Bâ/Aidoo and NDiaye would rather appropriately be termed a shift in time. The female characters in *Changes* (1993) are emancipated whereas the ones in *Anowa* (1970) and *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1970) are not.

By addressing women’s issues such as motherhood, marriage and polygamy, Witchcraft and otherness, twentieth-century African women writers have not only created a “room of their own”, in the Virginia Wolfe sense of a space of creativity, but more significantly have made forcible entry into writing, hitherto the preserve of men. If through writing, the marginalized African male has wrestled back the use of his voice, the African woman writer, doubly marginalized, recognizes the power of writing as a negotiating tool in the struggle to be heard on her own terms. This is precisely the case of Mariama Bâ *Une si longue lettre* (1979); *Un chant écarlate* (1982); Marie Ndiaye *Autoportrait en vert* (2005), *Papa doit manger* (2003), *Hilda* (1999), *La sorcière* (1996), *En famille* (1990) and *La femme changée en bûche* (1989); and Ama Ata Aidoo *Changes- A Love Story* (1993) *Anowa* (1970), *No Sweetness here* (1970) and *Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965).

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter One deals with the theoretical framework for the study by providing the critical overview of Sub-Saharan women writers and in-depth analyses of the concepts of writing, negotiation and culture, and explaining how these women writers are able to negotiate their respective cultures in

their writing. The chapter ends with brief biographical sketches of the writers in the study, namely: Mariama Bâ, Marie NDiaye and Ama Ata Aidoo and their works.

My choice of Mariama Bâ, Marie NDiaye and Ama Ata Aidoo is based on their reputation as acclaimed writers. Bâ, who died prematurely before her second novel was published, is considered a pioneer Senegalese woman writer who defied tradition by writing about social injustices plaguing her society. Her two novels have been the subjects of many important critical studies. Aidoo, a well acclaimed prolific Ghanaian woman writer, is a novelist, playwright and poet whose literary works have been widely studied in Sub-Saharan Africa and in the West. Like Bâ and Aidoo, NDiaye is a prolific writer who, at the age of thirty-eight has published twelve novels and plays. She won the prix Femina in 2001 for her novel *Rosie Carpe* and is the first woman still living to have made her way into the exclusive “Comédie française”. Despite that, however, her literary works have not attracted the critical attention they deserve in the same vein as the works of Bâ and Aidoo. Although the critical studies of the novels and plays of the three authors address issues explored in post-colonial literatures, none has so far focused on the issue of writing as a cultural negotiation. This is an entirely new area of inquiry making this dissertation original in its methodological approach and analyses.

In Chapter Two, hybridity and its perils are discussed specifically as these relate to the binary experience of colonizer/colonized relations. In this relation, displacement of authority is engendered through a series of mimetic identifications with the colonizer by the colonized. The conjunction of two cultures produces a hybridized cultural space that is ambivalent in its identity. That is, it is neither fully indigenous nor exogenous (Bhabha, 1994). Hybridity is also the reconciliation of indigenous traditions with Eurocentric

cultural paradigms (Ramsey, 1990). In other words, hybridity does not erase difference but helps to explain it. It is, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995), strength rather than a weakness. Hybridity thus understood is not a one-way process in which oppression obliterates in absolute terms, the oppressed or the colonizer silences the colonized. Since hybridity as a form of identity is not the combination, accumulation, fusion and synthesis of various components, but an energy field of different forces, the presence of fissures, gaps and contradictions, Nikos Papastergiadis (1997) asserts, is not necessarily a sign of failure. Its 'unity', as it were, is not found in the sum of its parts but emerges from the process of opening a third space within which other elements encounter and transform each other (Homi Bhabha, 1994). Hybridity also evokes narratives of origin and encounter premised on an exclusive boundary between 'us' and 'them'. In this case, the hybrid born out of the transgression of this boundary figures as a form of danger, loss and degeneration. But if the boundary is marked positively – to solicit exchange and inclusion – then the hybrid may yield strength and validity. From a linguistic standpoint, the conventional positioning of hybridity in terms of value of purity, along axes of inclusion and exclusion, is severely challenged by the linguistic mode of dissemination of cultural knowledge by African writers through hybridized texts.

Chapter Three discusses obstacles to happy marriages. We explore polygamy, one of the major obstacles, especially as it pertains to the role of victims ascribed to women in polygamous marriages. Of particular interest is the justification for polygamy in the caste-centered tradition of the Sahel Region of Africa where because of the strict class divisions within their social organization, inter-class marriages are difficult and discouraged. The different barriers that stand in the way of successful interracial and

intercultural marriages are also discussed. Some of these barriers are not only racial but cultural and religious as well. For example, the cultural barrier hindering marriages between an African man and an African-American woman, a Senegalese Moslem man and an Ivorian Christian woman, a Malian Moslem man and a Ghanaian Christian woman, and between a Senegalese Moslem man and a French Christian woman. Some of these barriers to inter and intra-cultural and racial marriages are explained through anthropological analyses. So frequent references are made in this chapter to the caste system as it defines social relationships based on trade, professional, ethnic, class affiliations and, in some extreme cases, whether one descended from former slaves. As is seen in this chapter, some of these distinctions account for the high incidence of endogamy among the Wolof.

Chapter Four discusses motherhood. A source of controversy among feminists, especially, where it is equated with womanhood and considered as women's reproductive counterpart to men's reproductive labor (Burnman, 2000), motherhood is seen as a key source of women's oppression. Other cultural feminists have, however, attempted to highlight women's orientation toward caring for non-biological relationships. Given the centrality of women as mothers to the mainstream theory on motherhood, policy on family, work, moral socialization, and control of women's sexuality, feminist debates on motherhood run the gamut of feminist thought. Second-wave feminists on the other hand have succeeded in disentangling the conflation of women as "child bearers" and "child carers" structured within notions of maternal instinct which, as a biological explanation, works to warrant normative assumptions about what women can and should do. Not all women are natural mothers, neither is the desire to have children inherent to women. For

such second-wave feminists, the extension of the labor of mothering from mere delivery to guidance of the offspring into responsible adult citizenship makes the political and affective relations between women and children particularly vexed and policies for children tend either to presume equivalence or, alternately, absolute separation of interests between mothers and children. This has given rise to relative silence on the part of feminists on the role of children in feminist policies, especially when among certain third world cultures such as in Africa and the Caribbean, motherhood is inextricably linked to matriarchy. As a form of social organization, matriarchy has existed in various forms, often in juxtaposition with patriarchy. This juxtaposition makes the maternal role even more important in strictly patrilineal societies, where women are important as wives and mothers because their reproductive capacity is crucial to the maintenance of the husband's lineage. In terms of feminist ideology, the importance of motherhood and the evaluation of the childbearing capacity by African women is probably the most fundamental difference between the African woman and her Western counterpart in their common struggle to end discrimination against women. The chapter therefore looks at matriarchy in terms of authority and leadership as well as vested major decision-making powers over marriage, communal property and relations with other groups. The European masculine standard that presumed and easily rationalized women's subordination to men will be challenged. Western constructs of matriarchy, especially in the African context and their reactions are discussed. This chapter also explores the impacts of slavery and indentured servitude on motherhood as portrayed in NDiaye's *Hilda* and Aidoo's *Anowa*.

Chapter five discusses witchcraft. The widespread use of supernatural or

inexplicable powers in underdeveloped cultures has attracted the attention of anthropologists and missionaries. The issues surrounding witchcraft both in Africa and Europe have long been a staple of Africanist anthropological research (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1993). From the general definition of witchcraft as preternatural power used by one person to harm another or others, “witchcraft” in Africa and other developing societies has been considered, beginning about the turn of the nineteenth century, as the irrefutable evidence of their “primitive” or “pre-logical thinking, that Europeans had endured in past times but had now outgrown”(Lévy-Bruhl, 1926). African witchcraft thus became a marker of the “primitive other” (Moore and Sanders, 2001). This idea meshed neatly with European social evolutionary thinking underpinned by Enlightenment-inspired notions of progress, development and modernization. By implication, therefore, Europeans had somehow evolved quite further than had Africans and other “primitive” societies (Moore and Sanders, 2).

Recent studies, however, put all the magical practices of the “otherworld”, including witchcraft, under the broad umbrella of paganism (Greenwood, 2000). It is a diverse range of practices that include Wicca, druidry, and the Northern magical traditions of the Scandinavian and Germanic peoples to chaosmagick. Hence it would be erroneous to limit such practices to Africa as evidence of its “primitiveness.”

CHAPTER 1  
WRITING AS A CULTURAL NEGOTIATION: DEFINITIONS AND A CRITICAL  
OVERVIEW OF SUB-SAHARAN WOMEN WRITERS

Writing is, in essence, a process that involves negotiating culture in one way or another. The written text is a result of the interplay of culture, negotiation and the scriptural process that gives it form. To understand this interplay fully, however, it is necessary to define as precisely as possible, the three conceptual pillars upon which this interplay rests: culture, negotiation and writing. At its face value, culture is one of those terms in our daily lexicon for which there seems to be consensus of use. Under the stricter scrutiny of the same meaning that would be applicable for all places, times and circumstances, however, such consensus buckles under the pressures of competing and often contradictory uses. Like culture, the existing, almost inexhaustible literature on terms such as “negotiation” and “writing” shows that various attempts at an uncontested definition have yielded mixed results at best.

In a more anthropological sense, Thomas Barfield in *The Dictionary of Anthropology* (2000), considers culture as a non-biological concept transmitted by society. It includes all aspects of human enterprise such as the artistic, social, ideological, and religious patterns of behavior, and the techniques for mastering the environment. In a numeric sense, it is “a social grouping that is smaller than a civilization but larger than an industry”( Winnick, 1956: 144). “A social grouping” is an organization based on relatedness or a shared common ancestry or a community of people sharing artifacts and living together at a given period and place. Even though Winnick fails to define “civilization” in its relationship to culture in this instance, Winthrop’s (1991) conclusion that civilization refers to the sum of numerous ethnic groups, would make Nigeria, a Sub-

Saharan country with over two hundred ethnic groups, a civilization. But, it is clear that one would not consider the literary works of Chinua Achebe as representing the totality of Nigerian civilization but the Igbo culture as distinct from the Hausa, Yoruba or any of the numerous ethnic groups.

Winnick also maintains that culture is not organic, although he observes that wherever there is human life there is culture. Hence if culture is non-genetic but rather a product of social interaction, then the residue of social knowledge as the basis of culture passed on through social transmission, would differ from the biological process. But since culture is entirely the result of societal invention, and is transmitted by precept from one generation to the next, it may also be thought of in terms of heritage. It therefore transcends the mere collection of isolated bits of individual behavior to include learned behavior traits which are manifest and shared by the members of the society. Individuals working within the confines of an anonymous super-individual or group dynamics become carriers and creators of culture (Hoebel, 1965). Although in some cases there is a marked individualized manifestation of culture, the notion that culture is determined by the individual is a false one because culture pre- and postdates the individual's existence. To the extent that culture is a series of integrated patterns of behavior developed from mass habits and which, once established, tend to project themselves into future behavior, the safeguard of these habits and their strict adherence falls to the members of that culture jointly and severally. Severe punishment or sanctions may be meted out to those who contravene or refuse to follow the established patterns of behavior. Granted that cultures are distinct in their own rights so that members of one culture may behave differently

according to its cultural patterns in some significant respects from members of every other culture.

Cultural patterns usually take on a compulsive or normative aspect. They consist not merely of what is done, but also of the additional element of the ought *to be*. Patterns *of* behavior then become patterns *for* behavior. Since, however, such patterns have to reflect the non-homogeneous nature of society in general, cultures become specialized in their normative applications - that is, distinct patterns of behavior for male and female, youth and adult, must be found. In other cases, societies function according to internal sub-groupings affording each one of these subgroups the freedom to exhibit its own behavior characteristics or specialties applicable only to its members. By specialties, Hoebel refers to the behavior characteristics that are applicable only to a particular sub-grouping of a society. The cohesiveness of a culture is, to a large degree, the effect of the relative proportion of universals and alternatives to specialties. In Hoebel's term, universals are those norms which apply to all members of the society from which there is no permissible deviation. Alternatives are patterns that exist where several different norms apply to the same situation. Often, there is an inevitable conflict between the standards or ideals set up in a culture for control of behavior of persons as members of the social group and errant individual impulses, but since cultural standards are selected and tested, on the whole, in terms of group benefit and well being, they call for the channeling and suppression of many possible lines of satisfaction of individual impulses. The individual, at the same time himself or herself and a group member, has to wrestle constantly with the conflict of individual self-interest as against his obligations to the group interest or universals. Hence a member of a cultural group, when thinking and

acting as a member of the group, may express the cultural standards of the group but when acting in response to dominant individual desires, may be found to contravene consistently those group standards (Shapiro, 1960). This is often the case in general with African women writers who are broadly labeled feminists in light of the issues raised in their literary creations. They often find themselves torn between Western feminist critics and their own African societal norms. Unlike their western counterparts who generally take a direct oppositional stance when discussing issues that plague their society, Sub-Saharan Women Writers tend to take a negotiatory stance. As Obioma Nnaemeka (1995) rightly puts it, Western feminists' search for and designation of authentic feminist voices from the Third World set these voices up for attacks from all fronts. In her view, these authentic feminist voices face resistance no matter what position they take vis-à-vis their culture. If they lean toward their culture, Western feminists dismiss them as apologists for oppressed and outdated customs. On the other hand, if they are critical of their culture, the members of their society scorn them. As this study will show, authentic feminist voices in Sub-Saharan Africa write astride their respective cultures and the culture of their colonial heritage: rewriting the latter, but not necessarily writing off the former. In other words, they discuss certain social injustices without necessarily condemning all the cultural practices. Indeed, as products of cultures in contact, Sub-Saharan women writers just like their male counterparts, are keenly aware that, as Chantal Zabus puts it, consciously or not, all cultures are hybrids (Zabus, 1994). When cultures come into contact, there is always a measure of a negotiated exchange.

In its daily use, negotiation pertains more frequently to labor disputes and collective bargaining rather than culture. Originally limited to economic relations,

negotiation is a process by which a joint decision is made by two or more parties. The parties first verbalize contradictory demands and then move toward agreement by a process of concession-making or search for new alternatives. The parties can range in size and importance from children trying to divide up a set of toys to nations trying to end a war. Whatever the size and importance of the parties, much the same casual principles seem to apply, suggesting that it is possible to talk about a general behavioral theory of negotiation (Pruitt, 1981).

In *Negotiation Behavior* (1981), Dean G. Pruitt describes negotiation as a decision-making process in which two or more parties talk with one another in an effort to resolve their opposing interests. Even though it is most often identified by name in the realms of international, labor-management and marketplace decision-making, negotiation is actually a much broader phenomenon, occurring within and between business and government offices, in homes, and among friends and relatives. In fact, it is found so frequently at so many levels of society that its impact on human welfare can hardly be underestimated.

Negotiation can be explicit or tacit. According to Anselm Strauss (1978), explicit negotiation which is more salient and thereby better understood, is the principal underpinning for labor negotiations, diplomatic exchanges, conflict resolution, and market bargaining. In an explicit negotiation, the theory goes, the parties do not necessarily begin by acting rationally or knowing beforehand their own or the others' preferences or values. However, they do communicate openly, making demands, stating preferences, asking for information, offering proposals, and making concessions. In so doing, they maneuver, use tactics and follow strategies that are observable to an onlooker.

In tacit negotiations, the communication is carried out in a non-explicit form. That is, the messages are passed between or among negotiators indirectly in the form of hints, signs and obscure intimations. Negotiators bargain tacitly by either using words to spell out a message “between the lines” or rely entirely on signs, gestures and signals.

In cases where norms or rules prohibit explicit bargaining, tacit bargaining fills the necessary negotiation role (Wall, 1985). Whereas tacit bargaining can serve alone in the exchange between parties, it most often accompanies and complements explicit bargaining (Puritt, 1971). Within this role, the tacit component can set the stage for the explicit exchange of concessions by indicating to the opponent that concessions will be matched. Tacit concessions, on the other hand, avoid position loss in the sense that once a concession has been made, it is difficult to withdraw. As Puritt notes, the negotiator who decides to put an issue off in early negotiation with the intention of coming back to it later may never return to it if he gets the concession he wants from the opponent. Tacit negotiation enables both negotiator and opponent to avoid losing face before their constituents, mediators and other third parties. Effective negotiation is often a tacit one because as negotiators develop their own language, their intimacy increases, they trust each other more, and they develop elaborate norms that in turn enhance their bonds, privacy, and trust as well as set the stage for improved future negotiations (Wall, 1985).

In the social sciences, the term “negotiation,” or its verb form “negotiate”, has gained widespread currency. In many cases, negotiation is used metaphorically to stress the fact that the essential nature of a phenomenon is not stasis or fixity, but its contingent mutability, its situated emergence and its inter-subjective interpretation are each symbolically accomplished through interactive process (Firth, 1995). According to

Berger and Luckman (1967) and Stauss (1978), negotiation extends to all areas of social life, since social order itself is a ceaseless “negotiated” process where, they argue, all forms of human interaction entail negotiated interpretations, meanings, goals, roles, decisions, arrangements and outcomes.

As the reality of everyday life is shared with others, however, the way these *others* are experienced through complicated interactions, becomes crucial to the negotiation process. According to Berger and Luckman (1967), the most important experience of others takes place in face-to-face situations where each party has the opportunity to have first impressions of the other from their initial body language or verbal expression. This initial impression is likely to be modified as interaction continues. More often than not, there are bound to be misinterpretations of certain physical or verbal expressions which are later changed by the other party as he/she gets to know the *other* better, either through verbal or non-verbal communication to present an image of himself/herself to the other. Even though face-to-face interactions are not devoid of insincerity due to the fact that the attitude of one party is a “mirror” response to the attitudes of the other, these interactions tend to produce better results than those involving remote forms of interaction. For instance, in face-to-face interactions, one party’s typification of the other is likely to change almost instantly whereas in anonymous interactions, one party is likely to persist in its judgment of the other in neat categories such as “American,” “African,” “Asian,” “European,” “Third World,” or “Western World.” This study will show that such neat categories fail to address the problems of castes systems in Senegal, especially as it pertains to marriage into and among the Wolof in Mariama Bâ’s novels. Wolof is an ethnic group spread over a number of countries in the Sahel region that

includes Senegal. To set the stage for negotiation, Bâ, NDiaye and Aidoo have chosen to use their writings to prepare negotiators by giving them the necessary information about their cultures.

Literature is a representational forum where cultural voices can act out the tense process of negotiating an identity. In the process of signification, these representations of the cultural voices confront and question the discourses of history and colonial power, shaking the monolithic foundations of those representations with their own multiple, dynamic functions (Malena, 1999). By disrupting western discourse, for example, Sub-Saharan Women's discourse suggests that an acknowledgement of the dynamics of identity is the necessary condition for the possibility of negotiation between classes, races and cultures. As the descriptor of a problem-solving encounter, this study suggests that "negotiation" is the process by which writers stake their claims vis-à-vis a dominant culture or universals.

The third element in our conceptual framework is writing. A familiar enough term indicative of the inscribed marks representing speech, the term can be understood in ways which expand and destabilize the conventional notion of writing as a more or less unproblematic way of communication or otherwise, as the idea of graphic approximation of speech. In "Signature, Event, Context," Derrida (1999) explores writing beyond its convention. Writing classically is first understood as a mark that can be reiterated, the function of which is not 'exhausted' in any single inscription. Such a mark, whether in the form of a statement, a signature or proper name, or, indeed, a literary text such as a novel, is, in principle, communicable as a writing in the sense that it can communicate beyond and, indeed, before, without the presence of any living subject such as the author.

Writing, according to Derrida, may also be cited outside its immediate context and its meaning therefore transformed, again beyond the control of any author or the notion of authorial intent. However, because the written sign is iterative and can be extracted from any context, its function or meaning cannot be contained by, or reduced to any finite context. The break with context indicates for Derrida the spacing of which any writing partakes in the first place in order to be meaningful. A written sign, in order to be meaningful, has to function not only through its immediate presence but, importantly, in its spatial difference from other signs. The spacing by which meaning emerges and is in fact possible at all is not a simple blank space or 'negative', but is instead that which makes the mark or inscription possible. In pursuing these aspects of writing by giving attention initially to the written sign, narrowly conceived as the written or printed words on a page, Derrida demonstrates how all languages, including spoken languages and images, are in fact writing, available only through spacing, through difference. Thus, not only is there no immediacy or plenitude in any sign, but writing is, in fact, that which makes any communication possible, even while, as writing, all signs can only refer to other signs, without ever attaining semantic or syntagmatic stability.

In *Writing Degree Zero*, Barthes (1968) discusses modes of writing, which include tone, delivery, purpose, ethos, and naturalness of expression. These modes are apparently very dissimilar and sharply defined by their very dissimilarity. Though different, they are comparable because they owe their existence to one identical process - the writer's consideration of the social use, which he has chosen for his form, and his commitment to this choice. Hence, writing, according to Barthes, is an ambiguous reality in the sense that, on one hand, it arises from the confrontation of the writer with the

society of his time and, on the other hand, from this social finality, it refers the writer back, by a sort of tragic return, to the sources. It is therefore not granted to the writer to choose his mode of writing from a kind of non-temporal store of literary forms since it is under the pressure of history and tradition that the possible modes of writing for a given writer are established. Language, the predominant instrument of literary expression, Barthes posits, is never innocent since words have a second-order memory which mysteriously persists in the midst of new meanings. As such and, in a general sense, a writer's use of language is a function of the message he intends to communicate. In Africa, more than anywhere else, the choice of the language of communication as well as the use to which the chosen language is put, becomes a crucial component of the creative process. Not so much for its consistency with linguistic conventions, as for the writer's intent on reaching a broader readership across the different cultures.

Looking at the literary landscape of the 1960s, Barthes contends that because of the multiple modes of writing, the writer is forced into a kind of behavior that gives rise to what he calls "an ethic of writing". This, in his mind, constitutes an added new depth to form, which he considers a parasitical mechanism of the intellectual function. In a modern sense, therefore, writing is a truly independent organism which grows around the literary act, decorates it with a value which is foreign to its intention, ceaselessly commits to a double mode of existence, and superimposes upon the content of the words opaque signs which carry with them a history, a second order meaning which compromises or redeems it, so that with the situation of thought is mingled a supplementary fate, often diverging from the former and always an encumbrance to it : what he calls, the fate of the form. In his later works, Barthes (1988) would consider writing as a reflection of society.

Writing is a blind alley, he would say, because society itself is a blind alley. For the modern writer, the search for a non-style or an oral style, for a zero level or a spoken level of writing is the anticipation of a homogeneous social state. But given the fact that there can be no universal language outside a concrete one, the modern writer understands that no longer can one aspire to a mystical or merely nominal, universality of society. In other words, diversity in writing is a basic fact of literary creation. Like modern art in its entirety, literary writing carries at the same time the alienation of history and the dream of history (Barthes, 1988). On the style of writing, Barthes concludes that it is form with no clear destination: It is a germinative phenomenon, the transmutation of a humor. Style plunges into the closed recollection of the writer and achieves its opacity from a certain experience of matter. Style is always a secret and a matter of density because what stands firmly and deeply beneath it, brought together in its figures of speech, are fragments of a reality entirely alien to language. The miracle of this transmutation makes style a kind of supra-literary operation which carries man to the threshold of power and magic.

Equally significant to our understanding of cultural negotiation by the sub-Saharan women writers in this study, is the question of writing as a gendered endeavor. In other words, are they women who write, or do they write as women? The distinction is a fundamental one, because it thrusts Sub-Saharan women writers into the political and cultural debate that began in France in the 1970s encapsulated by Hélène Cixous' theory of *écriture féminine* by which she explored the relations between women, femininity, feminism and the production of texts. In her theory of *écriture féminine*, Cixous seems to be against her own label "écriture féminine" since terms like "feminine" and "masculine" imprison us in a binary logic, within the classical vision of the sexual opposition between

men and women. Here, Cixous raises the issue of creating the possibility of a middle ground instead of always putting issues, thoughts, and theories into neat categories.

Another aspect of Cixous' theory of *écriture féminine*, is the essential bond between writing and the mother as source and origin of the voice to be heard in all female texts. Cixous asserts that femininity in writing can be discerned in the privilege of the voice, which, woven together with writing, becomes a combination of the writer and her mother's voice. Every feminine writer, Cixous postulates, is in touch with the voice of her first love, that which dominates the pre-oedipal baby. This first love is the mother's voice and body. The voice represents the long lost mother's milk which has been found again. The speaking/writing woman, inspired by her mother in such a powerful way, is in a space that allows no naming and no syntax. Cixous believes that the writing woman is thus powerful because her *puissance féminine* or feminine power is derived directly from her mother whose giving is suffused with strength. The female writer could then be compared with the fetus which, surrounded by water in the mother's womb, is free to change positions without the fear of danger. Writing thus becomes such a powerful tool for women to voice their concerns about societal injustice. The female writer is thus safely located in a space in which all difference is abolished.

### 1.1 Key Issues in Sub-Saharan Women's Writing

To fully understand how cultures are negotiated through writing, it is important to discuss two key issues that underline African literary texts in general and those by women in particular. First, the political and linguistic reality of Sub-Saharan Africa and secondly, the cultural and linguistic impacts on the literary text of the distinction between

first language or language spoken at home and the official language or language of instruction.

The history of Sub-Saharan Africa exposes a linguistic problem, which stands in the way of unhindered communication among Africans on one hand, and between Africans and Europeans on the other hand. According to Bryce (1992), the existence of contemporary African literature in European languages is a direct result of Western education, introduced to Africa by missionaries and later promoted by the colonial authorities as a way of producing elites for government and administration. The major role played by religion in this educational process can therefore not be ignored.

Even though contacts between Europeans and Sub-Saharan Africa dates back to the early fifteenth century when Portuguese navigators sailed along the West African coast, it is worth noting that the language policies that have shaped the linguistic culture of Sub-Saharan countries could be traced to early nineteenth century when European evangelists came to the Sub-Saharan region to convert the indigenous peoples to Christianity. These evangelists (English, French, German, Spanish, and Portuguese) would institute language policies reflecting their official religions. European expansionist policies would soon follow the evangelists' trails. Hence the French, Spanish and Portuguese, mostly Catholics, would discourage the indigenous peoples from using their mother tongues. Protestant Germans and English, however, did just the opposite. The motivation for this liberty, according to Bryce (1992), is to provide space for indigenous African culture. So German-occupied Tanganyika (present day Tanzania), parts of Ghana, Togo and the Cameroons as well as British-occupied Ghana and Nigeria would benefit from a more relaxed language policy. In these territories, evangelists learnt to

speak and write in the local languages. They also printed religious texts in these languages to ensure that they would reach their African readers. In fact, the first known African literature manuscripts sent to Europe in 1854 by the German explorer and linguist Ludwig Krapf was in Swahili.

Between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth in East Africa, the colonial authorities started to encourage the indigenous peoples among whom they lived to write in European languages. Indigenous peoples were even allowed to use the printing presses. German and English linguists collaborated with the indigenous peoples, by helping them to research interesting literary works and translating them into European languages, thus making them accessible to non-Swahili speakers. In French, Spanish and Portuguese colonial Africa, the language policy was very different. Great emphasis was placed on helping the educated indigenous peoples to adapt to the culture of their colonizers.

Even though the missionaries encouraged writing, it is obvious, from the standpoint of religious indoctrination, that the Africans were restricted as to the topics about which they could write. They could not write about anything that was considered to be contrary to the Christian faith. Despite these restrictions, however, the young educated Africans acquired valuable knowledge about western cultures and literatures. Inspired by what they read, they started to produce different types of literary works such as poetry, fictional narratives, and plays that adhered strictly to the teachings of the Christian faith. The cordial relationship between missionaries and Africans would change after the Partition of Africa at the Berlin Conference (1884-1885). It was at this conference that

sub-Saharan African territories that were once loosely controlled by missionaries whose main aim was to “civilize” the natives by converting them to Christianity, became the official properties of the European occupiers. The conference shaped the European colonizers’ policy toward Africa in terms of territorial administration, including language policies. Put simply, it spelt the death of African languages. In sum, pre-Berlin Conference cordiality soon degenerated into racial conflicts between Europeans and Africans. This state of affairs led to a rude awakening among the educated Africans which could be felt throughout their writings in terms of how Africans and Europeans viewed and portrayed one another. The net result of the different language policies put in place by the two missionary groups namely Catholic and Protestant, created two distinct linguistic cultures: diglossia and glottophagia. Glottophagia, coined by Jean-Louis Calvet, refers to the official recognition of the colonizer’s language resulting in the irrelevance of all other indigenous languages to official communication (Gérard, 1984). While the French, Spanish and Portuguese colonies practiced glottophagia, the British practiced diglossia. That is, allowing indigenous languages to coexist with the European language which was the *de facto* language of official communication. Hence, since the British who promoted diglossia did not prevent the indigenous peoples from using their mother tongues, African writers in their colonies had the choice of writing in English or in their mother tongues. Thus, in Southern Africa, literary works in the Sotho and Bantu languages preceded the first literary works in English. So were literary works in Kikuyu in Kenya, Yoruba and Hausa in Nigeria, Akan and Ewe in Ghana. In French Africa, on the contrary, only literature by Africans in French was allowed.

One of the enduring legacies of colonization even decades after independence is the fact that most African nations have maintained the language of the colonizers as their official languages of communication and literary production despite vehement objections from a minority elite. For this group, it is unthinkable to use a linguistic medium that came with white civilization: “Le recours à la langue européenne est la fatalité historique d’un médium acquis avec la civilisation de l’homme blanc.” (Bokiba, 1998:15)<sup>1</sup> While this is true, the issue is not whether the European language is best suited for writing but rather a practical one: accessibility. In other words, the writer is faced with the following dilemma: does he or she write in a mother tongue accessible to only a small group of people, or in a language that guarantees access to a wider readership? Stated in Abiola Irele’s terms, the question becomes:

Is there a unified reality that we can call African and to which we can attach a body of literary creations as belonging specifically and uniquely to that reality? There can be no categorical answer to this question even though our subjective disposition, determined by our recent historical experience, and our intimations of a common cultural reference – common traits in music, dance, art and social organization etc- lends a significant measure of objective direction and even validation to our efforts to evolve a concrete African personality. (...) Without a common African language, we can only speak, as yet, of various literatures in African languages (...) (Irele, 1990: 47).

While the choice of European languages for African literature is a deliberate and practical one, it raises other complex questions. One of which, as Irele puts it, is the question of whether or not a European language, once adopted as the official language of an African country, can be considered an African language. Achebe’s answer to this question is a pragmatic one:

As you know, there has been an impassioned controversy about an African literature in non-African languages. But what is a non-African language? English and French certainly. But what about Arabic? What about Swahili? Is it then a question of how long the language has been present on African soil? If so, how many years should constitute effective occupation? For me again, it is a pragmatic

matter. A language spoken by Africans on African soil, a language in which Africans write, justifies itself (Achebe, 1975: 83).

If Swahili is an African language despite its original roots in the culture and language of Arab slave merchants who came to East Africa to trade in slaves, it is Achebe's contention that European languages spoken in Africa should, by the same token, be considered African. It is important to note, however, that when speaking and writing African literatures in European languages, the English, French or Portuguese languages tend to be "africanized" as the indigenous tongues become source languages from which conception or ideas are translated either by direct equivalence, transliteration or circumlocution. Mainly because African cultures are rich in epigrams, proverbs and riddles, many African writers are hard pressed to find equivalents in the target European languages. It therefore means the writing process becomes a re-creative exercise that would allow the essence of traditional ideas and visions to be disseminated.

The net effect is the emergence and proliferation of African literature written in European languages, referred to by Mehrez, as "textes métissés", by which she means the hybrid nature of the European languages written to accommodate and disseminate the African writers' view of himself and his African culture vis-à-vis the world. As Achebe explains it:

Language or dialectical variance may not be the only barrier to understanding literatures in English. Although language is an important consideration, especially when there are significant dialectical differences with British English or other Englishes that the reader is familiar with, there are other barriers that may also create difficulties. Among the most important barriers to understanding are cultural barriers and these should not be easily discounted or underestimated (Achebe, 1975: p.93).

## 1.2 Translation, Hybridized Language and Cultural Transfer

In the communicative transfer from the mother tongue to the Western language(s),

the African writer continually and consistently engages in literary process akin to translation. Although African writers will readily reject the notion that they are translators, there is an overwhelming textual evidence in their works to the contrary. Whether these translations are always effective in their linguistic transformation as tools of cultural transfer is open to debate.

From a historically religious standpoint, André Lefevre (1992) maintains that a translation could be considered morally right or wrong. Lefevre's moral view of translation comes from his understanding of what the Church and the State through their educational institutions intended translation to accomplish: to ensure that moral tenets contained in the Bible were translated "right" and classical worldview contained in Greek and Roman texts were "faithfully" translated. That is why for Steiner (1975), there is no perfect translation since the acceptance or rejection of a translation in any given culture may well have much more to do with power and manipulation than with knowledge and wisdom.

Going beyond the realms of the early Church and State, Walter Benjamin, in "The Task of the Translator", rejects the notion that translation can or should be faithful to the original text by comparing the task of the translator and that of the poet. The poet seeks a "spontaneous, primary and graphic" outlet to his experiences, whereas the translator is "derivative, ultimate and ideational" in his task. Because poets need language to express their experiences, they are, more often than not, frustrated by what they consider the unsuitability of language to experience. Translators, on the other hand, mediate between languages. But for both translator and poet, language is the ultimate obstacle to their work. Even when a writer is bilingual his predicament, Benjamin contends, consists of

the inability of one language to assimilate entirely the experience that is perfectly embedded in the other. The bilingual writer therefore suffers doubly from the failure of both languages to articulate a double self.

Paul de Man (1985) questions Walter Benjamin's concept of "suffering" and "failure" since they, in no way, refer to any subjective experience. For de Man, the predicament of the bilingual writer is the compound suffering that is involved in any act of re-writing. He agrees, however, with Derrida (1980) on the issue of originality and authorship that subordinate the translation to the foreign text. Neither the foreign text nor the translation is an original semantic unity, de Man argues, because they are both derivative and heterogeneous and consist of diverse linguistic and cultural materials which destabilize the work of signification, rendering meaning plural and differential, exceeding and possibly conflicting with the intentions of the foreign writer and the translator.

In later developments, translation theory shifted its focus from the literary to the linguistic with the publication of the first works by Eugene Nida in the United States and Andrei Fedorov in the ex-Soviet Union. The emphasis was now on equivalence. But then, it turned out, if a translator always has to look for equivalence, translations would either be impossible to read or translators may simply be unable to translate since equivalence does not always match in the source language and the target language.

Nida's "componential analysis" technique (1974) seeks to improve on the equivalence model by broking down words into their semantic components in order to gauge their degree of equivalence. For example, bachelor = male +unmarried. But obviously, certain people, say the Pope, could well fit this definition although they may

not be considered as such in the given cultural universe: many people, especially Catholics, do not readily identify the Pope with bachelor but a celibate. Subsequent attempts at reversing Nida's model have not made the task of translation any easier. This is where the African writer comes to a dead end in his quest for non-existing European equivalents for African realities. As we shall discuss later on in this study, a common solution used by African writers for this problem is the use of neologisms. Bâ's use of such neologisms is notorious. In *Une si longue lettre*, it is not uncommon to come across neologisms from the Wolof like *Zem-zem*, *Siguil ndigale*, *lakh*, *thiakry*, *gongo*, *Djin*, *tours*, *Guélewar*, *ndol*. Through these words, not only does Bâ fall back on her native Wolof, but also introduces them into the French lexicon together with their new meanings. For Aidoo, literal translation is her way out of the problem because of the difficulty of naming a reality that does exist in the language of the cultural transfer. For instance, the notion of marital rape does not exist in the African culture because it is generally accepted that a husband, who controls his wife's in every aspect including her life and therefore her body cannot possibly rape her. So by describing the unwanted sexual act by Esi's husband as "marital rape," in *Changes –A Love Story*, Aidoo is fully aware that she is transferring a foreign cultural and linguistic reality to reflect a notional reality that does not exist either culturally or linguistically: in her native Akan language, the phrase "marital rape" does not exist.

Translation is acculturation (Even-Zohar 1981). As such, translation is not solely applying a set of grammatical rules but a decision-making process that involves the choice, among many, of the best strategy to use in order to transmit a text from the source culture to the receiving culture. Though Peter Newmark (1981) will end up subscribing to

the concept of equivalence in translation, he agrees with Even-Zohar that translation can be “semantic” or “communicative” and is a function of the culture in which it is produced. Arguing from a poststructuralist standpoint, Venuti (1992) points out that the reader and potential translator of texts such as African texts are expected to understand the circumstances under which the text was written.

The reality of the West African writer is that he may be a multilingual speaker in a multilingual milieu who writes in a state of acute diglossia (Zabus, 1991). In this state, the literary language produced is either the result of the interplay of linguistic codes or registers limited to specific national or regional realities, or a literary aesthetic medium that bears no relation to the current use of the European language. Whether by diglossia or polyglossia, a linguistic tension is created in the works of African writers that is resolved typically by a process of negotiation which, in effect, is an attempt at bridging the linguistic and cultural specificities of the writer and those of the reader. The net results are cultural realities conveyed through hybridized linguistic forms.

The linguistic format of a work is a determining factor influencing the reception of a text by readers or listeners. A writer’s treatment of mode, imagery, rhythm, and sound are all achieved through language. These together with paralinguistic devices like myth, allusion and irony enhance the act of communication. Most of sub-Saharan African written literature is in European languages owing to the European colonization of the continent between the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries. During that period, European languages supplanted African languages in government, education, business, and to a great extent, in daily communication. By far, the most widely used European language in sub-Saharan Africa is English, followed by French and Portuguese respectively.

Unlike the French colonizers who imposed the policy of centralism and assimilation on their colonies, the English allowed the indigenous languages to flourish alongside the official English language. The indigenous languages however grew within the borders of the Roman script. In other words, if a sound was non-existent in the Roman script, the indigenous languages had to be modified. Even though indigenous languages were allowed to flourish, they occupied a lower rank on official business than the English language. The colonizer's language is the *de facto* the medium of instruction and official *lingua franca*.

Although this was a problem in all colonized nations, the Anglophones seemed more radical than the Francophones in the fight to restore their buried indigenous languages to their former prominence. In fact, the Francophones had accepted the French language as the language of culture so they did not participate in the linguistic fight. In the Anglophone sector, some intellectuals advocated the complete elimination of western languages in the African system.

From the mid 1960s to the late 1970s, there were movements to decolonize Africa linguistically (Zabus, 1991). The most radical group was led by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan who advocated abolishing the English Department in Kenyan Universities. Interestingly, in Ghana, others argued for a comprehensive policy that would accommodate both the enhancement of indigenous Ghanaian tongues and the promotion of the borrowed English one. In 1977, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, who had changed his name from James Ngugi to his current name, decided he would write in his native tongue Gikuyu instead of English. This radical departure, he claimed, was inspired by Igbo critic Obiajunwa Wali who, in an earlier article, had contended that:

Until [African] writers and their western midwives accept the fact that any true African literature must be written in African languages, they would merely be pursuing a dead end, which can only lead to sterility, uncreativity and frustration (Wali, 1963:14).

The firestorm that this article created split the African literary world in two: those who, like Wali, insisted that African literature must be written in African languages; and those others, like Chinua Achebe, who favored the use of western languages. As Chinua Achebe put it in an article he wrote: “For me, there is no other choice. I have been given this language and I intend to use it. Where am I to find the time to learn the half dozen or so Nigerian languages each of which can sustain a literature?” (Achebe, 1975: 93). Clearly, Achebe identifies with the vast majority of African writers. Achebe’s position is a very practical one considering the fact that in his native country of Nigeria, there are so many indigenous languages, most of which are not written. Even if they were written, speakers or readers of one language do not necessarily speak or read the other languages. If every writer wanted to write in his own mother tongue, readership would be very limited, defeating the purpose of disseminating cultural knowledge within Africa and possibly the rest of the world. Although Achebe’s position is still unchanged on the issue of the necessity to write in western languages, the reality is that African writers face linguistic challenges, not least of which is how to convey their own realities using a medium that may fall short of a true representation:

The dilemma for any West African Writer who chooses English is that he often finds himself describing situations and modes of thought which have no direct equivalent in the English way of life. Caught in the situation, he can do one of two things. He can try and contain what he wants to say within the limits of conventional English or he can try to push back those limits to accommodate those ideas. The first method produces competent, uninspired and flat work. The second can produce something new and valuable to the English language as well as the material he is trying to put over (Achebe, 1975: 95).

Mariama Bâ, in her article entitled “La Fonction politique des littératures africaines écrites” published posthumously, makes an observation similar to Achebe’s:

Une considération essentielle : l’écrivain africain de nos jours, comme je viens de le dire, n’a pour s’exprimer que les langues européennes. C’est avec difficulté qu’il y a des pensées, des sensations et des angoisses particulières, charriées par son moi profond, différentes de celles du colonisateur. D’où parfois des brumes dans l’expression. Il peut éprouver de l’insatisfaction ; une pensée livrée à moitié faute d’expression adéquate ou un message délivré en termes impropres, sans le sel et le piment particuliers à sa langue (Bâ, 1981 :6).

From Achebe and Bâ’s observations, one could assert that African writers writing in the language of the colonizer encounter the same linguistic difficulties. In the inevitable quest for identity and redefinition of self-image in most literary works from Africa, the role of language becomes a central issue. Many critics of African literature like Daninos, warn against the odd use of European languages in their works: “Gardons-nous bien d’assimiler ces romanciers à certains romanciers français modernes. Ils manient le français à leur façon, selon leur génie propre, n’hésitant pas à penser dans leur langue maternelle (...)” (1983 :11) Daninos’ observation exposes an important problem that any bilingual or cross-cultural writer faces. He or she has to find a way of appropriately communicating mode, imagery, sound to his/her readers in the target language and culture which in most cases does not readily provide the necessary linguistic tools. The reality is that most African literary works cut across cultural and linguistic boundaries, thus creating substrata, of which translation is an important substratum, where different linguistic systems and modes intertwine (Abu-Haidar, 1999). Linguistic systems in this context to refer to the hundreds of languages that coexist in sub-Saharan African cultures.

It is true that among many post-colonial writers, however, the transfer of linguistic allegiance is more of a cultural and historic imposition than an artistic choice.

Most of these writers are not literate in their mother tongues. They are therefore obliged to use European languages to reflect on their cultural experiences by adapting these languages to their African realities. Hence their writing, as Jane Bryce (1992) observes, is often interwoven with oral elements of dramatic dialogue, storytelling, direct address to the audience, repetition and semiotic references to specific myths and traditions in the form of poetic motifs and archetypes such as proverbs, riddles, myths, model imagery, rhythm, irony steeped in oral African traditions.

Bâ and Aidoo have resorted to bringing their cultures to the rest of the world by promoting the use of a hybrid language that aims at conveying without unduly privileging Western languages nor distorting African cultures nor worldview.

### 1.3 Authors and Their Works: Brief Biographical Sketches and Synopses of Their Works

- Mariama Bâ

Born into an elite Dakar family in 1929, Mariama Bâ, unlike many young girls in Africa, grew up in a family of educated people. Her paternal grandfather worked for the French colonial office in Saint Louis, Senegal, as an interpreter. Her father was a politician and civil servant who became the first Senegalese minister of health in 1956, four years before Senegal gained independence from France. Mariama Bâ lost her mother at a very young age and was raised by her maternal grandparents who enrolled her in the colonial French school at the insistence of her father. In the true Senegalese Muslim tradition, she also received Koranic education. In her biographical article “Mariama Bâ: Pioneer Senegalese Woman”(1994), Cheryl Staunton points out Bâ’s early scholarly accomplishments: In 1943, she scored highest in the highly competitive entrance exam for the *École Normale*, a training institution for future teachers. She was admitted into this institution, one of the very few Senegalese females of her time to do so. Her

grandparents, however, opposed her pursuit of this line of studies. Since her father was then working in Niger, her teacher had to intervene before her grandparents consented. In 1947, Mariama Bâ completed her studies at the *École Normale* and became a teacher. She taught till 1960 (Herzberger-Fofana, 2000) and later became an Inspector of Schools until 1979. According to Staunton, Bâ became a school inspector only after an illness prevented her from teaching. For Herzberger-Fofana, Bâ's contribution to her society transcended the classroom. She was active politically in several Senegalese women's movements and associations. As spokesperson for feminist movements in Dakar, she was even said to have delivered a speech to the then Prime Minister of Senegal, Abdou Diouf, in which she denounced the poor conditions of mothers and children in Senegal. Bâ's writing vocation started in 1979 when the publishing house "Les Nouvelles Éditions africaines", invited African writers to turn in manuscripts. Bâ who felt the need for a woman writer's work to be published, quickly completed her first novel (*Une si longue lettre*, 1979) and submitted it for publication. The book won the *Noma* Award in 1980 and thereby making her a pioneer Senegalese woman writer. She died shortly after winning the award and her second Novel, *Un chant écarlate* was published posthumously the same year (Caws, 1996).

*Une si longue lettre* is the story of two best friends, Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou, who marry the loves of their lives against their society's norm. Aïssatou's mother-in-law hated the idea of her noble son marrying a goldsmith's daughter so she destroyed the marriage by encouraging her son to take his first cousin for a second wife. Ramatoulaye, on the other hand, married Modou, from a poorer family against her parents' wishes. In a show of disapproval, her parents refused to accept any dowry from Modou. Later in their

marriage, Modou married their teen-age daughter's best friend and abandoned Ramatoulaye with their children. Faced with these situations of infidelity, the two friends reacted differently. Aïssatou divorced her husband and took her four sons with her whereas Ramatoulaye stayed in her broken marriage until her husband's sudden death. *Un chant écarlate* is also the story of love and deception. Ousmane, born to a poor but pious Moslem cleric, Djibril Guèye, and an overbearing mother Yaye Khady, grew up in the slums of Tiali Niari, near Dakar, Senegal. He studied hard and gained admission to the University of Dakar where he met and fell in love with Mireille, a French girl whose father was a French diplomat on mission to Senegal. Mireille's father sent her back to France as soon as he learnt of his daughter's love affair with a black man. They continued corresponding with each other until Ousmane graduated, got a job and went to France to marry Mireille and returned with her to Dakar. They both kept their intentions away from their parents until after the marriage ceremony. Mireille's hope of a happy life in Senegal turned into a nightmare when Ousmane, with the blessing of his parents secretly married a Senegalese woman, Ouleymatou, and started to lead a double life, abandoning Mireille and their son. When Mireille found out, she murdered their son and attempted to murder Ousmane by stabbing him several times.

Staunton's discussion of Bâ's life and works gives us an insight into Bâ's concerns with European languages. It is not lost on Bâ that the educated African should want to write in the colonizer's language. It requires, however, a sustained level of creativity and adaptability. Bâ is quick to point out that European languages sometimes inadequately convey the thoughts and agonies of the African writer. This means that the African writer is often unable to use the written text as an instrument of mass education

since most of his/her target audience is not versed in the borrowed language. Bâ believes that the power of writing as instrument of change has universal resonance. African writers should therefore not look at issues only from an African perspective, but universally, since the issues they write about deal with the human condition. Bâ advocates solidarity with the plight of African women, since, as a group oppressed within a patriarchal African society and therefore victims of inequality, exploitation and in fact, colonized within an already colonized society (Herzberger-Fofana, 2000).

Recent critical literature on Mariama Bâ's works has sought to explain her concerns for women's issues in feminist terms. Critics such as Chossat, Edson and McElaney-Johnson see in Bâ's female characters the African woman in the preeminent role of redefining her place in society. In this redefinition, the African woman, by and large, also seeks to change the image that non-Africans have of her. On a more philosophical level, Chossat (2002) suggests that the struggle of women to change the status quo in Mariama Bâ's works brings into a sharper focus the clash between tradition and modernity, a clash which is at the very heart of the postcolonial condition, and a generational conflict between mother and daughter.

Bâ's works not only portray the clash between indigenous African traditions and Eurocentric values of modernity, but they are also reconciliatory. Raylene Ramsey (1998) contends that, in a way, Bâ attempts to reflect the rich cross-cultural pollination not only in the Senegalese society but in Sub-Saharan societies.

- Marie NDiaye

Marie NDiaye was born in 1967 in Pithiviers (France), to a Senegalese father whom she hardly knew, and a French mother. (Mouralis, 1994) Although she considers

herself French because she was born in France and raised French, her works appear in both the *Dictionary of Sub-Saharan African Writers* as an African writer, and in *Le Dictionnaire des femmes de langue française de Marie de France à Marie NDiaye* as a French writer. NDiaye studied linguistics at La Sorbonne and while there obtained a French Academy scholarship for a year study at the Villa Médicis in Rome. She also studied at the École Normale Supérieure de Fontenay St Cloud. She published her first novel, *Quant au riche avenir* (1984), followed by *Comédie classique* (1985) at the age of eighteen and has since published eleven more. Her most recent novel *Autoportrait en vert* was published in 2005. This study will focus on *Autoportrait en vert*, *Papa doit manger* (2003), *Hilda* (1999), *La sorcière* (1996), *En famille* (1990) and *La femme changée en bûche* (1987).

Critical studies on Marie NDiaye have emphasized the difficulty in categorizing her work as African since no explicit reference is made to Africa in it (Daniel Deltel, 1994). But the African novel, Chinua Achebe asserts, has to be first and foremost about Africa. Not African only as a geographical expression, but also a metaphysical landscape which involves “a view of the world and the whole cosmos perceived from [an African position]. On this issue, of who is an African novelist, Achebe continues, depends on the passport, the individual’s volition and predisposition to see the cosmos from an African perspective (Achebe, 1975:92). It is in this context that the question of identity that permeates NDiaye's work is central to *En famille* and *La femme changée en bûche*. Ambroise Teko-Agbo (1995) links the question of identity to that of alterity. This link is clearly shown in the character Fanny in *En famille* who in her individuality, personality, aspirations, desires, thoughts and actions displays an effrontery that sets her apart as a

bizarre character. Through the entire story, Fanny's peregrination sheds light on the tensions associated with being an "other". *En famille* also alludes to a political question of integration and exclusion. *La sorcière* deals with three generations of female witches with the representative of the middle generation, Lucie, being the least talented. The older generations, Lucie and her mother, have had to hide their identities and eventually lose their husbands because of the latter's hatred for their identities as witches. Soon after their initiation into witchcraft, however, the youngest generation, Lise and Maud, Lucie's twin teenage daughters, outdo their mother, prove to have great potential and openly practice their witchcraft. *Hilda* explores the theme of motherhood and surrogacy with indentured servitude as a major stumbling block. Wealth can allow a middle class woman to buy a surrogate mother for her children whilst the biological children of the surrogate mother suffer the loss of their mother. *Hilda* also explores the theme of marginalization. Madame Lemarchand, the middle class woman, marginalizes Franck and his wife Hilda from the poor class of society and, Franck in turn, marginalizes his wife by pawning her to Mme Lemarchand. *Papa doit manger* is about a man who abandons his wife and two daughters when they are financially strapped, marries another woman and leads a clandestine life in the same city while watching his wife's economic progress. Once he is certain his first wife has enough money, he shows up to reclaim his place in her life as the husband who had never left nor divorced her. His motive, purely financial, is to dupe his first wife of out her money and return to his second wife. His first wife stabs and disfigures him, and his second wife leaves him. He is forced to spend the rest of his days with his first wife, her fiancé and two daughters. As a biracial woman of Senegalese and

French parentage, NDiaye's ability to negotiate her cultural self through writing, lies at the core of her exploration of hybridity both as a cultural and a biological construct.

- Ama Ata Aidoo

Ama Ata Aidoo was born in 1942 in a small town in the Central Region of Ghana. (Linfors and Sanders, 1996) She attended Wesley Girls' High School, one of the most prominent high schools for girls in Ghana. The English literature teacher, Miss Barbara Bowman, was the first to make her aware of her talent in creative writing. The first story she wrote entitled "To Us a Child is Born" won a Christmas story competition organized by The Daily Graphic, one of Ghana's most influential newspapers. In 1962, in her freshman year the University of Ghana, she wrote her second short story *No Sweetness Here* which won her enough acclaim for her to be invited to an African Writers' Workshop at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria where she had the privilege of meeting renowned writers like Ezekiel Mphahlele, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. She graduated from the University of Ghana in 1964 with a degree from the well-known Institute of Drama. She completed her first play, *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, the year of her graduation. Her later works include *Anowa* and *Changes- A Love Story* and other novels, plays, poems and essays.

She was a professor in Ghana, Tanzania, Kenya, and was visiting professor in the Ethnic Studies Program at Xavier University in New Orleans. She was also a Fulbright Scholar-in-residence to the Great Lakes College Association and Writer-in-residence at the University of Richmond. She has also been a politician for a brief period and currently lives in Zimbabwe.

Like *Une si longue lettre* and *Un chant écarlate*, *The Dilemma of a Ghost* pitches African culture in the American diaspora against African culture back on the continent. That is, Ato's Ghanaian culture against his wife Eulalie's African-American culture. Ato, educated in Ghana and the United States, is torn between two opposing attitudinal expressions of being African. Eulalie is African but also American. Ato's failure to educate his African-American wife on one hand and his African family on the other, about the cultural difference, makes for a volatile cultural confrontation in *The Dilemma of a Ghost*.

*Anowa* (1970) articulates questions pertaining to the role and identity of women. The play focuses on Anowa's growing awareness of herself as a woman and the forces that hinder the female's struggle to attain her full potential. In this play, stubborn Anowa marries a stranger against her parents' wishes and takes off with him. They work hard and have become very successful, but there is one thing missing in their lives – a child. Kofi Ako, Anowa's husband wants to repudiate her because she is "barren". She refuses to be divorced and takes up her own defense. She puts the blame of their childlessness on Kofi Ako and commits suicide.

*Anowa* can be better understood or appreciated if it is read in its historical context (Odamtten, 1994 and Assimina, 2001). According to Odamtten (1994), the story of *Anowa* takes the reader back in history to the fifteenth century when the Portuguese traded with the indigenous people living on the coast of Ghana. Since historically, the Europeans who arrived by sea in that coastal region, did not go further into the heart of the region, traders traveled from the hinterland to exchange their gold and other wares for the merchandise brought by the Europeans. Kofi Ako, Anowa's husband, was considered

a stranger because he was one of those traders who came to the coastal town for a short period of time with the intention of trading and returning home. Aidoo situates the drama in this period of Fante/Gold Coast history. *Anowa* also attempts to delineate the causes and effects of ideological transformation that have resulted in the present configuration of social and economic relations in Ghana.

The power relations between Kofi Ako and Anowa are central in the play. Kofi Ako started to marginalize Anowa after he had become financially successful. Kofi Ako's efforts to marginalize Anowa replicates the patronizing effects of colonization, a reminder of the colonial abuse of power. Kofi Ako's attempt to mask his impotence by blaming Anowa of infertility could be likened to the colonializer's abusive use of power to mask inadequacies, insecurities and fear of the natives. Ama Ata Aidoo also wrote short stories. *No Sweetness Here* is a collection of stories, one of which deals with African traditional healers and charlatans. In this story, Mami Fanti, whose children had all died at infancy, is about to lose the only baby she has. A Moslem nomad from the Sahel, who makes a living by selling fake amulets and healing potions to people, is faced with the situation where unsuspecting Mami Fanti believes he can heal her dying baby. After pulling his stunt, the fake healer, afraid his secret will be revealed, disappears without taking any money. However, the baby is healed miraculously. *Changes- A Love Story*, reflects love in the lives of contemporary women in Africa and their freedom to choose their partners, stay in bad marriages instead of divorce, and choosing polygamy instead of monogamy.

## CHAPTER 2

### HYBRIDITY: CONCEPT AND IDENTITY FORMATION

By virtue of their western form of education, African women writers inhabit a hybridized cultural space; a cross between the passive and mediated influence of an imposed western culture through formal education, and the clear and active presence of their African cultural milieu. Because in most African countries, formal education is the first point of contact with western culture—language, belief systems and mores--, the consequences of such a contact cannot be underestimated. In many instances, the western educational system forces Africans, through subtle and sometimes covert cultural signals, to abandon their African heritage or, at least, look down on it as culturally inferior. In some cases, Africans who choose to identify with the western culture, do so because they have subconsciously come to accept without questioning its superiority. In such cases, these Africans are forced, so to speak, to live on the margins of their own culture(s). The outcome of this choice is often an identity altering experience evidenced in many African literary texts. In Achebe's *No Longer At Ease* (1960), Obi Okonkwo returns to his native Igboland after of period of study in the United Kingdom. On his return, he realizes that the traditional world he left behind has now become foreign to him. The fact is, that world has not changed, he has. While away, he yearned for his culture, but now at home, he feels estranged from it, but feels rather closer to the foreign culture he had left behind. The state of no-man's land he now inhabits creates a mental alienation: he is psychically torn between the Igbo traditional ways, which have now become foreign in their familiarity, and the new western culture, now familiar but out of reach. The cultural identity reversal produced by this mental alienation is known in West Africa

euphemistically as the “been-to” phenomenon: strangers in their own cultures.<sup>1</sup> Achebe ridicules such self-imposed cultural otherness in *No Longer At Ease*. The western educated African is no longer at ease among his own people. From this space of mental alienation and the cultural identity change it produces, the African writer reconstructs his or her homeland imaginatively by looking at traditional practices through the prism of the newly acquired culture. Nourished with episodes of the new culture and remembered childhood episodes, the imagination becomes the site for negotiation and reconstruction where the writer’s links to his or her traditional culture are forged. The complex space of cultural alienation is revealed in the ambiguity of living in-between two distinct cultures. This space, often characterized by perennial sense of loss and nostalgia for an identity, also involves the remapping of cultural, political and linguistic boundaries in the construction of the new cultural identity. For Aidoo and Bâ, the affirmation of an African cultural identity is filtered through their western education. For the biracial NDiaye, it is biology and more so than culture, that is going to be her sign of cultural self-identity. So while Aidoo and Bâ negotiate cultural self-identity through a hybridized language, NDiaye will use her second-hand knowledge of cultural constructs to produce an African identity which validates her biological hybridity.

Culture never stands alone but always participates in a conflictual economy acting out the tension between sameness and difference, comparison and differentiation, unity and diversity, cohesion and dispersion, containment and subversion. The constant construction and reconstruction of cultures and cultural differences is fuelled by an unending internal dissension in the imbalances of the forces-- economic, social, linguistic, political and racial-- that produce them. These imbalances, through which

societies have defined themselves, also produce the other. In sum, hybridity is the essence of identity formation in the works of Aidoo, Bâ and NDiaye.

## 2.1 Linguistic Hybridity: Proverbs, Neologisms and Translations

In chapter One, we discussed the issue of the need to “africanize” European Languages before using them to reflect African cultural realities. We also discussed the role of translation—from equivalence to literal—and neologisms to accomplish it. In this section, we will analyze how these various linguistic tools have been used by Aidoo and Bâ to negotiate the African realities they portray in their texts.

Proverbs, Chinua Achebe’s Okonkwo says in *Things Fall Apart*, “are the palm oil with which we eat our words.” Palm oil, the ever present condiment in the Igbo diet, is famous for its reddish color and special flavor. Words, like palm oil, add color and taste to human communication. As Paul Bandia (2000) puts it, for the most part proverbs have proven to be the most appropriate media to verbalize culture-specific prescribed actions and attitudes through language, imagery and abstraction. They are particularly suitable in giving depth and elegance to speech through their allusive, figurative and poetic nature.

In *On Poetry and Style*, Aristotle defines proverbs basically as metaphors with transference from species to species. By this, he considers proverbs as vehicular tropes authorized by analogical similarities between the intermediate speech topic and the subject. As metaphors, they are tropological agents which serve as means of transporting thoughts. Proverbs are generally short and witty, are widely known by the members of a linguistic group, and therefore make for effective communication. The oral milieu in which proverbs were invented make it imperative that the speaker should dispatch the

essence of a thoughtful unit in the smallest number of words possible, and open-ended enough for the receiver to decipher the sender's intent (Adéèkó, 1998:34).

Literary critics of African Literatures have not given proverbs as much importance as they have given allegories in Post-colonial writings by Africans. However, a close study shows that African writers use many idioms and proverbs in their native languages to convey what could otherwise be difficult to convey in a foreign language. As expressions governed by meaning the main function of proverbs in conversation is to give cultural depth to a speaker's thought. They cohere with timely utterances at nongrammatical levels of social situation and individual motivation. In other words, a proverb can only be created when a particular situation arises, however, its meaning could be open-ended thereby allowing it to be used in other situations.<sup>2</sup>

In *Un chant écarlate*, the character Ousmane refers to proverbs as words “Ciselés dans la réflexion, l'observation et l'expérience! Leur formule concise, faite de sagesse, puisait aux sources de la vie” (142). In spite of the richness and expressive quality of proverbs, *Un chant écarlate* does not abound in them. In fact, there is only one Wolof proverb that Bâ translates into French: “Kou waithe sa toundeu, tound'eu boo fèke mou tasse” meaning “Quand on abandonne son tertre, tout tertre où l'on se hisse croule”(250). The ant that abandons its anthill (*tertre*) to make another its home, will also find it crumbling after some time. The metaphor of the anthill is appropriate to the Sahel Region where the landscape is often dotted with majestic anthills. In *Un chant écarlate*, the family and culture are the anthill Mireille has abandoned and therefore left to crumble; her new adopted culture another anthill which will also crumble because it is not her own. The fact that Mireille goes insane and murders her son can be construed as an indication

of inhabiting a crumbled *tertre*. Ousmane has abandoned the *tertre* he and Mireille have built to live in a new one. But as the proverb goes, this new *tertre* built on his clandestine life with Ouleymatou will also crumble. In other words, charity begins at home. One's house is the one first put in order.

Aidoo makes a more prolific use of proverbs than Bâ. The proverbs fall into many categories: culinary practices, clothing, protocol, traditional virtues like patience and wisdom, and relationships. In *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, deception and wishful thinking are captured in the proverb one of the two village gossips uses:

If you perchance hear on a silent afternoon  
The sound of a pestle hitting a mortar,  
Get out your mortar too  
For they are only pounding cassava (16).

“Pestle” and “mortar” made of wood are common cooking utensils in the Ghanaian household. Typically, they are used to pound fufu, but also any other ingredient into a soft or powdery form. Fufu, a popular Ghanaian dish, is prepared typically by pounding boiled cassava, cocoyam, yam or plantain to form a sticky lump which is eaten with meat or fish in peanut or palm nut sauce. Among the Akans, Aidoo's native culture, fufu is typically a combination of pound boiled cassava and plantain, yellowish in color when boiled. It is this color that gives fufu its characteristic appearance. In her culture, fufu made with only cassava is considered a poor man's dish because the poor cannot normally afford the more expensive plantain. To pretend plantain is one of the ingredients, some poor households may add palm oil to give that characteristic yellowish color. So as the average Ghanaian usually associates the characteristic thud sound produced as the pestle hits the mortar with that of fufu being pounded, he or she is also aware that it may not always be the case. The sound of pounding is not therefore

automatically indicative of cassava and plantain fufu since it might just well be cassava fufu that is providing the sound--in Ghanaian culinary terms, a loud sounding nothing. In other words, appearances and sound can be deceiving.

Another of the proverbs dealing with food explores the symmetry between snails and effort, and palm fiber and temperament:

Monka : If nothing scratched at the palm fiber, it certainly would not have creaked (29).

Esi's calm demeanor suddenly devolves into utter displeasure when her son, Ato, pushes her to limit of her patience. Palm fiber or frond is used to make baskets and also a roofing material for thatched houses. Like the bamboo tree, a coarse and stiff palm fiber will normally not creak, not even under the most powerful wind, but will when scratched. Esi's calmness and anger are adequately conveyed by the metaphor of the palm fiber: she is quiet but will justifiably creak only if provoked. Esi's anger has to do with what she sees as Ato's failure at educating his African-American wife the Ghanaian way. Esi had brought to Ato and Eulalie some snails from her farm. Snails, a delicacy among the Fantes, are scarce except for the short months in the rainy season. So a woman who returns from the farm with no snails to prepare supper is deemed not only unworthy of her womanhood, but also lacking in her marital duties. When Ato and Eulalie visited Ato's village, in a gesture of goodwill, Esi, his mother, brought them the few snails she was able to bring back from the farm. By offering her daughter-in-law the snails, Esi was giving her the best she had only, as it were, for Eulalie to reject it. Even though that may not have been Eulalie's intention, it looked to Esi, especially as Ato would not say a word, as if his son had connived with his wife to show her disrespect. Feeling unappreciated and despised by her own son, and Eulalie, a foreigner, Esi could only

blame herself for having failed as a mother to properly educate her son. In a proverbial sense, “living a life of failure is like taking snuff at the beach” (30). Snuff, pulverized form of tobacco, is inhaled through the nostrils or placed against the gums, to clear sinus or act as a form of analgesic against toothache. To carry snuff to the beach with its strong tropical winds, is like throwing it to the winds—a useless effort. To Esi, all her sacrifice, in spite of her poverty, to educate Ato properly as a stand-up individual in the Ghanaian traditional society has been blown away by his western education which has made him disrespectful of tradition. In *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, Esi’s failure is likened to her nakedness: “If nakedness promises you clothes, ask his name” (33). “Nakedness” and “clothes” are naturally in an oppositional relationship in this proverb. Therefore, a promise of “clothes” made by “nakedness,” which is essentially absence of clothes, cannot be other than an empty one. Ato has failed her mother on other accounts as well. He has not been able, although he is capable, to make the monthly remittances his mother expected from her. In traditional Africa, retirement plans are not what people in the West think. They are the children into whose education parents have invested with the expectation that such investments will yield dividends on which to draw in their old age. So now that Ato has graduated, Esi is looking forward to her retirement with her son’s financial support. Ato, however, fails to do so, not because he could not, but because of a foreign wife who puts her immediate household comfort over that of Ato’s mother. Ato’s inability or perhaps unwillingness to meet this obligation, is likely to make her more financially vulnerable now that she is too old to work. It is as if a selfish and greedy heir had raided her retirement funds, forcing her to start all over again.

An item of clothing can also convey the idea of success by dint of hard work. *The Dilemma of a Ghost* captures this idea succinctly in this proverb by Anowa: “Kofi, one stops wearing a hat only when the head has fallen off” (35). The social significance of a hat is not lost on Anowa. A hat is more than an article of clothing. It stands for financial prosperity as well as social respectability, and so must one strive to maintain it till the end. Since no success can be sustained on rested oars, Anowa insists, Kofi should still be actively involved in his work in spite of his wealth which now enables him to use slave labor to sustain it. Anowa’s caution is based on two reasons. First, it is exploitation, and secondly, no one has more vested interest in ensuring that Ato’s business run successfully than Ato himself.

To the foreigner, African cultures can be painfully steeped in protocol. From the simple act of greeting to the more spiritual offering of gifts and libation to the ancestors, protocol must be strictly followed:

Nana : Young man, one does not stand in an ant trail to pick off ants .You find somewhere to sit and then ask for the purpose of the visit (*The Dilemma of a Ghost*, 38).

In the above proverb, a young man on a visit to an elder is told what the protocol requires in that particular situation. The suggestion that you cannot get rid of the ants crawling all over and biting you if you remain on their trail, indicates that you first need to get away from the ant trail, and then get rid of the ones still on you. It is customary when someone arrives in a home, to find out the purpose of the visit. Protocol requires that the visitor be made to feel at home by offering him a place to sit, water to quench his thirst, for he may have walked a long distance under the blistering sun, some food to eat, before the purpose of the visit is finally broached.

Wisdom, that rare human virtue, is highly extolled in Africa. But it is that wisdom that is often associated with old-age and experience lived, not read about nor theorized. Wisdom associated with old-age, is a quintessential African value, is manifest in gray hair. Gray hair is the mark of years lived and experiences. So befittingly, it is an old woman who says:

What foolish words! Some people babble as though they borrowed their gray hairs and did not grow them on their own heads (*Anowa*, 21).

To be wise also means to be able to look at both sides of an issue:

Old man: But what makes your heart race itself in anger so? What disturbs you? Some of us feel that the best way to sharpen a knife is not to whet one side of it only. And neither can you solve a riddle by considering only one end of it (*Anowa*, 20).

Anowa's stubbornness is blamed for her wanting to marry without her parents' consent. In the old man's opinion, Anowa may have a reason of her own. Until that reason is ascertained, all judgment would be premature.

Also associated with wisdom is patience. Patience, an age-old virtue, is extolled by the old woman in *Anowa*:

Badua should have told her daughter that the infant which tries its milk teeth on every bone and stone, grows up with nothing to eat dried meat with (*Anowa*, 21).

A child's teeth are meant for eating liquid not solid foods, and much less bones and stones. In the obvious ascending gradation milk-bone-stone, the proverb charts an undesirable and therefore dangerous course to self-destruction. A hasty child who wants to eat solid food when developmentally that is still premature, may end up with teeth incapable of eating food that may sustain him or her nutritionally later on in life.

Proverbs also reflect the nature of the relationships between wives and husbands in the African patriarchal societies as Nana's proverb illustrates:

Who is a good man if not the one who eats his wife completely and pushes her down with a good gulp of alcohol? (*Changes*, 19).

The phrases, "eats his wife completely" and "pushes her down with a good gulp of alcohol" should not be taken literally, especially as they define what for Nana is a "good man." By imagistic transference, a "good man" is one who puts demands on his wife to the point of absorption: "eating" her "completely" so as to be able to, with the aid of a form of liquid, absorb her into his digestive system. If "chewing" and "spitting out" could be said to be the biological equivalence of rejection, then a good husband's demand that his wife be completely devoted to him is what is being conveyed in this proverb. Pushing her down with a gulp of alcohol is a sign that the man is satisfied with what he sees in his wife and therefore accepts her.

In Bâ's texts, neologisms will perform similar linguistic functions as proverbs in Aidoo's. Neologisms normally work in two ways: they create new words from existing ones, but infuse them with new meanings as distinct from the original, or borrow words from another language to communicate an entirely new reality. In Bâ's texts, most neologisms come from her native Wolof with a glossary in the footnotes in French. If we take the sentence, "Dieu merci, Yaye Khady est l'unique Djêgue de notre concession" (*Un chant écarlate*, 14), we realize that "djêgue" is "lady of the house." Naturally, in a Moslem polygamous marriage in which there could be as many as four wives, each in her own right is the "lady of the house" even if this right is often shared with the other wife or wives. So, Yaye Khady can proudly proclaim she is the "Djêgue" because she is the only wife in her marriage. "Awo" is another neologism: "Mère Fatim, la première

épouse de Pathé Ngom, régnait en tigresse dans leur logis et utilisait exagérément de ses prérogatives de Awo” (*Un chant écarlate*, 210). In Senegal, “Awo” is the first wife in a polygamous household who enjoys the privilege of being served by the younger co-wives. It is her judgments and opinions of her younger co-wives that their husband accepts. A biracial son is a “Gnouloule khessoule,” a more perjorative term compared to the descriptive slang term “café au lait.” That is, one that is neither white nor black—an undefined racial and biological category. So when Yaye Khady tells Soukeyna, Ousmane’s youngest sister, that “Tu aimes ton gnoule plus que le gnouloule khessoule” of her brother, (*Un chant écarlate*, 245-246) she is, in effect, indicating to Soukeyna to choose Ouleymatou’s “gnoule” (full-blood black son) over Mireille’s “gnouloule khessoule” (a child of undefined race). Ousmane criticizes Lamine, his cousin, who returns to Dakar from Paris his French wife and biracial children, for living like a “toubab”: “Tu ne te rends pas compte que tu renies, tu vis “Toubab”, tu penses “Toubab” (152). A “Toubab” is a “white” person, but in this particular instance, what Ousmane criticizes Lamine for is aping a “toubab” because by giving his children European names he is disavowing his Africanness.

The presence and actions of the spirits in Africa are conveyed by neologisms like “Ndeup”, “gongo” and “thiouraye.” In *Un chant écarlate*, Ousmane remembered an incident in his childhood when mère Fatim was paralysed after a fight with one of her younger co-wives. She will owe her healing to an evening session of “ndeup”: “Sa guérison était-elle due au “ndeup?” (218). “Ndeup” is a traditional spiritual healing dance performed by the exorcist to heal people believed to have been bewitched. When Ousmane left Mireille for Ouleymatou, there was no doubt in his friend Ali’s mind that

such mad show of love could only have been caused by some love potion Ouleymatou might have given him. To counter the effect of this potion, Ousmane needed a session of “ndeup.” It was thought that with Mère Fatim’s complicit “clins d’œil” (181-182), Ouleymatou had accepted some “thiouraye” and some “gongo” to prepare her for the nightly rendez-vous with Ousmane. “Thiouraye” is a kind of incense, and “gongo”, a fragrant powdery substance. The fragrance of these two substances is believed to have the effects of an aphrodisiac that made Ousmane burn with the desire to be with Ouleymatou rather than Mireille. “Djinn”, “rab” and “tour” are also neologisms used in *Un chant écarlate* to refer to invisible creatures inhabiting the African spirit world. They have the power to help or cause harm to an individual. Yaye Khady believed that Mireille was so beautiful because the “Djinn” had been made flesh in her, in order to seduce Ousmane. When Ousmane was ill as a child, the concerned neighborhood brought him “Sâfara” (57), holy water, to drive away the evil spirits. As an adolescent, Ousmane performed female chores for his mother which Ouleymatou found to be the sign of his emasculation. To dispel any such thought, Ousmane quickly reminded her that he was a “Lebou” with powers over the ocean spirits of “rabs” and “tours”. In other words, his female chores notwithstanding, he was still in touch with his masculinity.

Wolof culinary practices are also communicated to the reader through neologisms: thiakry, lakh and dang. “Thiakry” is a drink prepared by steaming a mixture of sweetened curds with millet flour; “Lakh” is a meal prepared with roughly kneaded millet flour and curds; “Dang” are lumps that form during the preparation of couscous. A well-prepared couscous should not contain any “dang.”

Degrees of friendship are communicated in *Un chant écarlate* and *Une si longue lettre* by neologisms. A childhood playmate is “Kharit” (*Un chant écarlate*, 176), and “Woleré” is a lifelong friendship (*Une si longue lettre*, 101). Ouleymatou’s brother and Ousmane began as “Kharit” but later became “woleré,” just as in *Une si longue lettre* Daouda Dieng and Ramatoulaye decide to remain “woleré” after it was clear to Daouda Dieng that she would not marry him then when they were younger nor now that she is a widow.

“Habiller” originally “to clothe,” becomes, in the context of funeral rites, a form of mourning. Among the Wolof, on the death of her husband, custom requires that a woman dress in funeral clothes for the duration of mourning, typically months or till she remarries. During the mourning, the responsibility falls on the widow’s sisters-in-law to provide the clothes she will wear and sometimes money too.

Neologisms can sometimes appear as literal translations. This is the case of Aidoo. Unlike Bâ who uses Wolof words, Aidoo prefers literal translations akin to euphemisms from her native Fante into English in *Anowa* and *The Dilemma of a Ghost*. The use of euphemisms in Aidoo’s texts seem well advised because of the issues she explores: barrenness and impotence. Since in traditional Ghana like in Africa in general, public references to male and female genitalia are frowned upon, Aidoo resorts to euphemisms which she translates literally from her native Fante language.

A Ghanaian and by extension African man, is expected to have children, at least one of whom must be a son to succeed his father when he dies. Generally, the son is expected to take over his father’s trade or business and other responsibilities. The man’s family becomes very concerned when, a reasonable period into the marriage, there is no sign of

procreation. When that happens, it is usually the woman who is blamed. In an attempt to help her, it is not uncommon for some in-laws to suggest that she undergo a form of traditional fertility treatment, the euphemistic “washing her stomach” in *The Dilemma of a Ghost*. The “washing” usually done “pouring libation to ask the dead to come and remove the evil around you and pray them to bring you a child” (40) since it is believed that barrenness, a form of evil, is the work of evil spirits. As this example shows, Aidoo has effectively talked about the female reproductive organ in the fertility treatment without mentioning it by name.

The treatment of the mouth and the tongue as organs of communication, provides an insight into the African’s guarded respect for one’s utterances as the following examples from Aidoo’s *Anowa* illustrate:

Badua: Anowa, shut up. Shut up! Push your tongue into your mouth and close it (*Anowa*, 15).

A loose tongue may just spill the beans, so discretion is required in its use. In reply, Kofi Ako says “I thank your mouth” (*Anowa*, 23) in appreciation not only for the advice but also for the intended good wishes. By contrast, a wagging tongue is one to be chastised:

Kofi Ako: Anowa, see how you shiver! And yet my tongue cannot match yours (*Anowa*, 22).

Anowa’s tongue knows no rest even when her body is letting up. It is her husband’s way of reminding her to shut up.

The association of feet with journey provides the opportunity for some literal translations:

Badua: And may she walk well.

Anowa: Mother, I shall walk well so that I do not find my feet back here again (*Anowa*, 19).

“May you walk well” is the traditional Ghanaian wish for a safe trip. To convey the idea that her mind is made up, Anowa says, “My feet are on the road already” (*Anowa*, 57).

The angst of an expectation finds expression in the following euphemism:

Anowa: Fear “it is coming” but not “it has come.” But for me,  
“it has come has brought me no peace” (59)

The agony of waiting for the inevitable can leave one searching desperately for a way out, or adopting a coping mechanism for when it happens. Anowa’s problem is that she knows exactly what awaits her, but is powerless to do something about it. The longer the wait, the greater the agony.

The common saying, “like father like son,” or in this particular case, “like father like daughter” appears in the following forms:

Badua : (...) And if other people fear her then since a crab never fathers a bird, in their eyes, who are you yourself? (31)

The biological impossibility of a “crab” engendering a “bird” is what drives home the point. It would be a freak of nature were it so. Hence since offspring bear the genetic and often personal traits of their progenitors, it would be odd that the biological daughter be any different. To put it another way, to a feared father, an equally feared daughter.

## 2.2 Perils to Hybridity: Marriage, Racism, and Religious Purity

Aidoo, Bâ and NDiaye caution that while hybridity is one of the terms of negotiation, the potential perils that hybridity represents, be they inter or intra-ethnic, social or economic, cannot be overlooked. Unions that cross religious and historic lines are considered perilous. Rejected by either side, such unions are fertile grounds for creating alterity. The unsanctioned unions Aidoo, Bâ and NDiaye discuss in their works,

are interracial—between Ousmane and Mireille in *Un chant écarlate*, intercultural—between Ato, an African and Eulalie in *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, an African-American woman, interfaith—between the Christian Jacqueline and the Moslem Samba Diack, intercaste—between Aïssatou and Mawdo Bâ in *Une si longue lettre*.

In Bâ's *Un chant écarlate*, Mireille personifies the perils of interracial marriage, while in NDiaye's *En Famille*, it is the biracial Fanny who will question the neat racial categories into which people are put. She will be rejected by her white relatives, forcing her to make a false choice: embracing her blackness while rejecting whiteness. This is a false choice because either way, she is repudiating a part of who she is. In Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, the union between an African-American woman and her Ghanaian husband, both blacks, presents another form of peril: cultural alterity. Eulalie lives in Ghana with her Ghanaian husband Ato, but finds herself out of place in an otherwise familiar racial milieu. Her constant conflicts with her Ghanaian in-laws reveal deep differences that exist between the African-American culture that looks to Africa as its cultural and racial roots and the cultural beliefs and practices in Ghana. The women protagonists in Aidoo, Bâ and NDiaye's texts are overwhelmingly those who are pushed into a space of otherness, not only in terms of the new cultures they are trying to inhabit, but also of their own societies whose norms they have violated by their marital decisions.

In Bâ's *Un chant écarlate*, this otherness will be manifested throughout the novel. In Mireille's family, the visceral attitude of her father, Monsieur de La Valée, when he sees Ousmane's picture, with the words, "À Mireille que j'aime," (40) at the back, underlines her father's disdain for his daughter's amorous liaisons with a black man.: "Tu connais bien "ça" car "ça" t'es dédié" (50). In Monsieur La Valée's world, Ousmane is

like all of his race, “Le Nègre sauvage, au sourire ‘banania’”<sup>4</sup>; “le Nègre idiot hermétique au savoir”; “le Nègre aux yeux ronds dans un visage de cire” (44). It is significant how easily Monsieur La Valée’s attempt at categorizing Ousmane employs a variation on the old stereotype of the noble savage. Worst still, Ousmane is *ça*: no name, no identify, reified, a taboo. The reaction from Ousmane’s family and society is no less visceral. To Ousmane’s friends, an interracial marriage is unacceptable: “Ah! Non et non! (...) On doit choisir sa femme chez soi. Ces blancs sont des racistes,” (59). because it raises the kinds of questions that transcend the bedroom: “Au-delà de vos sens, quelles sources de communion aurez-vous toi et ta ‘toubab?’” (59). The idea that a “Toubab” will marry a black man on the grounds of sexual gratification also plays into the stereotype of the viril black man, a sort of sex machine ready to satisfy the sexual appetites and fantasies of the white person. It is the belief of Ousmane’s friends that since it is only the “sens” that hold this type of marriage, and not the real “sources de communion” such as culture, class and race, then it was doomed before it even began. In the opinion of his friends, faced with these irreconcilable natural differences, Ousmane and Mireille’s marriage cannot survive. Furthermore, given the historical contexts of colonizer and colonized within which this marriage will have to operate, the “communion” of the colonizer’s history with that of the colonized (Nahem, 89) is seen by the inhabitants of both historical experiences as a source of shame and personal affront (Cazenave, 2000). It is not surprising that a white woman like Mireille should find herself caught up in an African world unlike any other she had anticipated. So lonely and isolated, she knows she is unwelcome, the other: a stranger, an outsider, “white” and, worst of all, a daughter of the colonizer and oppressor. On both sides of the racial, historical and cultural divide, a

sexual relationship leading to marriage and procreation, between a black man and a white woman is considered undesirable and outright perilous because, as Cazenave explains, it is a loss of one of their own and therefore a threat to society's integrity (Cazenave, 2000). Earlier during their dating, Ousmane's friends tried but failed to convince him of this peril: "on ne bâtit pas l'avenir sur « des passés sans liens ». Tant de ménages mixtes sont broyés par incompréhension" (*Un chant écarlate*, 59). A relationship such as Mireille and Ousmane's, built on a past of misunderstanding and difference, is a harbinger of future calamity. So, the sound advice for Ousmane would be to look for a local girl: "N'importe quelle Nègresse plutôt que cette Blanche. N'importe quelle Nègresse aurait des égards pour moi. Dieu m'envoie un enfant pour redresser le chemin d'Ousmane Gueye" (*Un chant écarlate*, 190). Here is where Ouleymatou enters the Ousmane-Mireille marriage. And an expecting Ouleymatou was the confirmation Yaye Khady needed to proclaim that God had answered her prayer. But Yaye Khady's fears may well be in response to the historical racial divide as she ponders the future plight of her biracial grandson Gorgui: "L'influence maternelle si vigoureuse soit-elle ne pourra jamais faire s'intégrer cet enfant dans le monde des Blancs. Il serait toujours inévitablement singularisé" (*Un chant écarlate*, 187).

More than anything else, it is perhaps the complexity of gender roles in the criss-crossed relationships of cultures, classes and races that will prove overwhelming for Mireille. While Senegalese society sees Mireille in an almost masculine power role of the colonizer because of her whiteness, the reality, however, is that her own society marginalizes her from the power base of her colonial self because of her gender (Nahem, 89). Her mother's powerlessness and voicelessness in her own marriage to M. de la Valée

is indicative of the status of women in French patriarchal society. So in her choice of a life partner, Mireille violated her own society's racial code of conduct, and courted the severest form of punishment befitting her crime: disinheritance.

Although Bâ, does not make the explicit claim that in the Senegalese culture interracial marriages are undesirable and so are doomed to fail because in *Un chant écarlate* other interracial couples have successfully negotiated their unions and enjoy peace and harmony, it is clear that such unions are successful only when the couple agrees to go with one culture, mostly the western culture as seen in children bearing names like Arthur, Mélanie, Isaure, Raoul (185). Ousmane rejects this success because it is a form of cultural imposition and domination, especially as these children of western bearing names grow up internalizing the inferiority of their African heritage. This form of cultural arrangement, Ousmane asserts, is undesirable because it impoverishes Africa: “Ce métissage appauvrit l’Afrique (...) ce métissage n’était pas à prôner” (*Un chant écarlate*, 185). Rather Africa is enriched, “ce genre de métissage enrichit l’Afrique,” (*Un chant écarlate*, 185), Ousmane alleges, when the children in interracial marriages carry African names like Malick, Badara, Fatou and Yacine, wear African clothes and eat with their fingers, play with African children of their age and consider themselves black. What Ousmane fails to realize in the naming argument, however, is that even if the children bear European first names, in Africa children are recognized by last names which are their fathers'. Be it as it may, by these assertions Ousmane seems to disavow his earlier conviction that for culture to be universal, it must be built on mutual understanding, recognition of other cultures, and above all, trust. And all that cannot happen if we do not mingle: “Ousmane conclut dans la calmeur hostile ‘la Culture est Universelle. La culture

est un instrument de développement. Comment y accéder sans se connaître pour s'estimer, sans connaître autrui pour l'estimer ?” (*Un chant écarlate*, 72)

While it may be true that Mireille openly embraces Ousmane's culture and tries to expose Gorgui, her son, to his Senegalese and French cultures, the textual evidence shows that her supposed openness is self-serving: it helps her to blend in and avoid thus being marginalized. But when it does not serve her purpose, she is condescending even in matters most dear to her husband's cultural well-being. For instance, she would complain that the constant nocturnal drumming deprived her of sleep. As Ousmane tried to explain what African music and drumming meant to him, his emotional connection to it, from his initiation into adulthood through circumcision, Mireille would walk away disinterested. The ocean of incomprehension this episode epitomizes would mark the tipping point for Ousmane:

À ce point de son évocation, Ousmane ce retourna. Il désirait communiquer l'émotion de son souvenir à sa femme (...) Mais Mireille, depuis longtemps, avait disparu dans la cuisine. Mireille ne le suivrait donc jamais. Amer, il mesurait l'incompréhension qui les séparait: un océan (*Un chant écarlate*, 141).

The cultural insensitivity will only get worse when Ousmane recalls how proud Mireille was when she showed him pictures of herself as a ballerina and a pianist. If that is culture for Mireille, then African drumming is not and therefore not worth knowing. There are other instances where Mireille's cultural insensitivity verges on a self-perpetuating western cultural superiority: at times, she will say, the Senegalese culture “manque de savoir vivre,” is “toupet”, “inconscience”, “grossièreté” (*Un chant écarlate*, 144). Bâ's message here is that racism couched sometimes in cultural terms is, without a doubt, the soft underbelly of all interracial marriages.

Ousmane and his family are not exempt from this cultural insensitivity either. Also culturally insensitive is Ousmane's father, Djibril Guèye. By not opposing Ousmane's relationship with Ouleymatou when he had the power and authority to do so, Djibril Guèye resorts to Mireille's conversion to Islam as justification for Ousmane's right to marry up to four wives. Even Ousmane is guilty of cultural insensitivity when he obliges Mireille to convert to Islam before the marriage. As Ousmane would not negotiate this condition, Mireille accepted it. This is in sharp contrast to his cousin Lamine, also married to a French woman, who embraced the western culture and gave up Moslem upbringing. It was a compromise that Lamine thought would make their marital life easier:

On ne peut allier deux conceptions de vie différentes. Si l'on est honnête, il y a un choix à faire. Tu veux être heureux sans rien sacrifier. Tu ne veux rien sacrifier et tu exiges des concessions. La vie conjugale est plutôt humaine, approche et tolérance (*Un chant écarlate*, 151).

Sometimes the insensitivity is the result of callousness and greed. By Ousmane's own admission, he married Mireille not out of love, but as a meal ticket out of poverty. A poor boy from the slums of Dakar, to be able to court and marry into Mireille's white upper class, and the social prestige and recognition that came with it, was his dream come true:

Mireille? Il s'avouait que le besoin de s'affirmer, de s'élever intellectuellement et socialement l'avait poussé vers elle. "Les qualités de l'européenne ... sa beauté ensorceleuse... l'attraction de l'inconnu, le goût de l'originalité... ont consolidé nos liens (*Un chant écarlate*, 186).

While a mixed marriage is often defined interracially, the fact that two people of the same race but of dissimilar cultural backgrounds can also be said to form a mixed marriage, draws lesser attention especially as Africans living on the continent are usually

put into the same cultural category as those in the Diaspora. For Aidoo whether those in the Diaspora are the children of Africans living in the West or are Africans who have become American or Caribbean because of slavery is a moot point. The fact is, for most intents and purposes, their mentality or culture as a whole differs from that of their kindred brethren, raised and living on the African continent. This is the case of Eulalie in Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, an African-American woman and Ato, a Ghanaian. Eulalie's blackness does not make her automatically African.

*The Dilemma of a Ghost* starts off as a clash of black cultures, but ends up striking a rather conciliatory tone by finding a common ground for the two cultures in conflict. Tensions created in African societies by the introduction of new and predominantly Western manners and values were a common concern among West African writers in the 60s and 70s. In the play, Ato commits two major blunders that almost alienate him from his Ghanaian family and African-American wife. First, he marries without the knowledge of his family, a clear violation of his society's rules and secondly, he fails to educate his wife, Eulalie, on the cultural differences between them. These differences will be forcefully played out in this confrontation between Ato and his mother Esi when she finds out that he had hit his wife:

Esi: You slapped her? What did she do?

Ato: She said that my people have no understanding and that they are uncivilized.

Esi: My child, and why should your wife say that about us?

Ato: I don't know.

Esi: (...) We thank her, we thank you too. ... But it would have been well if you knew why she said this (48).

The culture of Western(ized) individual values, represented by Eulalie, and African communal values, represented by Ato, could not have been on a more tragic

collision course . What Esi's comment reveals, however, is the understanding that the two cultures are reconcilable, because after all as an African-American, Eulalie shares some African values. The fact that they may not be readily apparent, does not mean they do not exist. Esi saves the situation by making the couple see beyond the differences by focusing on their common marital bond. In the end, Eulalie ceases to be the "other" as she is guided through the Ghanaian culture.

The reconciliatory message of Aidoo's play, unlike in the novels of Bâ and NDiaye, has a specific political resonance. In the 1960s, American educated Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of the Republic of Ghana, had made it possible for African-Americans who wanted to resettle in Ghana, to do so. In this connection, one could read Eulalie's story as a literary endorsement of this political decision. Aidoo uses Ato's marriage to Eulalie, a union that could only be acceptable in the urban context, as a tool to educate the rural folk on the need to be open to other cultures. In their quest to preserve their traditional beliefs and practices they are confronted with the need to respect other traditional practices as well.

In *Une si longue lettre* and *Un chant écarlate*, mixed marriages reflect an existing system of segregation among social classes loosely referred to as castes within the Senegalese society. Similar to many ethnic groups in the Sahel, the Wolof in Senegal have a social class division which separates the upper class from the lower class. Their societies do not allow the lower class to mingle with the upper class therefore they tend to marry among themselves thus giving rise to endogamy. Castes are grouped under two broad categories--*Nyenyoy* and slaves. The *Nyenyoy* and slaves grouped together are inferior to the nobles, the *Gëër*. While Wolof does not provide a complex analytical

terminology for caste organization, a close examination of caste names and their semantic ranges gives a great deal of information on the hierarchical interrelationships of the groups. They are grouped by trade or profession. It should be noted however that apart from the particular techniques of an artisan specialty, a Wolof caste has in isolation, virtually no customs peculiar to it that would distinguish it from other castes. The *Gëër* are mainly considered noble in the moral sense. The members of this caste are said to possess qualities such as courage, dignity, politeness, and humaneness. Most Nobles are farmers even though in modern times, some Nobles have taken up industrial trades. One becomes a member of the Noble caste through kinship, no matter how remote. However, based on the closeness or remoteness of the kinship, the Nobles are divided into princes (those who are close to the throne) and commoners (those too distant from the throne). The *Nyenyò* are artisan castes (leatherworkers, smiths, griots). The smiths are mainly blacksmiths who make agricultural tools and knives and the goldsmiths make jewelry. The women make pottery jars and incense burners. In the past, men of this caste also performed surgeries for which metal instruments were required. Most of the younger generations do not practice the trade even though they know enough to take over from the older generation when they become too old to work. The leatherworkers with whom the smith group may intermarry make different items from leather. They are divided into two groups, each specializing in certain leatherwares. Some make harnesses, knife-sheaths, footwear, decorative leather cases for bottles, amulets. The griots are musicians, poets, entertainers and professional speechmakers. One of their specialties is the recital of genealogies and history of local families, especially Nobles. They also practice hairdressing as part of their duties as flatterers and praisers. Their communication

services include formal and informal announcements of news and gossip, as well as distributing food and gifts on behalf of others. Even though their duty is to flatter, their flattery may turn to insults depending on the circumstances; for example if the person who paid them to sing his praises does not pay enough. They are known to beg constantly for money. Female griots also recite genealogies and sing praises. They are also known for composing wedding insult poems especially in a polygamous setup where the bride's rivals are not thrilled with her coming to join them in the household. The griots are divided into two groups – the *Gewel* and the *Rabb*. The *Rabb* are the religious griots whereas the *gewel* are not religious. The two can however intermarry.

Although slavery no longer exists, descendants of those who were slaves before its abolition are still referred to as slaves. In the past, they lived in the same compound as their masters the Noble caste and worked for them in return for protection. Typical duties were working in the field, repairing the house, and digging and cleaning latrines. It should be noted however that the other castes could also own slaves and their slaves worked for them in their area of expertise, for example smith work, leatherwork, praise singing. By rank and social status, all tradesmen (smiths, leatherworkers, griots and slaves) are considered to be at the same level except, of course the slaves of the non religious griots who are a little lower in rank. The Nobles consider all the other castes as dangerous but the non religious griots are the worst. One of the reasons for calling Wolof occupational groups castes is the strictness of their endogamy.

Thus divided into upper and lower castes, parts of Senegalese caste society frown upon inter-caste marriages. Ramatoulaye, from the upper, noble caste, defies her parents and marries Modou Fall from the lower caste out of love. To show their disapproval, her

parents turned down the dowry. In the African tradition, the dowry not only seals the marriage contract but is a sign of respect for the woman, her parents and the extended family. Aissatou who comes from a lower caste, marries Mawdo Bâ from the Noble class, and incurs the displeasure of his mother. The marriage fails because the social class divisions of the caste system in Senegalese society can be too deep and therefore are impossible to bridge.

Religion, in its purity, is an overarching factor in the marital, racial, cultural and socio-economic tensions in the works of the Bâ and NDiaye. It is perhaps the most single peril to hybridity.

Religion, a set of beliefs and practices as related to moral behavior on earth and to life after death, is at the core of African societies. African traditional religions believe in a creator, who brings the universe into being and then departs, perhaps to the sky or some distant place above like the mountaintop. There is also belief in ancestors. Death does not end one's existence, rather, it moves one to a non-earthly realm to congregate with those who have gone before and those who will come after. Various rituals, including sacrifice and libation, are offered to honor and appease ancestors, to ensure that they help rather than cause trouble for the living. Often referred to erroneously as ancestor worship, it is not so much worship of ancestors as it is recognition of the importance of past present and future communities. The ubiquity in Africa of religious practitioners such as rainmakers, healers, diviners and priests, sacred places, art, music, dance, storytelling, naming, initiation, and marriage ceremonies attest to the pervasiveness of religion in the daily lives of Africans. Before the advent of the two monotheistic religions, namely, Christianity and Islam, all religions were indigenous. Today, indigenous religions make

up more than twenty percent of the population and in some, notably Liberia, Sierra Leone, Benin, Central African Republic and Mozambique, more than fifty percent, one percent of Senegalese and 16 percent of Ghanaians practice indigenous religions.<sup>3</sup>

Christian evangelization in the nineteenth century established many mission stations in Africa, leading to an intricate pattern of religious denominations. Africans found conversion to Christianity attractive not because they believed in it, but rather because of the incentives the missionaries offered. Today, new churches combining Christian doctrine with indigenous African ones are becoming increasingly common. Brigit Meyer (2001) points out the dilemma western educated Ghanaian elite face in dealing with Christian as well as African religious identities. This dilemma is at the root of an increasingly pervasive social phenomenon: religious syncretism as a way of negotiating Catholic and Protestant strong disapproval of indigenous “heathen” African religious practices. Peter Sarpong, a Ghanaian Catholic bishop, explains the religious dilemma that led to the syncretism this way:

The Catholic Church is the true church founded by Christ, but if my petition is unanswered when I go to Mass then there is nothing wrong in praying in a spiritual church or falling back on the traditional magico-religious ritual for help. After all, religion is worthwhile only inasmuch as it helps man to get rid of the many inevitable hazards of life – childbearing, illness, poverty, death, disgrace, hunger, etc. (Sarpong, 1991:288)

Sarpong seems to imply that neither the traditional nor the imported Christian forms of worship are enough to meet the spiritual needs of the Sub-Saharan African hence the adoption of a syncretic form of worship.

Whether animist, heathen, fetishist, witchcraft, magic or juju, African religions have so been mislabeled because they lack authentic written records like the Christian Bible or the Moslem Koran where beliefs about God, spirits, man, the world and life

beyond this world have been well defined, described and documented (Mbiti, 1991). Nonetheless, African traditional religions have well-defined spaces and set of traditions, rituals and ceremonies transmitted by practice from age to age, which have contributed to their survival, albeit in mutated forms, from the onslaught of Islam and Christianity, the two most influential monotheistic religions on the African continent. From shrines to religious objects, arts and symbols, to priests, priestesses and healers or medicine men, the omnipresence of African religions is palpable at every level of the African's being: Animist and Christian. The duality of religious expression in Africa overrides any notion that one form of religion is superior to the other. Hence the africanization or indigenization of Christianity is not religious heresy, rather an attempt at negotiating the reconciliation of the two traditions. Like Christianity, Islam which is widely practiced in sub-Saharan Africa is also imported, but its appeal to many parts of Africa seems to be its adaptability to African traditions. Moslem feasts have been made to coincide with traditional agricultural solar festivals. It is therefore not uncommon to find local names of old rituals marking the new year, rain, harvest, but observed with prayers and rites from the Koran.

Interpretation of such universal events as sickness, death, and prosperity are generally influenced by African traditional beliefs and has been incorporated into Senegalese magical practices: Koranic *gris-gris* (amulets) or *sâfara* (waters). The amulets mainly consist of a leather packet with a message sewn inside. These are believed by their owners to make them courageous, popular, virile, fertile or intelligent.

When Ousmane had malaria in *Un chant écarlate*, Djibril Guèye, after diagnosing him as having come under spiritual attacks, went to hang a horn in front of Mireille and

Ousmane's door to protect Ousmane from evil spirits (146). Rituals such as music and dance, integral parts of African religious practices, are also present in Mariama Bâ's work. When during a physical altercation with her co-wife, mère Fatim was brutally beaten and became very ill, her illness was interpreted as a sign of anger from the gods. A ritual dance (*ndeup*) was therefore organized to help her regain her health and return to the graces of the gods.

African religious practitioners also believe in the power of articles or objects often carried hidden on one's body or tucked away in one's pocket or undergarment or worn visibly, to protect them from all evil. They are the talismans in Bâ's *Un chant écarlate* and Aidoo's *Anowa*. They could also be a string of colorful beads or cowries worn around the neck, ankles or waist or both. They can also be objects placed conspicuously at a spot that needed protection. In *Un chant écarlate*, Ousmane reminisces about his childhood days when the whole community showed concern anytime he fell ill. His illness was always blamed on evil spirits so they brought talismans and other sacred objects to help deliver him from the grips of the witch believed to be the source of his illness: "Tombait-il malade? Tout le quartier, soucieux et soupçonneux, s'inquiétait. Chaque main s'armait de talismans et de « *sâfara* » pour le délivrer des « filets » d'une sorcière invisible" (56-57).

In *Anowa*, Kofi, now a wealthy man, thinks instinctively that the next step is to protect himself against evil eyes:

Kofi : We need something to protect us. Even though no one dislikes us enough now to want to destroy us, how about when we begin to do well ? Shall we not get a host of enemies then? (...) We only need a bead or two (25).

Bâ also highlights the special emphasis put on celebrations involving childbirth, naming of a newborn, marriage, funerals, and in agrarian cultures, praying for rain and a good harvest. At Modou Fall's funeral in Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*, Ramatoulaye describes a house full of people, most of whom had come to the funeral attracted more by the plentiful food rather than to show respect and empathy for the bereaved family for their loss. Unlike in the Western tradition, funerals in Africa, though solemn, are also occasions for merriment and social intercourse.

Bâ also explores the importance of marriage ceremonies in Senegal, especially where Islam and traditional religious practices are intertwined, by describing the minute details of both Mireille's and Ouleymatou's marriage ceremonies to Ousmane. Mireille's was a quiet and private one with no pomp whereas Ouleymatou's was an occasion for public celebration with a lot of music and dancing. Music and dancing are integral parts of the religious life of the African. According to Mbiti (1991), music gives outlet to the emotional expression of religion; helps to unite the singing or dancing group and to express its fellowship and participation in life. In Africa, one marries into a family, so the idea of a private marriage ceremony is foreign to the traditional African. Hence, by marriage in a private ceremony, Mireille and Ousmane have violated one of the basic religious tenets of his society by symbolically shutting his mother out of a celebration that represents the quintessential mother-son relationship:

Mais Yaye Khady était consternée. Elle avait rêvé de festins pour des cérémonies familiales. Un baptême pareil à la suite du mariage de son fils célébré à la sauvette à l'étranger, avait déçu ses espoirs (*Un Chant écarte*, 188).

In terms of their marriage, this quiet and private ceremony is a harbinger of things to come. The insignificance of their marriage in the eyes of Ousmane's parents is well

represented in the textual space devoted to their marriage ceremony: three sentences. However, almost fifteen pages of literary pomp and pageantry are devoted to Ouleymatou's pregnancy announcement, marriage and her son's naming ceremonies. Yaye Khady can now feel whole again as her fellow women and her community are witnesses to the fact that she has met the social and religious obligations of a woman and mother. This is exactly what society demands and, failure to do so, only brings shame and ridicule to the entire family. In the same vein, Mireille's son's naming ceremony, in its quietness and simplicity is "shameful" in Yaye Khady's eyes: "Les commentaires ironiques du baptême de l'enfant métis disaient clairement la déception de Yaye Khady" (161).

Places of worship are also evidence of the African's religiosity. Where mosques and other sacred places dot the textual landscape of Bâ's *Un chant écarlate*, shrines dominate in Aidoo's *Anowa*. As places of worship, shrines belonging to families or to communities could be caves, trees, hills and mountains. As sacred places where God's presence is manifest, animal sacrifices and gift offerings are made to priests and priestesses as custodians and human intercessors before the Almighty:

Osam : As for her wildness, what do you want me to say again about that?  
I have always asked you to apprentice her to a priestess  
to quieten her down. But ...  
Badua : I am not going to turn my only daughter into a dancing priestess.  
Osam : What is wrong with priestesses? (...) Did you not consult them  
when you could not get a single child from your womb to live  
beyond one day ? (*Anowa*, 11)

Often the line between religious dictates and their application is intentionally blurred to favor whoever stands to gain the most. In patriarchal societies like the African, it is no surprise that men are the ones who enforce strict religious rules. Hence,

religion becomes the site where cultural biases and gender inequalities are made to appear as if sanctioned from above thereby commingling God's designs and man's desires. Things are the way God meant them to be. To do otherwise, is a violation which puts the violator in a cultural and religious space of otherness.

Aidoo, Bâ and NDiaye have highlighted the inevitability of the commingling of traditional African beliefs with Islam or Christianity, but at the same time they also reveal some of the perils that can impede it. Nowhere is this commingling more present and with more devastating results than in NDiaye's *En famille*. This novel begins with the scene where the biracial protagonist, Fanny, is standing at the gates of her ancestral home, begging to be let in. Not even the family dogs will welcome her: "Elle était chagrinée que les chiens ne l'eussent pas reconnue, et y voyait là le signe d'un grave manquement de sa part" (7). As a youngster, she had paid short visits to her grandmother who lived in this very house and these dogs that now seem so strange, cold and distant had known her very well: "Dans le passé elle avait bien connu ces deux chiens dont elle s'était toujours occupée lors de ses brefs séjours chez l'aïeul" (8). She is finally let in, but is never accepted, neither by her white mother's family nor her black father's. Despite all her attempts to return to her family's graces, she remains the outsider, the "other". Fanny feels her "otherness" can be traced back to two crucial events in her life, in each of which she had no part. First, she is a bi-racial child, and secondly, her parents did not officially inform her maternal aunt Léda about her birth, as they should have, thereby violating a long family tradition:

Tout le malheur, annonce-t-elle à sa famille, vient de ce que Tante Léda est la sœur de ma propre mère. De même, vous étiez présents lors de ma véritable entrée dans la famille, un repas a été organisé ... Léda, bien sûr, était absente, ce dont personne ne s'est préoccupée ... Ainsi, les choses n'ont pas été accomplies

comme elles doivent l'être en toute circonstance, et la faute de mes parents est immense, quoiqu'il l'ignorent... Retrouver Tante Léda est tout ce que je peux faire maintenant (15).

Fanny's search for her Aunt Léda in order to set things right is futile because she has never met her and so has no way of identifying her, much less locating her. Perhaps this search is proving futile not so much because she does not know Tante Léda but rather because NDiaye is projecting on to this search a certain African tradition which dictates that it is the responsibility of parents, not the child, to introduce a child into the extensive family fold. To that extent, it could be said that had Fanny succeeded that would have meant that an important African tradition had been violated. The biracial NDiaye knows better.

As this chapter has shown, hybridity is an all encompassing term to refer to all manner of cross-cultural manifestations. The consensus among Aidoo, Bâ and NDiaye is that cultural hybridity strengthens society, therefore, obstacles such as racism, religious practices, gender differences and cultural superiority that stand in its way must be removed.

## CHAPTER 3

### IN THE PRISON-HOUSE OF MARRIAGE: BIGAMY, POLYGAMY AND CULTURAL STATUS QUO

In many sub-Saharan cultures, marriage is an alliance between two kinship groups and seldom a union of individuals. Some ethnic groups prefer exogamous marriages while others are endogamous. Among endogamous groups, marriages follow a strict set of rules so that an unsanctioned marriage is almost always doomed to fail. But whether endogamous or exogamous, polygamy's power to render a woman powerless in patriarchal socialization is one major reason why some marriages in African societies are not as successful as they might otherwise be.

Polygamy is a marriage of one man to two or more women simultaneously or successively. Usually in successive polygamy, the reason why a man takes on another woman, only to return the first one later on to her parents, has to do with barrenness or infidelity. Especially in cases where the marriage has not given him any children, repudiation may also come with a demand for the refund of the dowry the man had paid to her family upon marrying her. Once refunded, the marriage is officially annulled. In simultaneous polygamy, a man simply marries as many women as he wishes, with all women living as co-wives in the same compound or in different houses.

Many cultures around the world practiced polygamy at one time in their history but today the practice has almost disappeared, except in Africa, due to monogamy imposed by Christianity and legal marital laws. Polygamy, a polemical issue today in both intellectual and non-intellectual circles in Africa with its sympathizers as well as its detractors, is prevalent in West African Moslem societies where it actually predates

Islam. Nasimiyu-Wasike (1992) indicates that some scholars are sympathetic to it and would like to see the Christian Church accept it as a valid form of marriage.

Among Moslems, the men are required, at their first marriages, to declare whether they intend to be monogamous or polygamous. In practice, however, many West African Moslem men see polygamy as part of their devotion to their religion, as well as a status symbol. Affluence, an indicator of social status, usually determines whether or not a man can have more than one wife. If affluence is true for the urban elite, among the rural folk where polygamous marriages are higher it is family pedigree that counts. In Senegal where 94% of the people are Moslem,<sup>1</sup> approximately one quarter of urban marriages and a third of rural marriages are polygamous. A man, who at his first marriage declared his intentions to be monogamous, may change his mind later on in the marriage to take on more women, without being held to his word. Economic success, tied to levels of education, is usually one of the reasons why these men may decide to go back on their word. Western-educated Senegalese men are more likely to be polygamous whereas their female counterparts would prefer to be in monogamous relationships. For financially successful Hausa men from Nigeria, polygamy is an obligation in terms of their ability to take care of all their wives. In Mali, especially among the merchant class, one would take a man with more than one wife more seriously than a monogamous one. The Moslem Sosa men of Sierra Leone and Guinea see polygamy as a sign of prestige while in Côte d'Ivoire, the courts prohibit polygamy, although it is practiced among certain ethnic groups.

There were several historic justifications for polygamy. First, it was a way for the man to ensure his immortality. The traditional wisdom was that the man lived on through

his sons, but died once his daughter was married because daughters were lost through marriage as they became the genealogical extensions of their husbands. So to avoid genealogical death, the man wanted to have as many male offspring from as many women as possible to ensure continuity in his lineage. Two consequences flowed from this reasoning: first, male children came to be valued more than females. Secondly, it was the wife's responsibility to have as many sons as possible. The more the sons and fewer the daughters, the better.

The second justification had to do with labor. Polygamy thrived in agrarian and pastoral cultures where production depended on the number of workers. It was therefore practical to have several wives who would bear many children to ensure that the family accumulated wealth since the size of the land as well as the number of animals a family owned, depended on the number of wives and children he had. Although modern technology has improved agricultural production in other parts of the world, agriculture in Africa is still at a subsistence and basic level, hence a higher incidence of polygamy among its rural majority rural population.

Sex-oriented division of labor was another justification for polygamy (Nasimiyu-Wasike, 1992). Traditionally, work was sex-oriented in agrarian cultures of Africa. Men did the physically demanding jobs such as clearing the land for cultivation, felling trees, and hunting, whilst the women did the planting, weeding, harvesting and domestic chores. The sex-oriented division of labor was so strict in some societies that men would not do domestic chores like cooking and cleaning the house. A man with only one wife could therefore argue that when his only wife fell ill, gave birth or traveled to visit her family, he would have no female to do the jobs assigned to that gender. As the work

became too much for one woman, her husband would marry another woman to share the work with the first. It is therefore not of the ordinary that the woman should, in this case, ask her husband to marry a second woman to help out.<sup>2</sup>

In Africa where marriage is the cornerstone of family life, the very concept of marriage is another justification for polygamy: a woman would not be considered complete until she is married, and in many cases, has children. As the statistics show, women outnumber and live longer than men, so a woman may accept to be a second, a third, or even a fourth wife in order to meet society's definition of a complete woman. At the same time, but for a different reason, men believe they are carrying out a traditional obligation by marrying them since, without polygamy, some would be without husbands and might be tempted to settle for the less respectable status of concubines instead of wives. This is so among Hausa men of Nigeria who see in polygamy the obligation to make honest women out of would-be concubines or old girls.

The complex and problematic inter-caste marriage system is another justification for a man to want to marry another woman from a more acceptable caste class. A man from a higher caste class who marries below his caste class, owes it to himself and his family to have children of "clean" or unadulterated blood by marrying another woman from a similar caste class. For instance, through Aïssatou's failed marriage to Mawdo Bâ in *Une si longue lettre*, Bâ explores the caste system and how it is used in Senegal and other countries of the Sahel region of sub-Saharan Africa to justify polygamy. Aïssatou's story is the case of a mother-in-law who, motivated by strong caste prejudice, raises her brother's daughter to be her son's new wife with the sole purpose of ensuring that the bloodline is kept pure and uninterrupted.

In Senegal, it is easier for two people of equal social standing but from different ethnic groups to marry than for those from within the same ethnic group but belonging to the wrong caste. For example, the Wolof will readily accept marriages between Wolof and other ethnic groups and even from neighboring countries provided the two parties are of parallel castes in their respective rank systems. Many such inter-ethnic marriages occur in the urban areas. Inter-caste marriages however are rare in both rural and urban areas. Westernized Wolof who wish to marry from a lower caste may have to go as far as breaking ties with their families. It may also happen that people from lower castes conceal their origin in order to marry the partner of their choice. A smith and a leatherworker may intermarry as may the religious and non religious Griots intermarry. It must be noted however that unmixed marriages are more frequent than mixed marriages. Children born of mixed caste marriages, especially if they are male, have to choose the caste (occupation) to which they wish to belong.

Marriage between noble and slave exists, though they rare. It can, however, only take place between a noble man and a slave woman on condition that the slave woman is not the noble's first wife. Such marriages are generally prevented from happening. The man's noble family members may discourage him from going through with it or the potential co-wives may put up some form of resistance. In most cases, the man caves in to such resistance since he knows it might cause disharmony in the household. Most of the marriages between noble and slave end in divorce. The children of such unions are called "child with one foot," because only one of their ancestral branches is noble instead of the usual two branches. Despite the fact that such a child has at least one part of his genealogy that is noble, he or she is never seen as a noble and is automatically considered

a slave by the rest of the community. His or her portion of the family inheritance could also be affected because of his or her link to slave ancestry.

Marriage between noble and a tradesman is a different matter. In the past, the different tradesmen (castes) were categorized as a special category of slaves and rules governing marriage between them and the noble were not different from those applied to the union between the noble and slaves. A woman from the tradesmen group can marry up but a man cannot. Unfortunately, the offspring of these unions are always the ones to face society's bigotry and discrimination. In all this, there is a double standard enjoyed by the noble. Even though the Wolof and other ethnic groups that practice this type of caste system are patrilineal, a child of mixed noble-caste lineage can never enjoy the status of full nobility. The girls of these unions are always at a disadvantage when it comes to marriage. Noble men are not ready to marry them because they are associated with their mothers' low rank in society. The women, in spite of being discriminated against by their paternal nobility, also look down on the lower caste and do not want to be married to them. Such women mostly end up having sexual relations with noble men and inadvertently remain concubines. This is because, it is alright for a noble man to have sexual relations with a smith, leatherworker or a griot woman but he may never marry her not because he does not want to do so but because his noble family frowns on it. The only logical reason for men not marrying up is that it will be difficult for them to assume the role of the possessor and not the possessed. However, the reason the noble gives is that the man of the lower rank does not have enough material wealth to maintain the lifestyle his noble wife was accustomed to before getting married to him. In reality, however, some caste members are much richer than the nobles. Generally, the caste members are

considered as unclean and are therefore seen as likely to contaminate the clean (noble) in a union. Some nobles consider themselves as pure and the longer a noble person can reach back in his ancestry, the higher the rank. Other nobles believe that purity refers to a person who stays within his caste through endogamy. For this reason, a slave who marries a fellow slave will be considered purer than a “child with one foot.”<sup>3</sup> So in *Un si longue lettre*, Aïssatou’s marriage to Mawdo was doomed to fail from the start because of her family ranking in the Senegalese social system. As the daughter of a goldsmith, she was not expected to marry Mawdo Bâ who was of noble blood. Unhappy with her son’s choice, Tante Nabou, a Princess of Sine, who clings to old customs and traditions, set out to destroy the marriage by imposing her niece, petite Nabou on Mawdo and, by so doing, breaking his marriage with Aïssatou. It is assumed that Mawdo is preventing his lineage from extending by marrying Aïssatou since the children born to him by Aïssatou will not be full-blooded nobility but rather regarded as children with one foot:

Devant cette mère rigide, pétrie de morale ancienne, brûlée intérieurement par les féroces lois antiques, que pouvait Mawdo Bâ? (...) Tu ne comptais plus, pas plus que tes quatre fils: ceux-ci ne seront jamais les égaux des fils de la petite Nabou (48).

So it is that Mawdo’s children with his first cousin Nabou will be more accepted socially than the four sons he had with the daughter of the goldsmith. *Une si longue lettre* also deals with polygamy, the burden of not only the modern Senegalese woman but African women as a whole. It is an issue that goes, not surprisingly, to the very heart of what African women writers have fought against by attacking it in the hope of reforming or destroying it. From their perspective, in polygamy one woman tends to be alienated as the *Other* as she is forced to play second fiddle when a new wife joins her in the marriage. As we shall see later on, *Une si longue lettre*, *Un chant écarlate* and *Changes*

draw on the notion that polygamous marriages serve to control women in a patriarchal society. Some women writers, like Aidoo, have, however, shied away from a one-sided view of this issue by presenting polygamy in a way that makes it difficult to blame its practice only on men. So by stopping short of treating the female characters in polygamous relationships in *Changes* as underdogs, she avoids condemning polygamy outright, deciding to emphasize instead the freedom of choice that modern African women enjoy; a freedom that no longer makes them victims of polygamy as they choose for personal selfish reasons polygamy over monogamy. In *Papa doit manger*, NDiaye explores the same issue but through bigamy. Hence bigamy is for her what polygamy is for Aidoo and Bâ: forms of marriage that degrade women.

Aidoo's *Changes* portrays women whose level of emancipation permits them to ignore societal norms and impose their own. As emancipated African women, they choose to break with tradition. In this novel, women are able to make choices about their marital lives, assume their mistakes and decide their next course of action. Esi and Fusena (*Changes*) are forced by their individual circumstances to make difficult choices about their love lives which include their decision to be in a polygamous marriage. As wives and mothers, educated, career-oriented, financially independent and strong-willed, the choice will throw them into a web of complications. Fusena's husband Ali, is a college mate and friend. At the time of their marriage, they both had the same level of education. Fusena, however, gives up her teaching career and becomes a wife, mother and homemaker. She follows Ali to England where Ali earns degree after degree while she secretly fears how the educational gap between them might affect their marriage. Upon their return, Fusena's secret fear becomes her worst nightmare when Ali begins to

fantasize about having a more exciting woman in his life. She decides to pursue a business career and owns the most successful grocery store in her neighborhood. In fact, she is much better off financially as a grocery store owner than she would ever have been as a schoolteacher. Esi, unlike Fusena, is a highly educated data analyst working for Department of Urban Statistic of the Ghana government. Her husband is an equally successful head (principal) of a secondary school, a less prestigious position than his wife's. By the account of Esi's grandmother, it would seem plausible that both Esi and Fusena have accepted the fact that there was the possibility they might end up in polygamous marriages where the men would be the undisputed heads of the household:

In our time, the best citizen was the man who swallowed more than one woman, and the more, the better. So our warriors and our kings married more women than other men in their communities. To prove that they were, by that single move, the best in the land (*Changes*, 109).

Typically, Esi's husband Oko will turn out to be such a man: he refuses to understand the demands of Esi's career, her fight to succeed in a sector dominated by men. He wants his wishes to be Esi's command. By demanding that Oko recognize her problems at her workplace, her husband's friends see him as less than the "man" in the marriage: "They think I am not behaving like a man." (*Changes*, 8) Esi is unlike the traditional wife who is expected to put her husband's wishes above her personal ambitions and problems. Her demanding job that makes her leave home early and return late with work to be completed at home, does not move Oko to understand why she does not want to have more children. Rather, he sees her professional advancement as a hindrance to their marriage:

He knew she was very much respected by her colleagues and other

people who knew the work she did. She also should not really be trying so hard to impress: leaving the house virtually at dawn; returning home at dusk; often bringing work home? Then there were all those conferences. Geneva, Addis, Dakar one half of the year: Rome, Lusaka, Lagos the other half (*Changes*, 8).

Holding Esi up to her best friend Opokuya, a well educated career woman, wife and mother of four boys, Oko finds his wife falling short. As a nurse, Opokuya is financially independent. As the “real African woman” that Oko thinks she is, Opokuya also takes care of her husband Kubi’s needs. She is a selfless workhorse who puts the interest of her household above her personal well being. The story of both women is typical of emancipated women who, for fear of divorce and its impact on their children, continue in less than desirable marriages. Unable to impose his will on Esi to become another Opokuya with children, Oko resorts to subjugation through rape. As the rape has become for Oko the instrument of negotiation, Esi decides to divorce him. Ironically, Opokuya’s selflessness only serves to make Kubi more selfish. Both decisions—Esi’s divorce, and Opokuya’s bad marriage—present a dilemma to the younger generation of women. On the one hand, divorce is a way out of undesirable marriages, and on the other, for the sake of the children and societal pressures, it is better to stay married.

Ali’s sexual desires fantasies will eventually push him into the arms of a newly divorced Esi, now recast as a sex object:

Esi had always enjoyed walking around naked after lovemaking (...)  
So as if to encourage her boldness, he often pretended to be asleep so that he could lie there, aware of all the movements she made. It excited him enormously and was a source of one of the pleasures of being with her. He had slept with a great number of women in his time, but he knew very few women from his part of the world who even tried to be at ease with their own bodies (...) His wife Fusena, a good woman if ever there was one, was no exception. All the time they had lived practically alone in London, he never detected the faintest desire in Fusena ever to walk naked in the Flat (*Changes*, 74-75).

Not only does Esi accept this new role of a sexual performer and seductress, an oasis of bliss for Ali, but she also enjoys the pleasures it brings her. As a financially independent woman with her own house, she is not being pushed into it out of financial necessity. In Esi's home, Ali is able to forget problems of his household. With time, Ali asks Esi to marry him, which she accepts. With Ali not intent on divorcing Fusena, it must have been clear to Esi that she was accepting to be a second wife. Esi's decision to go from a monogamous marriage with Oko to a polygamous one with Ali may seem ill advised but, as she confides to Opokuya, she needed the change because "monogamy is so stifling." (98)

Esi and Ali come to the marriage with two different objectives: Esi hopes that her marriage to Ali would be without the traditional household duties since those would be the obligations of Fusena. For Ali, a marriage to Esi would give him exciting sex on demand and total control over her life. But before long, Ali is on the prowl again. The calls to her become fewer; the time spent with her become shorter and far between. All that is happening at a time Esi had become emotionally dependent on Ali. Christmas becomes lonely without Ali as he could not be located, but still she hopes he might show up anytime unannounced. When Ali eventually shows up on New Year's Eve, he gives no reason why he did not show up, but instead buys his way out of the predicament by bringing Esi a brand new car to replace her old one. As Ali's excuses for his repeated absences give way to bouts of impatience whenever Esi tries to contact him, it is clear to Esi that Ali's material largesse is not what she needs. So while the once strong-willed and independent career woman who walked out of her first marriage because of marital rape, is now coming apart emotionally, Ali has moved on to his next victim: his new younger

and pretty secretary to whom he gives a daily ride home after work. To help cope, Esi now turns to anti-depressants when Opokuya spells out to her the new reality:

Esi: It hurts.

Opokuya: Does it?

Esi: Terribly

Opokuya: Well, just remember that if a man can have two wives (...) Then he can have three wives... four wives... And on and on and on .... (*Changes*, 156)

A similar situation of heartbreak and disappointment occurs in *Une si longue lettre*. Ramatoulaye is cheated on and later abandoned by her husband Modou for Binetou, a classmate and friend of Ramatoulaye's teenage daughter Daba. Five years earlier, Ramatoulaye's best friend, Aïssatou, also suffers the same fate as her husband, Mawdo, cheats on her and eventually marries his much younger first cousin Nabou. Aïssatou leaves her husband taking her sons with her. She pursues further education and eventually accepts a position with the Senegalese Embassy in Washington D.C. Ramatoulaye, on the other hand, remains married to Modou who decides not to pay any attention to her and spends instead all his time and money on his younger bride and her extended family. Some have seen in this story a parallel between Ramatoulaye and Mariama Bâ's life, to the point of being her alter ego. Bâ was one of the pioneer women elite in Senegal. She became a teacher, married and had nine children and divorced her husband in her later years. For example, Ramatoulaye's letter in the novel to her friend after her husband's death, is probably a fictionalized version of the real letter that Bâ had written after her divorce. There is a slight and essential difference: While we may never know Bâ's decision to divorce, it is likely she did so when their marriage had fallen apart and was

not worth salvaging unlike Ramatoulaye who stays in a similar situation. Although the message in the two parallel stories could somehow be considered confusing and conflicting, by juxtaposing Ramatoulaye to Aïssatou in her novel, Bâ seems to be making the point that failed marriages like Ramatoulaye's should not be tolerated no matter how societal pressures on the woman encourage her to stay married. Above all, in matters of husbands, Bâ advises, young women should listen to their parents before choosing. This will be in keeping with the traditional African understanding of marriage: it is between families not individuals.

The decision of a spouse is not limited to the family alone. Since in the African context, marriage should lead to procreation, the physical as well as the mental health of the partner is also very important. A known disability in a family can be grounds for discouraging the marriage. In *Anowa*, this explains why Anowa's father, Osam, is utterly amazed by his wife's objection when he saw no major problem that should prevent Kofi from marrying their daughter: "Has he an ancestor who unclothed himself to nakedness, had the Unmentionable killed himself or another man?" he would ask about Kofi's pedigree (16).

The resourcefulness of the partner prior to the marriage is another important reason why two people may or may not be allowed to marry. The man as the main or sole breadwinner must be seen to be resourceful enough to be able to take care of his future family. One way of showing resourcefulness is through expensive gifts the suitor lavishes on the woman's parents during the courtship. But a western educated career woman at a time when most Senegalese women were uneducated and homemakers, Ramatoulaye in *Une si longue lettre* is not impressed by Daouda Dieng's financial grandstanding. She

marries the less solvent Modou in clear defiance of her parents' choice of suitor, thus choosing love over money, obedience and duty to parents. This decision turns out to be a regrettable one, not on account of Modou's solvency or lack thereof, but on that of love betrayed. Modou does not remain monogamous as Ramatoulaye had hoped. He brings in Binetou as a second wife:

Alors que la femme puise, dans le cours des ans, la force de s'attacher, malgré le vieillissement de son compagnon, l'homme, lui, rétrécit de plus en plus son champ de tendresse. Son œil égoïste regarde par dessus l'épaule de sa conjointe. Il compare ce qu'il eut à ce qu'il n'a plus, ce qu'il a et ce qu'il pourrait avoir (*Une si longue lettre*, 62).

The institutionalization of polygamy Ramatoulaye will learn, provides men with the perfect legitimizing instrument of domination of women. So while Modou spends the family's fortune on Binetou and her family, including a loan using the house as collateral, Ramatoulaye and her children face a possible eviction and life on the street. Ramatoulaye and Modou's oldest daughter, Daba, will however save the day. She puts up the money to buy back the house and give it to her mother, leaving Binetou with nothing.

Ramatoulaye's decision to stay in the marriage despite the emotional and financial abuse may have hinged on three considerations: First, she grew up on and in her adult life has come to accept the notion that men are polygamous by nature. Secondly, and perhaps a more plausible consideration, is that she sees the institution of marriage to be the bedrock of every society, hence larger than oneself. The third consideration may have been self-interest: she has invested too much in the marriage to just walk away.

If *Une si longue lettre* deals with polygamy within a same-race marriage, *Un chant écarlate* tackles polygamy through the interracial marriage between Ousmane and Mireille, daughter of a French diplomat on mission to Dakar. Although the two are

worlds apart socially as Mireille puts it, “mes parents n’ont rien ménagé pour faire de moi une jeune fille accomplie” (30), it is education that will prove to be the glue that will bring them together. The two fall in love in an educational setting: while Mireille was studying in Dakar. When Mireille’s diplomat father discovers the liaison, he dispatches her back to France to continue her education there in the hope that once out of sight they would be out of each other’s mind. The plan backfires. Ousmane and Mireille remain in contact and in love until Ousmane goes to Paris to marry her and brings her back to Dakar much to her father’s disapproval and chagrin because he is convinced his daughter deserves someone better than Ousmane. On their return to Senegal, Mireille finds Yaye Khady’s role as the matriarch over-bearing. She is impatient with Mireille’s progress in adapting to the Senegalese culture, and worst of all, she casts her in the perverted role of her rival: the woman who has robbed her of her son. If Yaye Khady considers her open hostility to Mireille as justified, Djibril Guèye, Ousmane’s father, resigns himself to fate: Mireille is a necessary evil: “Accueillons ce mariage comme le “mal” nécessaire à notre survie.” (102) Since the pious Djibril Guèye will not want to tempt fate, he seeks divine intervention to help them through this ordeal: “Rendons grace à Dieu de nous asséner des coups que nous pouvons supporter.” (102) Just as Djibril sees his son’s marriage to Mireille as the cross they must carry, so does Mireille who laments the intrusion of Ousmane’s family members into their lives. She hates their continuous presence in her home, and restricts Ousmane’s visits to them – if he must, it will have to be with her. Yaye Khady, for whom marriage is a contract between both families and not between the man and his wife, is baffled by the restriction Mireille has imposed on the family access

to Ousmane: for her it is the case of “La Blanche manie son homme comme un patin. Son mari reste sa propriété.” (112) In short, she owns Ousmane.

Ousmane’s peers are another source of concern for Mireille. Her beautifully decorated home - thick rugs covering the floors, lampshades everywhere, original paintings on the walls and a library of precious and rare books, has now become a sort of curiosity shop where weekend friends could meet:

Mais le flot des copains, de plus en plus fourni, envahissaient fauteuils, tabourets, chaises et tapis tous les samedis soirs (...) Sans se gêner, on transformait les battants des portes et fenêtres en porte-manteaux. (*Un chant écarlate*, 133).

Mireille is now on a slippery slope in terms of her Senegalese family immediate and extended. She has already lost the support of her mother-in law, is about to lose that of her husband’s friends, and perhaps ultimately, Ousmane’s. At the least indication by his friends that Mireille may be the one calling the shots, Ousmane shows his mettle: “surtout [il] ne se laissait ni dominer ni assimiler.” (132) Ousmane’s way of showing that he could not be dominated or assimilated into Mireille’s culture, is to remind her that she is married not only to him but his habits and way of life as well. Mireille’s inability or unwillingness to accept these habits and ways of life will end up alienating her from her husband’s family and cultural milieu. As the cultural “Other” she has made herself and her biracial son to be, Ousmane’s parents find themselves having to urge their son to marry a local, Ouleymatou, who would give him a local son. In other words, the best antidote to foreign cultural domination and assimilation is local cultural re-entrenchment.

It could be said that Ousmane is attracted to Ouleymatou in part because she possesses the local feminine qualities so many local men find irresistible: docility,

servitude and sensuality. From a young age, Ouleymatou has learned that a woman's power lies in her ability to maximize her feminine attributes by being beautiful, seductive and sensual:

...elle poudra son visage, redressa ses cils en appuyant leur noirceur, tira deux légers traits à l'emplacement de ses sourcils rasés. Un tube de marron à lèvres alourdit les contours de sa bouche (...) Elle choisit un pagne assez léger pour laisser deviner ses formes tout en restant décent. Elle déplia un soutien-gorge blanc spécialement acheté, pour faire valoir sa poitrine (...) Un boubou en tissu léger laissant entrevoir, dans le déplacement de ses pans, tantôt une épaule charnue, tantôt des seins dans leur prison de dentelle, tantôt les saillies des rangs de perles à ses hanches (*Un chant écarlate*, 167).

It is not surprising that once out of her cultural milieu, Mireille will lose the stiff competition from the Senegalese women for the heart and body of Ousmane because they, unlike her, know what their men want in a woman:

Que pouvait une Mireille toute simple contre la résonance voluptueuse du cliquetis des « fer » et la puissance aphrodisiaque de la poudre de « gongo » ? Que pouvait Mireille contre le roulement suggestif d'une croupe de Négresse dans les couleurs chaudes du pagne? (*Un chant écarlate*, 171)

The answer to this question is self-evident especially as Mireille, the invincible in all matters feminine becomes a victim of her own invincibility partly from a sense of French cultural superiority that will make Ousmane choose her over the Senegalese women. Driven over the edge by the realization that she could be vulnerable, Mireille murders her son by poisoning him, and attempts to stab Ousmane to death. Marriage for Mireille has become not the love, understanding, tolerance, and respect for their differences that she once had thought, but the entrapment, abuse, exploitation and rejection that her father had feared. As she relives the promises of love made to her by

Ousmane in his love letters, it is painfully clear to her that she has no place she can call home.

The significance of Mireille's final acts of desperation, comparable to that of the anonymous narrator in *La femme changée en bûche*, needs to be emphasized. Murdering her son is an act of condemnation of polygamy as well as a physical genealogical repudiation. In a patriarchal society, by murdering Gorgui, she has in a way killed her husband who would have lived on through his son. But whether Mireille's action qualifies as a premeditated crime or insanity by virtue of loneliness, rejection and desperation, Bâ does not say. Feminine criminality is the first thing that comes to the mind of the reader. As society has created the ideal self-sacrificing, passive and nurturing woman, the female who kills a member of her family has not only broken the law but has also violated gender expectations. This violent act perpetrated by a woman must therefore be explained if the self-sacrificing nurturing and passive image is to be maintained.

The story of Euripedes' Medea has laid the foundations for society's response to women who kill and the name still evokes images of unchecked female rage. Medea, Euripedes tells us, is a sorceress, daughter of Aëtes and wife of Jason the Argonaut, whom she assisted in obtaining the golden fleece. When Jason deserted her, she killed her children. Mireille and the anonymous narrator in *La femme changée en bûche* and *Un chant écarlate* become Medea-like characters as they decide to take revenge on their unfaithful husbands by murdering their children. The anonymous narrator in *La femme changée en bûche* is not only spurned by her husband but is at the point of losing her son to her husband's new companion. She therefore seeks help from the devil in order to burn

her son in his bed. In *Un chant écarlate*, Ousmane's betrayal and desertion leads Mireille to a frenzied jealousy and to exact revenge. Both women lay their sons in bed to die. Mireille fed Gorgui with poisoned food and put her in bed and the woman in *La femme change en bûche* clothed her son in the magical clothes given her by the devil and put him in his crib to burn to death. The act of putting the dying children in their cribs in a way symbolizes a mother putting her baby to bed to rest. Mothers rock their babies to sleep when the babies show signs of tiredness. This act symbolizes the unspoken maternal love that makes her want her son to rest forever. Like Medea, Mireille and the anonymous narrator have asserted themselves in a way that is foreign and outside the boundaries of accepted female behavior. They have by their actions gone against what society has prescribed as normal female behavior – that is, sacrifice their self for the good of males in their lives - father, husband and son. A normal woman is therefore one who, impotent with rage, must still be submissive and suffer in silence. Falling back on the Medea paradigm, a mother who kills her child to spite her husband, may have so acted out of love and protection for the child. Mireille ends Gorgui's life to save him from racism. To arrive at this decision, Mireille has to accept the fact that neither Ousmane's family nor the Senegalese society will accept him. By killing him, she is therefore putting him out of a sure misery – partly an act of love. It is true that Mireille's claim that her action was based on her love for her son may upset our comfortable notions of maternal powerlessness in mixed marriages. The truth is that, it was a conscious decision based on what she was witnessing: "Le « Gnouloule Khessoule »! n'a pas de place dans ce monde (...) Monde de salauds ! Monde de menteurs ! Toi, mon petit, tu vas le quitter ! Gnouloule Khessoule!" (*Un chant écarlate*, 245). As a biracial child whose mother has

been rejected by both her husband and her parents, Gorgui is heading toward a life of rejection. His Senegalese as well as French blood relatives will consider him an outcast. His paternal grandmother, Yaye Khady, has already given him the nickname “Gnouloule Khessoule” (that is “neither black nor white”) and also wonders aloud about Gorgui’s bleak future in the French society. In her opinion, Mireille’s can never make her French relatives accept her biracial son in spite of the effort she is making to raise him French: “L’influence maternelle si vigoureuse soit-elle ne pourra jamais faire s’intégrer cet enfant dans le monde des Blancs. Il serait toujours inévitablement singularisé.” (187) His maternal grandfather, Monsieur de la Vallée, has openly shown his racist attitudes by referring to Ousmane as less than human. Therefore, a child from the union with such less than human father, will never be totally accepted into the de la Vallée family. In *La femme changée en bûche*, the son is killed so as not to live through the difficulties most children of divorced parents have to endure. Among other things, the child has to bond with her new stepparents and families, not to mention the emotional trauma he/she will have to overcome if his/her parents’ divorce was not a friendly one.

Possibly, Mireille’s action could be interpreted as a legitimate act of self-defense in so far as she tried to protect her interest and that of her son. Whatever the real motive of her action, it is a scenario which brings into sharp focus the clash of mindsets produced by two conflicting cultural attitudes.

Two men in this story are singled out for special attention: Djibril, Ousmane’s father and Ali, Ousmane’s friend. Djibril, a deeply pious man with strong religious beliefs, embraces Mireille as a new member of the family because he believes it was God’s will. In the end, however, Djibril is not so sure anymore that Mireille and Ousmane’s monogamous marriage in Paris was also made in Senegalese Heaven. It is this realization from the facts surrounding Ousmane and Mireille’s marital life in Senegal

that convinces Djibril to allow Ousmane to marry a local girl secretly. In the cultural view of Djibril, this secret local marriage is made both on Earth—the Senegalese cultural reality—and in Heaven—as Moslems, Mireille understands that Islam does not prevent Ousmane from being a bigamist or even a polygamist. Though Moslem, Ali rejects Djibril's view, so in an unprecedented but sincere fashion, he advises Ousmane to divorce Ouleymatou. He even takes Ousmane to an exorcist believing that Ousmane may have been acting under Ouleymatou's spell. It is not clear why the text does not comment on Djibril's advise to his son. One may surmise from this textual silence that Bâ may be giving a tacit recognition to the intractable issue of polygamy or interracial marriage in the Senegalese society. One message can be heard loud and clear over this silence: Ali has crossed a traditional line—one does not usurp the role that corresponds to the patriarch no matter how misguided his decision or strongly one rejects the issue at hand.

Bâ is somehow ambivalent on the larger cultural question of polygamy in *Un chant écarlate* and *Une si longue lettre*. This may be due partly, as Volet observes, to a generational shift in attitudes toward polygamy across the African continent:

Les romancières africaines ne se dressent pas contre une forme évasive de la domination masculine. Elles s'insurgent contre les abus de pouvoir tolérés par les générations d'aujourd'hui. Elles condamnent non seulement l'attitude des rustres qui ne respectent pas leurs femmes, mais aussi l'élite intellectuelle et religieuse qui s'ingénie à justifier de tels comportements, à dénigrer les efforts d'émancipation de la femme africaine (Volet, 159).

Bâ's ambivalence could also be the result of fear. That is by openly condemning polygamy she may be thought of as engaging in religious heresy. She therefore has to draw a very careful and clear distinction between criticizing tradition and denouncing societal abuse under the guise of respect for tradition and religious laws:

If you fear you cannot be equitable to orphan girls (in your charge, or

misuse their persons), / then marry women who are lawful for you, two, three, or four:/ but if you fear you cannot treat so many of them with equity, / marry only one, or a maid or captive. / This is better than being iniquitous (Koran. English and Arabic, 4:3).

Under this Koranic dictum, Moslem men have the right to marry as many as four wives but this right must be balanced with the duty and obligation to treat the women fairly and equitably. In practice, equal treatment of wives means, among others, sharing each wife's bed on three consecutive day rotations. During this period, the husband eats only the food prepared by the wife "on duty" and stays the nights with her. However, because there are no clear guidelines about what "equal treatment of women" really means, men have interpreted them to suit their ends, hence the abuses. For example, it is not uncommon that a husband spend more nights with the youngest and most recent wife than the older ones. Such are the cases of the co-wives in Bâ's novels: Ramatoulaye and Binetou; Aïssatou and petite Nabou in *Une si longue lettre* and Mireille and Ouleymatou in *Un chant écarlate*. When Modou Fall marries Binetou, his attention is now diverted from his first wife Ramatoulaye to her, and many times the Islamic three-day marital rule is flouted as his nights with her become numerous and longer. Consequently, Modou Fall becomes completely beholding to Binetou and her whims, including her outbursts anytime Modou mentioned Ramatoulaye or expressed the desire to see his children:

Je m'étais préparée à un partage equitable selon l'Islam, dans le domaine polygamique. Je n'eus rien entre les mains. (...) Il ne vint jamais plus ; son nouveau bonheur recouvrit petit à petit notre souvenir. Il nous oublia." (*Une si longue lettre*, 69)

One woman's fight against polygamy is sometimes a fight against another woman's interests. This is what underlines the conflicting attitudes some women in Bâ's

novels have toward polygamy. Ramatoulaye, for example, claims that polygamy works on the notion of complementarity. She believes that men and women are created to complement one another, but fails to mention that for that to work, marriage must adhere to the societal pact that stipulates that two people cannot be forced to be together if they shared nothing in common or once did but no longer do. Ramatoulaye should now be thinking of how she is going to raise twelve children all by herself since it is clear that Modou Fall has decided that Binetou complements him. But when complementarity fails, divorcées, common in West Africa nowadays, are still frowned on by society which sees them as having walked out on their family. After she leaves the marital home, a Moslem divorcée is expected to observe *idda*, a forty-day waiting period prescribed in the Koran. Her ex-husband is only obliged to support her during this period. Once the period of *idda* is over, she is expected to re-marry within months since it is socially unacceptable for a woman of childbearing age to stay unmarried. When Aïssatou walks out on Mawdo, she does so fully aware of the social stigma attached to her decision. But given the choice between the abandoned first wife and the divorcée, she takes the latter. She has already taken the corner to freedom, so at this point not even the male role model argument for her children will dissuade her:

On te conseillait des compromis : « On ne brûle pas un arbre qui porte des fruits ». On te menaçait dans ta chair : « Des garçons ne peuvent réussir sans leur père. » Tu passes outre (*Une si longue lettre*, 49).

Granted that the male role model argument is a powerful one, but in Aïssatou's situation it is precisely the polygamous male role model that Mawdo now represented she did not want for her children.

The role of the Imam in polygamous relationships is briefly discussed in *Une si longue lettre*. It is the one who breaks the news of Modou and Binetou's marriage to Ramatoulaye: "Oui, Modou Fall, mais heureusement vivant pour nous tous, Dieu merci. Il n'a fait qu'épouser une autre femme, ce jour. Nous venons de la Mosquée de Grand Dakar où a eu lieu le mariage." (*Une si longue lettre*, 56) Here he comes across as an insensitive individual, completely oblivious to the fact that he has just delivered a heavy blow to Ramatoulaye. But it is hard to blame him. As a man versed in Islamic laws, all that mattered to him was whether the laws had been adhered to or not. Whether Modou treated his wives equally staying three days with Ramatoulaye and three days with Binetou on a rotating basis was not within the Imam's immediate purview. Again, the Imam will be on hand to accompany Modou's brother Tamsir as his witness to ask for the widowed Ramatoulaye's hand in marriage.

In bringing in the Imam and his role in polygamy, Bâ criticizes the selfish desire that leads men toward polygamy while staying clear of the religious laws that sanction it because she considers polygamy a basic human flaw. That is why the polygamist Mawdo Bâ strikes an intriguing chord with readers compared to the other polygamists in the novel. Mawdo Bâ does not use Islam to justify his right to have a wandering eye or cheating heart. He insists his intimacy with his new bride is out of love, but still professes his love for Aïssatou and misses her. He also claims he is with Nabou because she is available. To Ramatoulaye's accusation that he is not being truthful to Aïssatou if he is also married to Nabou and is having babies with her in quick successions, he replies that a man, put in close proximity to a woman, would be attracted to her. It is the

animalistic instinct in men, he explains, that makes them cheat on their wives, while expecting their wives to understand and forgive their husbands:

Voyons, ne fais pas l'idiote. Comment veux-tu qu'un homme reste de pierre, au contact permanent de la femme qui évolue dans sa maison ? » (...) Débarrasse-toi de ton excès de sentimentalité rêveuse. Accepte la réalité dans sa brusque laideur. On n'exige pas aux lois impérieuses qui exigent de l'homme nourriture et vêtements. Ces mêmes lois poussent le "male" ailleurs. Je dis bien mâle pour marquer la bestialité des instincts... Tu comprends... Une femme doit comprendre une fois pour toutes et pardonner; elle ne doit pas souffrir en se souciant des "trahisons" charnelles. Ce qui importe, c'est ce qu'il y a là, dans le cœur ; c'est ce qui lie deux êtres, au-dedans..." "Acculé aux extrêmes limites de la résistance, je me repais de ce qui se trouve à ma portée (...)" (*Une si longue lettre*, 52-53).

Mawdo's point is that in every man who will admit it publicly, is a powerful natural predisposition to cheat and lie, an animalistic instinct against which man seems irremediably powerless. Fighting polygamy, Mawdo seems to indicate, is counter-intuitive. It does not come to him naturally because, at an instinctual level, the same laws of nature which imbibe man with innate nurturing qualities--provider of food and shelter-- are the very ones that push him to resort to acts that bring pain and suffering. From this paradoxical standpoint Mawdo seems to suggest that modern man, in an evolutionary sense, still lives in the Garden of Eden and therefore ill-equipped to learn modern socializing skills. At another level, Mawdo's naturalistic defense could be construed as a deliberate jab at feminist criticism, because he not only affirms his male identity but, also shields such identity from any attempts at changing it. Mawdo's message to the feminist critic is simple: stop trying because men will always be men. All men seem to be like Mawdo. It is therefore not surprising that Ousmane's relationship

with Mireille could not remain monogamous. He would have brought another woman into the marriage whether or not Mireille had been a local.

If religious obligation justifies polygamy, it also creates unholy alliances among women vying for the attention of the same man. In Ousmane and Mireille's case, difference in religious affiliations rather than differences in culture and skin color seem to weigh heavily in the decision to be polygamous. So it is that Yaye Khady, Ousmane and Ouleymatou's family did not unite against Mireille because of the color of her skin, but because she remained a Christian in her ways, even though outwardly she had converted to Islam. Similarly, in *Une si longue lettre*, Jacqueline, an Ivorian Christian woman, married to Samba Diack, a Senegalese Moslem and pharmacist working in the Côte d'Ivoire, would suffer the same fate as Mireille. While in the Côte d'Ivoire where mixed religious marriages are common and are known to have worked, Jacqueline did not convert to Islam. But this would become an issue once Samba Diack relocated to Senegal. His family looked on benignly as Samba Diack cheated with Senegalese Moslem women. Jacqueline was vilified and thought not to be deserving of Saba Diack on religious grounds. The heavy-handedness and rejection from her in-laws would drive Jacqueline into depression:

Jacqueline voulait bien se sénégaliser, mais les moqueries arrêtaient en elle toute volonté de coopération. On l'appelait gnac et elle avait fini par percer le contenu de ce sobriquet qui la révoltait (*Une si longue lettre*, 64).

There is a social and legal background to Bâ's treatment of polygamy in her novels: the passage of the Family Code in Senegal in 1970. It gave women equal rights and protected them against arbitrary repudiation. It also reinstated women's traditionally recognized rights as wives and mothers. Although long overdue, these reforms came

under strong opposition from Senegalese Moslem religious leaders. Their main claim was that the Code opposed the principles of the Koran which stipulates that men are the managers of the affairs of women and for that Allah has preferred one of them over the other (Magassouba, 1985:112-114). In spite of the passage of the Family Code in the early 1970s, women did not really benefit from it because, as a form of civil redress, Moslem religious leaders refused to recognize its civil jurisdiction over Islamic laws involving marriage, divorce and inheritance. A backlash to this legislation is the resurgence in the late 1970s of Islamic fundamentalism in Senegal which was so strong that Ahmed Niass created a short-lived Islamic political party, the first of its kind in Senegal. The objective of the party was to raise the religious consciousness of Moslems in Senegal, fight against materialism and purify Islam (Magassouba, 1985).

Marie NDiaye's view of women in bad marriages is heavily informed by her personal cultural circumstances. Her depiction of interracial marriages, albeit from an autobiographical point of view, complements aspects of polygamous marriages in Senegalese society as described in Bâ's novels. In *Papa doit manger*, Ahmed, a black Moslem man and a philanderer, walks out on Maman and their two daughters, and disappears from their lives for ten years and changes his name to Aimé. He gets married to another woman and has a son with her, and later connives with her and returns to his family and first wife since in the eyes of the law, he was still married to her. Ahmed had disappeared when his wife was in training to become a beautician because of the financial difficulties they were facing. He lived in the same city for ten years under an assumed identity. In his own words, he had met his daughters a few times without one recognizing the other. He has observed his wife from a distance and has realized that her business is

prospering enough for him to scheme to get some money from it and return to his other wife. During his ten-year absence, however, Maman has become a successful beautician and has a fiancé Zelner. Ahmed's claim of the right to return to his wife and share in her financial success is beyond the pale. It nevertheless underscores the extent to which traditional marital laws work against women and families. Legally, he is still married to his wife so if she is able to complete her training and earn a good living, he can hope to return to enjoy her wealth. Needless to say, his return confuses Maman who, in her newfound freedom, is left wondering whether having a fiancé is the right thing to do within her marriage.

NDiaye deals with the same issue of men's claim to their jilted wives' wealth both in *Papa doit manger* and in *La sorcière*. In the latter novel, Lucie's husband disappears one day with all Lucie's money, a gift she received from her father. He goes on to marry another woman, have children, and support the new family with the money he had stolen from their joint bank account.

In NDiaye's novel *La femme changée en bûche*, the story of cheating and polygamous tendencies of men is told by the anonymous narrating voice during a visit to her best friend Valerie:

Portant Bébé sur mon bras, je suis allée trouver Valérie car j'étais dans le plus grand désarroi, j'étais tout enfiévrée de rage et de dépit, je songeais aux ennuis que mon mari allait s'attirer avec une irritation montante et presque de la peine. S'il était coupable, n'était-il pas également pitoyable pour avoir une mémoire aussi courte? (*La femme changée en bûche*, 9)

Other details of the cheating in the novel include how her husband openly kisses his lover: "Et voilà qu'il me mentait et me trompait! La femme avec qui je venais de le voir était beaucoup moins jolie que moi, en tout innocence, mon mari l'embrassait dans la

rué”(9-10). Like Ramatoulaye in *Une si longue lettre*, this anonymous narrator talks about how she had to save him from a hopeless situation at work, by soliciting the devil’s help:

J’ai rappelé à Valérie comment, autrefois, j’ai tiré mon mari de l’embarras en cédant au Diable pour lui, mon mari qui ne savait que gémir et se lamenter et former des plans oiseux, et se frapper la tête et regretter ses erreurs, et s’accuser inutilement, tandis que d’un pas ferme, je m’étais rendue chez le Diable, horrifiant mon mari et ainsi pourtant le lavant de tous ses ennuis (*La femme changée en bûche*, 9).

The fact that she sought recourse to the power of the devil to help get her husband out of his troubles underlines how devoted she is to him, and to be repaid by going for a less attractive woman, goes to show NDiaye’s distrust of polygamy.

In this novel, NDiaye’s critical lens seems to be focused on a less known figure in African Literature: the home-wrecker. It is worth noting that this figure is better developed in Bâ’s *Une si longue lettre*. The home wreckers, Binetou and Petite Nabou, have inserted themselves into Aïssatou’s and Ramatoulaye’s marriages and destroying them. If both Binetou and Nabou succeeded, because of their youth, in interfering with the marriages of the older women, Ouleymatou did not use age, but cultural compatibility to steal Ousmane from his wife Mireille. In all three cases, the women knowingly and willingly destroyed their fellow women’s marriages.

The social reality of the home-wrecker has made only timid inroads into the fictional world of literature. A home-wrecker is a woman who knowingly disrupts a marriage to take personal advantage of whatever problems the marriage may be having. These gains may be social, economic or even emotional. In a monogamous society, the home wrecker is considered a menace to societal stability. In a polygamous society, however, the notion of the home-wrecker is non-existent in the sense that whatever

relationship the man has outside the marriage is viewed as the preliminary stages of a potential marriage, much like a courtship. The impact of a home-wrecker on the existing union goes far beyond a normal courtship. This is clearly borne out by Ramatoulaye when she rejects Daouda Dieng's marriage proposal on the grounds that it would destabilize his already existing marriage:

...Je n'ai pas l'élasticité de conscience nécessaire pour accepter d'être ton épouse alors que seul l'estime, justifiée par tes nombreuses qualités, me tend vers toi.

Je ne peux t'offrir rien d'autre, alors que tu mérites tout. L'estime ne peut justifier une vie conjugale dont je connais tous les pièges pour avoir fait ma propre expérience.

Et puis, l'existence de ta femme et de tes enfants complique encore la situation. Abandonnée hier, par le fait d'une femme, je ne peux allègrement m'introduire entre toi et ta famille.

Tu crois simple le problème polygamique. Ceux qui s'y meuvent connaissent des contraintes, des mensonges, des injustices qui alourdissent leur conscience pour la joie éphémère d'un changement (*Une si longue lettre*, 99-100).

Ramatoulaye could have benefited economically by marrying Daouda Dieng, a very generous man who had not stopped loving her since their youth and in terms of social esteem from the accepted practice of polygamy to resolve her problem of prolonged widowhood: "Je suis sûr que l'amour est ton mobile, un amour qui exista bien avant ton mariage et que le destin n'a pas comblé." (*Une si longue lettre*, 100). She does not, however, because as she put it, she does not want to inflict the same pain she suffered on another woman. Her rationale is symbolic: Polygamy is a vicious circle that must be broken, and someone must be willing to take that first step.

In NDiaye's *La femme changée en bûche*, pain and abandonment associated with rejection in a bigamous relationship will be fought with revenge: "Mon mari, ai-je dit, ne

devait-il pas être puni exemplairement? (...) Mon mari qui me trahissait ne devait-il pas être puni de la manière la plus impitoyable ?” (11) She uses her son as a weapon to fight against her husband because she knows how much the child means to him: “Ce petit enfant faisait le bonheur et la fierté de mon mari.” (12). By depriving him of his son, she is breaking the father-son continuum which is essential in patriarchal societies: “ J’ai donc écrit à mon mari que j’étais vengée de ce qu’il m’avait trahi en brûlant Bébé dans son petit lit.” (23). Even though brutal, one might say that the radical decision to burn a son is equal and proportional to the pain inflicted. Only through a break with the status quo can the generational vision of relationship that Bâ proposes be fully appreciated.

Aidoo also addresses the new generational break with the past by highlighting the role of freedom of choice, mutual consent and equality in a marriage. In *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, Ato, educated in the United States and Ghana, chooses his wife without waiting for the approval of his parents:

1<sup>st</sup> Woman: But where is his wife?

2<sup>nd</sup> Woman: I do not know, my sister.

But I heard them say that his mother had gone to knock the door of Yaw Mensa to ask for the hand of his daughter for him

1<sup>st</sup> Woman: Oh, he would have had a good woman. I saw that girl when she came home last Christmas. School has not spoiled her, I think.

2<sup>nd</sup> Woman: And that is the sad part of it, my sister. He has not taken that girl whom we all know and like, but has gone for this black-white woman (*The Dilemma of a Ghost*,17-18).

The general assumption that freedom of choice of a spouse comes with the influence of western education is disproved in Aidoo’s play *Anowa*. Anowa has not had the benefit of western education but she defies tradition by choosing Kofi Ako over all the men designated by her family:

Badua: Any mother would be concerned if her daughter refused to Get married six years after her puberty (...)

Anowa: Mother, Father, I have met the man I want to marry.  
Badua: What is she saying?  
Anowa: I say I have found the man I want to marry. (...)  
Kofi Ako asked me to marry him and I said yes (*Anowa*, 10).

This break with family tradition is indeed symptomatic of the generational divide. What we are therefore witnessing in Anowa's case is the culmination of changes that have been internalized over the years that pitches old mores against new ones rather than a programmatic imposition from without. Much like counter-cultural movements such as the hippies of the sixties or today's generation X are the underbellies of a status quo that has outlived its lifespan: the days of polygamous marriages are numbered in African societies.

Anowa's family is worried about her union with Kofi purely on moral grounds. He is lazy or lacks ambition. At his age, it is expected that he owned a farm or at least practiced a trade: "Badua: (...) Are he and his wife going to feed on stones when he will not put a blow into a thicket or at least learn a trade?" (*Anowa*, 16) It turns out that what will threaten Kofi and Anowa's marriage is neither laziness nor lack of ambition, but the contention surrounding labor. Kofi does not disagree but believes that they are wealthy enough to buy slaves to do the work for them. Anowa strongly disagrees with his idea. By stressing her opposition to her husband acquiring slaves, Anowa, according to Odamtten, is upholding the natural rights of individuals to be free of any form of subjugation. Anowa now faces a dilemma: compromise her opposition to slave labor and make her marriage work, or leave her husband and thereby prove her parents right. Like Anowa, the pursuit of happiness, Aidoo claims, is at the core of her characters' marital choices. In light of such authorial claim, it could be said that there is a glimmer of hope for Ato and Eulalie, and Anowa and Kofi Ako's marriages.

Meddling from members of the extended family is associated with the freedom of choice in the African marriage system is. What is meddling in the eyes of a wife may just well be attempts to show attention and care to the new addition to the extended family. Eulalie does not understand this and will be a source of disappointment to Ato's caring sister and mother, Esi Kom. This is the case, for instance, when Ato's mother visits her son and daughter-in-law unannounced and Eulalie refuses to receive her. For a visitor to feel welcome, Ghanaian traditional protocol requires that on arrival, a visitor is offered a seat and a drink before the purpose of the visit is asked. Eulalie does not perform this protocol, which to her mother-in-law means she is not welcome by her daughter-in-law. In another instance, as seen in Chapter Two, Ato and Eulalie pay a visit to the village. To make Eulalie feel welcome, Esi brings in some farm produce and live snails. Unaware that snails are a delicacy in Ato's culture and that she needed to show appreciation for his mother's gesture, Eulalie throws away the snails much to Esi's dismay. Regardless of these awkward cultural moments, Esi is proven to be caring with a genuine interest in Eulalie's well-being. So when Eulalie and Ato were having problems in their marriage, it was Esi who convinces them to see negotiation as the only viable tool to resolving the differences that stand in the way of their happiness together.

Unlike Ato's family, meddling is what many extended family members do best. In *Changes*, Oko's sisters are not happy with the lifestyle their brother and his wife Esi are leading. They accuse Esi of preventing their brother from giving them money regularly because she spiritually made Ato turn his mind away from his obligations to the extended family. The solution was to find Oko a "proper wife" (39). But after learning that Esi makes more money than Oko, the reason changed: Now they want to find him "an

unspoiled young woman, properly brought up, whose eyes have not jumped over her eyebrows with too much education and too much money of her own” (39). In Bâ’s *Un chant écarlate*, Ouleymatou is the meddler in Ousmane and Mireille’s marriage.

Whereas Chossat (2002) finds the clash between Yaye Khady and Mireille as typical of the daughters and mothers-in-law in Moslem societies, Ramsey (1998) rather sees a generational conflict. Ramatoulaye grapples with this conflict with her oldest daughter Daba’s non-traditional attitudes toward household chores. She even tells Daba’s husband, Abou, to restrict on her freedom, but Abou decides to go against tradition and so rejects his mother-in-law’s advice: “Daba, les travaux ménagères ne l’accablent pas. Son mari cuit le riz aussi bien qu’elle, son mari qui proclame quand je lui dis qu’il “pourrit” sa femme dit : “Daba est ma femme.” Elle n’est pas mon esclave, ni ma servante.” (*Une si longue lettre*, 107). Sometimes the generational shift is a consequence of western education which affords women the opportunity to work outside the home, as is the case of Aïssatou in *Une si longue lettre*. She leaves her husband instead of remaining in an unhappy marriage, to pursue further education and to change careers. Ramatoulaye contests the tradition which frowns on single women by rejecting the notion that a woman derives her social prestige and legitimacy only from marriage. She refuses to remarry because as a second wife, she could only bring unhappiness to the first wife. She learns to drive at a late age and fully enjoys the freedom that driving provides.

It is undeniable that in Bâ’s novels, there is a lot of hope placed in the new generation to contest tradition in order to change the status quo. Ramatoulaye’s teenage daughter, Aïssatou, is faced with having to drop out of school because of pregnancy. For many pregnant schoolgirls, that would have been the end of her dream of ever completing

her education. Instead, Ibrahima Sall, Aïssatou's boyfriend, encourages her to complete her education after the birth of their child. He helps her with her homework because he does not want to be the one to shatter Aïssatou's dream: "Ibrahima Sall talonne Aïssatou pour ses leçons et devoirs. Il a à coeur la réussite de son amie. Il ne veut pas être la cause d'une regression." (*Une si longue lettre*, 126). This new mentality displayed by the youthful Ibrahima Fall comes as a surprise to Ramatoulaye who grew up in a society where women were useful only as mothers and wives. The idea that Ibrahima Sall would see the lack of education for girls like Aïssatou as holding back their advancement as women is a significant revelation in itself. By helping Aïssatou with her lessons, Ibrahima Sall is contributing to redress centuries-old discrimination against women. No matter how small the step, it is nonetheless a first and important one especially when we consider the fact that in postcolonial Africa, women's literacy still lags behind men's.<sup>4</sup> The new fate of African women is reflected in Ibrahima Sall and Abou. In a larger context, it is clear that by neglecting women's education, African societies are mortgaging the future in terms of women's effective participation in all spheres of society. It is against this background that Ibrahima Sall's decision goes to the heart of a looming social problem in Africa. In independent Senegal where colonial patterns are replicated and reinforced, inequalities in education still relegate women to second-class citizenship status. Ramatoulaye in *Une si longue lettre* is one such second-class citizen. She laments that she will not be able to divorce Modou and start a new relationship with another man. This is due in part to her twelve children whom no man would be willing to parent: "Quel homme d'ailleurs aurait le courage d'affronter douze paires d'yeux hostiles qui vous décortiquent sans ménagement?" (79) Secondly, she is a victim of her own self-

defeating and unpragmatic conception of marriage by persuading herself that men and women complement each other: “Je reste persuadée de l’inévitable et nécessaire complémentarité de l’homme et de la femme.” (129) Given her situation, this persuasion feeds into the general attitude of many women to remain in bad marriages mainly for the sake of their children: “Je n’ai jamais conçu du bonheur hors du couple, tout en comprenant, tout en respectant le choix des femmes libres.” (82). The other option, as Ramatoulaye sees it, is more problematic because it is uncharted territory: “Partir? Recommencer à zéro, après avoir vécu vingt ans avec un homme, après avoir mis au monde douze enfants? Avais-je assez de force pour supporter seule le poids de cette responsabilité à la fois morale et matérielle?” (60-61)

Bâ and NDiaye also explore silent women whose lack of voice has made them prisoners in their marriages. Hilda in *Hilda* and Mathilde de la Vallée in *Un chant écarlate* are typical examples. Silence, according to Mary Field Belenky (1986), indicates a position in which women experience themselves as mindless and voiceless and subject to authority around them. As Mme Lemarchand puts it, “Il faut lire et vous instruire vous aussi, apprendre à discuter, à lutter avec les mots. Personne n’a jamais rien gagné à se taire, Franck.” (83) Silent women tend to lack self-confidence and are at the mercy of dominant figures who, in many cases, are their husbands. Hilda’s silence makes her live in her husband’s shadow, and, even though NDiaye does not give the reader a glimpse into her life at home with her husband and children, the mere fact that she never objects to her husband’s decisions as detrimental as they may be to her, underscores her life of subordination. She could not protest the life of servitude she is living under Mme

Lemarchand, had nowhere else to go but continue serving Mme Lemarchand after Franck, her husband, had left with the children.

Mathilde de la Vallée in *Un chant écarlate* is another voiceless woman. Her husband, Monsieur de la Vallée, is so domineering that she has to march in lockstep with him, perhaps for fear of incurring his displeasure. Two significant scenes in *Un chant écarlate* illustrate the point. In the first scene, when Monsieur de la Vallée finds out that Mireille is in love with Ousmane and reacts violently, a shaken Mathilde de la Vallée does not say a word. As a mother and wife, her intervention could probably have had a calming effect on both father and daughter, but she seemed afraid to make her voice heard. In the second scene, Monsieur de la Vallée, upon learning Mireille's marriage to Ousmane, once again exploded in anger. This time, Mathilde speaks out but only to act as her husband's voice:

“La traiteuse! La saleté!” Alors, elle aussi par habitude, - trente années où elle n'avait eu aucune pensée propre, aucune initiative, aucune révolte, trente années où elle n'avait fait que marcher où on la poussait, trente années où acquiescer et applaudir avaient été ses lots – alors, par habitude plus que par conviction, elle répéta, les larmes aux yeux, des sanglots dans la voix : ‘La traîtresse ! La saleté ! avant de tomber évanouie (*Un chant écarlate*, 120).

Whether emotionally abused, culturally relegated to second class citizenship status, marginalized by religion, or voiceless, the women in Aidoo, Bâ and NDiaye, except for the occasional glimpses of hope as a result of the generational shift in attitudes toward tradition, share one common tragic bond: their marriages have condemned them invariably to the prison-house of bigamy, polygamy and cultural status quo. The prison-house of marriage will survive anywhere women put societal laws and dictates above

their personal happiness and well-being. However, in their search for happiness, women should guard against selfishly infringing upon other women's liberty and happiness.

## CHAPTER 4 MOTHERHOOD: A WOMAN'S BURDEN

In most traditional African societies, women are expected to go through three important stages before death, namely: puberty, marriage and motherhood. Motherhood is the stage that raises the thorniest questions, because it goes to the heart of the African's view of the fundamental role of the woman: procreation. It is therefore not surprising that at some point, almost every novel dramatizes a woman's struggle to conceive: her fear of being rejected and replaced, the consequent happiness at conception and delivery or agony at the denial of motherhood, various attempts to appease the gods and hasten pregnancy, followed by the joys and pains of motherhood. So important is motherhood to most African cultures that a woman's reproductive health is one of the major considerations prior to marriage. Some families may investigate the genealogy of the future bride to make sure her family has no known cases of infertility among its female members. A man's family could therefore deny him marriage to the woman of his choice on this ground.

Motherhood has always played a vital role in the life of women in many cultures of Africa, Europe and the Caribbean, for as Simone de Beauvoir (1976) puts it in *The Second Sex*, a woman is complete only after she has become a mother, because motherhood is a woman's natural vocation since her role in life is to procreate and ensure the continuation of the human race (de Beauvoir, 1976). Women, as little girls, have been raised to become future mothers, and although other cultures have changed in this regard, black women in all cultures are yet to reexamine their vital role in society beyond that of motherhood.

In this chapter, motherhood will be defined in terms of what it means to be a woman, her subservient and surrogate roles. Motherhood will also serve as the site of contestation of the mother image by mothers who are abusive and infanticidal, and self-emancipating daughters.

#### 4.1 A Mother as a Woman Fulfilled

In Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, motherhood is seen as the fulfillment of complete womanhood. In a scene, two village women, one a mother, and the other barren are seen gossiping about Ato, Esi Kom his mother, and Eulalie his African-American wife. The two village women's gossip about Eulalie's presumed infertility reveals the general attitude in some African societies toward motherhood. Although men do not react positively to barren women because they see in them a denial of fatherhood and continuation of their lineage, it turns out from the gossip scene that women are equally as harsh with their fellow women who are childless, be it by choice or involuntary. The gossip reveals that in Ato's culture, education and financial independence come to naught if the woman does not bear a child or two. By this standard, a childless woman is of no value to the man's family. When the barren woman joins the second woman in the gossip about Eulalie, she is quickly reminded that she is no better than Eulalie. This point is forcefully driven home when the second woman tells the barren woman of the joys and sorrows of motherhood: "Fear them my sister. If you meet them, jump to the wayside. Have I not born eleven from the womb here? I know what I am talking about." (35) The painful reality the mother seems to be telling the barren one is that as a childless woman, she has no voice when children are being discussed because she has no first-hand knowledge of what it means to be a mother. In this way, the second woman not only

claims her authority in issues regarding motherhood but also makes clear to her barren friend that her child takes priority over their friendship and gossip:

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: I hear in the distance the cry of a child.  
That cry is meant for my ear.  
Let us hurry home, my sister.  
1<sup>st</sup> woman: Oh Eternal Mother Nature,  
Queen mother of childbirth,  
How was it you went past my house  
Without a pause,  
Without a rest?  
Mighty God, When shall the cry of an infant  
Come into my ear;  
For the sun has journeyed far  
Into my sky. (18)

In this exchange, the intense loneliness and sadness the barren woman feels as a result of her childlessness is clearly manifest. She returns to an empty home with no child to love. To stay single as a way of avoiding the ignominy of barrenness is no solution either, since in the final analysis, an unmarried woman is unacceptable. It seems therefore that the barren woman is between a rock and a hard place, and so empathizes with Eulalie because she believes she is truly barren. A childless woman's loneliness is compounded by the fact that she has no children to keep her company in the absence of her husband. If she has a co-wife, her childlessness becomes the subject of suspicion and vituperation.

In Act Four, the two women now focus on Eulalie's childlessness by linking her obsession with electronic gadgets to her barrenness. The suspicion here is that Eulalie had traded financial stability and material possessions for a child. This is obviously a bad trade-off since nothing ensures a woman's place among women more than having a child:

1<sup>st</sup> woman: But this is too much for my head  
Or is she pregnant with a machine child?  
2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Pregnant with a machine child?  
How can she be?  
Does she know what it is to be pregnant

Even with a child of flesh and blood?  
 1<sup>st</sup> woman: Has she not given birth to a child since they married?  
 2<sup>nd</sup> woman: No my sister,  
 It seems as if the stranger-woman is barren.  
 1<sup>st</sup> woman: Barren!  
 If it is real barrenness,  
 Then stranger-girl,  
 Whom I do not know,  
 I weep for you.  
 For I know what it is  
 To start marriage with barrenness.  
 You ought to have kept quiet  
 And crouched by your mother's hearth  
 Wherever that is (35-36).

A barren woman's predicament is many times dire when it comes to her status in her family and community. In *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, one of Ato's relatives reminds him in no uncertain terms that marriage is for procreation: "when two people marry, everyone expects them to have children: For men marry because they want children." (41) Ironically, since Ato is from a matrilineal society where social descent and lines of inheritance are traced through mothers and not fathers, therefore his lack of fatherhood, which means not only failing to produce a child but preferably a son, should logically be of grave concern to his wife's family, not to him. However, his family still decides to do something about it. At a family meeting, a delegation is selected to approach Ato and Eulalie delicately about Eulalie's infertility, and offer solutions:

Petu: It was a couple of days ago that we met. What came of the meeting is that we must come and ask you and your wife what is preventing you from giving your grandmother a great-grandchild before she leaves us.... (40)

Under any normal circumstance, a caring family is a comforting thought except that in this particular situation, nothing is normal. The family's concern has to do with what they perceive as Ato and Eulalie not fulfilling tradition's most important law - that of

procreation. Certainly, Ato's child will make his parents happy, but the main and profound reason is that of continuing the circle of life: the new must replace the old. Ato's grandmother is old and may soon die but she wants to make sure that she is, in a way, being replaced by her grandchild before her demise. But as is often the case, it is the woman who is blamed in a childless family: Eulalie in *The Dilemma of a Ghost* and Anowa in *Anowa*:

Badua: Anowa has not yet had children.

Osam: There you are. And is not that too strange? She has not yet had children. And barrenness is not such a common affliction in your family, is it? (...) But it certainly looks as if she and her husband are too busy making money and have no time to find out and cure what is wrong with her womb. (32)

Anowa, like Eulalie, is childless because she does not have children. End of story. The possibility that it may be her husband who is infertile, or that it is a choice the couple has made, is not even a consideration.

The recourse to the spirit world and the power of benevolent and malevolent spirits to intercede in the affairs of the living is often one of the solutions sought for childlessness. In other words, the African's belief in the connectivity of the spiritual and physical worlds explains why even in physiological circumstances like fertility and infertility, recourse is usually made to the spirits. The focus in the process of intercession is usually the woman because of her vulnerability to attacks by evil spirits. Ironically, neither Anowa nor Eulalie has fertility problems. For the Western woman, the gods are fertility doctors and modern technology. So although Eulalie and her husband had simply decided they were not ready to start a family, for Ato's family, it is because her priorities, as many western women, are other than children; a clear example of cultural misunderstanding based on stereotypical projections of one culture on another.

Although in African societies, a woman is praised for her fertility and shares the honor with her husband, she is left alone to find solutions to her infertility. That fact is borne out in other instances in other stories and plays. The first instance of childlessness in *Anowa* is a case of infant mortality. Anowa's mother, having repeatedly lost her children, consulted the gods to help her have children: "Did you not consult them over and over again when you could not get a single child from your womb to live beyond one day?" (11) The gods indeed helped her but on condition that she apprenticed Anowa to a fetish priestess to learn to become a fetish priestess herself. The problem is that as a fetish priestess, she would be betrothed to the fetish in spirit and could never marry and therefore not be able to have children, making her mother's concern that her daughter may not be a mother after all, the more real:

I want my child to be a human woman, marry a man, tend a farm and be happy to see her peppers and her onions grow. A woman like her should bear children, many children so she can afford to have one or two die (...) Should she not take her place at meetings among the men and women of her clan? And sit on my chair when I am gone? (12)

Simply put, a woman betrothed in the spirit cannot, in the eyes of Anowa's mother, be a woman fulfilled. Like the barren Eulalie's useless economic power, Anowa's financial stability is a useless pursuit. As one of Anowa and Kofi's slave girls put it: "If I had more money than I knew what to do with it but not a single child, I should be very unhappy." (44)

Unlike her mother Badua, Anowa is about to question the status quo in childlessness. She refuses to take the fall for her husband Kofi and confronts him to make public his impotence:

Anowa: Kofi, are you dead? Kofi. Is your manhood gone? I mean,

you are like a woman? (...) Why didn't you want me to know? You could have told me because we were friends. Like brother and sister. And the priest said it was my fault. That I ate your manhood up? (...) Now I know. So that is it. My husband is a woman now. He is a corpse. He is dead wood. But less than dead wood because at least, that sometimes grows mushrooms ... Why didn't you want me to know? (61-62)

The concept of “manhood eater” goes back to the belief that the childless woman is inhabited by malevolent spirits who eat up the man's semen rendering their reproductive functions ineffective. In most traditional African cultures, infertility is almost never a biological problem and so although the net result is the negation of procreation, it is a spiritual “eating up” akin to witchcraft either practiced by the woman or an evil eye, and in many cases that of a female member of the man's family. It is with this knowledge that Kofi can blame his impotence on Anowa: “Anowa, if you don't leave me quietly, but go consulting anybody, I shall brand you a witch (...) And you know those who would be prepared to furnish proof.” (60)

The issue of motherhood is also tied to that of matriarchy. According to Philomena Okeke (2000), matriarchy supposedly places women as mothers in positions of authority and leadership as heads of families. In matriarchal societies, social descent and lines of inheritance are traced through mothers in whom are vested major decision-making powers over marriage, communal property and relations with other groups. In *Anowa* and *Dilemma of a Ghost*, the author represents the matriarchal Fante ethnic group of Ghana from which she herself comes. In this sense, one can understand why Anowa rather than Kofi would be worried about not having children. After all, Anowa comes from a matrilineal society and, in theory, it is her lineage that will suffer the lack of continuity if she fails to procreate:

Anowa: (...) It is just that when I throw my eyes into the future, I do not see myself there

Kofi: This is because you have no children. Women who have children can always see themselves in the future

Anowa: Mm... children. It would be good to have them. But it seems I am not woman enough. (36)

By accepting that she is not “woman enough” for Kofi, the stage is now set for a divorce:

But...but I do not have children from this marriage. Ah! Yes, Kofi, we do not have children, Kofi, we have not got children! And for years now, I have not seen your bed.

And Kofi, now that I think back on it, you have never been interested in any other woman. (61)

According to tradition, Kofi has the right to send his wife back to her family if she cannot bear him children:

Kofi: Please, just leave me alone. O God, Anowa, did you have to destroy me too?

Anowa: Why are you sending me away from you? What have I done wrong?

Kofi: Nothing.

Anowa: Is it because I did not give you children?

Kofi: In fact, I thought you would be glad to get away. I don't know what you want, and even if I knew, I am not sure it would have been in my power to give it. And you can't give me the only thing I want from you, a child. Let us part, Anowa. (...) And you must leave immediately, I myself shall come to Yebi, or send people you can respect to come and explain everything to your family. (55-61)

By right, a man can divorce his wife on the grounds that she is unable to have children. In some cases, the man may allow the barren woman to continue living in the marriage while he takes a second wife.

If in *Anowa* and *The Dilemma of a Ghost* motherhood is centered around women's ability to have children, in *Changes* the issue of not having enough children or children of the desired gender is examined. In *Changes*, Esi and her friend Opokuya are

both married and pursuing their careers. Opokuya has four sons and is visibly exhausted, because she has to juggle motherhood and her career, with no help from her husband who is undoubtedly proud of having four children of the desired gender. Esi, on the other hand, has only one daughter and does not want to have any more children, a situation that is likely to make her husband want to get more children from “outside”:

He wanted other children, at least one more... a boy if possible. But even one more girl would have been welcome.

The fact that his mother and sisters were always complaining to him about the unsafety of having an only child made him feel worse. One of them had even suggested that he did himself and them the favor of trying to be interested in other women. That way, he would perhaps make some other children ‘outside’ (...) ‘My friends are laughing at me,’ he said.

Silence. ‘They think I am not behaving like a man’ (...) ‘What would you like me to say?’ She spoke at last, trying very hard to keep the irritation out of her voice. ‘You don’t care what my friends think of me?’ he pressed. (*Changes*, 8-9)

It is important to stress that children conceived “outside” are as legitimate as children conceived within the childless marriage. Interestingly, it is these children who vindicate the man’s procreative ability. However, the number of children the man has does not earn him much recognition if the children are girls. His ‘manhood’, so to speak, rests on the number of sons he has “outside” or within the marriage. Herein lies Oko’s perceived problem: he is not satisfied with just one child. He is frustrated that he cannot have a son and it is this frustration that pushes him to rape Esi partly to indicate his total control over her bodily functions and partly in an attempt to vindicate his manhood by having a son.

#### 4.2 Contesting Motherhood: Abusive and Abused Mothers and Their Unyielding Daughters

Marie NDiaye explores an aspect of motherhood that is not often addressed: women who refuse to play the conventional role of affectionate mothers to their children. This lack of maternal affection often verges on child abuse. In *La sorcière* (2003),

Isabelle represents exactly that type of mother. With her five-year old son Steve in tow as she moves from neighbor to neighbor, Isabelle insults and vents her frustration on her son at the least provocation: “(...) elle se baladait de maison en maison, tirant par la main son fils qu’elle ne manquait pas d’injurier copieusement s’il butait ou tombait, s’il pleurnichait de fatigue, s’il l’embêtait enfin d’une quelconque manière.” (18) It is clear at this point that Isabelle’s maternal woes may be self-inflicted. She is an unemployed alcoholic married to an alcoholic man. A dreamer, she will not face the reality of her maternal inadequacies, but rather resorts to her neighbor’s power of divination to see into her future as well as Steve’s. It is on one such occasions to enquire from Lucie, the diviner, about her son Steve’s future, that we see Isabelle failing as a mother: she leaves Steve out in the cold, alone: “Steve se tenait planté au milieu de la pelouse, frissonnant dans le soir qui tombait, les bras ballants, l’air perdu et résigné.” (20) Strangely, the more Lucie pleads with her to let him in, the more disdainful Isabelle is toward her son:

- Tiens, d’abord, faisons entrer Steve, il n’a pas l’air d’avoir chaud, plaidai-je machinalement.
- Oh, pour un coup qu’il se tient tranquille, pourquoi tu veux le faire rappliquer, dis ? Si tu sais comme il fait suer sa petite maman à longueur de journée, je ne suis pas comme toi, moi, je m’énerve, qu’est-ce que je m’énerve avec ce petit con. (20)

By calling Steve “ce petit con”, Isabelle is certainly not endearing herself to her son.

What Isabelle has succeeded in doing is to turn Steve into an abused five-year-old who expects no better treatment from her: “Il savait que sa mère n’aimait pas être dérangée quand elle discutait et qu’elle se plaignait assez de l’avoir dans les jambes, fût-il éloigné d’elle de plusieurs mètres. Il l’attendait pour rentrer chez eux, patient et craintif.”(20)

Isabelle’s interest in Steve’s future, as the reader will realize, is only a pretext to know her own: “Je voudrais bien savoir, Lucie, je voudrais bien que tu me dises où j’en serai

dans quelques années, avec Steve sur le bras....” (24); Hence Lucie’s bleak picture of Steve’s future will not augur well for the poor soul:

Eh, Steve, regarde-moi un peu, comment ça se fait, dis, que Lucie t’aies vu sans cravate? (...) Tu crois peut-être que ta petite maman supportera que tu deviennes un zéro, tu crois que c’est pour ça que je me crève à te donner une éducation, sans rien faire de ma vie, juste voir le temps filer? (24).

If we subscribe to the notion that divination is the ability to foretell future events or discover hidden knowledge usually by the interpretation of omens or by the aid of supernatural powers, it is clear to Isabelle that Steve’s future is inexorably tied to her own. It is this bleak picture she may be living vicariously through her son that makes Isabelle fearful of what may lie ahead. With this knowledge revealed through divination, Isabelle is being given a second chance to put her own house in order. So it is reasonable to say that her dogged determination to change course and to chart a purposeful one for herself that provides the context in which to re-evaluate her attitude toward her son’s emotional development.

Isabelle completely stifles Steve’s spontaneity:

- Steve, viens donc boire un jus d’orange  
- Pas la peine, dit calmement Isabelle, il ne viendra que si c’est moi qui le sonne. Tu n’as pas de cacahouètes ? (...) Ramène-toi (...) Le petit Steve, brutalement aiguillonné par l’ordre de sa mère, se hâtait vers la cuisine. Il entra prudemment, les yeux au sol, sachant par expérience qu’une chose entendue pouvait être contredite une minute après par Isabelle, avec autant de violence et d’indignation que s’il lui avait désobéi sciemment (...) il avait le regard instable, hagard, terrifié et vaincu, même hors sa présence. (23)

Steve’s psychophysical response reflected in qualifiers like “aiguillonné” (stung), “instable” (unstable), “terrifié” (terrified), “vaincu” (defeated), and nouns like “indignation” and “violence”, spell a maternal education rooted in intimidation and

abuse. Experience shows that a terrified five-year old is likely to grow up to become a psychologically unbalanced adult. Episode after episode, the emotional and physical abuse will continue until like a reject, Isabelle searches fruitlessly all over Paris for “une pension où caser Steve.” (71) The mere mention of a “pension” draws a rather grotesque and animalistic reaction from Steve: “la figure maigrichonne, abrutie par l’inquiétude consternante, du petit Steve se déforma brutalement, il poussa un seul cri de terreur.” (71) The facial contorsion which precedes the terrified cry by Steve, only elicits the ire of Isabelle: “Ah ce que tu m’emmerde!”, she yells, as she pushes him away from her with a heavy blow. As little Steve clenches his teeth as if to ward off the barrage of blows raining down on him, and holds fast on her mother’s waist, an exasperated Isabelle gives in, but not before uttering this emotionally shattering threat: “Tu ne reverras pas la maison de sitôt, je te le dis, moi.” (71) And once again to Steve’s now familiar panicked reaction: “Steve se pressa contre elle comme s’il avait voulu s’enfouir dans le tendre velours de sa combinaison de sport, il était livide et ses dents claquaient ....”(71-72)<sup>1</sup> So as Isabelle thinks she has ridden herself of Steve forever by hauling him like a human detritus into a hostel for children, she will be reminded by Lucie’s enquiry that it is not easy for a mother to get rid of a child: “Je lui demandai des nouvelles de Steve, elle eut une moue décontractée.” (132). As if to shrug off the soul-searching question from Lucie, she manages to reply: “Il n’y a pas de raison qu’il aille mal. Je n’ai pas eu le temps d’aller le voir” (132), and to add as a generous after thought: “Un de ces jours, je ferai descendre Steve pour un week-end.” Isabelle’s generosity is certainly misplaced. What Steve needs at this stage in his life is not an expensive boarding school, “cette espèce d’école qui me coûte les yeux de la tête” (132), but a mother who is generous with her

time and affection. Like Eva in Tony Morrison's *Sula*, Isabelle's lack of motherly love is treated as a perverse affection in which mothering becomes a substitute for emotional sustenance. *Sula* is the story of a woman who, faced with the dilemma of having been abandoned by her husband with their three children and nothing to live on, leaves the children in the care of a neighbor and disappears for almost two years. She returns with money but without a leg. How she got the money, she would not say. The point here, as it is in *Sula*, is whether an expensive school for Steve compensates for his emotional loss.

Lest we be overly judgmental of Isabelle, it is worth noting that her attitude toward Steve, though reprehensible by any period's standards, may well be her own way of teaching Steve to become a self-reliant, productive man in society. From the textual silence about Steve's father and the role he may have played in his son's life, it is easy to surmise that Isabelle was raising him as a single-mother. Given the prevailing literature on single motherhood, this would have been fertile ground to explore it further but NDiaye does not seem to take that direction in her novel because there is only a passing mention of Steve's father. NDiaye's interest in single motherhood only serves in the story to bring out the untold hardships of women having to raise children by themselves. This therefore is the direction this study takes. In many ways, it will be safe to say that Isabelle could not look up to Steve's father as a role model for him. There is no textual evidence of what Steve's father did for a living. We also know that he was never around. Alone with her son, therefore, Isabelle's reactions toward Steve could indicate a mother under severe social and personal pressure to make something of a son who may just turn out like his father. Seen from this perspective, Isabelle's treatment of Steve could be her way of preparing him for the inevitable separation: the emotional detachment and the very

little maternal affection may make him think that his mother does not love him, so that it may be easier for him to accept to live among total strangers in the hostel where affection may be lacking just as much with his own mother.

The story taking place in modern France, eliminates, perhaps, the possibility of interpreting Isabelle's actions in terms of the archetypical patriarchal or matriarchal dichotomy. The reality of Isabelle's single-motherhood means that by trying to be a "father" to her son she is, by all social accounts, in a conflictive relationship because it subverts the accustomed father-son/mother-daughter binaries. The image of Steve screaming and holding onto his mother when he learns about his mother's intention to send him to a boarding school, she hitting him and trying to push him away from her and he clutching to her thigh as if to bury himself in her soft velvet jogging suit, speaks eloquently to this conflict. What is more, it reflects what in Isabelle's mind, is the proper way to prepare her son to face the harsh realities of life, and live up to life's daily challenges unlike his father.

While this vision of what it means to be a man is clearly modeled after the patriarchal division of parental roles and responsibilities, the inscription *I love my mom* on Steve's T-shirt may be disconcerting to Isabelle because mothers who love and are affectionate are loved in return. Fathers are loved only when sons have themselves become fathers. By being tough, almost to the point of being abusive, Isabelle is not seen by Steve as the woman in the male role, but rather a mother who did not know how to be one. For that reason alone Steve is prepared to forgive her.

In the textual context of *La sorcière*, Marie NDiaye deconstructs society's definition of "normal" or "natural" motherhood by redefining motherly love through

Isabelle's model of mothering. Mothers are naturally supposed to be doting, especially on their sons while fathers inculcate in them toughness associated with masculinity. In this light, Isabelle's efforts to hide her love for Steve for fear perhaps of emasculating him, produces a Steve who wears his emotions on his sleeves: I love you mom, Steve seems to say, even though you have forgotten to be one to me.

There is an autobiographical parallel between Marie NDiaye's own mother in *Autoportrait en vert* and Isabelle. In *Autoportrait en vert*, Marie NDiaye's youngest sister Bella whom her mother had in her late forties with a younger man, is sent off to a boarding house and Marie NDiaye's mother tried hard to hide that fact from Marie NDiaye when she visits at Christmas to meet her new sister for the first time:

Je finis par apprendre, bien que ma mère s'emploie à me le dissimuler, que Bella vit la semaine dans une famille d'accueil et ne rejoint ma mère et Rocco que le week-end (...) Il est probable que de s'être fait retirer la garde de Bella pendant la semaine la blesse considérablement (69-70).

The attempt to hide Bella's living arrangements stems from the fact that her mother feels embarrassed for her inability to be the mother she is expected to be. Bella like Steve, comes home at the week-end from the family with whom she had been placed at a much younger age than Steve. Like Isabelle who put Steve in the boarding school in order to have the time to earn a living for both of them and also to ensure his future, Marie NDiaye's mother had become jobless and so had to place Bella with a family in order to have time to look for another job. Just as nothing is said of the role Steve's father played in his life, Rocco's role in Bella's upbringing is also not known. Like Isabelle's friend Lucie, who will learn that Isabelle does not visit Steve frequently, Marie NDiaye learns that Bella lived most of the time with a family in Marseille and saw her mother only twice every month:

- Et la petite fille ? Bella ?  
Elle m'informe que Bella est restée à Marseille, placée dans une famille,  
que ma mère descend la voir deux fois par mois (...) (90)

Finally, like Isabelle, the decision to send off Bella seems to be a solution of last resort.

In *En famille*, Fanny's mother is not available to her because she is constantly gone. But Fanny's story is somehow different because it addresses the issue of motherhood through the eyes of a child. A desperate and lonely Fanny seeks comfort from her extended family, but she is also rejected by them. In her mind, this rejection has to do with the fact that the announcement of her birth had not been made to her long lost Aunt Léda as custom requires. So in order to appease her aunt and thereby gain official acceptance into the extended family, she goes in search of her. Nobody in her mother's family would reveal to her the true reason for Léda's disappearance except Tante Clémence. According to Tante Clémence's account, Fanny's mother, then a young woman, introduced her fiancé, a black man and later to become Fanny's father, to her family. Everybody was against their union except Aunt Léda. Taking advantage of the fact that the last-born of any family is usually the most beloved, Aunt Léda pressured her family to allow the union, which it eventually did. Fanny's mother married her fiancé and they had Fanny. Meanwhile, the whole family turned against Léda, accusing her of having forced their hand. As she came under attack from the family, nobody, not even Fanny's mother for whose defense she was now being made an outcast. Léda, now fallen out with her family, was forced to leave by the innuendos directed at her. At first, nobody took her disappearance seriously, believing that she might have left to join Fanny's mother, her husband and child. It was only after Fanny's mother returned to the family

fold as a result of her divorce, and without Léda that the family awoke to the possibility that something horrible may have happened to her.

Tante Clémence's account of how Fanny came to be, sheds some interesting light on Fanny's relationship with her mother. First, it becomes clear to Fanny that her mother never really loved her and tried very hard to banish her from her life because as Fanny's mother came to understand it, her daughter is the source of the animosity in the family. So by abandoning her daughter, she was, in a way, making amends with her past and mending fences with her family. More importantly, Tante Clémence's account reveals the source of the bad blood that exists between Tante Colette and Fanny. So armed with Tante Clémence's account, Fanny confronts Tante Colette who had refused to tell her Aunt Léda's story.

Fanny's next move is to ascertain from Tante Colette whether her biracial condition is what kept them apart. Tante Colette does not admit what may constitute a racial animus toward Fanny, rather she tries to blame Fanny's miserable childhood on her difficulties in relating freely to her white cousins:

(...) dès le début, nous t'avons considérée, tout naturellement puisque tu es la fille de ma sœur, comme une des nôtres, comme un membre de la famille à part entière (...) parce que nous n'avions rien remarqué qui te distinguât. Tu étais pour nous tous, la fille de ta mère, et une enfant assez charmante de surcroît, en tout cas parfaitement semblable à tes cousines. (...) Mais ce qui est curieux, c'est que la singularité que nous ne voyions en toi, tu en as pris apparemment une conscience de plus en plus vive en grandissant, nous forçant à la découvrir, bien malgré nous. Tu nous as obligés à te distinguer, par les moyens les plus divers! (...) Car qui étais-tu véritablement, à l'époque? (...) Ta mère elle-même hésiterait à le dire! Tu nous as confondus, embarrassés par une humilité excessive.... (151)

The above observations by Tante Colette mark a significant turning point in Fanny's relationship with her extended family as well as the beginning of her awareness of her

difference. On one hand, Tante Colette's affirmation that Fanny is a blood kin, leaves no doubt. But that the extended family was colorblind was stretching the truth. From the outset, Tante Colette had opposed her sister's marriage to Fanny's father precisely on the grounds of difference - racial and cultural. Secondly, to say that it was Fanny who suddenly opened their eyes to the fact that Fanny was not quite like her cousins, is fallacious at best and a flat-out denial at worst. The truth of the animosity will be clear when mother and daughter meet:

Elle frôla Tante Colette: son regard, craintif, croisa celui de sa mère, qui se perdit dans le vague et demeura souriant, léger et poli. Il y avait pourtant bien longtemps que Fanny et sa mère ne s'étaient pas vues. L'oncle Georges a dit vrai, pensa Fanny, résignée. Car pas la moindre émotion n'altérait le doux visage de la mère de Fanny et ses yeux pâles avaient rencontré l'œil sombre de Fanny comme celui d'une inconnue, avec l'affable détachement qu'elle avait cultivé au salon de coiffure. Dans son trouble, Fanny trébucha, manqua de tomber. Sa mère ni Tante Colette ne tendit la main.... (169)

At this meeting between mother and daughter, the first in a long time, it is clear daughter and mother are strangers to each other. From the secure proximity of her aunt, Fanny is able to steal a frightened glance at her mother who replies with a vague, light and polite and detached smile. With her emotions in check, mother's expressionless glance meets daughter's distant gaze. But when Fanny trips and falls, neither Tante Colette nor Fanny's mother lend a helping hand. For Tante Colette, after accepting Fanny into their family, her duty was over. Neither she nor Fanny's mother did anything to encourage Fanny to mix freely with her cousins without feeling different. Fanny blossoms as an adolescent—she is beautiful and attracts a lot of attention to herself and makes her cousins look unattractive—and develops self-esteem that her extended family misconstrues as condescension and defiance:

- Puis, une fois que tu nous as eu réduits à te mettre à part dans nos pensées et à te mésestimer, voilà que l'orgueil t'a saisie, voilà que tu ne tolérais plus la condescendance défiante avec laquelle nous te parlions. (...) Tu as tenté d'attirer de ton côté l'aïeule, la plus faible, plus clémentine (...) Nous ne voyions plus que tout ce qui te séparait de nous. Et quand, parfois, nous te regardions assise à notre table, nous nous demandions avec surprise ce que tu faisais parmi nous, avant de nous rappeler que tu étais la fille de notre sœur, ce qui nous semblait de plus en plus mystérieux, quoique indéniable. (...) Sais-tu que nous avons dissimulé ton existence à chaque fois que nous l'avons pu? Tu te promenais, certes, dans le village avec l'aïeule. Mais ce qu'elle disait de tes liens avec elle, le sais-tu? (151-152)

As her school work improves, she makes her cousin Eugène, Tante Colette's son, by comparison, appear to be stupid. Ironically, it is this mixture of beauty and intelligence that will make Eugène fall in love with her. But Tante Colette would not have any of that as she pushes Georges, the dark-skinned boy on to Fanny instead.

Fanny's encounter poses an intractable problem for her mother's family: she is at the same time part and outsider. She is like them and at the same time different. This ambivalence, only acceptable to her maternal grandmother, will play against Fanny after at her grandmother's death: "Mais aux yeux de la famille, tu n'es plus rien maintenant! L'aïeule est morte, quant à ta mère, elle se repent de t'avoir donné le jour et acquiesce à nos reproches, enfin elle reconnaît sa faute." (168) Ultimately, Fanny will be rejected by her mother and with it, her perceived ambivalent existence, in favor of a racial status quo that puts people in neat categories:

Ma chère Fanny,  
Je préfère t'avertir tout de suite que tu ne dois pas t'y tromper : je n'ai pu résister au plaisir d'employer cette expression une dernière fois, tu comprendras donc à quel point il m'a été douloureux de prendre la décision que tu vas lire (...) Fanny, il est exclu que, telle que je te devine, je te considère encore comme ma fille et que tu voies en moi ta mère (...) Fanny, ne tente ni de me revoir ni de m'écrire. Et pourquoi le ferais,

puisque nous ne sommes désormais plus rien l'une à l'autre. Signé: la deuxième sœur de Tante Colette. (224-225).

In this letter to her daughter, Fanny's mother sees her daughter's existence as a bad dream. She cannot come to terms with the idea that she has a biracial child whom she wished could vanish from the face of the earth in order for her life to be *normal* again. In her view, her life cannot be normal as long as her paths constantly cross Fanny's. The only way she can erase Fanny from her life without physically killing her, is by disinheriting her and forbidding her from having any form of contact with her. A broader reading of Fanny's mother's action shows that her first and only obligation is to keep her family and her society free of any racial ambivalence represented by Fanny and other biracial children.

In *Anowa*, the issue of motherhood is resolved by the old man when he declares rhetorically: "Is a man a father for sleeping with a woman and making her pregnant? And does bearing the child after nine months make her a mother?" (20) In *Changes*, Esi and Opokuya, both career women and mothers, do not model themselves after traditional rules of motherhood. Esi is so preoccupied with her career and personal life that she ends up becoming an absentee mother. Esi's husband, Oko, takes the responsibility of being both father and mother to their daughter Ogyanowa. She therefore feels closer to her father and does not miss her mother anytime she has to miss her scheduled weekend with her. As the roles have been reversed, Ogyanowa bonds more with her father Oko as he has become her mother.

The portrayal of women by Bâ, NDiaye and Aidoo also brings into sharp focus their (in)ability to make the right choices. In Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*, Ramatoulaye tries to raise single-handedly twelve children. With no help from her

husband, the task of raising daughters becomes daunting. But she seems so preoccupied with saving her marriage that she overlooks the possible negative impact her abusive marriage might have on her daughters. Daba, her daughter, had been betrayed by her father, and by marrying Binetou, had also robbed her of her best friend. She is outraged by the thought that Binetou is now her stepmother and true to form advises her mother to get out of the marriage:

La rage de Daba augmentait au fur et à mesure qu'elle analysait la situation: "Romps, Maman! Chasse cet homme. Il ne nous a pas respectées, ni toi, ni moi. Fais comme Tata Aïssatou, romps. Dis-moi que tu rompras. Je ne te vois pas disputant un homme avec une fille de mon âge. (60)

Disrespect and indignity have fueled Daba's rejection of her father's behavior, not only because it is clear to her that Binetou has found a goldmine in her father but because she has been forced into a new type of relationship with her former best friend: she is not even ready to contemplate the thought that Binetou is now her "mother".

Living in total denial, Ramatoulaye is reluctant to admit that a younger woman has robbed her of her happy marriage. She convinces herself that she has enjoyed the best of Modou and that there is not much left for Binetou: "Si Modou était le lait, c'est moi qui ai eu toute la crème. Ce qui restait, bah! De l'eau avec une vague odeur de lait." (60) But the problem with Ramatoulaye's acceptance of Modou's emotional abuse is the unfortunate model it provides for her daughters who may choose to stay in an abusive relationship instead of leaving.

By defying their mother, Ramatoulaye's daughters are sending the clear signal that they no longer see her as their role model and therefore are charting their own paths. They have just seen their defenseless mother's marriage crumble, and here she is unable

to defend her own interest as she accepts that their father marry Binetou. By her daughters, she has lost the power to make rules for them, let alone enforce them. Ramatoulaye can only look on helplessly as she becomes aware that: “Daba aussi fréquentait parfois les Night-Clubs malgré mes remontrances. Vêtue sans recherché, elle paraissait suspendue au bras de son fiancé...” (75)

Her teenage daughters manifest one early sign of rebellion when they pickup the self-emancipating act of smoking. In Africa in general, only older married or widowed women smoke normally raw tobacco, for medicinal reasons. For all other females, smoking may be a sign of loose morals associated with women of ill-repute, like prostitutes. In that light, a girl who picks up smoking is on the road to moral perdition. To the extent that some modern and frequently educated African women smoke as a statement of their self-affirmation and emancipation, it bears stating that such a habit is still frowned upon in Africa as foreign and culturally anomalous.

The second sign that Ramatoulaye is losing her power has to do with Aïssatou’s pregnancy. Much to the amazement of her childhood friend, who expected nothing short of a serious rebuke and severe punishment of her pregnant teenager, Ramatoulaye shows acceptance and understanding:

Et puis, on est mère pour illuminer les ténèbres. On est mère pour couvrir quand les éclairs zèbrent la nuit, quand le tonnerre viole la terre, quand la boue enlise. On est mère pour aimer, sans commencement ni fin. On est mère pour affronter le déluge. (*Une si longue lettre*, 120-121)

No-one will disagree with Ramatoulaye’s responsibilities as a mother, but in this case, one wonders whether her confusing reaction comes out of a mother’s unconditional love for a strayed daughter or a self-fulfilling prophesy, possibly the guilt for failing her children on two grounds. First, that by allowing her marriage to fall apart, she had

allowed their world to fall apart, and so doing had robbed them of the stable home they once knew. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, that she was too absorbed in trying to save her marriage that she failed to provide the maternal guidance to her adolescent daughter at a most vulnerable stage in her young life. If her teenage daughter's pregnancy is now a "déluge", it is because she had been negligent.

Other willful mothers populate Bâ and Aidoo's novelistic universe. When in *Un chant écarlate*, Mireille defies her parents by eloping to marry the man she loves, and causing a rift in her relationship with her parents forever, Bâ invokes the power of telepathic maternal instinct to bring daughter and mother together. So Mme de la Valée could hear her daughter's plea for help after Ousmane had abandoned her and their son for another woman: "La sincérité du cri lointain de sa fille l'émouvait. Elle pardonnait. Elle ouvrait les bras pour bercer son enfant. A l'automne de sa vie, l'instinct maternel renaissait. Devrait-elle renoncer à être grandmère?" (119) It is the maternal instinct that makes Mme de la Valée ready to take her daughter back, and to forgive her for straying whereas Monsieur de la Valée may still react negatively: "Mireille revenue de son escapade! Chassée par son nègre." (241).

In *Anowa*, the protagonist Anowa also eloped with the man she chose to marry in defiance of her parents', especially her mother's, wishes. As if that was not bad enough, Anowa adds salt to her mother's injury by calling her a witch.<sup>2</sup> But that vilification does not stop Badua, her mother, from being concerned that Anowa still has not had any children.

In theory, it would have made a lot sense if Ramatoulaye, Badua and Mme de la Valée had left their daughters to resolve their own problems. But like the traditional

mothers they are, they could not, in practice, help feeling their daughters' pain.

Ramatoulaye, at least, could console her daughter by helping her stay on course to complete her education. In Mme de la Valée's situation, her own marital problems made her helpless, voiceless and hopeless to be of any use to her daughter as a mother and wife at a time she needed that most.

#### 4.3 Motherhood: Subservience and Patriarchy Reversed

In Marie NDiaye's portrayal of motherhood, certain categories of mothers clearly emerge: mothers who neglect their children (*En famille*), show tough love (*La sorcière*), and surrogates (*Autoportrait en vert*). In her novel *Hilda*, however, the two mothers who are portrayed are by their actions difficult to categorize. Hilda, the eponymous mother, is a wife and mother of two, from the lower class of society. She is portrayed as a silent woman who, by this very fact, becomes a victim to both her husband Franck and her employer Mme Lemarchand's authorities. The power the two have over Hilda has reduced her to a state of powerlessness, a nonentity without rights. The novel takes the form of a long dialogue between Franck and Mme Lemarchand about Hilda in which Hilda is silenced, referred to only in the third person. As the third person, Hilda is kept out of the conversation about her. As the marginalized third person, she becomes the passive agent in a study about her in which, by this stylistic intermediary, she is rendered irrelevant and therefore her voice is silenced. Voiceless and passive, she is rendered an object of neither expressed desire nor volition. Hence, allowing Mme Lemarchand to make decisions for her: give her a bath and cut her beautiful long hair because she needed to be clean. By deciding what Hilda needs, even in a most personal way, Mme Lemarchand not only humiliates her but also abuses her. Madame Lemarchand's

authority is not limited to Hilda: it extends to Franck as well. His monosyllabic answers to most of her questions may well be a sign of subservience on his part. In the end, Franck and Madame Lemarchand prevent Hilda from being the mother she could have been, and deprive her children of the mothering they could have enjoyed.

Hilda's problems begin with Franck deciding to find her a job as a house girl. He represents her at the job interview and accepts the conditions of work without seeking her approval and without considering the effect this job would have on their young children who, until this time, had been used to having their mother's undivided attention. As a housemaid, Hilda's duties include doing the household chores and taking care of Madame Lemarchand's three young daughters. As she takes up this job, childcare becomes a problem for Hilda and Franck's children at this point. To do her job well, Hilda has to spend all her waking hours caring for Madame Lemarchand's children at the expense of her own children, an emotional cost Mme Lemarchand transfers on to Frank and Hilda's children. For instance, she forbids Franck from ever mentioning their children because as far as she was concerned, they do not exist: "Vos enfants n'existent pas pour moi, Franck. Je ne veux rien savoir d'eux. Débrouillez-vous mais ne me parlez pas de ces gosses. Plus un mot à leur propos." (62)

Although also a mother, it is evident that Mme. Lemarchand's relationship with Hilda is an economic one, and it is that which underlines her authoritative voice and actions. Madame Lemarchand has admitted to Franck that much as she loves her daughters, she is incapable of being a mother to them, but can afford one for them. Here is where Hilda comes in:

J'ai désiré mourir pour ne pas passer cette journée seule avec mes enfants, puisque M. Lemarchand s'en va travailler chaque matin. Vous savez

maintenant ce que M. Lemarchand ignore, Franck, que je ne supporte pas de m'occuper de mes enfants la journée entière, et de leur parler, de jouer et de rire comme il faut le faire. Hilda fera tout cela. Hilda parlera, jouera, rira avec mes enfants. Hilda fera tout cela à merveille. Il le faut. Car j'aime mes enfants et je ne veux autour d'eux que de la joie. Hilda aura cette joie pour moi. (24)

Madame Lemarchand sees mothering as a commodity that is available for those with the necessary financial wherewithal to afford it. In other words, in today's society that places so much weight on financial independence for the woman while considering stay-at-home mothers as a throwback to patriarchal status, Mme Lemarchand's attitude to mothering is clear: money can buy maternal care and love. But in so doing, she is unwittingly perpetuating the same status quo from which she endeavors to break free. Hilda, by reason of financial needs, has now been cast by a fellow woman into the role of the stay-at-home mother: at the beck and call of the (wo)man, without rights nor ability to decide for herself.

Mme Lemarchand's middle-class status with its attending economic power makes it all happen, including arranging for the municipal daycare center for Hilda's children so that she could discharge her duty toward Mme Lemarchand's three children without any hindrance from her own children:

Franck: Il faut que les enfants s'habituent  
Mme Lemarchand : De quels enfants parlez-vous, Franck ?  
Franck : De nos enfants, à Hilda et moi.  
Mme Lemarchand : Ah les vôtres. Ces sacrés enfants qui m'empêchent d'avoir Hilda tout de suite. Ce sont des enfants sages, certainement. Tout se passera bien pour eux.  
Franck : Il faut qu'ils s'habituent à la crèche.  
Mme Lemarchand: Soyez tranquille, Frank  
Frank: Oui.  
Mme Lemarchand: Les enfants se font à tout. Les vôtres aimeront la crèche. (25)

A familiar pattern is recreated here: that of working mothers dropping off their children at the daycare before going on to work. Only in this case, the workplace is another home and the employer, a stay-at-home mother. If children are that easily adaptable as Mme Lemarchand implies, one would wonder why the crèche is not suitable for her children. On the other hand, if Mme Lemarchand's argument about the merits of a daycare convinces Franck, it fails to convince the reader because it is self-serving. Children need toys; however, above all, they need someone to talk to and with whom to play. That role undeniably falls to the mother.

Mme Lemarchand's offer seems generous at a first glance because it implies that she will take care of the daycare expenses. Purely from a financial standpoint therefore it may be argued that the promise of a higher income makes Mme Lemarchand's offer more attractive to Franck especially. Mme Lemarchand is offering to pay her much higher wages than any of the other middle-class families are ready to pay their housemaids. Furthermore, Hilda could leave her children at the daycare center during the day while she and Franck are at work and return home in the evenings to be with them as most double career households do. The problem, however, is that not only does Mme Lemarchand not pay for daycare for Hilda's children but she also changes the terms of the agreement. Hilda's work schedule is extended thereby obliging her to keep her own children at the daycare center longer at additional costs. As time goes on, Hilda's schedule gets longer and for days, she is not allowed even to return home to see her children. Hilda's take-home pay, already meager, will further be diminished by the incidental costs of extended daycare. Franck's income is no better, so the net result is a

strain on their household income. To make up for the difference, Franck secretly agrees with Mme Lemarchand to exploit Hilda for a little more money.

Franck's willingness to allow Mme Lemarchand to exploit his wife comes as no surprise. At the interview for Hilda's job, Franck agrees that Mme Lemarchand should pay for only half of the total number of hours Hilda works for her and the other half paid to him. While this arrangement is intended to benefit both Mme Lemarchand and Franck, it is the former that stands to gain as Frank's moral authority as his wife's spokesman and advocate is sacrificed on the altar of financial gain. For a long time, the financial complicity seems to be working until Franck realizes that his gain is not only his wife's loss but the entire family's. He has to take care of the children because Hilda works so late and he has now to use part of the bribe money to pay for the extra daycare. At this point, he wants his wife to stop working for Mme Lemarchand. However, it is not going to be easy to resist Mme Lemarchand's manipulation. The occasion arises when Frank is involved in a work-related accident and needs Hilda to help him and the children. From his workplace, he comes straight to Mme Lemarchand's residence with his arm still bleeding from the accident to request that Hilda be allowed to accompany him home. Not only does Mme Lemarchand refuse to grant his request, she does not even allow Hilda to speak to him. A visibly troubled Hilda, as usual, silently continues to work. To get the adamant Franck to leave the premises, Mme Lemarchand calls a taxi for him and again bribes him with a three-month advance on Hilda's wages: "Tenez, Franck, prenez cet argent, trois mois d'avance sur le travail d'Hilda. Vous êtes blessé et anxieux, l'argent vous aidera." (55) As Franck accepts to be bought by Mme Lemarchand, he is in effect pushing Hilda further into bondage, much like indentured servitude:

Mme Lemarchand : Avez-vous dépensé l'argent que je vous ai remis,  
 Franck : comme avance sur le travail d'Hilda?  
 Franck : Oui. Je n'ai droit à rien quand je ne travaille pas  
 Mme Lemarchand : Vous travaillez donc au noir?  
 Franck : Oui.  
 Mme Lemarchand : Bon, c'est bien imprudent, mais en fin c'est votre droit et votre liberté. Quoi qu'il en soit, Franck, si vous avez dépensé cette avance, vous ne pouvez me la rendre. Par conséquent, vous ne pouvez racheter Hilda  
 Franck : Racheter?  
 Mme. Lemarchand : Pourquoi vous redonnerai-je Hilda avant qu'elle n'ait effectué le travail correspondant à la somme que je vous ai avancée et que vous avez déjà dilapidée? Si vous voulez Hilda, tout de suite, Franck, rachetez-moi Hilda en me payant ce que vous me devez. Hilda sera en ma possession tant que je ne serai pas remboursée (...) Nous la garderons jusqu'à ce qu'elle ait fait son temps, jusqu'à ce qu'elle ait travaillé pour l'équivalent des six mille francs que je vous ai avancés. (60-62)

Hilda's plight as the above dialogue illustrates defines indentured servitude. Taken into service out of family necessity, the indentured servants working as housemaids, are a step removed from slavery: they have no rights, not even to personal happiness. They live and serve at the pleasure of their bosses. And like all indentured servants, they are dispensed with when they are no longer needed. As Mme de Lamarchand puts it, it sounds as if Hilda, not her services, has been paid for; she will be free to leave only after she has served the time agreed upon, or has been bought back: "rachetez-moi Hilda en me payant ce que vous me devez."

By definition, indentured servitude is the situation where a person works under an unbearable contract for a fixed period of time in return for room and board, training or pay. In theory therefore the master can legally control the labor of his servant but not his private life. Indentured servitude, though not new, is a topic seldom explored even though it flourished both in Sub-Saharan societies as well as in the New World in colonial and postcolonial times. Akin to slavery, indentured servitude is often considered less

invasive. In the New World, it thrived before the importation of slaves from Africa, and was revived after emancipation in British, French, Dutch and Spanish colonies in the Caribbean and Latin America. In Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, the system of involuntary servitude known as pawns not only survived but thrived fuelled by a buoyant internal market for slaves and a system of credit which was rooted in the pledging of pawns (McSheffrey, 1983). Much of the wealth of African merchants in that era was tied up in part to pawns, most of whom were offered by family heads or arbitrarily seized by creditors for debts that were not of their own making. Characteristically, pawns were usually from the same ethnic group as the masters they served so that even in servitude, they retained their lineage ties. Pawns or indentured servants were primarily, although not exclusively, young males. Although Hilda's situation is not exactly like the historic system of indentured servitude, it is worth noting that it bears a striking similarity to indentured servitude as practiced in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In all this, Hilda's children are left to suffer whereas Mme Lemarchand boasts that Hilda is gradually forgetting her own children and is growing closer to hers acting as a surrogate mother. It is obvious that Mme Lemarchand's actions and intentions reveal a deeply felt need to be happy. We are told Mme Lemarchand had been unhappy in her marriage and was not only looking for a maid but also a confidante and friend. Not long after hiring Hilda, it became clear to Mme Lemarchand that happiness and a full marital life could not be bought. Hilda was poor but enjoyed a healthy sexual relationship with her husband, whereas Mme Lemarchand's husband was inattentive to the point of neglect and indifference. Since she could not buy love nor happiness, she had to destroy the very symbol that reminded her of her misery: Hilda. She had a conniving Franck to help her

reach her goal. As Hilda's absences from her home and children become longer and routine, Corinne, Hilda's sister has to move in with Franck and the children. After months of not seeing their mother, they end up seeing in Corinne the mother they wished they had. Now, Mme Lemarchand is ready to return Hilda to Franck, but he will not take her back.

There is a similar parallel portrayal of forced labor in Aidoo's *Anowa* in which it is indicated that Anowa and Kofi owed their prosperity to slaves, some still young and others so tender they could not even remember from where they came. The eight-year old twins, Paynin and Kakra, for example, could only remember they came from "the big house in Tantri":

Anowa: I say. Stop fanning that chair Panyin, go and tell Yaako that I have asked you to stop fanning the chair. [*They put their fans on one of the stools and PANYIN goes out. Anowa puts her arms around KAKRA and moves down with him. When she sits down he sits on a rug by her.*] Kakra.  
Kakra: Mother  
Anowa: Where do you and Panyin come from?  
Kakra: The big house from Tantri, Mother  
Anowa: No, I mean before that.  
Kakra: Mother, I don't know (*Anowa*, 52).

From Anowa's questions, the reader gathers the big house in Tantri was not their family home after all, but the slave market where they had lived before being sold. The boy and girl cleaning the room were.

To fully understand Anowa and Kofi's use of slave labor, one must first contextualize it within the historical framework of slavery in Africa in general, and in particular in the then Gold Coast Colony and Protectorate (now Ghana), where it was abolished in the late nineteenth century.

Slavery was practiced across Africa from prehistoric times to the modern era. It existed in some of Africa's earliest organized societies. Except in Ancient Egypt where written records show that the buying and selling of slaves were regular activities along the Nile River, most other early Sub-Saharan African states and societies did not have records. Therefore, our understanding of most early African practices of slavery is based on much more recent observations of African traditions like oral histories and kinship regarding slavery.

Even though in many African societies slaves were property, they were, in some cases, considered dependents who eventually might be integrated into the families of slave owners given that both slave owners and slaves were black Africans, although they were frequently from different ethnic groups. Slaves performed menial or domestic labor, served as wives or concubines, or enhanced the status of the slave owner. In Sub-Saharan Africa, slaves were not always acquired through purchase. Some were captives during the intertribal wars who, in order to prevent escapes, were sold or exchanged for captives from far distant lands. By reason of the land tenure system where little recognition of rights to private landholding until colonial officials began imposing European law in the nineteenth century, land was typically held communally by villages or large clans and was allocated to families according to their need. The amount of land a family needed was determined by the number of laborers that family could marshal to work the land. To increase production, a family had to invest in more laborers and thus increase their share of land. The simplest and quickest way to do this was to invest in slaves, hence the frequent raids on distant villages.

Women constituted the majority of early African slaves. They were used as farm hands, were involved in trading, cotton spinning and dyeing. As domestics, they prepared the food, did the laundry and cleaned. Some female slaves were trophies for some powerful African men who kept them as wives or concubines. Some others, like the elite soldiers of the Dahomey (now Benin) Kingdom in the nineteenth century, became powerful and influential. Male slaves farmed and herded animals. The captives from wealthy families and ruling lineages, became porters, rowers, and learned weaving, construction, and metalwork. Others worked in the always dangerous mines and quarries. Children born to slave owners by their female slaves could not be sold or killed, and after three or four generations, descendants of slaves could often shed their slave status. So while, on one hand, slavery separated, on the other, it provided the possibility of becoming attached to other families and, after several generations, re-integrated into the web of kinship. This is not to suggest that slavery in certain forms was justified—neither in its African form nor in its transcontinental derivation.

Panyin and Kakra, forcibly separated from their mothers, look to Anowa as a surrogate mother. In her new role, she is led to reflect not only on the gruesome reality of slavery, but also its perverted benevolence:

(...) Hmm... woe the childless woman, they warn. Let someone go and see their mother, who is she? Where is she sitting? While they stand here fanning an empty chair? Let someone go and see how she suffered bearing them. The nine months of dizziness, when food tasted like dung and water like urine. Nine months of unwholesome desires and evil dreams. An then the hour of the breaking of the amnion, where the space between her life and her death wore thin like a needy woman's hair thread. (...) Did she go through all that and with her rest at the end postponed so they will come and fan an empty chair? (51)

Whereas the breaking of the “amnion” represents the child’s entry into the world and naturally getting to know and bonding with his or her mother, it also represents separation from the mother for the rest of their lives. Slavery as an act of disunion, breaks the slaves from the comfort of a maternal union, and launches them into an anchorless emotional and physical state, a let loose. That is why Anowa’s admitted sadness for young Panyin and Kakra’s plight is poignant: “Poor children, I feel like picking them up and carrying them on my back.” (51) In Ghana as in many Sub-Saharan cultures, mothers carry babies on their back to give them comfort, to rock them to sleep and also to bond with them. In feeling like carrying Panyin and Kakra on her back, Anowa is trying to reconnect them to the broken maternal bond as she asks them to call her mother instead of madam. One of the girls sums up the child-mother bond best when she tells a fellow slave: “I wish I really was their child ... born to them.” (48) Such was the bond Anowa had developed with the slaves that when they learnt that their master wanted to send their mother off, one of them planned to go with her:

Boy: What do you think is going to happen now?

Girl: Do I know? All I know is that if she goes away, I shall run away too. (... ) And the way she carries on with everyone here...

Boy: Playing with us as though we were her kinsmen? (49)

It may be suggested that Anowa’s motherly treatment of the slaves soothes her soul as well as reassures the slaves. Whether these little children had become slaves because they were pawned by their parents who could not buy them back, is irrelevant at this point. What is objectionable is Anowa’s unwillingness to denounce a practice which benefited her. So despite Anowa’s show of compassion, she is nonetheless a willing participant in the maintenance of the status quo that allowed children to be sold into slavery. She allowed slaves to serve her household all these years and never expressed

sadness for the children's separation from their mothers. She only started to feel the slave children's loss of maternal bonding and love in the latter years of her life when she realized she could not have children of her own. To that extent, her demonstration of maternal love to these young slaves is insincere because it is predicated on her belief that slavery was good only if it is to the economic advantage of the slave owner.

In conclusion, all three authors agree that motherhood should not be synonymous with womanhood. Women should be allowed to become mothers out of choice rather than obligation. In situations where they are incapable of mothering after having children, surrogacy should be considered an option to ensure the children's healthy psychological development.

## CHAPTER 5 UNDERSTANDING WITCHCRAFT: WITCHES, WITCH HUNTERS, HEALERS AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Witchcraft is a blanket term that generally refers to nefarious activities of a spiritual nature. It is sometimes synonymous with the occult, magic, enchantment and especially sorcery. But while witchcraft refers to a mystical innate power, sorcery is thought of as an evil form of magic consciously used to harm people (Middleton and Winter, 1963). Susan Greenwood (2000) who studied witchcraft in England asserts that the devil and witchcraft are not necessarily evil but are forces for good. At this point, it is essential to stress that while the English language makes the semantic distinction between sorcery and witchcraft, in the French language *la sorcellerie* is polysemic: it is witchcraft or sorcery. Hence in Marie NDiaye's novels, the practitioner of such supernatural powers is *le diable* or *la sorcière/le sorcier*.

The issue of witchcraft and its impact on human affairs on the one hand, and the role women play in it, on the other, are central to the novels by Marie NDiaye, Mariama Bâ and Ama Ata Aidoo. By piecing together notions of traditional mystical powers and Western modernity, these novelists introduce the reader to an African world still considered by many to be geographically and culturally distant, but which at the same time reminds him or her of its lingering impact in post-Enlightenment Western cultures.

In most Sub-Saharan African cultures, certain individuals profess to have the powers to recognize witches. Traditionally known as witch hunters, healers or doctors, these individuals are themselves witches except that their witchcraft is used for good. So if witches are believed to be cannibals who hunger and thirst for human flesh and blood, the proverbial "eaters of others" or "drinkers of blood" in Senegalese society (Dilly,

2004), then witch hunters are their counter-agents. Witch hunters are healers or medicine men who dispense a range of medicinal cures and healing techniques that involve potions or “sâfara” in the Senegalese society. “Sâfara”, or herbal remedies, are frequently touted as having a cure-all quality. Witch hunters also double as exorcists. Through the medium of incantations, they are able to exorcise bewitched individuals, or cast out spells.

Witchcraft can be acquired in most African societies. Paul Stoller (1987) points out that in order to understand fully witchcraft among the Songhay of Niger for instance, he had to undergo training as a witch. Since the traditional Songhay believe that power emanates from God’s incantations which he delivers through his messenger to the ancestors to be passed on to witches, the learning and mastery of incantations become the medium through which a witch may acquire the power of healing and self-transformation. For the witch, the power to take the form of whatever object, animate or inanimate, becomes a vital part of his power. His ability to be invisible to the enemy determines the extent of his invincibility and therefore power.

Although cultural anthropologists Susan Greenwood (2000) and Paul Stoller (1987) trained to become witches while studying witchcraft in London and in Niger respectively, the general consensus among scholars is that witchcraft is mainly inherited through the female line. It is therefore not surprising that in many parts of Africa, women, mostly old and poor, are those generally accused or suspected of witchcraft. A female witch hands down her powers to a daughter, usually the last born, or the most beloved or the only daughter. In Ghana, for instance, a paternal aunt could also hand down her powers to her niece. Among the Haalapulaar’ en of Senegal, the potential for witchcraft is inherited through the female line just as in Ghana, except that men are equally eligible. In

very rare cases is witchcraft transferred to someone not related by blood, although cruel witches may transfer their powers to someone outside their bloodline. Some do seek these powers, but many others may inherit them against their will. In such cases, the weak of soul may fall critically ill and may even die, the unequivocal signal of their rejection of witchcraft. The children of a female witch are likely to become witches too, unless they are protected in time, in which case they may no longer feel the urge to “eat other people”, choosing instead to become witch hunters. The children of a male witch become witch seers. The witch seer has the power to see through even the clothes a person is wearing, through his or her skin into his or her body. In this way, he is capable of determining an individual’s disposition either as a witch or a possible victim of witchcraft. The victims of witchcraft may suffer a series of afflictions, such as becoming listless and lethargic or slipping into a trance-like state.

In Mariama Bâ’s *Un chant écarlate*, polygamy becomes one of the staging grounds for witchcraft. As mentioned in Chapter Two (see supra p 52-53), Pathé Ngom, Ousmane’s childhood friend’s father had four wives. With four women living in the same house and sharing one husband, there is bound to be jealousy and animosity – the root cause of evil thoughts. Even though in a traditional polygamous home the co-wives are supposed to maintain cordial, civil and sometimes sisterly relations with one another, it happens that some of them harbor hatred for the others. In a home where the man has more than one wife, the most senior wife has more privileges than the younger co-wives. With these privileges comes the right to insult or treat any younger co-wife with disrespect without any consequences. This was the case where mère Fatim, “the first wife,” would always taunt her younger co-wives until the day when the youngest co-wife

could no longer take the abuse. In her anger, she beat mère Fatim so badly that she became gravely ill and slipped into a trance-like state for days. Mère Fatim was later diagnosed by a witch seer to have offended the gods by attempting to use her spiritual powers to bring harm to her co-wife. Bâ uses this anecdote to introduce the reader to the fact that in Senegalese and by extension African cultures, belief in the existence of witchcraft is so strong and viewed so negatively that every inexplicable mishap may be attributed to its power. She however stops short of discussing how this negative power is acquired. NDiaye, on the other hand, explores it further and discusses its acquisition in *La sorcière*.

### 5.1 Living With Witchcraft and Its Ubiquitous Evil Eye

After her initiation in *La sorcière*, Lili now sees birds differently from her mother. While for her mother birds are a zoological species, they are for Lili companions who will soon take her on a spiritual journey:

Ma fille (Lili) n'a plus sa raison. Elle me parle d'oiseaux, elle affirme que je ne sais quels oiseaux doivent venir la prendre ou qu'elle-même doit prendre la forme d'un oiseau. Je ne sais plus, je ne la comprends pas.... Que veux-tu que je lui dise? Je lui dis simplement : Comment voudrais-tu t'envoler, grosse et lourde comme tu es? (164)

The skepticism of Lili's mother about her daughter's new abilities to fly with birds goes to the very heart of modern attitudes toward witchcraft. In an ever increasing technological world, these attitudes, ranging from the legal to the philosophical, underscore this basic unresolved question in African and Western societies: Is there room for the unseen, the magical powers that transcend ordinary human control and comprehension? In other words, is witchcraft real? Is it a crime? How can it be codified into law for those unjustly accused to seek redress?

In *La sorcière*, NDiaye broaches the issue in Western societies. A desperate, rejected and strapped for cash Lucie joins the teaching staff of the “Université féminine de la santé spirituelle d’Isabelle O” to teach “Connaissances objectives du passé et de l’avenir de soi-même.” Founded by her longtime neighbor and friend Isabelle, the institution’s mission is that of giving young women between the ages of 18 and 25 a sense of direction in life. Lucie’s course will initiate young women into witchcraft to be able to read their past and predict their future. Not surprisingly, some students become disappointed with the course and report her to their parents. The police gets involved, and arrests her on charges not of witchcraft, but of extortion:

-J’ai l’ordre de vous emmener, me dit le gendarme....

-Vous êtes accusée de charlatanisme et d’escroquerie, dit un autre monsieur, dégoûté....

-Je suis une espèce de sorcière, malgré tout. Là-dessus, je n’ai abusé personne. Un monsieur ricana. Les autres pouffèrent d’écœurement et d’incrédulité. Seuls les gendarmes se tenaient réservés et méfiants, comme hésitant à me croire tout de même.

-Vous n’êtes qu’une méprisable arnaqueuse, siffla l’un des conseillers. Une sorcière, hein ? Laissez-nous rire.... Nous croyons à tout, même aux sorcières s’il le faut, mais vous n’êtes qu’une invention de sorcière, une vile tricheuse qui salissez injustement la réputation de cette excellente maison. (*La sorcière*, 156)

Even though at an intuitive level, the suggestion here is that people are willing to tolerate witches, at a rational level, they repudiate tricksters and charlatans. But this is only a literary slight of hand because, while extortion is codified into law, witchcraft is not.<sup>1</sup> With the abolition of witch trials in Europe, colonial rulers in Africa considered witchcraft as nothing more than superstitious belief and therefore refused to prosecute charges of witchcraft. It is still the prevalent institutional attitude today all over Africa.<sup>2</sup>

In Aidoo’s *No Sweetness Here*, Mami Fanti has lost all her older children at infancy and is about to lose the only one she has left. A nomad from the Sahel (Papa

Kramo) who goes from village to village selling fake amulets and pretending to be a healer, happens to enter Mami Fanti's house just at the time her baby is at the point of death. Believing him to be a real healer not a charlatan, Mami Fanti counts on him to save her child:

- Mami Fanti...I am telling you. This little one, he will live.
  - Papa Kramo, if you say that, I believe you. But you will give me something to protect him from the witches?....
  - I will do everything for you. You hear? (...) He proceeded to spit on the child: once on his forehead and once on his navel. Then he spat into his right palm and with his spittle, he started massaging the child very hard....
- (76)

To prove that he is legitimate, the "Mallam" or healer performs a ritual with his saliva. The use of saliva in spiritual healing is common in the semitic cultures. In the Bible, Jesus is said to have mysteriously healed a blind man with a mixture of his saliva and earth. In the Islamic tradition, it is believed that the saliva from the "Mallam" has healing powers. As he applies the saliva to the child's navel, his first contact with life through his mother, and his forehead, which contains the brain, the center of all human activities, the "Mallam" makes the child's mother believe that his act is not a symbolic but a literal bringing life back into her lifeless child.

Like Anowa's mother in *Anowa* who believed that she lost her children at infancy due to witches' attacks, and Yaye Khady in *Un chant écarlate* who believed that Mireille has used her witchcraft powers to steal Ousmane, Mami Fanti attributes her ill luck to witchcraft. Faced with the real possibility that she may lose yet another child to witches, Mami Fanti consults Papa Kramo whom she believes could heal and protect her sick child:

Mami, I myself say this child will live. Now, himself he is too small. Yourself must not eat meat. You must not eat fish from the sea, Friday,

Sunday ...if he is about ten, tell him he must not eat meat and fish from the sea, Friday, Sunday. If he himself he does not eat, you Mami Fanti you can eat You hear? (...) Now you have the blue dye for washing?  
 ‘Yes’ she murmured.  
 ‘And a piece of white cloth?’  
 ‘Yes, but it is not big. Just about a yard and a quarter.’  
 ‘That does not matter. Yourself find those things for me and I will do something and your child shall be good.’ ...  
 ‘Now, put the child in the room. Come back, go and find all the things.’  
 (*Anowa*, 79)

It is typical of spiritual healers to ask for certain personal items like a piece of cloth and blue dye from the person requiring healing without explaining for what exactly those items are to be used. Likewise, these spiritual healers may impose taboos in the form of dietary restrictions without explaining their relevance to the healing process. Some dietary restrictions may be as common as not consuming meat or fish that is not from freshwater on Fridays and Sundays. For a poor person from the coast where freshwater fish is rare and expensive, such dietary restrictions may prove too difficult to follow, thereby further complicating the healing process.

No matter the number of rules to be obeyed and for how long “I myself will go on observing it until I die” (*Anowa*, 83), says the child’s mother. By the virtues of his spittle, Papa Kramo is selling an illusion that, in this case, just happens to have worked, as he dropped out of sight:

And he was thinking. Ah...llah just look, I cannot remain here. It will be bad of me to ask the woman for so much as a penny when I know this child will die.... He rose up, picked up his bag from the ground and...he vanished from the house. But do you know, this child did not die. It is wonderful but this child did not die. (*Anowa*, 80-81)

The disappearance of the healer is perhaps a cautionary tale for those who put their entire hope and trust in spiritual healers: The same healer may not be around when you need him, or worse still, he may have been a trickster.

Much the same way people seek recourse to witchcraft for healing, protection, and explanation of the spiritual dimensions of life, they also seek for it for the destructive abilities of its eye. One way witchcraft can be used to destroy someone is to aim its evil at the heart of the victim. As the source of life, to attack the heart is to cut off the victim's life source. As a result the victim may fall suddenly ill and if the evil is not cast out, he ultimately dies. In *Un chant écarlate*, Ousmane, a sickly child, was always thought to be assailed by witches: "Tombait-il malade? Tout le quartier, soucieux et soupçonneux, s'inquiétait. Chaque main s'armait de talismans et de "sâfara" pour le délivrer des "filets" d'une sorcière invisible." (56-57) As an adult in love, Ousmane's mother believes that her Ousmane is so devoted to Mireille because she has bewitched him. But she is helpless in this situation because it is assumed that Senegalese healers and witch hunters have no antidote for the white person's witchcraft. So pervasive is the notion of an invincible white witchcraft that even the well-educated Rosalie buys into it:

Ali s'énerma en entendant de tels propos. "Ousmane ne serait-il pas "ensorcelé"?"  
- Ousmane n'aurait-il pas été victime du « dedelé », ce sortilège par lequel les amoureuses s'attachent à un homme ?  
-Rosalie Peut-être ! (206-7)

As it will turn out, Ousmane's mother takes it upon herself to find out the cause of her son's mad love: "Elle aurait cherché l'antidote du sortilège secrété par cette "fille du diable" qui a envoûté son fils." (101)

Among the Wolof and other ethnic groups in the Sahel region of sub-Saharan Africa, "dedelé" is a spell used to make people do things that they would otherwise not do. For example, a man or woman can make the person she is interested in fall in love with him or her by following the instructions he or she receives from a witch. "Dedelé"

can also be used to harm enemies since under its spell, the victim is at the speller's beck and call. A spell typically involves animal parts that represent the weapon to be used. The horn could become the gun, which at dusk, will be "fired" at the victim. Dusk is the preferred time to act because the victim cannot see his assailant and therefore may not be able to conduct a spiritual counteroffensive. Sometimes, the horn ("gun") may be strategically positioned, but always hidden from the victim's view. The appearance of sudden "incurable" physical afflictions indicates that the "gun" has hit its target.

Generally, physical afflictions precede the spiritual ones. So in Bâ's *Un chant écarlate*, Ousmane's family could rely on healers to cure their son when he was a child. But with Mireille the traditional antidote is going to be severely tested. Displeased that her father-in-law had conspicuously hung a horn in front of the door, ostensibly to harm first anyone trying to harm his son, Mireille lamented her invasion of privacy but did the unthinkable thing of playing along: "J'ai supporté ces odeurs nauséabondes. J'ai supporté cette corne qui pend, mes draps noircis. Maintenant que tu es guéri, je demande le respect de mon intimité." (146) Her acting will not be for long as she breaks with what may have seemed to her a bizarre way of treating the common malaria her husband had. It is important to emphasize here that Ousmane's submission to his father's healing session illustrates how even western educated people submit to it either out of indifference or a complete belief in the utility of such ancestral practices. This is the central point of Ama Ata Aidoo's *A Dilemma of a Ghost*.

Ato's family wants to use a potion to wash literally the skin of Anowa's belly and afterwards pray with libation to their ancestors for their intercession. The potion, like the

Senegalese *sâfara*, would make it possible for Eulalie to become pregnant by deflecting all evil eyes:

Petu : And if she leaves now, whose stomach shall we wash with this medicine ?.... We were to choose this day because, as you know, on this day, we try to drive away all evil spirits, ill luck and unkind feelings which might have invaded our house during the past year. You know also that we invoke our sacred dead to bring us blessings. Therefore, we are asking you to tell us what is wrong with you and your wife so that first we will wash her stomach with this and then pour the libation to ask the dead to come and remove the spirit of the evil around you and pray them to bring you a child (40)

The destructive powers of the evil eye, a metaphor for witchcraft, is also alluded to in *Anowa*:

Badua: A-a-h, I wish I could turn into a bird and come and stand on your roof-top watching you make something of that husband of yours. What was he able to make of the plantation of palm-trees his grandfather gave him? And the virgin land his uncles gave him, what did he do with that?

Anowa: Please, Mother, remove your witch mouth from my marriage (...) And so you call me a witch? The thing is, I wish I were a witch so that I could protect you from your folly.... I do not need your protection mother... And now, Mother, I am going, so take your witchery to eat in the sea. (18)

In traditional Ghana, a prosperous family may be thought of having the protection of ancestors or other supernatural forces. Hence through the intercession of these forces, Badua wants to protect Anowa from the evil eyes working against her marriage. In NDiaye's *La sorcière*, we learn that the evil eyes have the power to cast and break spells or conjure thunder:

Je savais pourtant, par ma grand-mère qui me l'avait confié lorsque j'étais enfant, que ma mère était capable de voir, dans une clarté et précision inouïes, tout ce qu'elle désirait sans le moindre effort, pleurant de rares larmes de sang pâle, et qu'elle aurait même su fabriquer des sortilèges, envoûter et désenvoûter, pour peu qu'elle eût admis que

l'irréprochable employée d'une importante compagnie d'assurances qu'elle tâchait d'être depuis vingt-cinq ans pût renfermer sans malhonnêteté ni dommages, une enchanteresse de grande volée....  
Personne d'ailleurs n'aurait pu ressembler à une sorcière que ma mère, au visage sérieux et uni, aux yeux sages, à toute la contenance parfaitement convenable et pragmatique. Et qu'elle eût la connaissance, elle, de philtres et de formules (pour jeter un sort, appeler l'orage, contraindre à ses désirs), qu'elle sût lire jusque dans l'âme des figures dont elle voyait l'image à quelque époque que ce fût, j'étais maintenant seule à le savoir .... (67)

Unlike their male counterparts, casting an evil eye by a woman must be hidden:

Il allait être puni d'avoir posé son regard là devant quoi il aurait dû fermer les yeux... Elle lui aurait fait un mal irrémédiable. Cette volonté de le châtier, de l'estourbir, de le détruire, elle la sentait s'installer en elle sans espoir d'apaisement. (112)

Lucie's mother, surprised by her husband during one of her spiritual rituals of trying to cast an evil eye, is embarrassed and angry for the interruption. Believing that her husband's action was out of hatred or indifference to her witchcraft, Lucie is tempted to harm him. She does not however follow through with her intentions and chooses instead to walk out of the marriage:

Elle ne le haïssait pas, non, mais cette part énigmatique et puissante d'elle-même qui ne se dévoilait que dans la solitude et l'obscurité, cette part glacée, souveraine, violente, combattait ses sentiments habituels de bienveillance à l'endroit de mon père. Elle aurait bientôt usé de son génie pour le foudroyer d'une manière abjecte. Le comprenant, elle était partie, s'était sauvée. (112-113)

Even though she decides to leave the marriage, she makes sure she has the last laugh. At a rendez-vous arranged by their daughter, Lucie's mother meets her ex-husband. The reconciliation their daughter had hoped for does not happen. But Lucie's father had his own secret plan: he would pretend to attempt to reconcile with his ex-wife so that in return, Lucie would return a large sum of money he had given her earlier on, to pay off monies he had embezzled at his financial institution and for which he may be fired.

Rather than reconcile with him and start afresh, Lucie's mother transforms her ex-husband into a snail and sends him off in a box with her fiancé Robert to Lucie:

Il plongea sa main dans la poche et sorti une petite boîte de carton rouge et jaune ... Il me la fourra entre les mains avec une grimace d'écoeurement, me fit signe de l'ouvrir, puis recula d'un bon pas.... A l'intérieure, un petit escargot gris bavait sur une feuille de salade.... Puis d'une voix terne, morose: Ta mère affirme que cette bestiole est ton père.... Samedi, elle a pris le train pour aller au bord de la mer, elle est rentrée dimanche avec l'escargot dans son sac.... C'est ton père. Il n'a que ce qu'il mérite. Elle trouve qu'il avait refait sa vie d'une manière déplaisante, ou trop vite, ou trop volontiers.... (150-151)

Just as an evil eye could be the cause of a sudden illness or death, sudden or unexplained riches can be attributable to witchcraft. That is, as economic disaster is traceable to witchcraft, so is sudden prosperity. According to Geschiere (1997), the belief that the nouveaux riches supposedly owed their wealth to the intervention of a supernatural power of sorts, is prevalent in Cameroon. Simmons (1971) documents the widely held belief among Senegalese that successful people are often suspected of possessing some magical powers. Among the Tiv of Nigeria, influential men are generally thought to have *tsav* or witchcraft-like substance. The Nyakyusa of Tanzania perform a ritual to give village headmen "python power" to protect their subjects from harm. In parts of Ghana, it is *sikaduro*. "Aduro" which means medicine in Akan, also refers to amulets and potions that have magical powers hence "sikaduro" literally is medicine to make one rich. So that even though in Aidoo's *Anowa* Anowa knows that hardwork is the source of her family's financial prosperity, the possibility that her husband may have used *sikaduro* is not far from her mind. It is perhaps the *sikaduro*, she suspects, that has prevented Kofi Ako from taking a second wife:

Kofi Ako: Ei, Anowa, you ought to have been born a man....  
Anowa: Why don't you marry another woman? At least she could help us....

Kofi Ako: Anowa, please don't go on. You know you are annoying me.

Anowa: Ah my master, but I don't understand you. You are the only man in this world who just wants one wife and swears to keep only her!

[silence] Perhaps it is your medicine's taboo?

Kofi Ako: What medicine are you talking about? What taboo? (*Anowa*, 24)

In line with Anowa's thinking, *sikaduro* has not only forbidden Kofi Ako from having more wives although that is what most financially prosperous men would do, but may have been what has forced him to sacrifice his manhood and ability to have children on the altar of economic well-being:

Badua : They have been saying it for a long time around here that she and her husband sold their birth-seeds to acquire their wealth....

Old woman : Others say he had consumed it acquiring wealth, or exchanged it for prosperity.... Let the gods forgive me for speaking ill of the dead, but Anowa ate Kofi up! (*Anowa*, 40)

If it is the belief among the Ewes of Southeastern Ghana (Meyer, 2001) that the same powers that bring you prosperity can also turn you into their victim, then the old woman's assertion that Anowa has spiritually eaten up Kofi is entirely plausible. On the other hand, it may well be that Anowa and Kofi's prosperity partly comes from hard work and partly is the result of their entrepreneurial spirit: their ability to see in the lucrative skin business a better economic alternative to the traditional subsistence farming.

## 5.2 Witchcraft and the Literary Imagination

In Marie NDiaye's novels, initiation into witchcraft is explored at multiple levels through the Lucie family tradition of handing down their preternatural powers to the next generation of women. In this regard, the following description in *La sorcière* is critical to our understanding of the initiation process:

Quand mes filles eurent atteint l'âge de douze ans, je les initiai aux mystérieux pouvoirs.... Elles ne tentèrent même pas, certains après-midi ensoleillés, d'y couper sous quelque prétexte.... Dans cette grande pièce

froide et basse,... je tâchais de leur transmettre l'indispensable mais imparfaite puissance dont étaient les dotées depuis toujours les femmes de ma lignée.... Il fallait qu'elles m'observent et, par tout leur être, de l'ensemble de leur petite personne issue de la mienne, intégrant le douloureux processus de la divination.... Après onze mois, les premières larmes de sang coulèrent sur leurs joues le même jour... Maud et Lise avaient acquis à leur tour la capacité de voir le futur et dans le passé, après tout un cortège d'aïeuls plus ou moins talentueuses dont la plus âgée et peut-être la plus douée était à ce jour, ma propre mère.... (*La sorcière*, 9-12)

As part of the initiation, witches-in-training must learn to connect with the other world, and be able to harness and channel the cosmic forces. This takes time. So at the tender age of twelve, and over the course of eleven months, Maud and Lise must learn to spiritually strip their human flesh, switch to an altered state of consciousness likened to a journey in time and space, and then reverting to their original selves, enter into the physical world to lead an unsuspectingly normal life. The initiation rituals end with the appearance of the first tears of blood, an indication that the power of witchcraft has indeed been handed down to the next generation. However, the initiation will be deemed a success only if the young initiates promise to pass on the family powers down to the next generation: "promettez-moi une chose, dis-je encore, si un jour vous avez des filles, faites avec elles ce que j'ai fait avec vous durant cette année." (*La sorcière*, 13) Lise and Maud will, however, break with the mother-daughter line of transmission by initiating their paternal aunt Lili. The initiates will also violate the duration of the process: they will shorten it to one night, and reduce its solemnity: Lili was initiated on a night out with her nieces and in total secrecy:

Soudain, la maman parut se rappeler quelque chose.  
Lucie, va donc voir si les filles sont bien là-haut, dans la chambre de Lili, me brusqua-t-elle, inquiète.  
(...) Elles ne sont pas rentrées ! s'exclama la maman  
- Bon, murmurai-je, laissez-leur le temps de revenir. (115-116)

We may never know how Lise and Maud, who spent eleven months going through initiation rituals, are able to initiate Lili in one night during an all night out. Nonetheless, Lili had become a witch. She now constantly talks about birds that will soon come for her and fly away with her: “Elle me parle d’oiseaux, elle affirme que je ne sais quels oiseaux doivent venir la prendre ou qu’elle-même doit prendre la forme d’un oiseau.”(164) By talking to her mother about the spiritual powers of birds, a reference understood by only initiated witches, Lucie bewilders her mother who could only quietly hope that her daughter has not lost her mind. For violating the rules of line of transmission and duration, Lili’s initiation suffers a serious reversal: she is unable to revert to her former self. So unlike Lise and Maud who reverted to living like normal girls, Lili finds herself hallucinating.

In NDiaye’s *La femme changée en bûche*, a story about a scorned woman seeking revenge against her husband, the initiation into witchcraft takes a different form: It is the would-be witches including the scorned woman who go to the devil’s house to seek help. And that means only one thing: acquire the power with which to do harm. It is this harmful power that the anonymous narrative voice is now seeking in order to punish her ungrateful husband. Earlier on in the story, the narrative voice had gone to see the devil personally to ask for special favors for her husband who was in trouble at work and was about to be fired. After granting her wish, the devil promises her protection against her husband if he ever was ungrateful to her. With this promise, narrator and devil have tacitly entered into a pact that will force her to keep coming back to the devil for more help. This is exactly what happens when her husband starts to cheat on her, even contemplating moving in with his new girlfriend and their son. Faced with this dire

situation, the narrator returns to the devil to fulfill the promise: punish her ungrateful husband. The repeated recourse to the devil will prove harmful to the narrator. Her total dependence on the devil makes her go against her own self-interests: she commits what could only be termed a spiritual infanticide. She burns her son without physically setting him on fire by clothing the baby in a special outfit the devil had provided. Having faithfully executed the devil's orders, she returns for the protection he had promised. Unknown to her, the protection will be her initiation into the devil's society. She will then become one of the agents of harm in the world. In this regard, the veiled reference to the Biblical notion that the path to destruction is littered with evildoers as depicted by the multitude at the entrance to the devil's house could not be more apt. Upon her arrival at the devil's door, the narrator finds many people waiting to be let in, each person claiming to be worthy of being allowed to enter the house. However, the presence of the writer among this cohort of evildoers battling to serve the devil, is most intriguing. He tells how much destruction he has caused by writing evil things and believes the devil could use him as professional evil writer:

Pour ma part, ...je ne suis qu'un malheureux écrivain, mais j'ai écrit des choses telle que vous ne supporteriez sans doute pas que je vous le lise. Ce sont, à proprement parler, des horreurs.... Je vais tâcher...de les montrer au Diable, et alors, je suis certain qu'il me recevra comme un prince.... Nous tous ici,... nous sommes des hors-la-loi, des maudits.... Alors comment voulez-vous qu'il me ferme la porte au nez ? J'ai bon espoir qu'il me prenne comme écrivain de service.... (*La femme changée en bûche*, 29-30)

At the level of a captive serfdom, the devil makes no distinction. Not all offering to serve the devil, however, will enter his house. Such is the case of the woman who axed her husband to death so that she could have his money: "Celle-là, a dit l'homme en

tapotant l'épaule de la femme, a fendu le crâne de son mari avec une hache, puis, elle l'a enterré dans son jardin, elle en avait après l'argent du bonhomme.... (29-30) Indeed, it takes a self-destructive act like that of the narrator who burned her son to death in his crib : "D'un air supérieur, et distant, j'ai dit que j'avais brûlé mon enfant dans son petit lit...." (*La femme changée en bûche*, 34) In *La femme changée en bûche* and *La sorcière*, to accept to be part of the devil's household is to accept to do his will which may include offering to write stories about people so harmful that their public reputation may be called into question or be completely destroyed. The devil seems to prefer the services of men than women.

Witches in Africa are organized under strict rules of association. The associations can be groups of friends, members of a family or other similar groupings. As a general characteristic, witches are spiritual cannibals who meet at nightly banquets to feast on their victims. Once initiated, they are expected to contribute to their nightly meetings and feasts with human flesh (Dilley 2004). To attend these meetings, they must take off their human skins and take on their desired spiritual forms. In West Africa, it is normally the owl. Hence, the presence of the owl, a nocturnal bird, indicates the presence of a witch ready to take his or her victim to one of such nightly feasts. Both William S. Simmons (1971)<sup>3</sup> and Birgit Meyer (2001)<sup>4</sup> document the link between the owl and witches. They observe that witches also take the form of goats, centipedes and wild animals. However, the significance of a bird as a means of transportation in the spirit world is not uniquely African. In *La sorcière*, it is the crows in Paris, on the way to Poitiers, and the birds that will come for Lili.

The first time the crow serves as a spiritual mode of transportation in *La sorcière* is during Lucie and her daughters' visit to their grandmother in Paris. They saw a crow that Lucie mistook for her friend Isabelle sitting at the window of her apartment:

Un grand oiseau brun tenait sur le rebord, nous observant à travers la vitre d'un œil vigilant et sans effroi, si semblable à la corneille que j'avais remarquée le matin même qu'un petit frisson d'inquiétude me parcouru.  
-Un corbeau ! s'écria ma mère.  
Alors je ne pus m'empêcher de chuchoter en direction de l'oiseau :  
-Isabelle? (79)

Lucie's mother was embarrassed by such a scene especially as her fiancé Robert commented on the oddity of a crow in Paris. Her denial is betrayed by an even more suspicious demeanor: "Je te jure que je n'ai rien à voir avec cela. Elle ferma les yeux, tâchant de se reprendre." (*La sorcière*, 80) Though odd in Paris, such a scene is plausible in the context of the spirit world. If witches have the power to take on the form of other living creatures, then for the witches Lucie and her mother, it is easy to recognize one of their own no matter the form in which nor the place where he or she appears. On the train to Poitiers, Maud and Lise, Lucie's twin teenage daughters, already initiated witches, also turn into crows. In a series of movements reminiscent of children at play, they leave their boots at their seats in the train and fly outside trying to race with the moving train to the consternation of their mother:

Mes yeux se fermèrent, je somnolai quelques minutes. Lorsque je me réveillai, mes filles n'étaient plus là. Je parcourus le wagon, puis le train, et, soucieuse, je revenais à ma place quand deux gros oiseaux vinrent frôler la vitre du compartiment. Ils s'éloignèrent, disparurent à ma vue. Puis ils revinrent, dans un piqué joyeux, froter leur aile au carreau, et je leur souris soulagée. Ils me fixèrent d'un œil froid, malin – qui étais-je pour ces corneilles ? Qui étais-je encore pour mes filles, certes tendre envers moi, mais déjà sorcières si accomplies qu'elles ne pouvaient certainement s'empêcher de ressentir, envers leur mère peu douée, une sorte d'indifférence condescendante ?... Maud et Lise je n'avais fait que précipiter le moment où elles se seraient détachées de moi, fortes de leur

volonté de puissance.... Je remarquai alors que Maud et Lise avaient laissé devant la banquette leurs grandes bottes noires à lacets....

Le train s'enfila dans un tunnel, toutes lumières subitement éteintes, et à la sortie Maud et Lise étaient assises devant moi, bottées, feuilletant leur revue. (96-98)

As their mother pushes the empty boots under the seats to avoid any suspicions, the two young witches, invisible to the non-witch, protest what is the spiritual equivalent of being prevented from exercising their new power. On another occasion, their excited paternal aunt Lili decides to take her nieces out on the town on their insistence that they wanted to experience nightlife in Poitiers. Since it was inclement weather that day, Lili's mother, the nieces' grandmother, was understandably concerned for a pregnant Lili:

Puis elle fit signe à Maud et Lise. L'orage grondait toujours, inhabituellement long.  
-vous n'allez pas sortir par ce temps, hasarda la maman.  
Mais déjà mes filles avaient ouvert la porte et elles semblaient n'avoir aucun besoin de leurs jambes (...) Sans me jeter un regard, Maud et Lise se ruèrent sous la pluie. (108)

When at daybreak the girls had still not returned home from their adventure, Lili's mother is visibly alarmed. "Elles ne sont pas rentrées!" she would exclaim. Eventually when they make it back home, Lili is no longer pregnant:

...Lili, très rouge, assurée, regardait la maman.  
- Eh bien, voilà, dit-elle doucement, la main sur le ventre, il n'y a plus de bébé.  
- La maman fit : « Ah », sans comprendre.  
- Une autre fois peut-être, reprit Lili de sa voix douce, mais là, c'est fini, tu vois, plus de bébé  
Maud et Lise répétèrent en chœur, froidement :  
-Plus de bébé, c'est comme-ça. (116-117)

It is true that an unmarried Lili did not want to have a baby by a man she hardly knew, but the disappearance overnight of the unborn child was most confusing to Lili's mother who now sees her desire to be a grandmother by Lili frustrated. The disappearance of

Lili's baby, a situation that would qualify scientifically as a miscarriage, takes on the spiritual dimension of an offering: Lili as a witch initiate had offered her unborn baby for the nightly feast. When to Lucie's question, "Qu'avez-vous fait du bébé de Lili?", her daughters Lise and Maud with a smirk on their faces, replied through the television signal, "La télévision s'éteignit sans qu'aucune de nous ne l'eût effleurée," (118), she knew right away that Lili's fetus had been eaten. What Lucie was not sure of though was whether or not her daughters could possibly have tricked their paternal aunt into their maternal circle of witches and, without her realizing it, had transferred the witchcraft to her in violation of the normal line of transmission: that is, the next generation of females which, in this case, would be Maud and Lise's daughters. Whatever happened during their all-night out remains a mystery, but one thing is certain, that Lili left home pregnant and returned without her pregnancy. In the world of witchcraft, the night feast is the ultimate confirmation that the Lucie girls have come of spiritually age and soon after will fly off as typical adolescents do, seeking their freedom and never to return to the maternal nest.

In *La femme changée en bûche*, the devil is also capable of spiritual transformations by taking the form of other living beings. But unlike the witch in *La sorcière*, the transformations in *La femme changée bûche* take place in real time before the very eyes of the narrator, adding to the already heightened dramatic tension:

Quelques bougies brûlaient dans de hauts chandeliers. Une femme était assise dans le fauteuil du Diable, devant un grand miroir posé à terre. Je me suis approchée du fauteuil et la femme est devenue un jeune homme aux cheveux roux. Puis le jeune homme a disparu, remplacé par un enfant qui s'est observé un long moment dans le miroir en fronçant le sourcil d'insatisfaction. Et sous les traits de la femme et du jeune homme, et de l'enfant, et du chien, et même de la plante qui a succédé à l'âne gris, je distinguais nettement la physionomie particulière du Diable, et de telles

métamorphoses auraient été incapables de m'abuser, moi qui le connaissais. (*La femme changée en bûche*, 62)

Even to the initiated in witchcraft like the narrator, these real time transformations are evidence of the devil's ability to defy the physical laws of time, space and species: the transformation into a dog that nobody likes, but with which Stéphane Ventru, the fiancé of Esmée, one of the anonymous narrator's friends, would not part, or becoming the lustful server at a café who ends up sleeping with Esmée in the kitchen to the utter devastation of her fiancée. The devil's evil force continues to plague Stéphane Ventru and Esmée. At their wedding reception, the devil possesses Esmée's father to almost ruin the occasion by making him eat most of the food before the guests arrive. Finally, the devil, now a driver of some of the wedding guests, reveals his true identity to the narrator and asks her to join him. She accepts but after the narrator had begun her own journey of transformations:

Enfin, ne pouvais-je continuer de bavarder et de tenir le devant de la scène ? Ma petite histoire, à moi n'existait plus ! Mes mains et mes pieds étaient de bois, mon cou, le haut de ma tête. Valérie s'est approchée sans me voir, très fière sur ses talons.... J'ai tenté d'appeler Valérie mais il était trop tard. Ma langue ne remuait plus, figée dans le sapin.... Car je sentais que mon corps réclamait l'eau où flotter.... Heureusement, mes jambes ont été les dernières à se transformer et en courant, j'ai pu gagner la rivière, je m'y suis jetée tout à fait bûche à présent, du haut jusqu'en bas, de bois clair. J'avais été si jolie autrefois ! Mais comment pleurer, tout de bois que j'étais ? Je me suis dit : N'est-ce pas là l'état idéal.... La bûche fut emportée par le courant, on ne sait où. Plusieurs fois, des gamins, sur la rive, s'amusèrent à la prendre pour cible avec des pierres, et même il arriva qu'une petite fille voulant l'attraper pour monter dessus comme à cheval, tomba dans l'eau et se noya. (*La femme changée en bûche*, 98-99)

In this transformational scene where the narrator becomes a log, hence the title of the novel, we see two fundamental notions come to light. First, witchcraft is explored as a transformational experience. Secondly, and more importantly, through the narrative

process the experience becomes a literary one. So the story of “La femme changée en bûche” is both spiritual and literary.

In Chapter One, we discussed Barthes’ (1968) discussion of modes of writing, which include tone, delivery, purpose, ethos, and naturalness of expression (see supra p 121.) These modes owe their existence to one identical process - the writer’s consideration of the social use, which he has chosen for his form, and his commitment to this choice. Hence, writing, according to Barthes, is an ambiguous reality in the sense that, on one hand, it arises from the confrontation of the writer with the society of his time and, on the other hand, from this social finality, it refers the writer back, by a sort of tragic return, to the sources. It is therefore not granted to the writer to choose his mode of writing from a kind of non-temporal store of literary forms since it is under the pressure of history and tradition that the possible modes of writing for a given writer are established. Many strange things happen in our daily lives that are not all recorded by historians. Through the creative process of writing, however, the writer is able to recreate the strange episodes by giving them a human touch. A case in point is the anonymous narrator’s encounter with the devil. This is a spiritual encounter which is not supposed to be visible to the ordinary person. However, NDiaye gives the devil a physical house where evil people go to seek him. He even has three female secretaries who record and file documents. In this way, Marie NDiaye not only makes witchcraft real but transforms witchcraft, which is generally considered a rural phenomenon, into an urban one as well. In *La sorcière*, big cities like Paris and Poitiers are scenes of witchcraft and the witches are either professionals or spouses of professionals. So through the literary imagination,

NDiaye forces the readers to confront key issues such as witchcraft in terms of whether it is a myth, a thing of the past, or a phenomenon that lives on today.

Again through literature, Marie NDiaye, is also broadening the debate on an issue that has been silenced by the Enlightenment and Modernity in Western cultures, and among Western-educated elite in African societies: the fact that belief in the existence of mystical powers has not completely disappeared but still lingers in all human cultures. Skillfully avoiding any direct participation in the debate, NDiaye tries to walk a fine line between the scientific and the supernatural positions on the issue, allowing the readers to interpret her textual representations in as many different ways as possible, according to each and everyone's social and cultural backgrounds just as Michel De Certeau asserts in *La Fable mystique*:

Le discours mystique transforme le détail en mythe : il s'y accroche, il l'exorbite, il le multiplie, il le divinise. Il en fait son historicité propre. Ce pathos du détail (qui rejoint les délices et les tourments de l'amoureux ou l'érudit) se marque d'abord en ceci que le minuscule découpe une suspension de sens dans le continuum de l'interprétation (Michel de Certeau, 1982:19).

In *La femme changée en bûche*, the issue of the little girl who drowned because she tried to hold onto a log, which happened not to be an ordinary log, draws the reader's mind toward superstition. This is not surprising as the parallel between *La femme changée en bûche* in terms of a recourse to superstition to explain what will normally be an ordinary chance occurrence, and the belief systems among the people of the Bocage, a region in France, illustrates. In her study of witchcraft among the villagers of the Bocage, Jeanne Favret-Saada (1977) learnt that the people generally attribute mishaps such as the sudden death of a prosperous person, miscarriages, illness, to witchcraft. Even though

some of these mishaps are explained scientifically by the medical doctor or other specialists, the villagers still sought out spiritual explanations:

Mais quelle que soit l'efficacité du traitement au coup par coup, elle est incomplète aux yeux de certains paysans, car elle affecte la cause et non l'origine de leurs maux. L'origine c'est toujours la méchanceté d'un ou plusieurs sorciers, affamés du malheur d'autrui, dont la parole, le regard et le toucher ont une vertu surnaturelle (Favret-Saada, 1977:17).

The problem that Favret-Saada's study exposes is not so much the fact that people in the technologically developed world still believe in witchcraft, but the ambiguity of modern Church's position when it comes to belief in the preternatural. She gives a typical example of the Catholic Church whose dogmatic theology tends to blur the existence and definition of the supernatural. This is evident in the fact that when the people go to see the priest for spiritual answers after having received the scientific ones, the priest usually chooses one answer from three possible ones: he sides with the scientific answers the doctors give and brands the people as superstitious; accepts that the mishaps fall under the supernatural and interprets them as Divine suffering; or agrees with the afflicted people that their mishaps are the works of the Devil and refers them to the exorcist. The problem is that the village priest who is well aware of the beliefs of his faithful has to face the diocesan exorcist who tends to be more like the modern believers in science and thus dismisses the victim in need of exorcism and simply promises to pray for him or her. The afflicted person who does not find this solution satisfactory tends to seek answers from the witch doctor. Contrary to the Catholic priest's treatment of victims of attacks from evil spirits, therefore, the witch doctor tends to show better understanding of the victim's social and cultural background and accordingly responds to his or her urgent need for answers. In the eyes of the victim, the healer's words spoken at the precise

moment may just be the magic that dispels the spell and restores the victim to his or her normal spiritual self.

### 5.3 Reclaiming the Feminine Power: The Witchcraft Model

With Enlightenment, notions such as divine interventions that were widely accepted were now called into question. Overall, it is believed that man's understanding of the physical world through science, not religious dogma nor superstition, will lead to progress and ultimately happiness. But reason and rationality, the building blocks of the Enlightenment, will come to be associated in Western cultures with notions of masculinity (Seidler, 1989). Men were rational and women more intuitive. Paradoxically, this notion of masculinity taken to its logical conclusion, must be advantageous to women because in the spiritual realm, rituals provide space devoted to the forces of "unreason", thereby valuing emotions and intuition which are feminine qualities over rationality that is associated with men. In *La sorcière*, Lucie's mother's uneasiness that she had been caught practicing witchcraft is more emotional than rational, after all she had the power to silence the intruder for good:

Elle n'avait jamais douté qu'il aurait été facile de lui faire oublier.... C'est elle, ma mère qui, sachant qu'il avait vu ce qu'il n'aurait pas dû voir, avait senti au fil des jours son affection pour lui se muer en frénésie d'anéantissement. (*La sorcière*, 112)

So that more than the intrusion, it is the public vilification that makes women witches feel uneasy with their power.

In *La sorcière*, the negative association in men's mind of the power of witchcraft with women, is enough for men not want to have anything to do with it: "Alors tes filles? Maud et Lise? avançai-je.... La pâle et grasse figure de Pierrot se crispa de dégoût.... Ces saletés de petites sorcières! siffla-t-il en me lançant un coup d'œil haineux." (130) Like

all men, Lucie's husband, Pierrot's disapproval of witchcraft is illustrated by his drastic decision to cut off all financial assistance to his family and taunts Lucie to use her power to provide for her daughters and herself:

Maintenant, tu débarrasses le plancher et tu te débrouilles pour le reste avec tes sacrés petits moyens diaboliques! - Mais ils sont médiocres, dis-je, ils ne valent rien tu le sais...- Non, je n'en sais rien du tout et je ne veux rien savoir. Tais-toi, plus un mot là-dessus, va-t'en!" (130)

Prior to this meeting and conversation, Pierrot had walked out on his family and started a new life in Bourges with a new family, and on to a new religious life: "L'ainé des garçons trépigna jusqu'à moi, les poings ramassés devant la figure, et alors qu'une grosse croix de bois sautait hors de son pull et se mettait à danser sur sa poitrine, attachée par une ficelle de cuir." (126) Rather than eschew witchcraft, the new family's Christian faith seems oddly tolerant of witchcraft: " Nous pénétrons tous dans Son Royaume, n'ayez pas peur, dit-elle avec un sourire légèrement craintif." (126)

Birgit Meyer observes that among the predominantly Presbyterian Ewe Christians of Ghana, witchcraft is associated with the devil. They also see devil and witchcraft in the Biblical term of the Fall of Man. In the story of the fall, women are associated with the power of deception, therefore, are closer to the devil than men. As such, women are spiritually more vulnerable to the power of the devil than men. This contrasts with Susan Greenwood's notion that the devil and witchcraft are forces for good. In *La femme changée en bûche*, except for one man, all at the devil's gate are women. Inside the devil's house, except for Mécistée the dog, the devil, a male, is surrounded by women referred to as his secretaries. The same is true in *Un chant écarlate* where Ouleymatou is suspected of using witchcraft to lure and keep Ousmane and Mère Fatim is suspected of plotting evil against her co-wife. The overwhelming number of female witches in all the

novels reinforces Greenwood's observation that women dominate in witchcraft because of their intuitiveness. In a more general sense, it is safe to posit that the overt association of evil doing through witchcraft and women is one that is deeply rooted in patriarchy. Whitney Elspeth (2001), whose study focused on the interplay of gender and the historiography in European Witch-Hunts, posits that gender is clearly central in the European witch-hunts of earlier centuries even though historians have not made it evident. Most of the labeled witches, she claims, were women and yet most scholars have either ignored that fact or have not considered it problematic. The hunting of witches, she asserts, reflected a sharpened fear and distrust of women as powerful sources of danger, disorder and pollution. In most cases where men and children were accused of witchcraft, the accused men and children were relatives of already suspected women. To imply therefore that gender was not a significant factor in the hunt because women accused women and men accused men of witchcraft is, according to Elspeth, to reduce the subtle complexities of gender dynamics to an overly simple notion of "war between the sexes".<sup>5</sup> Other scholars point to misogyny, prevalent in western cultures, as a possible explanation for why most of the witches were women. In early modern France, "witch" was a general term of abuse for a woman and her failure to reply to this accusation was used as evidence against her if she were later accused of witchcraft. For Trevor-Roper (1967), witchcraft is part of feminine hysteria. Lyndal Roper's study of witch trials in Augsburg in Germany in the seventeenth century validates the feminine hysteria theory by showing that the accusations of witchcraft were often made by postpartum mothers against lying-in-maids who had been caring for an infant who had died. Witchcraft accusations also involved murderous antagonisms having to do with psychosexual anxieties and rivalries

about maternity and fertility between women. Julio Caro Baroja who does not dispute the existence of witchcraft, suggested that a woman usually becomes a witch after the initial failure of her life as a woman, and after frustrated or illegitimate love affairs have left her with a sense of impotence or disgrace.

Feminists in modern day have turned around the negative image of witches by referring to witchcraft as a case of womanspirit (*Encyclopedia of Feminism*, 1986), and therefore should be reclaimed by women. The idea of reclaiming witchcraft emerged in the 1970s when women, dissatisfied with patriarchal religions, felt the need for a spiritual dimension to their lives. By becoming witches or using forms of divination or simply devising personal rituals to develop previously suppressed aspects of their lives, women could reclaim the image of the witch as powerful, wise and feared by men.<sup>6</sup> So today, women looking for spiritual sustenance and an alternative to male-dominated religions have turned to witchcraft, be it the Craft and Wicca.

Many feminist witches have chosen to reject the standard male-female polarities of the traditional Craft rituals, substituting their own rituals within the context of an all-female coven. The Susan B. Anthony Coven started in California in 1971 may have been the first explicitly feminist coven. Rituals in these covens are psychological tools used to change women's internal image of themselves. The assumption is that, once women recognize the divinity within and are no longer convinced by the image of a male god, they will be less accepting of male dominance in everyday life. In the literary universe of NDiaye, the recognition of the divinity within the narrator in *La femme changée en bûche* and Lucie in *La sorcière* makes both women, after their ordeals with their first husbands, to reject a second marriage. In the same vein, the anonymous narrator of *La femme*

*changée en bûche*, once emotionally dependent on her unfaithful husband, sought to leave everything behind and make the choice to work for the devil, the ultimate source of the feminine power. A self-emancipated Lucie no longer had to hide her rituals as she accepted a job at her Friend Isabelle's school, an open and public space, where she taught young women how to use the power of divination to know their future.

These women have rejected the espoused traditional female roles by embracing witchcraft which empowers them to render the men who once wronged them powerless. A case in point is the anonymous narrator's husband in NDiaye's *La femme changée en bûche*. The death of his son affected him so much that he literally lost his mind and became a wanderer. Lucie's mother transforming her ex-husband into a snail is another way of rendering him powerless. What the transformative power of witchcraft has shown is that these women have successfully wrestled power from the men who once wielded it, and are not afraid to use it to their fullest advantage. In the context of this study, however, using this extreme tactic of using the power of witchcraft as tool for revenge would be counter-productive in the negotiation process.

## CONCLUSION

The critical review of the existing literature on Sub-Saharan African women writers literature has clearly shown that nowhere is the question of writing as a cultural negotiation posed, discussed or less addressed. By proposing a re-reading of the selected works of Ama Ata Aidoo, Mariama Bâ and Marie NDiaye through the new prism of writing as cultural negotiation, this dissertation has addressed, for the first time, a lacuna in the literature on Sub-Saharan women writers. Through negotiation, this dissertation has also served to make the powerful case for the necessity to transcend the paradigm of binary oppositions in favor of the alternative concept of negotiation.

The task of exploring works in cultures suppressed, in the African case, by dominant male and western cultures, necessarily has had to be approached in this dissertation from an interdisciplinary perspective including an examination of the literature's historicity and social significance, and an understanding of the writer's commitment to reflect and often to reform the culture that the literature represents. As such, this study has used an alternative critical methodology that obviated generally accepted approaches ascribed to postcolonial women writers like ethnocentricity and its attendant preconceived notions of racism, patriarchy, afro-centrism and euro-centrism, metropolis and periphery, within the innovative context of cultural negotiation. This is where it has been necessary to look at how African women writers have decided to tell their own stories. To this end, hybridity in Sub-Saharan women's writing, has been useful as part of the overarching conceptual framework of negotiation. In this respect, Ama Ata Aidoo, Mariama Bâ and Marie NDiaye have broken their silence on important societal issues not only to women, but to men as well through yet another symbolic act:

negotiation, a process which starts off with the interested parties first verbalizing contradictory demands and then moving toward agreement either by making concessions or searching for new alternatives that might be acceptable to the parties involved.

In negotiating with their western counterparts, Bâ and Aidoo have successfully brought the language issue to the fore. But rather than debate language per se, these writers have opened a cultural dialogue that uses the borrowed European languages of English and French as its vehicle. In this way, the issue of language, though very important, becomes a means rather than an end. The way Aidoo and Bâ like their male African counterparts have dealt with the issue of language, is to produce an Africanized version of the English and French languages that is more representative of their cultural histories and present realities. Therefore by interlacing their written texts with African proverbs, neologisms, and literal translations from their cultures, African writers in general have evolved a literary language that is a cross between English or French and their indigenous African languages. Linguistic hybridity is the term used to describe such linguistic reality. This type of language, by Bhabha and Ramsey's definition, is neither fully indigenous nor exogenous. It is the reconciliation of indigenous traditions with Eurocentric cultural paradigms, and by so doing difference is not erased but rather explained. As discussed in chapter one, linguistic hybridity is the net effect of the emergence and proliferation of African literatures written in European languages referred to by Mehrez as "texts métissés". That is, the hybrid nature of the European languages written to accommodate and disseminate the African writer's view of himself or herself and his or her African culture, to the world. Some have suggested that by leaving the comfort zone of their mother tongues and moving to the center by translating their mother

tongue into English or French, writers like Aidoo and Bâ have somehow betrayed their first love. However, compromise, the very heart of the negotiation process, calls upon the different parties to give up, as it were, their comfort zones as well. In this case, the African writer gives up his or her linguistic medium of expressing his or her worldview, at the same time as the western interlocutor puts in some effort to decode the hybridized language in order to understand the texts.

As this study has shown, hybridity is an all encompassing term to refer to all manner of cross-cultural manifestations. The consensus among Aidoo, Bâ and NDiaye is that cultural hybridity strengthens society. However, obstacles such as racism, religious practices, gender differences and cultural superiority stand in its way. Through their texts Bâ and NDiaye have brought racism, the bane of societies modern and old, to the negotiation table and thereby forced all to see the scourge of racism through the other's eyes. Racism, they remind us, flourishes when it is made part of a social and cultural system that tends toward exclusion, and toward the differentiating identity of "otherness". In discussing racism and cultural superiority in *Un Chant écarlate*, Bâ's focus is on black/white racism. Mireille's white father and Ousmane's black mother are portrayed as racists. Later on in the story, however, both Ousmane and Mireille, a relatively younger couple, fall prey to racist tendencies as well. For instance, Ousmane shows admiration for mixed race couples only when the black man's culture is made to look superior to the white woman's, a clear racist disposition. So are Mireille's characterization of African practices as "manque de savoir vivre", "toupet", 'inconscience' and "grossièreté". These reactions may not have been caused so much by racial animus per se as by a sense of cultural superiority which pits Ousmane's cultural

practices against Mireille's---that is, Senegalese therefore African against French therefore European. In the same light, so is Ousmane's philandering an offshoot of his sense of cultural superiority in the context of culture that sanctions polygamy on both religious and socio-economic grounds. Socially and culturally, Mireille's refusal to understand the nightly drumming while accepting and acknowledging her ballet and piano lessons as a child as normal cultural practices, will not endear herself to her in-laws and ultimately Ousmane. Interpreting such an attitude on the part of Mireille as a sign of a self-identifying "other", Ousmane will take the next logical step: that of treating her as different. To this end, Oleymatou, playing the role of the Senegalese good woman--- sensual, docile and subservient---will further alienate and ostracize Mireille. As the battle lines are drawn, Yaye Khady and Ouleymatou find themselves on one side and Mireille on another. In feminist terms, cultural differences rather than gender has set the stage for a confrontation among women for the heart and soul of a man, when they should have presented a united front in order to fight effectively against men's injustices toward women.

In negotiating difference, Bâ has also shed light on an important issue in African Literature: the conflictive relationship between the European colonizer and the colonized African. In *Un Chant écarlate*, M. de la Vallée disapproves of Ousmane's marriage to Mireille partly on the grounds of this conflict. From the master-servant relationship that was the hallmark of the colonizer-colonized dichotomy, Monsieur de la Vallée foresees a catastrophic end to his daughter's marriage. From his own marriage, he visualizes a situation of paradigm reversal: the black man becomes the colonizer, and his daughter,

the colonized. Bâ's proposal, however, is not to erase but to forgive past failings in order to move forward.

Unlike Aidoo and Bâ, NDiaye represents a biological and cultural hybrid: the daughter of a black father and a white mother. In *En Famille*, NDiaye discusses the extent to which racism destroys otherwise loving family relationships. Fanny, a literary alter ego of NDiaye, is a biracial child who, after her parents' divorce, will be rejected by her mother and her mother's family. Without any knowledge of the other half of her identity—her father's—, she is left in an identity limbo; an ambivalent state of belonging and outsider.

Although not clearly evident in NDiaye's texts, Aidoo and Bâ advocate sensitivity to those cultural practices that may be different from one's own. Sensitivity does not necessarily mean believing in those practices, but acknowledging and respecting their difference. In Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, the initial misunderstanding between Eulalie and Ato's family stems from not recognizing difference between the African-American cultural practices of Eulalie and their own. By forcing African traditional fertility treatment on Eulalie who is African-American, Ato's family nearly loses an otherwise loving and caring in-law. Either by design or by accident, it will take the conciliatory action of Ato's mother to break the cultural impasse. On the other hand, by refusing to welcome her family-in-law when they visit, Eulalie is openly condemning her husband's culture. Lest the reader conclude that cultural differences occur in European and African relations, Bâ is quick to remind us that because of religious beliefs and practices, cultural insensitivity can occur among Africans and, even worse, among people from the same country and ethnic groups. So in *Un chant écarlate* the Ivorian Christian

Jacqueline and her Senegalese Moslem husband Samba Diack, will feel the sting of cultural and religious difference when they move from Côte d'Ivoire to predominantly Moslem Senegal. Her refusal to convert to Islam is enough for her husband's family to shun her and even condone her husband's infidelity. Aïssatou suffers a similar fate even though she is from the same ethnic group as her husband Mawdo and both are Moslems. Aïssatou's situation is further compounded by the strict caste divisions that put loyalty to class and ethnic affiliation before marital bliss.

Bigamy and polygamy are issues that Aidoo, Bâ and NDiaye discuss in their works. This study has shown that while these matrimonial practices are inimical socially, economically and emotionally to women, it is women who are cast as willing participants in a social structure that is designed to subjugate them. For instance, although religion was used to justify their decision to marry second wives, neither Modou Fall nor Mawdo Bâ (*Une si longue lettre*) nor Ousmane (*Un Chant écarlate*) could have succeeded if the women had refused to be second wives. By conniving with the men, second wives typically violate the Islamic marital law of fair and equal treatment of the co-wives. If the second wives portrayed in Bâ's novels are either much younger (petite Nabou and Binetou) or have very little education, are unemployed, (Ouleymatou) thus are completely dependent on their men, Aidoo's *Changes* portrays women who are financially independent with successful careers and who choose polygamy over monogamy. So Esi whose first marriage has just fallen apart, is now trying to wrestle Ali from his first wife Fusena.

While Aidoo and Bâ attribute women's unhappy marital lives to polygamy, NDiaye focuses on bigamy. Aimé in *Papa doit manger* lives in France and knows that

bigamy is illegal. However, he is able to marry another woman and have a child with her, abandoning his first wife and their two daughters. Ironically, his second wife is aware of his marital situation but does not mind as long as he can swindle his first wife and bring the money for them to enjoy. Not all women are, however, are by their actions apologists of either bigamy or polygamy. Ramatoulaye in *Une si longue lettre* goes against the cultural grain and as such is singled out as the voice of reason. Her rejection of Daouda Dieng's marriage proposal after the death of her husband Modou, illustrates the extent to which some women are willing to go against the status quo, even at personal costs to themselves. Obviously, Daouda married his current wife only after Ramatoulaye had refused to marry him. That should have been an indication to Ramatoulaye that he never stopped loving her and that she could easily enjoy having Daouda's complete attention. The reason of her refusal was simple – knowing how it felt to be abandoned, she did not want to be the cause of Daouda abandoning his wife.

The prison-house of marriage will survive anywhere women put societal laws and dictates above their personal happiness and well-being. However, in their search for happiness, women should guard against selfishly infringing upon other women's liberty and happiness. All three authors agree on the issue that in many parts of the world, problems in marriage stemming from men's infidelity is a sore point for women. It is not only avowed polygamists that make women's lives a living hell. It has been argued in this study that polygamy exists under different guises in societies where the practice is unacceptable. Even though women's issues seem universal, they should be addressed on individual basis taking the culture of the women in question into consideration.

Not all the women in this study fall under bigamous or polygamous marriages. In NDiaye and Bâ's texts, some women, though in monogamous marriages, have been rendered voiceless by their husbands. Madame de la Valée in *Un Chant écarlate* is an example. Her silence in the text illustrates her powerlessness in her marriage. As a mother, she could only look on helplessly when Monsieur de la Valée opposes the marriage between Ousmane and Mireille. NDiaye reaffirms the existence of voiceless wives in France in her portrayal of Madame Lemarchand in *Hilda*. She is an unhappy housewife whose husband spends all day at work and when he returns home, does not even notice her. She enjoys all the financial comfort possible but misses the most important ingredient in her marriage-her husband's love.

Another dimension of marriage discussed in this study is procreation. In all patriarchal societies including Africa, marriage should lead to motherhood. A childless marriage is therefore a source of many tensions and conflicts. At the center of these conflicts are women. In *Anowa*, for instance, Badua, Anowa's own mother, is putting pressure on Anowa to have children. Refusing to betroth her to the gods as it had been ordained for the simple reason that Anowa will not be able to have children goes to the very core of the issue of motherhood as the fulfillment of complete womanhood. A mother is a woman fulfilled. Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost* takes up the issue of barrenness of Eulalie as part of the problem of womanhood unfulfilled. Although her choice of not having children is due to any physiological obstacles, it is not good enough for the cultural milieu she now inhabits that childbearing is an individual decision.

NDiaye and Aidoo explore a woman's choice to be or not to be a mother. The modern woman has broken with tradition to have control of her bodily functions as well

as the course she wants to take in life, and she expects society to respect her choice. Such is the case with Eulalie who has decided either not to be a mother or to postpone motherhood. But her newly adopted culture sees it differently. This study points out that when a woman becomes a mother out of obligation rather than choice, the chances are that she may not be a devoted mother. In Aidoo's *Changes*, Esi is more interested in career than her daughter. She had that child to satisfy patriarchal demands from women. But even after proving her "womanhood", she realizes that one child is not enough for her husband, his family and friends. Madame Lemarchand in *Hilda* has three young children with whom she cannot bear to spend an entire day, so she resorts to a nanny to take care of them, and by so doing deprive them of the nurturing and attention that only a mother can provide. So as society puts the burden on women not only to have children but to be their main caregivers, many women like Hilda in NDiaye's *Hilda* are forced by financial circumstances to spend all day taking care of other women's children. Madame Lemarchand has been able to find a way out of taking care of her own children because she can afford to do so. She not only has the financial wherewithal to ensure that her children receive the care she cannot provide them but also is in a position of power to demand that responsibility from a less powerful woman. This power relation has forced housemaid Hilda to deprive her own children of her love and to sell it to Madame Lemarchand's children for next to nothing. M. Lemarchand provides the money for a housekeeper and baby-sitter but is not interested in knowing anything about their well-being. On his part, Hilda's husband Frank is only interested in the money Hilda will earn by working for Madame Lemarchand. As for the care of their children, he is willing to let

them spend their days at a public daycare center and the expenses will be paid for with some of Hilda's earnings.

The power relation between Hilda and Mme Lemarchand replicates the power relations in patriarchal societies based on an economic system that creates a festering underclass, dependent on bosses like Mme Lemarchand. Whereas women's attention is usually focuses on men when the issue of power relations is raised, NDiaye has successfully turned the reader's attention to another kind of power struggle that does not necessarily involve men. Economics has more to do with this power struggle than gender. Both Hilda and Mme Lemarchand are women but the latter is able to take control of Hilda's life because she is rich. This study has demonstrated that such a power relation perpetuates a system akin to indentured servitude, a subservient situation where a person works under an unbearable contract for a fixed period of time in return for room and board, training or pay. Under this system, in theory complete legal control of the servant's labor is the master's, but not his or her private life.

Of a different order of subservience is surrogacy. In *La Sorcière*, the treatment Isabelle gives her son Steve is a clear indication that either it was not her choice to have a child and that she only did it to please society, or her husband has pushed the responsibility of raising their son on to her. NDiaye offers surrogacy as a solution for those mothers who are incapable of mothering. In *En Famille*, surrogacy could have been a solution to Fanny's problem much like for Bella in *Portrait en vert* and also as Isabelle eventually did for Steve in *La sorcière*. Surrogacy is, however, not a benevolent solution to a child's separation from his or her mother. In Aidoo's *Anowa*, surrogacy is discussed in the negative context of slavery. So as Anowa acts as a mother to two of their young

slaves, it is clear that surrogacy can be self-serving. In *Anoma* surrogacy sanitizes the brutality of slavery and the hypocrisy of slave owners.

Bâ's major concern in her writing is about mothers being role models to their children by making the right choices. Ramatoulaye and her friend Aïssatou's decisions in the face of their failing marriages are going to affect their children. By walking out on Mawdo and taking her sons with her despite society's condemnation of her action, Aïssatou has decided to prevent her husband from negatively influencing his sons. She has taken over raising them single-handedly but she is surely preventing them from feeling treated as undesirables since their father's family will not accept them completely due to their link with their mother's lower caste. By deciding to stay in her failed marriage, Ramatoulaye has become a negative role model for her children as they will come to accept ill-treatment in a marriage as normal.

There is consensus among Aidoo, Bâ and NDiaye that witchcraft exists, and that it is generally associated with women. They do not deny the existence of male witches, however, but represent them as power sources to reflect society's belief in male witches. Typically cast as healers or witch hunters, male witches benefit from a positive portrayal that perhaps may belie their evilness. As sources of power, male witches become purveyors of such powers to not only the chosen but also those who seek it. In *La Sorcière*, Lucie's mother is so powerful that she is able to turn her ex-husband into a snail as retribution for his evil designs on her. Lise and Maud in this story are also portrayed as having eaten Lili's fetus. On the other hand, in *La Femme change en bûche*, le Diable, an all powerful male spirit, helps people to take sweet revenge on those that have wronged them. Such is the case of the anonymous narrator who is able to make her husband pay

for doing her wrong. However, when she gets more powers and turns into a log floating on a river, she drowns the first person who tries to hold onto her--the log. In *Un Chant écarlate*, when Ousmane falls madly in love with Ouleymatou, his best friend Ali interprets it as Ouleymatou having overpowered him through witchcraft. To find a solution, he takes him to a witch doctor who is male. In *No Sweetness Here*, Mami Fanti reveres the Moslem nomad who claims to have healing powers while entertaining the fear he may just be another charlatan. In effect, the females portrayed as having preternatural powers are seen in a negative light whereas the men with the same powers are seen more positively. But the association, in the Enlightenment, of reason and rationality with notions of masculinity will turn out to be advantageous to women because in the spiritual realm, rituals provide space devoted to the forces of “unreason”, thereby valuing emotions and intuition which are feminine qualities over rationality that is associated with men. Armed with the strength of witchcraft then it is the feminist theoretical assertion that women can reclaim the power that patriarchal society so often denies them.

A paradigmatic shift is observable both in the authors and in their works. In terms of the authors, the shift is more in a time continuum whilst the characters in their works represent a generational shift. If we understand a generation to be the average span of time between the birth of parents and that of their offspring, then Bâ and Aidoo belong to the same generation while NDiaye will occupy the next step on the time continuum. However, the geographical space from which they write makes it impossible to talk about a complete generational shift because generation implies similar geographical, linguistic and cultural space which produce a particular worldview. Within the texts of the three authors, however, there are clearly demarcated generational shifts – Ramatoulaye and

daughters in *Une si longue lettre*, Mireille and parents in *Un chant écarlate*, Lucie's twin daughters, Lucie and her mother in *La sorcière* and Anowa and her mother in *Anowa*.

That is why what we see between Bâ/Aidoo and NDiaye would rather appropriately be termed a shift in time. The female characters in *Changes* (1993) are emancipated whereas the ones in *Anowa* (1970) and *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1970) are not.

In Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*, Ramatoulaye is forced to face her teenage daughter's problems. In the Senegalese school system, a pregnant girl is forced to leave school, and the consequences are enormous. Until it happened to her daughter, she had not thought of the numerous cases where teenage girl's potential success had been truncated because of unplanned pregnancies. By the same token, Ramatoulaye is forced to see her newly married daughter, Daba, as the product of a younger generation who define liberty in their own way. For that reason, she has reluctantly accepted the fact that it is normal for Daba's husband to help with the household chores. In *Un chant écarlate*, Mireille's mother finally realizes that her daughter, who belongs to a younger generation, sees life as full of opportunities and of freedom of choice, therefore her decision to marry a black is an act of the freedom to choose. Bâ however draws the reader's attention to the fact that racism and cultural intolerance is prevalent not only among the older and more conservative generation but also among the younger and liberal ones. In *Un chant écarlate*, Ousmane has proved to be no less racist than his mother. On the question of marriage, Ramatoulaye has finally realized that her friend Aïssatou's decision to divorce Mawdo was right even though in a subtle way, she wished Aïssatou had remarried since in her opinion, men and women are meant to complement each other.

The characters in Aidoo's plays and novel also portray a generational shift. In *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, Ato's mother, Esi, who was initially disappointed in her son's choice to marry a foreign woman without her consent, is eventually the one who reconciles the young couple when their cultural differences threatened their marriage. She did this by educating her son on the importance of negotiation in every relationship. Her novel, *Changes-A Love Story*, which she published twenty-three years later, completely eliminates the issue of cultural superiority and religious intolerance. Esi is a Christian who marries Ali, a Moslem and even accepts to be a second wife whereas in *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, Ato's African-American wife takes issue with her husband's family's beliefs and practices of animism. It is not lost on Aidoo to point out to the reader that Esi and Ali's relationship began to crumble shortly after their marriage because they both had selfish reasons for entering into that marriage.

Marie NDiaye's novels would appear to be non negotiatory because of the confrontational nature of her novels but even then, we see an emerging trend toward negotiation. In *En famille*, Fanny's aunts successfully forced Fanny's mother to divorce her black husband and eventually to cut all ties to her biracial daughter in her quest to wipe her slate clean in order to start a new life. In *La sorcière*, Lucie and her mother lose their marriages because of their husbands' hatred for their identities as witches. As for Lucie's teenage daughters, Maud and Lise, Marie NDiaye allows the reader to speculate what their fate will be when they become adults. It is probably NDiaye's hope that by the time the teenagers become adults, their identities as witches will no longer be a stigma because society would have arrived at a compromise to accept them for who they are. In *La femme changée en bûche*, and *Papa doit manger*, the women's radical and violent

reaction to their husbands' infidelity gives the reader the impression that NDiaye does not encourage negotiation. In *Hilda*, NDiaye explores the prevailing theme of double colonization of women in Third World cultures. She does this, however, from a geographical space far removed from the Third World. In the play, Franck uses his power to exploit his wife Hilda, only to be exploited in turn by Mme Lemarchand. The problem is that Mme Lemarchand exploits both Hilda and Franck indiscriminately, making Hilda feel doubly exploited.

From the preceding examples, it is easy to see how Bâ and Aidoo engage in explicit negotiation in their works. In an explicit negotiation, the parties do not necessarily begin by acting rationally or knowing beforehand their own or the others' preferences or values. However, they do communicate openly, making demands, stating preferences, asking for information, offering proposals, and making concessions. In so doing, they maneuver, use tactics and follow strategies that are observable to an onlooker. That is exactly what Aidoo and Ba are doing in their works when they raise issues and try to resolve them within the literary universe they have created. NDiaye's position as gleaned from her works point toward what may aptly be termed tacit negotiation. In tacit negotiations, the communication is carried out in a non-explicit form. That is, the messages are passed between or among negotiators indirectly in the form of hints, signs and obscure intimations. Negotiators bargain tacitly by either using words to spell out a message "between the lines" or rely entirely on signs, gestures and signals. That seems to be Ndiaye's approach to her constructed African identity.

Finally, it is important to stress that our theoretical framework as enunciated and explained in chapter one of this study, has made it possible to explore and approach our

understanding of African literature in general, and the writings of Aidoo, Bâ and NDiaye in particular as engaging in a continual search for cultural self-identification, not by opposition to western cultural paradigms or their patriarchal African counterparts, but by negotiation.

## END NOTES

### Chapter 1

1. This is a paraphrased version of Bokiba's statement. To see the full text, see Bokiba, André-Patient. *Écritures et identité dans la littérature Africaine*. Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan. 1998:15

### Chapter 2

1. Achebe illustrates this point brilliantly with the following true story:  
There was a Nigerian academic who went to study in Britain in the late 1920s and decided to become an Englishman. So he settled down in Britain after his studies, married, and raised a family and, by all accounts, was a perfectly happy man. Forty years later, as a result of an unhappy conjunction of events, he found himself appointed to an administrative position in a Nigerian university. To his first press interviewer, he boasted that he spoke no Nigerian language. He cannot recognize Nigerian food, let alone eat it. Given a chance, he will appoint a European over a Nigerian to teach at his university; his argument: a university, as the name implies, is a universal institution. Achebe, Chinua. *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. 1975:85
2. To stress the importance of how proverbs are created, Evans-Pritchard (1963:7) recorded a folk story on the theory of proverb meaning in Ghana. In the folktale, an Omanhene (paramount Chief) who had heard of how talented another Omanhene was in his use of proverbs, sent his linguist to him imploring the talented Omanhene to recite a hundred proverbs to the linguist who would bring the wise sayings back to him. Upon his arrival, the linguist went through the necessary protocol and waited to be permitted to speak. When he told the talented Omanhene of his mission, the Omanhene told him to close his eyes and after a while asked him to open them. The Omanhene then asked the linguist to tell him the dream he had had while his eyes were closed. In reply, the linguist told the talented Omanhene he could not have dreamt since he had been awake all the while his eye had been shut. The Omanhene then told him that since one needs to sleep in order to dream, one can only create a proverb when the right situation arises.  
For a detailed study of African proverbs, see Adéléké Adéèkó, *Proverbs, Textuality, and Nativism in African Literature*. (1998)
3. Figures taken from CIA World Fact Book
4. Banania is a French chocolate drink.

### Chapter 3

1. The figures, according to The CIA world Fact document, are: 94% Moslem, 5% are Christian, 1% indigenous religions.
2. Nowhere is this justification better expressed than in this dialogue in *Anowa*:  
Kofi Ako: Do you know how many days we have been walking?

Anowa: No, I have not been counting the days. All I know is that we have been on the highway for about two weeks now.

Kofi Ako: The ghost of my fathers!

Anowa: But think of it, if we are not too tired to go a little further, We shall be there tomorrow.

Kofi Ako: Anowa, you ought to have been born a man.

Anowa: Kofi.

Kofi: Hmm...hmm

Anowa: Why don't you marry another woman? At least she could Help us. I could find a good one too. Let me see. There is a girl in one of the villages we go to (...) (Anowa, 24)

3. Details of the caste system can be found in chapters two and three of the following document: Irvine, Judith, T. *Caste Communications in a Wolof Village* Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1974.

#### 4. Literacy in Sub-Saharan Africa

Country	Literate Male (%)	Literate Female (%)	Total population (%)
Benin	56.2	26.5	40.9
Burkina Faso	36.9	16.6	26.6
Côte d'Ivoire	57.9	43.6	50.9
Gambia	47.8	32.8	40.1
Ghana	82.7	67.1	74.8
Guinea	49.9	21.9	35.9
Guinea Bissau	58.1	27.4	42.4
Liberia	73.3	41.6	57.5
Mali	53.5	39.6	46.4
Niger	25.8	9.7	17.6
Nigeria	75.6	60.6	68
Senegal	50	30.7	40.2
Togo	75.4	46.9	60.9

Source: CIA World Factbook, May 2004.

#### Chapter 4

1. Steve is not a homeless child that needs a home but, by all account, the treatment he receives from his mother makes him feel worse than a homeless boy. Isabelle does not seem to care about the feelings of the visibly terrified boy who knows only his mother and immediate surroundings. He has not been given any prior indication that he will be leaving the comfort of his familiar surroundings to go to a boarding school. Steve learns this for the first time when he overhears Isabelle telling Lucie her plans concerning him and his reaction is to cling to and seek consolation from the very mother that is trying to get rid of him. This may seem exaggerated but Marie NDiaye is in a way telling society that being a woman does

- not make one a natural mother. Clearly, Isabelle does not seem to be a mother. At this point Steven could be happier with a surrogate mother who will treat him with more love and kindness.
2. A fuller discussion of the implication of calling her mother a witch will be made in chapter 5.

#### Chapter 5

1. Brian Levack notes in his introduction to *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic and demonology* (2001) that prior to the seventeenth century, there were witch-hunts and witch trials all over Europe. He contends, however, that prosecution of witches slowed down and gradually came to a stop, and, by 1782, the last officially sanctioned execution for witchcraft in Europe had taken place and in many jurisdictions, witchcraft as defined in the seventeenth century was no longer considered a crime. Even though legislation of witchcraft was officially ended, the belief in witchcraft continued to linger since it was embedded in the popular culture.
2. According to Peter Geschiere (1997), in colonial Cameroon and during the first decades after independence, state courts pursued cases related to witchcraft only when they had concrete proof of physical aggression. Healers who were once persecuted by the colonial system of justice for being threats to the social order, now appear in court as witnesses for the prosecution. The services of the healers have become so useful to the courts that in many instances, their testimony is enough to convict. Some Africans believe that by failing to prosecute witchcraft, colonial law inherited after independence, had created a safe haven for witches.
3. Simmons recounts in his study that on his first night in a village, he was awakened by the sound of a gunshot. The gun had been fired because there was an owl hooting from the rooftop of the chief's son's living quarters. This bird was believed to be a member of that village who had come to collect human life. On another occasion, a group of owls were heard hooting from a tree and two French hunters who were spending the night in the village were asked to shoot into the tree for the nocturnal birds to leave. Simmons had to explain to the puzzled hunters that the villagers believed that the owls were restless souls which had flown to the village to announce that a life had come due. (*Eyes of the Night: Witchcraft among a Senegalese People*, 1-3)
4. Meyer recorded in her findings that the Ewes of Ghana believe that witches are active at night. The evil spirit of the witch, they believe, flies as a visible light ball over the roofs while her body is resting at home.
5. Recent work has shown, according to Elspeth, that in many of the outlying areas of Europe in which the accusation rate was more equal for men and women, a more medieval pattern of belief persisted in which male sorcerers rather than female witches were thought to have access to the supernatural, distinctions with

important implications for a gender analysis of the hunts. In Finland, for example, the populace which had a strong folk shamanistic tradition associating men but not women with access to the supernatural, had to be taught that witches were women. These highly regarded male practitioners of magical arts were thought to conjure spirits through their superior knowledge and wisdom, not as pawns of the devil. The contrast between the respected male sorcerer who exerts power through his own knowledge and control and the feared and hated female witch perceived as harming others through her enslavement to the devil is suggestive of deeply held highly gendered belief systems. Ruth Martin (*Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice*, 1989) states that male witches were considered to concentrate on more profitable branches of witchcraft including treasure-hunting which is linked with Venice's economic tradition whereas women concentrated on malefaction and especially love magic. According to Ellen Goody (1970), the Gonjas of Northern Ghana make a clear distinction between male and female witches. Male witches work for the public good while female witches are feared, hated and punished for the propensity to use their powers for evil.

6. The 1968 WITCH Manifesto, witches were described as the first feminists and many feminist writers since have imagined witches in the same way.

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## VITA

Catherine Afua Kapi was born in Ghana where she had her basic education. She studied at Université Laval where obtained her bachelor's degree in translation in 1993 and her master's degree in linguistics in 1999. She came to Louisiana through the CODOFIL program while she was writing her master's thesis and taught French in the Pointe Coupé and East Baton Rouge Parishes from 1995 to 2004. In August 2004, she accepted a position as a Lecturer of French at Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia. She defended her doctoral dissertation on March 13, 2006. At the May 2006 commencement, the degree of Doctor of Philosophy will be awarded to Ms Kapi.