

**For my father and my mother,
For my sister and my brother,
For my husband,
For my daughter,
For my son.**

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**The Changing Faces of Marriage
in Selected Works
by
Anglophone and Francophone
African Women Writers**

by
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*A Thesis Submitted to the
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Abstract

This thesis explores representations of marriage in the works of Anglophone and Francophone African women writers. It presents a trajectory of such representations from the mid-1960s to the 1990s, and examines the various social, ideological and literary influences that have shaped these narratives of marriage.

The introduction contextualises the study within existing critical scholarship on African women's writing and representations of marriage. From the evaluation of this literature, it identifies and states the thesis's problem and assumptions. It explores various theoretical perspectives on gender, feminism and nationalism as frameworks for analysis in the thesis. The body of the thesis makes connections between different contexts and periods of women's writing and between the different works of individual women writers. The first chapter focuses on the early works of Ama Ata Aidoo and Mariama Bâ, two pioneer writers from Anglophone and Francophone Africa. It examines the subject of marriage in Aidoo's play, *Anowa* in the context of transition and change in nineteenth century Ghana. It explores Mariama Bâ's *So Long A Letter* as a narrative of decolonisation in which marriage plays a crucial part in delineating the betrayals of decolonisation. In the second chapter, the thesis's focus on the later works of these pioneer writers aims at exploring the impact of social change and new ideas on the way each writer handles the subject of marriage. The chapter draws out connections between the two texts and considers the significance of their respective Anglophone and Francophone contexts.

The third chapter expands the theme of marriage to cover specific political contexts. It focuses on women's representations of marriage in colonial worlds as in Tsitsi Dangaremba's *Nervous Conditions* and in the oppressive context of apartheid as in Khadi Fall's *Senteurs d'Hivernages*. In its fourth chapter, the thesis examines motherhood as an important dimension of the wider theme of marriage. It focuses on Buchi Emecheta's *Head Above Water* and *The Joys of Motherhood*, and explores the relationship between her autobiographical writing and her novel. And the thesis's last chapter tackles issues of displacement and gender as it examines marriage and migration in Emecheta's *Kehinde* and Calixthe Beyala's *Loukoum: The Little Prince of Belleville*. The thesis concludes by drawing out the different ways in which social and linguistic contexts, changing world situations and varying perspectives have produced

similar and contrasting insights and literary forms in the writing of African women between the 1960s and 1990s.

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Introduction

The thesis examines changing representations of marriage in the writing of Anglophone and Francophone women writers. Focusing on a selection of works from the 1960s to the 1990s, it explores selected texts in their different historical and linguistic contexts, showing how these impact on, and shape, the different representations and perspectives of the writers. Its particular focus on women's writing is based on the assumption that this body of writing has been instrumental in widening the ramifications of marriage as a theme; has challenged existing assumptions; has provoked new questions; and created new forms of representations in African literature.

0.1 Background

As a subject in African literature, marriage features prominently in imaginative texts and in literary criticism. In both contexts, historical conditions, ideas of the time, and the writer's or critic's perspectives play central roles in the shaping of themes and critical analysis. In the early years of modern African literature, a period dominated by the creative work of male writers, marriage featured as a subject of imaginative writing, but it was often contained within the larger themes of nation formation and the post-colonial condition, and was either presented as part of a general re-writing of community and the nation or incorporated into the critique of the political elite in independent Africa. For instance, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) gives a lot of space to the rituals and ceremonies of marriage, but such ceremonies function largely as ways of exploring cultural meaning and validating a way of life that had been considered barbarous and uncivilized. Within this larger space of men's public actions, marriage as a socio-cultural institution that shapes women's social,

economic and psychological conditions was until the contemporary writing of African women never given centre stage in the creative explorations of literature. In Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), written a few years after Achebe's novel, marriage is seen mostly in the context of the novel's main theme: the corruption of values in the new nation and the loss of political, moral and spiritual direction. Here the narratives of the two marriages in the novel are linked thematically to the corruption of the ideal national vision. The marriage of Koosam and Estella epitomises the greed and crass materialism into which the socialist ideals of the national struggle have sunk. The protagonist's marriage is presented in equally symbolic terms as a projection of the conflicting pulls, tensions and oppositions which the protagonist constantly struggles to overcome within a post-colonial world. The theme of marriage is thus determined in a one-dimensional way, and constrained by the pressing national ideologies to which it is continually subordinated. We see the subject of marriage, then, in the restricted context of the novelist's particular ideological stand, whereas marriage is a wide and complex socio-cultural institution that has several implications for gender, religion, class and women's quest for space and agency.

In the works of Ousmane Sembène, particularly *Tribal Scars* (1974), *Xala* (1973) and *God's Bits of Woods* (1970) we are presented with a much closer and complex insight into the varied social, cultural and religious implications of marriage, especially within the transition from pre-colonial to colonial and post-colonial times. Sembène's focus on polygamy as inextricably linked with religion, traditional gender values and politics have done a lot to open up the theme of marriage. Indeed he particularly addresses women's social condition by linking marriage, and especially the practice of polygamy, to his political agenda, which is the denunciation of any sort

of exploitation, whether by the French ruling class in *God's Bits of Wood*, or the new African elite in *Xala*. His linking of nation building in Senegal to the change in the condition of women and his drive for a fairer society influence his representation of marriage. For instance, he recognises the traditional and social functions of polygamy, but sees its contemporary manifestation in a modern context as a limitation of women's capacity for agency and full participation in the construction of modern society. All Sembène's works—the short stories and the novels—reveal sensitivity to women's plight in polygamy and to their daily struggles to re-shape its conditions in a changing world. In *Xala* and *God's Bits of Wood* this social phenomenon is woven into Sembène's political theme and made part of his perspective on the nation. In *Xala*, the condition of polygamy in a modern environment is part of Sembène's satire on the newly empowered African male elite, even though this satire is itself only part of the bigger critique of the developing new capitalist system. In *God's Bits of Wood*, Sembène's political agenda is clearly to demonstrate how a major crisis in society can lead to a change in established systems and codes of behaviour and relationships. The strike of the railway workers on the Dakar-Niger railway presents a destabilizing force within which Sembène can re-examine relations between the Africans and the French, between coloniser and colonised, and between men and women.

During the strike women are allowed to take part in discussions, to the great surprise of men (Sembène; 1970:92), and women are shown as able to do things only men are expected to do in the society. The risk of children and adults dying because of the strike allows Sembène to show women doing daring things that they would never have done in other circumstances. Although it seems Sembène's main goal is to dramatise the strike as a struggle between different classes, he also presents women

characters who are strong and forceful, and who can function both in the domestic and public arena.

Yet, in spite of Sembène's sympathetic focus on women, the thrust of the narrative is in most cases on the larger political issues. In *Xala*, the source of the curse that exposes and shames El Hadj Abdou Kader Beye is not the women but the beggar, and the novel's main issue is therefore centred more on the new exploitation of the poor than on the plight of women in the institution of polygamy. In *God's Bits of Wood* the story is not the story of the women but the bigger national struggle against colonialism and colonial exploitation. The economic and social upheaval caused by the political struggle destabilises the established roles and relationships of men and women. But marriage as an institution has more implications for women than these economic and social openings: it has implications for women in terms of their relations with their bodies, and in terms of the demands of motherhood and childbearing. More than this, there are several aspects of marriage that may be overlooked when the theme is subordinated to larger national issues. There is, for instance, the question of women's legitimate need to pursue education and careers, the agonies they suffer in having co-wives, the meaning they derive from their sexuality, and their need to be part of decision-making in both domestic and public arenas. Thus my claim in this thesis is that it is not until the emergence of women's imaginative representations that we get a more varied and substantial focus on the cultural, social and psychological ramifications of marriage, particularly as it affects women's experiences and quests. In opening up these areas of women's conditions and psychology in marriage, my thesis intends to present a wider canvas for exploring women's focus on the theme of marriage in all its different facets.

The critical work already done on women's writing has explored some of these wider issues and in reviewing the existing literature on this writing; I hope to situate the problem of my thesis in relation to this scholarship. In its thematic approach, my thesis offers a study of the theme of marriage from the Francophone, as well as the Anglophone, perspective. There are not many critics who have investigated the changes in the writing about marriage by both Francophone and Anglophone women writers, although there are some studies with areas of interest similar to mine. Sonia Lee's PhD dissertation *L'image de la femme dans le roman Francophone* (1974) (*The Woman's Image in the Francophone Novel in West Africa*), and Kembe Milolo's PhD thesis *L'image de la femme chez les romancières de l'Afrique noire Francophone* (1986) (*The Woman's Image by Female Novelists from Black Francophone Africa*), concentrate their research only on Francophone women. Anne Lippert's doctoral dissertation, *The Changing Role of Women as Viewed in the Literature of English Speaking and French Speaking West Africa* (1972), brings together Francophone and Anglophone perspectives in African literature, but, like Sonia Lee and Kembe Milolo, does not focus on marriage.

Until the 1980s, criticism of African women's writing appeared only in book reviews, conference papers, scattered articles in journals, and chapters in books. *African Literature Today*, edited by Eldred Jones, Eustache Palmer and Marjorie Jones, has been consistent in publishing articles on women's writing and, in 1987, a whole issue was devoted to it. Lloyd Brown's *Women Writers in Black Africa* was published in 1981, and is still regarded as a landmark publication in the field, even though the author's views on Flora Nwapa and other writers have been widely criticised. *Okike*, edited by Chinua Achebe, featured African women both as critics and writers, and they are also included in Hans Zell's *A New Reader's Guide to*

African Literature (1983). Oladele Taiwo's *Female Novelists of Modern Africa* was published in 1984: although it was one of the first studies of African women writers, it has attracted a lot of controversy because of the author's patronising attitude towards the writers he discusses. His criticism is condescending in tone, and the textual analysis is sketchy and superficial. In a lecture given in Zimbabwe in 1985, Ama Ata Aidoo commented on this study as follows:

In 1984, Oladele Taiwo published *Female Novelists of Modern Africa*, a book whose publishers burbled it [sic] 'as an important study' and for which the author himself claimed in the preface that it is a 'celebration' of the literary activities of female novelists in modern Africa. For any writing woman, reading that 'important study' should be a fairly sobering experience. [...] He virtually treats those African women writers whose novels he discusses (and short stories when the spirit moves him) as though they were his co-wives to whom he dishes out his whimsical favours. He constantly remarks on their intelligence or storytelling capabilities in the best 'dancing dog' tradition or as if they were a bunch of precocious six year olds who had demonstrated some special abilities to the head-teacher. (Aidoo, 1985)

Aidoo's judgement provides sufficient comment on this work. In 1986, Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves published the edited volume, *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*. This is a groundbreaking work, and a valuable contribution to the field. It marks a shift in emphasis towards African women's perceptions of themselves, advocating an African, female-centred, critical approach. Since then, there has been a steady growth of critical works on African women's writing that have continued to move away from male-centred analyses of women's texts. Critics are now applying the feminist, cultural and historical insights required to grasp the implications of this literature.

In 1990, Adeola James published *In their Own Voices*, an important reference work which gave fifteen African women writers the opportunity to discuss literature,

Western and male criticism, the feminist movement, and their own creativity. This was followed, in 1994, by Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie's *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformation*, which combines perspectives on African literature and gender politics as well as the author's materialist analysis of female inequality. The study advocates social activism for women. Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi's 1997 work, *Gender in African Women's Writing Identity, Sexuality and Difference*, analyses African women's writing within a post-colonial context. In the same year, Mary E. Modupe Kolawole published *Womanism and African Consciousness*, which argues that African women are not voiceless, but rather that their voices can be heard in particular places, for example in oral genres. Kolawole goes on to examine African women's self-definition. Obioma Nnaemeka's edited collection, *The politics of (M)O-thering: Womanhood, Identity and Resistance in African Literature*, which also appeared in 1997, sheds further light on the concepts of motherhood and womanhood in African female writing. Looking at African women writers from a specific geographical location, Susan Stringer's *The Senegalese Novel by Women: Through their Own Eyes* (1996) highlights the concerns of Senegalese women writers regarding the status of women in their society.

As for detailed studies of individual African women writers, the first of these is Vincent Odamtten's *The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo: Polylectics and Reading against Neo-Colonialism*, published in 1994. Uzoamaka Azodo and Gary Wilentz's 1999 study of Ama Ata Aidoo, published as part of the Africa World Press's *Emerging Perspectives* series, is an important contribution to the debate about African women. Before Aidoo, Maria Umeh edited (in 1996), in the same series, *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*. In 2002, Ann Elizabeth Willey and Jeanette Treiber edited *Emerging Perspectives On Tsitsi Dangarembga: Negotiating the Postcolonial*,

and finally, Uzoamaka Azodo, alone this time, edited and published *Emerging Perspectives on Mariama Bâ Post-colonialism, Feminism, and Postmodernism* in 2003; a very extensive work on Bâ. Otherwise, as far as Khadi Fall is concerned, only articles about specific aspects of her work have been published from time to time.

In the field of Francophone women's writing, *les Editions CLEF* published two consecutive issues of *Notre Librairie* in 1975, which focused entirely on women. Women's issues were subsequently referred to, and then, nineteen years later, in 1994, two more issues were devoted to women, this time with many more contributions from women writers. In 1989, Madeleine Borgamano published *Voix et visages de la femme dans les livres écrits par des femmes en Afrique Francophone (Voices and Faces of Women through the Writings of Francophone African Women)*, a catalogue of Francophone African women writers with a brief summary and analysis of their writings. Irène Assiba d'Almeida's *Francophone African Women Writers: Destroying the Emptiness of Silence* (1994) emphasises the silence of women in Francophone literature as well as analysing novels and autobiographies by little-known female writers. The book provides an account of the evolution of Francophone female writing, from Nafissatou Diallo's autobiographical *De Tilène au Plateau. Une Enfance Dakaroise* (1975), translated as *A Dakar Childhood* (1982), to Veronique Tadjó's *A Vol d'Oiseau* (1986), translated as *As the Crow Flies* (2001). Odile Cazenave's 1996 study, *Femmes Rebelles: Naissance d'un Nouveau Roman au Féminin (Rebellious Women: the New Generation of Female African Novelists)* notes the emergence of a new type of female character in Francophone female writing with new forceful, 'rebellious' characters portrayed for example, by Calixthe Beyala. In 2000, Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana published *Littérature Féminine Francophone d'Afrique Noire Suivi d'un Dictionnaire des Romancières*, in which she analyses

Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*, Ken Bugul's *Le Baobab Fou*, as well as providing some thematic analysis of Aminata Sow Fall's work, and of Islam and Animism in the novels of Nafissatou Niang. A list of Francophone women writers is also given, with a brief biography for each, and a summary of their texts. The same year, Nicki Hitchcott's *Women Writers in Francophone Africa* was published. It is a valuable contribution to the field, with specific chapters about leading writers like Mariama Bâ, Aminata Sow Fall, Werewere Liking, and Calixthe Beyala.

On the subject of marriage, a lot of anthropological work has been done, such as Lucy Mair's *African Marriage and Social Change* (1969), a detailed study of marriage customs in West Africa. However, there is very little on the depiction of marriage in African literature. Isidore Okpewho in his article, 'Understanding African Marriage: Towards a Convergence of Literature and Sociology' (1987) clarifies the distinction between a sociological and anthropological perspective of an African marriage and a literary view of the topic. As he states:

Scholarly studies of society may best be compared to aerial photographs which provide only broad outlines: they may locate a church within the general layout of a town, but they cannot show us what the church is really like. A work of literature, on the other hand, presents something like a personal or family portrait, etched sharply, in which we see individuals and situations for what they really are. (Okpewho, 1987: 337)

After making this clear separation between sociological treatises on marriage and literary ones, Okpewho continues by reviewing literary texts that focus on marriage in various different forms. He uses African literature by male authors such as J.P. Clark's *Song of a Goat* (1964), Ngugi Wa Thiongo's short story "Wedding at the Cross" (1975: 97-112) and Okot P. Bitek's *Song of Lawino* (1984). He also includes works by a female African writer, Ama Ata Aidoo; *Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965) and *Anowa*

(1970). Okpewho discusses the Afro-American and the African marriage represented in the former, and the importance of choice within marriage in both works. I have chosen to study *Anowa* in depth at the beginning of my thesis, as this echoes how oral literature is pivotal in early African written literature. Aidoo was inspired to write *Anowa* by a Ghanaian folktale, and thus I start with the African oral context. Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang's article "Gender-Role Perceptions in the Akan Folktale" (1999) is an analysis of a number of folktales, and in it she delineates the social expectations with regard to the relations between men and women in these stories. She shows the moral standards that these folktales teach about marriage and relationships between men and women. She demonstrates that in these contexts nothing less than marriage is acceptable. The principles taught are that women accept their parent's choice of husbands and, as good wives, cook, look after the family, and submit to their husband at all times. My work takes the analysis of folktales forward by showing how contemporary African women writers re-write and transform these folktales to explore their modern relation to marriage.

In exploring the changing faces of marriage in women's writing, I hope to show the complexities of marriage for women and all the unsuspected ramifications of marriage that affect women's lives and the community at large. For example, I investigate the cultural and social positions from which they write, and how these influence their choice and treatment of the subject of marriage. I analyse the treatment of the theme over three decades, dating from the 1960s to the 1990s, raising questions that have helped to bring out various thematic concerns and narrative strategies of exploration. Some of these questions are as follows: to what extent, and in what ways, does the thematic focus on marriage reveal the incompleteness or inadequacies of discourses on tradition, culture and nationhood? How have women writers focused

simultaneously on the domestic and political spheres of experience? To what extent does an awareness of gender and sexuality shape representations of marriage in women's writing? How do women's personal and class situations colour their understanding of gender, and in what ways do such personal situations determine the themes and the forms of their writing? In these later questions on forms of representation, my concern is with new and different strategies of narration that the focus on marriage has enabled in the writing of African women. The selection of female writers in my study focuses on women's subjective experiences of marriage and brings to the fore the hidden ramifications that affect women's lives. Moreover, through my selection of texts spanning three decades, my aim is also to show that the topic of marriage is an evolving one: hence the notion of change in my topic.

Another aspect of my thesis comes from my selection of writers: I have chosen to study Anglophone and Francophone women writers. This choice allows me to examine writing from different linguistic and historical backgrounds, and to demonstrate how different colonial experiences impact on the writers' thematization of marriage. Though my focus is only on Francophone and Anglophone texts, the study is not too restrictive, since English and French are more widely used than Spanish and Portuguese in Africa (and in any case it seems that there are not many African women writers writing in Portuguese or Spanish at the moment).

In my selection, I have picked the most widely read women writers with English or French backgrounds, and my aim here is that even these widely read women authors have not yet had the critical focus they deserve. Writers like Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta and Tsitsi Dangaremba are widely known for their works. Similarly, Mariama Bâ and Calixthe Beyala are well known in the Francophone world. Nevertheless, I have added Khadi Fall, who has interesting works to her name,

although she is not so well known internationally. My hope with this range of women writing on the theme of marriage is to deal with multiple representations of the subject, showing it in various ways: sometimes their ideas coincide, and at other times they have divergent views, but these all come from their background in the rich, diverse societies of Africa. This means sharing certain common traits like their experience of oral traditions.

In this connection, the oral literature of most African communities presents various examples of women's narratives and their critical, satirical and often ambiguous representations of marriage. However, the oral narratives and their possibilities differ from those of the written text. The oral medium can at times be limiting, because it may not always provide an adequate platform for free uncensored expressions of women's discontentment. Contemporary women writers have therefore found wider imaginative ways within the written medium, working with it and infusing it with the energies of the spoken arts.

Dealing with Anglophone as well as Francophone writers brings up the issue of translation. First, each of these writers has their own vernacular language. There is probably some translation of ideas and concepts as well as words from the vernacular to the European language, and there may be some loss of meaning as with any translation. At another level, there is also translation from one European language to the other with its impact on the readers as well as the writers themselves. Translation of Mariama Bâ and Calixthe Beyala's texts into English allows more people to read their works and access their ideas and their creative responses to the issue of marriage. It also creates a wider network of African women writers who can be aware of each other's publications and their treatment of the subject, and creates a sharing and a dialogue, which broadens the debate.

At yet another level, the terms Anglophone and Francophone, with all their colonial implications, are important considerations in the thesis. For these writers being Anglophone or Francophone does not simply mean writing in English or French. It means carrying the historical baggage of British and French colonization, and the influence and implications that this has for their writing. Indeed, the impact of British and French colonization on their subjects is still evident in the writings of these women. British 'indirect rule' produced educated people who still valued their customs, whereas the French policy of 'assimilation' produced educated people who were taught to become black French people.¹ From the colonizers' point of view, both systems were satisfactory.

Although all African women writers address the issue of female visibility in African literature, there are significant variations in their individual views of the institution of marriage. While they are all, in some way, disrupting and deconstructing conventional images of women, they are also constructing new alternatives, and comparing these to each other. I choose to discuss the work of both Anglophone and Francophone women writers, and aim to test the questions that I have identified across this varied body of work, linguistically, culturally and historically.

One other assumption that my thesis works with is that the representation of marriage in literature is a continually shifting discourse within which writers not only engage with male writing, but also with other female writers and their own early work. My thesis therefore focuses on the circumstances that gave rise to variations

¹ Clara Tsabedze clearly states the difference between British and French rules: 'The British tended to follow a policy of indirect rule, that is, a system that adopted local forms of government and institutions, and channelled them to develop in a constitutional manner under the control of British officers. Colonial government policy was explained and enforced through native authority based on traditional chiefs.

The French, on the other hand, adopted a policy of direct rule and cultural assimilation of the people they colonized. The goal was the creation of an elite class of black Frenchmen in French territories. Through French education, these colonial subjects would be raised to nearly the same cultural level as the French people. These assimilated people would then act as intermediaries between the French and the African masses, and thereby help to reinforce French domination'. (1994: 7)

and changes in the themes and the corresponding forms of writing that such changes generate. How, for instance, do differences between generations, and the influence of global and other external ideas impact on women writers at different phases of their writing? Why is marriage depicted in a particular way in Mariama Bâ's *So Long A Letter* (1981), and then differently in the same writer's *Scarlet Song* (1986)? Why does Ama Ata Aidoo in *Changes* (1991) perceive marriage differently from, say, Buchi Emecheta in *Kehinde* (1994)? What do these women writers bring into the foreground through these changing perspectives? I hope to reveal how changing ideas about gender influence the writing about marriage.

In addition to raising these questions, my thesis also makes assumptions about the impact of gender on women's writing. A community's understanding of gender affects its social institutions and creative writing. The cultural assumptions, as well as the power relations that underlie them, influence the subject of marriage. The patriarchal structures of the family and society in most African communities clearly mirror this power relation between male and female. Thus, marriage and the family structure also reflect these power relations. The institution of marriage is ultimately linked to the family, society, and the politics of the nation, since all these structures exist in an all-encompassing patriarchal system. In dealing with the theme of marriage, writers are thus well placed to explore various aspects of social relationships, and the power politics that shape them. Marriage as a theme is therefore the gateway to exploring a society's culture, traditions and history, and how these are shaped by the values of gender.

0.2 Theoretical framework

In order to answer the questions I raised about the representations of marriage in African female writings, I will use, as theoretical foundations to build my arguments, the notion of gender and its impact on social institutions, African feminism, and nationalism and nation building.

First, gender is an important category that frames my analysis and interpretation of the selected texts. In this study, the term 'gender' refers to the cultural and social assumptions that shape men's and women's roles and relationships. Gender assumptions are generally determined by the individual's biological sex, which automatically creates two social groups: men and women. In most societies, these groups are exclusive, in that what is feminine cannot be masculine, and what is masculine cannot be feminine. These roles are determined by particular cultures and their ideas about the world. The reality and the expectations usually associated with women are those associated with femininity: being weak, powerless, and preferably beautiful. Men, on the other hand, are expected to be strong and powerful. These ideas permeate all aspects of society and its institutions, including the institution of marriage.

As well as these binary divisions of male/female and masculine/feminine, there are more complex notions of gender, which govern relationships between men and women. As Joan W. Scott explains in her article *Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis*:

Gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power. [...] It might be better to say, gender is a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated.

(Scott 1986: 1067/1069).

The perception of gender, as such, is useful when analysing the power relations in institutions like marriage. The use of gender as an analytical tool reveals how social institutions like marriage determine the power between men and women along gender lines, and thus how gender norms can be challenged through the re-allocation of economic and political power within a community. Another assumption that I have made in this regard is that a perspective on gender can help me to examine the nature of a woman writer's interrogations of a community's gender values.

I also explore my selection of texts in the light of the theoretical discourse known as African feminism. Feminism is fundamentally a political position as well as a critical and theoretical practice that focuses on women's issues, and is 'committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism' (Moi 1997:104). Beyond a concern for gender and the exposure of the norms that determine women's place in society, a feminist position works to unravel the power relations that sanction male dominance and keep women perpetually subordinate. The politics of feminism vary within different feminist camps, and are related to how men and women are constituted in relation to each other in different societies. As such, the fundamental political position of feminism may be interpreted in different ways in different social contexts. For instance, the Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo expands the concept of feminism to include not just a focus on women's issues, but also a concern with larger issues of African agency:

When people ask me rather bluntly every now and then whether I am a feminist, I not only answer yes, but I go on to insist that every woman and every man should be a feminist—especially if they believe that Africans should take charge of our land, its wealth, our lives and the burden of our own development. Because it is not possible to advocate independence for our continent without also believing that African women must have the best that

the environment can offer. For some of us, this is the crucial element of our feminism. (Aidoo, quoted in Horne 1999: 305)

Thus for Aidoo, no real independence and no real development and progress is possible in Africa until African women are given their due place in society and allowed to be full participants in the development of their societies. Similarly, many other African feminists take up the debate and bring it within the African context, problematising specific African issues. As a result, African feminists re-define the term 'woman' to make it valid in an African context. Such re-definitions and re-conceptualisation of feminist concepts is called for by African critics, and is reflected in the way African women writers deal with marriage in their writings. Indeed, African feminists, because of the universal reading Western feminists make of the term 'woman', often reject Western feminism, arguing that in the homogenization of this term, many African issues get lost in the debate. As Susheila Nasta writes:

Whilst, for instance, there are obviously parallels between the experiences of women's oppression in previously colonised territories and women's oppression worldwide, there is a danger even in Western feminist literary circles (which often have failed to give full critical attention to literary works by black women writers) of being seduced by easy notions of a 'universal feminism'. (1991: xv)

African theorists may get a sense that their problems are not being addressed, and sometimes that they are dealing with topics that are not relevant to the dual concerns of national agency and women's empowerment that underlie their feminist projects. For instance, as Ogundipe-Leslie argues;

The enemy is the total structure, which is a jumble of neo-colonial and feudalistic, even slave-holding, structures and social attitudes. As women's liberation is but an aspect of the need to liberate the total society from

dehumanisation and the loss of fundamental human rights, it is the social system that must change. (Ogundipe, quoted in Susan Arndt 2003: 73-74)

The issue of motherhood has also been a contentious one in feminist debates. Feminists like Jeffner Allen see motherhood as a patriarchal institution, which is detrimental to women:

Motherhood is dangerous to women because it continues the structure within which females must be women and mothers and, conversely, because it denies to females the creation of a subjectivity and world that is open and free.

(Allen 1984: 315)

But Obioma Nnaemeka counters Allen's argument when she asserts that:

African feminism's valorization of motherhood and respect for maternal politics should not be pitted against the demotion of motherhood / maternal politics by radical feminism in the West; rather these traits should be investigated in the context of their place and importance in the African environment. (Nnaemeka 1998: 9)

Indeed, in several other areas of African women's location in society, African scholars have positioned feminist debates in different ways. For instance, Philomena Steady has claimed that the feminist spirit is indigenous to Africa:

True feminism is an abnegation of male protection and a determination to be resourceful and self-reliant. The majority of the black women in Africa and in the Diaspora have developed these characteristics, though not always by choice [...] the black woman is [...] the original feminist.

(Steady 1981: 35-36)

In a similar vein, Helen Chukwuma identifies a feminist self-assertive spirit in the oral poetry of semi-lettered African women, which, as she argues, both celebrates and asserts women's superiority, particularly in exclusive female domains like motherhood:

Women come together at the birth of a baby to celebrate their femininity and the superiority of motherhood. This is an area of female exclusiveness where they are their own mistresses. (Chukwuma 1989: xvii)

While aware of the general and fundamental position of feminism, my analysis and interpretation of the texts has been informed by these specific perspectives of African scholars. Nationalism and the concept of nation building constitute another important aspect of my study. The texts I focus on date from the 1960s, when newly independent African states were involved in the process of nation building. Many scholars, like Kumari Jayawardena (1986), Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (1989) and Deniz Kandiyoti (1997), have written about these concepts, and have shown that gender permeates the idea of the nation. Gender identities, during the period of struggle against colonial power and the nation building process that followed, changed dramatically according to the political actors of the moment. As Jayawardena points out:

In their search for a national identity, the emergent bourgeoisies also harked back to national culture: the new woman could not be a total negation of traditional culture. Although certain obviously unjust practices should be abolished, and women involved in activities outside the home, they still had to act as the guardians of national culture, indigenous religion and family traditions—in other words, to be both ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’.

(Jayawardena 1986: 14)

This is an accurate description of the plight of women during these periods. This Janus-faced quality of being both traditional and modern is reflected in the institution of marriage. Clearly, such concepts raise questions that need to be addressed in this study: does the ‘nation’ mean the same for men as for women? Does the notion of equal citizenship in the nation include the private, domestic sphere within marriage, or is this ‘equality’ confined only to the public domain?

In focusing on the most crucial social institution in their communities from the perspectives of female protagonists, African women writers are not only exploring it subjectively, but are also scrutinising the fundamental values that regulate gender. Theoretical perspectives on gender in both feminist and nationalist discourses are thus highly relevant to my concerns. Writing at a time of national awakening and the creation of new nations, these women are conscious not only of their marginalisation and oppression within the patriarchal communities they portray, but also of the entire continent's wider oppression under colonial rule.

As I am working on texts written in both French and English, issues about translation also provide insights into the topic. The linguistic divide left by colonisation and the colonial heritage in the African societies that came into involuntary contact with the West, is far-reaching. The fact that African women writers are influenced by oral literature but write in European languages leads us to view their work as a double translation. My thesis attempts to unravel the implications of this intersection. It also attempts to examine the impact of translating African women's texts from French to English. Mariama Bâ's and Calixthe Beyala's novels are frequently read in English translation in Anglophone Africa, and in my analysis in the thesis I have been aware of the problems and issues in translating from one text to another: I have resolved these issues by reading both English and French versions of the different texts.

In order to examine the connection between marriage, motherhood, sexuality, nationhood and the African woman's identity in African female writing, I have structured my thesis to demonstrate both this interaction, and the gradual shifts and evolution in the writing about the theme of marriage. This thesis assumes that because gender as a social construct is never stable, the notions and assumptions that surround

it are mediated by social and economic change. Women's writing across decades and generations reveals the resulting changes in the perception and interpretation of gender roles and relations.

In focusing on pioneer women writers' discourses on marriage, politics and nationalism in Chapter One, my aim is to locate the writing in the politics of the time, and determine how the politics of nationalism shapes these early writers' understanding and interpretation of marriage. I have chosen to begin with Aidoo from Ghana, and Bâ from Senegal, because they have both become representative of women's writing, both in Africa and abroad, and are recognised pioneers in this field.

I have selected Aidoo's second play, *Anowa* (1965), to begin my study, because the literary journey of *Anowa* from a popular narrative to a play, with Anowa as the main character, sets the stage for the discussion of the problems facing African women and their writing. Anowa's marriage represents the crystallisation of the gender dynamic in African society. *Anowa* is therefore at the forefront of African women's literature. Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* occupies a similar position in Francophone African women's writing.

Chapter Two discusses the beginnings of a change in the representation of marriage. I illustrate this change by comparing the texts studied in Chapter One to later works by the same authors: Aidoo's *Changes* (1991), and Bâ's *Un chant écarlate* (1981). Through this comparison, I show that social change permeates all aspects of life, and particularly the institution of marriage.

Chapter Three analyses new developments in writing about marriage. In Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and Fall's *Senteurs d'hivernage* (1992), the depiction of marriage is taken to a new dimension. The chapter shows how

Dangarembga and Fall represent the tensions and anxieties created in marriage in an apartheid, colonial, and post-colonial context.

Chapter Four explores the issue of motherhood in relation to marriage. Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1980), and *Head Above Water* (1986), allow a profound examination of marriage and motherhood in fiction, as well as in reality. I scrutinise how the personal experience of the writer can shape her representation of marriage and motherhood. The final chapter looks at the issue of marriage, but in the new context of migration, in black communities in France and England. Emerging new concepts of marriage, motherhood and gender relations are discussed and contrasted in Calixthe Beyala's *Loukoum: The Little Prince of Belleville* (1995), and Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* (1994). The conclusion sums up the course of the representation of marriage in works by Francophone and Anglophone West African women writers.

Marriage, Politics and Nationalism: Pioneer Women Writers And New Narratives of Marriage

1.1 Writing as a New Discursive Space:

The Early Novels of Ama Ata Aidoo and Mariama Bâ

For women in Africa today, the process of writing provides a new medium and space for creative expression. Writing, and the literacy that enables it, creates a completely different mindset. The encounter with Western civilisation and the subsequent spread of literacy has had a profound impact on both women's lives and perspectives, providing a new medium for sifting, conceptualising and adding further dimensions to their experiences.

Although, as most critics have pointed out, women did function creatively within the oral tradition, the leeway available to them for individual engagement with their world was always limited. Women critics like Mary E. Modupe Kolawole, argue that women's songs, court poetry, and other creative forms were manifestations of collective creativity:

A keen appraisal of selected female genres of African orature reveals the wealth of original creativity. From Hausa Bori songs to women's court poetry, this creative impulse is visible. These oral genres are manifestations of collective women's voices, dynamic group consciousness and a tool of eliciting positive influence on the society. They are not passive texts. From Akan dirges to Nzema satirical songs, the women are not simply parroting communal texts. Among the Yorubas, dirges, wedding chants, rara, satirical songs, and story telling are areas in which women excel in creativity, adaptation and manipulation of existing or new texts into contemporaneous situations. (Kolawole 1997: 76)

Although, as Kolawole points out, women's voices, like all oral narratives, are multiple and various, these texts, whether court poetry, wedding or satirical songs or tales, belong to the collective oral tradition. The different genres and texts are passed down from one generation to the next in certain conditions, and according to precise sets of norms. With the process of transmission relying as it does on human memory, a high degree of ritualisation is involved. As Emmanuel Obiechina puts it in his discussion of the oral literary tradition in West Africa:

The oral tradition relies largely on human memory for the preservation and transmission of the cultural repertoire, and so develops elaborate mechanisms for helping the human memory. These include a high degree of ritualization of belief, actions and concepts, of symbolization as a means of concretizing experience, and of routinization of everyday actions, fostered no doubt by the homogeneous nature of beliefs, sentiments and attitudes. (Obiechina 1975: 33)

Thus, while women can produce texts within this tradition, there is a limit to their creativity in this context. They can manipulate existing texts and adapt them to particular circumstances, but all their initiatives are circumscribed by a precise set of norms. For example, in an oral narrative tale, the choice of words is left to the imagination of the storyteller, and it is through this choice and her depiction of the characters, that the performance is dramatised and made highly entertaining.

However, although all the participants in these storytelling sessions are aware of the limits of any creative initiative, any alteration is, in fact, welcomed provided it sticks to the initial plot or 'spirit' of the narrative. For instance, in the cautionary tale of the girl lured by the attractions of the handsome stranger, the pedagogical thrust of the narrative demands that the girl be harmed by the handsome stranger and forced to learn her lesson however much the other plot details change from generation to generation. The basic lesson of the tale thus clearly emphasises the importance of

obeying social prescriptions and trusting the familiar and the known. Women narrators may change the lyrics of songs and incorporate words that are critical of events in their communities, but they cannot alter, modify or manipulate the fundamental ethos underlying these cautionary tales. There is thus no real opportunity for radical and individual revaluations within these oral narratives.

Writing, on the other hand, presents a new and open medium that offers African women writers a huge opportunity to expand and explore their inner selves and the world around them. Because the shift from collective to individual creation significantly relaxes the constraints of social censorship, women artists operating in the written medium have had the freedom to re-imagine society in accordance with their ideals and aspirations. The Zimbabwean novelist Yvonne Vera explains these possibilities brilliantly in the introduction to her edited volume of contemporary short stories by women, *Opening Spaces*:

If speaking is still difficult to negotiate, then writing has created a free space for most women—much freer than speech. There is less interruption, less immediate and shocked reaction. The written text is granted its intimacy, its privacy, its creation of a world, its proposals, its individual characters, its suspension of disbelief. It surprises in the best carnival way, reducing distances, accepting the least official stance. The book is bound, circulated, read. It retains its autonomy much more than a woman is allowed in the oral situation. Writing offers a moment of intervention. (Vera 1999: 3)

As Vera argues here, the margin of individual, uncensored creativity and expression is far greater in the written medium than in the oral. African women writers have exploited the benefits of both oral and written forms not only to recreate their lives, but also to challenge common social and gender assumptions and forge new visions of their contemporary situations. Thus, while they have generally ac-

knowledgeed their indebtedness to inherited oral forms, narratives and themes², they have continued to use the written medium³ to transform these narratives and their

² These writers generally acknowledge their indebtedness to oral literature, the songs, proverbs, riddles and narratives of which pervade people's daily lives. In this respect, Buchi Emecheta recalls: "It was at home that I came across the real story tellers...the story teller...was always one's mother. My Big Mother was my aunt. [...] We would sit for hours at her feet mesmerized by her trance like voice..." (Cited in Arndt 1998: 8) Ifeoma Okoye also remembers tales from her childhood: "I grew up with tales my mother and other relatives told me. You could just stop them and ask them to narrate a story. Right from birth on I started listening to folktales." (*ibid.*: 98)

Similarly, Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo recalls:

When I was growing up, I was struck by the large corpus of stories by women in my locality for the purpose of entertaining and educating our young people. Wherever I found myself—whether at home or visiting my maternal and paternal grandparents and their kinsmen—I was always a participant in and an avid listener to exciting tales narrated and performed by gifted women story-tellers, young and old. (98)

From these testimonies, we can see that oral literature is ever-present in the lives of African women writers. The coexistence of the oral and written provides them with several technical advantages and strategies for representation.

The influence of orality in the case of Francophone African women writers has not been as well documented as it has with Anglophone writers. However, Aminata Sow Fall, in an interview with Peter Hawkins, has this to say on the question:

- You said you discovered African literature in French relatively late in your studies. But was there any influence from folk-tales or from oral literature? Are you aware of any?
- Yes, I am quite aware of this. I think you can't carry in yourself a whole heritage...without revealing it. I am quite aware that my novels are novels, but novels which carry with them a heritage of tradition, from folk-tales, from stories, from legends. (Hawkins: 423)

³ They also appreciate their Western education and all the possibilities offered to them as a result. For many Anglophone women writers, reading is vital. Ifeoma Okoye describes how reading influenced her writing as follows:

At an early age I became introduced to books because of my father. He was not rich, but interested in books. So, he invested all his money in books. He was a sort of newspaper agent and I helped him. Our village was remote, and he was sending newspapers to places which were even more remote. It was my job to write down the names of subscribers on their copies. Moreover, I distributed the papers. That's how I got interested in them and in reading early. This interest continued at my first institutions. There I was always found in the library. [...] I read all the classics, like Jane Austen's, even those who were supposed to be read by boys like Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. This love of reading was a precondition for my becoming a writer. You can't write if you don't love reading. (Cited in Arndt op. cit.: 65)

Thus, African women have been exposed to two narrative traditions—the local oral and the Western European written—which they combine in their writings. However, although Francophone women writers do acknowledge the influence of the oral tradition on their writings, they tend to place greater stress on their Western European education, and especially on how well they did in French essays at school or in the humanities at university. Mariama Bâ speaks about her brilliant essays:

Quand j'étais à l'Ecole Normale des jeunes filles de Rufisque, mes devoirs étaient jugés très bons. Notre directrice avait montré l'un d'eux au directeur de la revue 'Esprit' qui était venu en visite dans notre école. Ce dernier avait trouvé le texte tellement intéressant qu'il l'avait publié dans la revue. Après, Maurice Génévoix en publia de larges extraits dans un livre. M. Terisse en faisant un manuel pour les élèves du cours moyen de deuxième année a adapté le texte en le titrant: 'Enfance à Dakar'. (Dia: 1979)

[When I was at the ladies' Ecole Normale of Rufisque, my essays were thought to be very good. Our headmistress showed one of them to the editor of the magazine 'Es-

biases against women. In the early writing of African women this process of integration and transformation was crucial in creating new perspectives on marriage. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the various connections between Anglophone and Francophone texts, and examine their significance for the general corpus of African writing in the 1960s and 1970s. The most notable of these interactions are Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* (1965), Efua Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975), and Mariama Ba's *So Long A Letter*⁴ (1979). Writing within these two literary traditions, these women writers gave their writing a particular historical and cultural specificity while at the same time leaving themselves free to critique and transform both contexts.

1.11 Ama Ata Aidoo's Critical Dialogue with the Traditional Narrative of Marriage: *Anowa*.

In Aidoo's play *Anowa* (1965) the interaction between the oral narrative and written play text is particularly productive because, apart from the play's intertextual relation with the oral tale, the dramatic medium enables Aidoo to incorporate several aspects of the spoken arts at the same time as the play text critiques the ethos of the cautionary tale. First, Aidoo re-writes the familiar story, but revises both its thrust and its message even while deploying its story-telling forms within the play text. *Anowa*, the heroine of the oral narrative, functions as an agent of revision in Aidoo's play,

prit' who came for a visit in the school. The latter found the text so interesting that he published it in the magazine. Later, Maurice Genevoix published large passages of it in a book: M. Terisse, while composing a textbook for primary school children, adapted it under the title of: 'Childhood in Dakar'.]—*my translation*.

When asked how she became a novelist, Aminata Sow Fall gives the following answer:

When I was a child, I used to adore reading. I read a lot. I was fascinated by the written text, and in fact I had no other pastimes apart from reading. Later when I went to Paris to study, at the Sorbonne, in my free moments in the Sorbonne library I tried my hand—like everyone, I guess, everyone goes through this stage—at writing poems, at sketching out plays (Hawkins op. cit.: 421).

⁴ From this point on, I shall be using the English translation *So Long A Letter* for *Une si Longue Lettre*.

becoming a more complex and individual character than the protagonist of the oral narrative. In order to explore the significance of this inter-textuality, it is necessary to briefly sum up the details of the oral tale and the concept of womanhood and marriage it champions. The version of the tale in E. V. Asihene's book seems appropriate not only for its accessibility and conciseness, but because it is a specifically Ghanaian version of the story:

Once upon a time, there lived a beautiful girl in a town. She was so beautiful that wherever she went people could not resist to look at her. Some rich and handsome men in the town proposed marriage to her but she turned all of them down. Her parents advised her to marry a certain modest young man whom many people liked due to his exemplary good character. But this proud girl's beauty went to her head and she became insolent and as stubborn as a mule.

One day when she was at the riverside washing clothes with her friends, she met a strange young and handsome man. It was during a festival and people were coming from the neighboring towns and villages to celebrate the occasion. Their meeting was love at first sight. The beautiful girl introduced this stranger to her parents as the one she wanted to marry. This girl's parents realized the strangeness of this young man and became skeptical about his origin if not his background. The parents privately warned their beautiful daughter not to rush into marriage with a strange young man who had no relatives in their town or from where he claimed he came from. But the hard-headed girl was madly in love with him and did not listen to her parents' advice. They got married on the third day after she had met him.

After the festival, the newly married couple left for the man's town or village. Some girl friends accompanied the couple. The group walked for hours until evening when they found themselves in the heart of the forest. When the girls asked why they had stopped at such a place, the strange husband replied that the forest was his home. He instantly changed into a python and swallowed one of the girls for food. Every night, he killed one person until there was no one left except his bride. The poor wife knew that she would be killed by all means. So she tried to play games with him. But on the third day he could not control his hunger. He changed into a python again. As he raised its head and

was about to kill his beautiful wife, a hunter who happened to be around the spot shot the python. The beautiful girl was saved but lost all her friends. "Beauty without respect is like a rose without any fragrance at all."

(Asihene 1997: 225)

The version from other West African communities (particularly in the Fon community of Benin) is similar with only slight variations. Against her parents' will, the young woman insists on following to his village the young man she has just met. Once alone with him, on the road that was supposed to lead them to his village, she discovers that he has no body parts of his own and is, piece by piece, returning his body parts to their owners. Finally, the adventurous girl finds herself walking with a kind of ghost. What happens to her after that is not clear. In some stories she gets killed, in others she runs all the way back to her parents' house followed by the rolling torso, which is all that is left of the handsome stranger. In neither case, however, does the tale have a happy ending. Because Anowa, or the beautiful girl, refuses her parents' choice of husband, and against their wishes insists on marrying the young and handsome stranger, she is severely punished.

The lesson at the end of Asihene's version is clearly stated: "Beauty without respect is like a rose without any fragrance at all." The issue of choice is fundamental. First, the girl in the story refuses her parents' choice of a young man with good qualities (hard working, respectful)—summed up by Asihene as of "exemplary good character"—and instead chooses a "strange and handsome man" who is the opposite of the man suggested by her parents. She then insists on marrying this unknown young man against her parents' wishes. In the end, she is forced to live the life she has chosen and this proves to be painful and difficult, and her tale becomes a deterrent to other young girls. The moral concerning women and marriage is that a "good" girl generally accepts her parents' choice, and the underlying principle is that parents

know better than their child. Their choice of husbands for their daughters is based on qualities like respect and hard work, qualities that suggest their daughter's future husband will work hard to support his wife, and eventually his in-laws⁵.

As a cautionary tale the narrative also warns against the dangers of the unfamiliar, suggesting that what is known and familiar is the safest context for happiness and self-realisation. What is stressed about the young man who loves the girl of the tale is not only his handsomeness, but also his lack of a known context that would provide a social basis for assessing him. The revisionist character of Aidoo's play lies in its ability to subvert the moral of the tale, and re-write a subversive version of it that both questions and transforms the very ethos that validates the traditional tale. What is ironic in Aidoo's revision is that it is within the very realm of the unfamiliar and the unknown that she suggests a possible transformation of the community's social and gender values. In her text the stranger is not the monster disguised as a handsome man, but a male figure from the community itself, whom Anowa hopes to transform within a radical, non-conforming concept of marriage.

On the face of it, there seem to be some similarities between Anowa—the heroine of the play—and the girl in the oral tale. Anowa is beautiful like the girl in the tale: Aidoo depicts her beauty through comparisons and images drawn directly from what appears to be the original version of the tale in which a girl's beauty belongs to the privileged male. Here, Anowa's beauty is described either in the original Akan words, or in direct literal translations from Akan. She is:

⁵ Female characters like Anowa are very common in tales about girls ready for marriage (see, for example, 'The Girl who Married a Leper' in Okechukwu 1980: 33; 'Olikperebu' in Balogun 1978: 48-52; and 'A Proud Girl's Punishment' in Umeasiegbu 1982: 94). Obedience to one's parents is expected regardless of how handsome the stranger is, and a man turning out to be a leper or python always punishes disobedience.

Beautiful as Korado Ahima,
Someone's-Thin-Thread.
A dainty little pot
Well-baked,
And polished smooth
To set in a nobleman's corner. (Aidoo 1965: 67)

Like the girl in the tale, Anowa also insists on marrying the man of her choice against her parents' wishes. Aidoo's play continually makes direct allusions to the oral narrative. The 'mouth that eats pepper and salt', the old man and woman who function as two contrasting social commentators in the play, frequently link Anowa with the girl in the tale. Anowa's own mother recognises the link between her daughter and the classic heroine of the cautionary tale when Anowa breaks the news of her engagement to the young man of her choice:

I say, Anowa, why did you not wait for a day when I was cooking banku and your father was drinking palm-wine in the market place with his friends? When you could have snatched the ladle from my hands and hit me with it and taken your father's wine from his hands and thrown it into his face? Anowa, why did you not wait for a day like that, since you want to behave like the girl in the folk tale? (74-75)

Again, like the girl in the tale, Anowa insists on marrying the man of her choice against her parents' wishes:

Badua: ... Look here Anowa, marriage is like a piece of cloth...

Anowa: I like mine and it is none of your business.

Badua: And like cloth, its beauty passes with wear and tear.

Anowa: I do not care, Mother. Have I not told you that this is to be my marriage and not yours? (77)

A further similarity lies in the fact that Aidoo's play also ends tragically. However, the nature of the tragedy is different as it has more far-reaching implications for the community.

In making revisions, Aidoo not only demonstrates that dangers and tensions lurk in both the familiar and the unfamiliar; but also signals a different interpretation of the tale by creating a conflict between the play's radical concept of marriage, and the assumptions that underlie the traditional narrative. As she herself admits in an interview, the play

is more or less my own rendering of a kind of...legend, because, according to my mother, who told me the story, it is supposed to have happened. The ending is my own and the interpretation I give to the events that happen is mine. [...] A girl married a man her people did not approve of; she helped him become fantastically rich, and then he turns round to drive her away. The original story I heard, which in a way was in the form of a song, didn't say why he did this, and I myself provide an answer to this, a clue, you know, a kind of pseudo-Freudian answer... (Duerden and Pieterse 1972: 23)

In Aidoo's play the social and ideological attitudes behind the oral tale surface in the play's text. The subject of marriage is presented at the beginning of the play, when Badua is worried that, six years after her daughter's menarche, she is still not married. In this society, marriage is crucial for women, and Badua voices the community's fears regarding an unmarried daughter. Problems and tensions regarding the position of women also surface and are debated within the play. In Phase One, Badua sums up the social expectations based on gender: "I want my child to be a human woman. Marry a man, tend a farm and be happy to see her peppers and onions grow. A woman like her should bear children, many children, so she can afford to have one or two die." (72)

The three main expectations for a “human” woman are quite clear: to marry, tend a farm, and bear children. Her work within the family is also predetermined by her sex. She is to grow peppers and onions and be happy with it. Men do not grow peppers and onions—they grow more important crops, like yams. By growing yams instead of onions or peppers, a man is economically stronger than his wife, since in the market yams are sold at a higher price, while onions and peppers fetch very little. As a result, a hardworking man in any family is bound to have more economic power than his wife, or wives. Many social taboos help to maintain this economic division. Although there is nothing to stop women growing yams if they want to, society maintains that yams are for men, and peppers and onions for women. This cleavage accords with the social prescription of gender roles, as women dealing with peppers and onions—vegetables that are used for the daily soup—are thereby confined to the kitchen and house. Meanwhile, the all-powerful male head of the family goes to the market to sell his yams and earn money, and this reinforces his position as master and chief of the household. He also decides the quantity of yams kept in the family for consumption.

The woman’s biological capacity to bear children, instead of placing her in a stronger social position, keeps her down. There are numerous social taboos related to menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and childcare. For example, a menstruating woman, or one that has just given birth, is banned from certain farm activities, as it is believed that the crops will not grow. Women are thus prevented from gaining economic autonomy, particularly since they menstruate every month, and live in a society where they are encouraged to have as many children as they can. The social order thus ensures its continued consolidation and the male appropriation of power.

These wider social norms are, however, what Aidoo's play challenges. In moving beyond the more specific family context of the tale, she expands its thematic thrust by locating the play's plot within a crucial period of Ghana's history, thus adding a nationalistic dimension to the theme of gender relations in marriage and allowing consideration of slavery and colonialism. This expansion also helps the play to widen the meaning of gender by linking it with the whole of a community's history. Gender is, in this sense, not a fixed, unchanging construct, but a fluid notion that may be transformed by social, economic or catastrophic change. Secondly, Aidoo's play reveals that what may be considered strange and unfamiliar in the play's context may not be so strange after all. As I mentioned earlier, the play creates two contrasting social commentators referred to as 'the mouth that eats pepper and salt'. In the play they represent the generality of the social world, and the fact that Aidoo gives them two contrasting points of view demonstrates that the social world itself has never been one-dimensional and homogenous, and that ideas about gender and women's place in the social world have perhaps always been contradictory within the community. There is, for instance, no agreement between the two social commentators about how to judge Anowa. While the old woman sees her as a strange and headstrong transgressor of the established order, the old man's judgement of her is more accommodating in recognising the possibility of a woman's spiritual and intellectual elevation in a male dominated world: "But certainly, it is not too much to think that the heavens might show something to children of a latter day which was hidden from them of old?" (101) Although the old man talks of a child's wisdom in relation to the wisdom of the old, the very focus on Anowa reveals that radical and transgressive women like her are not at all strange, and that women like Anowa can be gifted with wisdom and insight and may be singled out to become the truth bearers of their communities even

though they *are* women. Thus Aidoo makes what appears to be strange quite familiar, and suggests that Anowa's challenging of her community's expectations about marriage may be socially acceptable and even sanctioned in a world that has contrasting views of the possibilities of women. In this way Aidoo validates Anowa's transgressions in her re-interpretations of the tale within a wider ideological frame.

Thus Anowa, the protagonist of the play, sets herself apart by going against social and cultural traditions and choosing a husband disapproved of by her parents. Though her prospective husband is judged 'a good-for-nothing' young man not considered manly enough to fulfil the marital obligations of appropriating his wife, Anowa has a different view of the possibilities of shared responsibilities in marriage. She wants to help him make something of himself, and she succeeds. The couple share work and life, and become rich.

Within the context of Aidoo's play, the conventional place of a woman appears to be clear and obvious, especially to the woman herself. Badua, for example, is fully aware of the rules governing the relationships and sexual roles of men and women. She echoes the old woman's vision of gender relationships when she says, "[Anowa] should have waited for me to tell her how to marry a man. [...] A good woman does not have a brain or mouth," (93) suggesting that a woman should not contradict her husband, produce ideas of her own or challenge men's decisions. Despite the old woman's and Badua's position as far as gender and roles are concerned, we can nonetheless read a certain subversion in the former's words:

As the sourest yam
Is better than the sweetest guava,
The dumbest man is
Always better than a woman.
Or *he* thinks he is! (102)

The emphasis on what a man believes he is, namely superior to any woman regardless of how dumb he is, suggests that women's apparent submissiveness is a successful survival strategy. If women play their role dutifully, masculine superiority remains unchallenged, but beneath the surface, women can be seen to be covertly manipulating the situation. Women have learned the art of manipulation and, behind a mask of submissiveness, can gain and exercise power. Badua is aware of all this when she preaches to her daughter about marriage, advising that a good wife is stupid and silent. Badua and other women use marriage to attain power and respectability. Married women also become powerful through working on the farm, fishing, and selling in the markets. However, this perpetuates the status quo, and while women survive, they do not advance. Anowa rejects this kind of subterfuge by imagining the possibility of equality between husband and wife.

The play's confrontation with the community's gender regulations is more crucially addressed in the portrayal of the relationship between Anowa and her new husband. While many women use manipulation to manage in marriage, this survival strategy is alien to Anowa. Instead, she challenges male domination head on, and dares to imagine gender equality within marriage. In the second part of the play, we see Kofi Ako and Anowa on the highway, helping each other and working hard together to set up a skins business, and with no indication of distinctive male and female roles. They both carry heavy loads and walk long distances. When morale is low, Anowa is the one to offer encouragement. (82-84) They work alongside each other harmoniously and Kofi Ako predicts: "I shall be the new husband and you the new wife." (87)

Anowa's full and equal participation in their business sets her apart from the traditional figure of the wife, and people think that she is Kofi Ako's sister. Her

behaviour proves that the roles in their marriage are not going to be determined by gender. As they carry heavy loads of monkey skins through the rain, Anowa helps and encourages her husband. When Kofi Ako says, "This life is not good for a woman," she responds: "But think of it, if we are not too tired to go a little further, we shall be there tomorrow." Faced with so much determination from a woman, Kofi Ako states: "Ei, Anowa, you ought to have been born a man." (84) But before the third part of the play there are ideological arguments between them in which Kofi tries to win his point by asserting the power of maleness.

Later on, however, we can see that Anowa's aspirations and dreams about marriage remain unfulfilled. Indeed, her female powerlessness is underlined in phase three, when we find her in the big house in Oguaa. While Kofi Ako and Anowa were like equals in building up their business, once it starts to flourish Kofi Ako tries to reduce Anowa's influence, and encourages her to be more of a wife and depend on him to be the breadwinner. He overrules her disquiet about using slaves in the business, and effectively sidelines her in business decisions.

In the big house in Oguaa, Anowa is restless and cannot settle into the role of a wealthy businessman's wife. While she remains deeply unhappy, Kofi Ako enjoys parading his wealth and elevated social position. She is fundamentally opposed to the means by which their new wealth and social standing have been acquired, having opposed the buying of slaves to work in their business, and disagreeing with Kofi Ako about buying anything that he can get his hands on. Kofi Ako dresses up in all his finery and is carried around in a sedan chair while Anowa wears ordinary clothes and often walks barefoot. This poses problems for him, as he expects her to reflect his newly won social standing by wearing expensive outfits and managing their home

according to his wishes. Anowa refuses to play the wealthy man's wife and continues to question her husband's morality.

Aidoo plunges her heroine further into marginality by denying her children. Because a childless marriage is usually blamed on the woman, Anowa automatically becomes a worthless wife. A woman gains social recognition from having children; Anowa is therefore further marginalized in both her home and society. Conforming to neither the role of daughter nor wife, Anowa lives on the fringes of society, and on the boundary of acceptability. Ironically, the only time throughout the whole play when she feels "at home" and at peace with herself is when she and Kofi Ako are working happily together in starting up their business and are constantly on the move. The nomadic life represents "home" for her, and she and Kofi Ako agree with each other over things and work as equals. However, this way of life cannot go on indefinitely and they eventually have to settle down. The brevity of this "dream come true" marriage based on gender equality, located on the highway, and represented by constant motion, suggests that what Anowa is seeking is impossible in the society she lives in. She takes a great risk when she challenges established gender relations in her marriage, and in the end her only recourse is to suicide. She also challenges the current view on slavery and colonialism. She is the character that succeeds in making a link between her husband's impotence and his exploitation and enslavement of others. She is also the only character who can connect the individual impotence of the up-and-coming modern man with the community's failure to deal with its complicity in the historical enslavement of a greater portion of its population. Thus, in spite of the apparent loss with her death, it has an impact and suggests the possibility of new changes in current thinking.

Anowa can, then, essentially be analysed in terms of its interrogation and revision of traditional gender relations in marriage, and its exploration of new visions and alternatives to traditional ideas of gender and marriage. In the light of this discussion, we can see that gender constructs and expectations permeate all aspects of women's daily lives, and that cultural norms and economic organisation have helped to shape and maintain male advantage. It is by expanding the parameters of gender, and locating them in the wider social and national context, that Aidoo reveals the pervasive nature of gender norms and the ways in which marriage itself is embedded in the wider social arena.

1.12 Marriage in the Post Colonial Context: Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter*.

Bâ, like Aidoo, locates the possibilities for new relationships between men and women in the context of social, political and economic change. While Aidoo focuses on 19th Century changes in colonial relations, Bâ locates her work in the period of decolonisation and the new changes envisaged therein; changes that provide hope for similar transformations in gender relations. *So Long a Letter* is set in the 1960s, when French African colonies became newly independent sovereign states, a period full of promises for change not only in terms of politics, but also in terms of personal freedoms, human rights and equality. Now, after independence, people are full citizens and all children have access to Western-style education regardless of their sex. Bâ was hopeful that gender relations would change, and that there would be equality between men and women within marriage.

Although Bâ and Aidoo both envisage change with regard to gender relations within marriage, the context within which they write is different. *Anowa* portrays the slave politics and colonial past of Ghana, when Britain was engaged in pitting differ-

ent ethnic groups against each other, for example the Fantis and Ashantis (see Odamtten 1994), thereby ensuring its domination. *Anowa* is located against this background of budding nationalism when memories of the slave trade era were also fresh in people's minds. *So Long A Letter* is set in Senegal around the end of colonialism in the two decades after independence was granted. For educated women like Bâ, this was a time of egalitarian ideas such as equal gender relations within marriage, although, in the novel, this proves difficult for the heroine, Ramatoulaye, in social and religious terms.

Anowa is set in a matrilineal social context, where although women's lives are limited by some constraints, they are sometimes able to speak their minds and choose what they want to do—Badua, is outspoken and argues with Osam, her husband, and Anowa goes ahead with her marriage to Kofi despite the disapproval of her elders. In Senegal, however, women were totally silenced by both the patriarchal and caste systems. Ramatoulaye has a consistently patriarchal childhood, which informs her vision of equality with her husband, who also dominates and mistreats her according to the male prerogatives supported by Islamic society.

The two texts also differ in genre. *Anowa* is a play, and *So Long A Letter* is an epistolary novel. This difference in genre points up the wide gulf between the texts with regard to their engagement with the oral tradition. Aidoo bases her text on a familiar oral narrative and, as a play, it takes on a communal quality: the play is performed and involves interaction between the actors and the audience. The audience answers questions, claps and boos appropriately, and may join in in heckling the villain (see Bame 1985). This double oral dimension is absent in *Une Si longue lettre*, although we are presented with a similar theme. Both authors refer to the African tradition, and show how men work hard to climb the social ladder and that this is a

difficult time in their lives. Kofi Ako and Anowa build up their business by travelling and selling skins. Modou Fall and his wife Ramatoulaye, and the other couple in the novel, Mawdo Bâ and Aissatou, study to become professionals. Once in a position of power, like most African men, Modou Fall, a trade union secretary, and Mawdo Bâ, a doctor, happily enjoy and rely on the privileges accorded to them by patriarchal society. Through a discussion of the rise and fall of the two main couples in the novel, this section will analyse the gender relationships and power struggles within each marriage. At the same time, the depiction of these marriages will be used to analyse the political situation of post-colonial Africa in the 1960s.

Unlike Anowa, Bâ's text does not engage in an intertextual dialogue with an oral narrative. As mentioned above, Francophone women writers do not refer much to oral literature, even though they live in an environment impregnated with oral narratives. When asked whether oral narratives have influenced her, A.S. Fall, who is a Senegalese woman writer, gives an evasive answer:

Yes, I am quite aware of this. I think you can't carry in yourself a whole heritage, especially when you don't write in the calculated way we discussed earlier, when you don't make a point of eliminating your own personality for the sake of possible readers whom you have not yet seen; you can't carry all that with you without revealing it. I am quite aware that my novels are novels, but novels that carry with them a heritage of tradition, from folk-tales, from stories, from legends. (Hawkins op. cit.: 423)

This answer does not have the same depth and lengthy detail usually put forward by Anglophone women writers in response to the same question. This difference owes a great deal to the way French colonials relate to the French language and how Anglophones relate to English in addition to their own culture. In English colonies, people were taught the English language and English values on top of their own culture, while the French language and customs were taught in place of the people's

own language and cultural values. Pupils were discouraged from using their mother tongue at school, and punished for it. A special slate was kept by the schoolteacher and passed to any child caught speaking his mother tongue. The child had to carry the slate everywhere they went in school as punishment until another child was caught speaking their mother tongue and the slate was passed them. It is not surprising therefore that Francophone women writers were pressured to excel only in French during their studies.

Although Mariama Bâ's *So Long A Letter* does not draw on oral narratives and forms from Wolof oral traditions, it is based around the customs and rituals of the Wolof and Islamic traditions relating to widowhood, according to which a widow is expected to live in seclusion for forty days and then marry either one of her brothers-in-law, or someone else chosen from the family. At the same time, she undergoes the practice of a "mirasse", the religious ritual that strips a dead man of his most intimate secrets". (Wilson-Tagoe, 1997: 20). By stripping her husband Modou Fall of "his most intimate secrets", Ramatoulaye inevitably exposes herself and her innermost thoughts by the same token. Bâ uses the compulsory seclusion prescribed for widows as a literary device. It serves as a time frame for the narrator to have the time and space to write. This traditional practice also allows Ramatoulaye to uncover the deepest secrets of their marriage. Bâ is concerned with how women cope with these customs, and the novel explores the possibilities for renegotiating their terms. Ramatoulaye's subversive attitudes arouse visions of future gender equality in marriage. Similarly, Aissatou's subversive attitude towards class and marriage, and her later divorce, serve to prefigure a culture of monogamy and gender equality in marriage. The new couples in the book embody these visions and transformations.

So Long A Letter is primarily a critique of the underpinning of gender within the traditional institution of marriage. Rituals and expectations, as well as the division of roles within marriage, reflect the inequalities and power relations that define the institution. The critique is extended beyond man and wife to a focus on bereavement and the demands on the widow. In the second chapter, Ramatoulaye describes the social expectations surrounding a woman after her husband's death:

My back propped up by cushions, legs outstretched, my head covered with a black wrapper, I follow the comings and goings of people. Across from me, a new winnowing fan bought for the occasion receives the first alms. The presence of my co-wife beside me irritates me. She has been installed in my house for the funeral, in accordance with tradition. With each passing hour her cheeks become more deeply hollowed, acquire ever more rings, those big and beautiful eyes which open and close on their secrets, perhaps their regrets. At the age of love and freedom from care, this child is dogged by sadness.

While the men, in a long irregular file of official and private cars, public buses, lorries and mopeds, accompany Modou to his burial (people were for a long time to talk of the crowd which followed the funeral procession), our sisters-in-law undo our hair. My co-wife and myself are put inside a rough and ready tent made of a wrapper pulled taut above our heads and set up for the occasion. While our sisters-in-law are constructing it, the women present, informed of the work in hand, get up and throw some coins on to the fluttering canopy so as to ward off evil spirits.

This is the moment dreaded by every Senegalese woman, the moment when she sacrifices her possessions as gifts to her family-in-law; and, worse still, beyond her possessions she gives up her personality, her dignity, becoming a thing in the service of the man who has married her, his grandfather, his grandmother, his father, his mother, his brother, his sister, his uncle, his aunt, his male and female cousins, his friends. Her behaviour is conditioned: no sister-in-law will touch the head of any wife who has been stingy, unfaithful or inhospitable. (Bâ 1981: 3-4)

Here, Islam and African patriarchal rules combine to keep a woman down when she most needs assistance and support.

The two main areas explored in the novel are polygamous marriage in Senegal and married women are invisible in this society. According to Islamic and African traditions, a woman's life centres on marriage, which is her only goal in life. Once married, a woman is defined by her husband and, by extension, her family-in-law, to whose rules she has to conform. If her husband deserts her or dies, her social status is severely threatened since she has no status of her own. Widowhood both signifies the end of a woman's social identity, and produces an identity crisis. The widow is distressed, and the traditional customs and rituals lead to her becoming even more invisible than when she is married. Ramatoulaye is irritated by the ritual of the undoing of her hair by her sisters-in-law, as this underlines the moral power that her in-laws have over her. She dislikes the forty days of confinement in her house, which imprisons her both physically and psychologically, and is hardly able to think for herself. Having achieved some balance with her new young co-wife by not having to share the same space, she is now obliged to sit and perform the necessary rituals with her. Outwardly, Ramatoulaye obediently complies and carries out all her obligations as a widow in a polygamous marriage, but she is inwardly critical, privately revealing her thoughts and feelings and discussing her doubts and questions with the reader.

Bâ's commitment to changing the customs surrounding marriage is revealed by Ramatoulaye's rebellion against the custom of levirate marriage, which she cannot accept however hard she tries. Her individuality surfaces, and she speaks for herself with determination:

Ah, yes! Your strategy is to get in before any other suitor. [...] You forget that I have a heart, a mind, that I am not an object to be passed from hand to hand. You don't know what marriage means to me: it is an act of faith and of love,

the total surrender of oneself to the person one has chosen and who has chosen you. (58)

Here, the meaning of marriage for Ramatoulaye, and by extension Bâ, is clearly stated: it is based on free choice and love, and is monogamous. Ramatoulaye rejects a polygamous marriage with Daouda Dieng, who had courted her years ago, and who now has a wife and children: "Abandoned yesterday because of a woman, I cannot lightly bring myself between you and your family." (68)

Despite this rebellion, Ramatoulaye cannot escape the power of tradition. She can only occasionally transcend entrenched customs. For example, when she says to Aissatou: "Mawdo raised you up to his own level, he the son of a princess and you a child from the forges," (19) she is inadvertently acknowledging the validity of the caste system. Ironically, the caste system lies at the source of the problems in Aissatou and Mawdo's marriage. Mawdo's mother is ashamed of her son's choice of wife and views this alliance as a disgrace to their family. She therefore forces Nabou as a second wife on him and, as a result, Aissatou asks for a divorce and leaves. Ramatoulaye's words reveal how deeply entrenched the caste system is.

When she refuses Daouda Dieng's offer of a polygamous marriage, Ramatoulaye is implicitly arguing for monogamy and the revision of social conventions. She has also turned down Tamsir's proposal. In her article "The concept of choice in Mariama Bâ's Fiction", Irene Assiba d'Almeida argues that Ramatoulaye chooses to remain single after her husband Modou's death. In reality, I do not think she has any real choice: she is consistently and fundamentally opposed to polygamy, although she does tolerate it when it is forced upon her through her husband's marriage to Binetou. Were Daouda Dieng divorced or widowed when he proposed to her, she may well have accepted. She is not set to remain single for the rest of her life; she just does not

meet the right man in the right circumstances. By the end of the novel, Ramatoulaye is alone, but it is suggested that this situation may change, as she is now ready for new beginnings: "Despite everything—disappointments and humiliations—hope still lives on within me. It is from the dirty and nauseating humus that the green plant sprouts into life, and I can feel new buds springing up in me." (89)

Bâ underlines the belief that happiness in marriage comes with monogamy and two equal partners sharing their pains and joys together. Ramatoulaye's daughter, Daba, and her husband, Abou, represent the ideal couple. Abou claims that Daba is his wife, not his servant or his slave (73). Bâ depicts Aissatou as choosing divorce and succeeding in her choice, and thereby illustrates that a marriage with mutual respect between equal partners cannot be polygamous. Divorce is therefore portrayed as a real option for women who are mistreated in marriage. However, Aissatou's story is slightly romanticized, and might have been more rounded if we had been given more details about her struggle to bring up her four sons as a single mother with a demanding career. This would have shown that while divorce is a viable option, it is not easy.

While the problems between Kofi Ako and Anowa take place within a monogamous marriage, Bâ's novel is concerned with the custom of polygamy permitted in both traditional African society and Islam, which is widely practised in Senegal, and allows men to have up to four wives. At the same time, women are expected to enter marriage as virgins, and infidelity on their part is not tolerated. *Une si longue lettre* examines polygamy through two marriages: Modou, Ramatoulaye, and Binetou and, secondly, Mawdo, Aissatou and young Nabou. Although Ramatoulaye says: "The presence of my co-wife beside me irritates me. She has been installed in my house for the funeral, in accordance with tradition"(3), there is little she can do about the presence of Binetou and being in a polygamous marriage. However, while she

chooses to abide by (or give in to) tradition, and live according to the expectations of society in this instance, she reaches her limit of traditional behaviour when her brother-in-law wants to marry her (I will discuss this refusal later.) As for the second marriage, with Aissatou's departure and subsequent divorce leading to a successful life, Bā suggests alternative possibilities for women, beyond marriage.

The novel also portrays the familiar pattern of men accepting women's suggestions only when they do not involve money and do not affect their social position within the community. With regard to the beginning of these two marriages, Ramatoulaye recalls: "Because being the first pioneers of the promotion of African women, there were very few of us. Men would call us scatter-brained. Others labelled us devils. But many wanted to possess us" (15). Modou and Mawdo are at first happy to have these "scatter-brained" women as wives. However Modou, once installed in the socially and financially powerful position of renowned trade unionist, reverts to the patriarchal niche carved out for men by the traditional and Islamic society. He starts dating his eldest daughter's friend and eventually marries her without informing his wife. Ramatoulaye reacts in accordance with Islamic and traditional laws, bowing and thanking her husband, while concealing her frustration and disappointment:

I forced myself to check my inner agitation. Above all, I must not give my visitors the pleasure of relating my distress. Smile; take the matter lightly, just as they announced it. Thank them for the humane way in which they have accomplished their mission. Send thanks to Modou, "a good father and a good husband", "a husband become a friend". Thank my family-in-law, the Imam, Mawdo. Smile. Give them something to drink. See them out, under the swirls of incense that they were sniffing once again. Shake their hands. (38)

The marriage of Mawdo and Aissatou follows a similar pattern with the added issue of inter-caste marriages. When they are a young couple, being from different castes does not matter:

What, a Toucouleur marrying a goldsmith's daughter? He will never 'make money'. Mawdo's mother is a Dioufene, a Guelewar from the Sine. What an insult to her, before her former co-wives. (Mawdo's father was dead). In the desire to marry a short skirt come what may, this is what one gets. School turns our girls into devils who lure our men away from the right path'. And I haven't recounted all. But Mawdo remained firm. 'Marriage is a personal thing', he retorted to anyone who cared to hear. (17)

Their marriage therefore goes against social norms. Some years later, and after they have had two sons, Mawdo is unable to resist his mother's emotional blackmail: "My brother, Farba, has given you young Nabou to be your wife, to thank me for the worthy way in which I have brought her up. I will never get over it if you don't take her as your wife. Shame kills faster than disease." (30) Mawdo has the courage to inform his wife of his second marriage only when his mother has fixed the wedding day, and he offers the following reasons: "My mother is old. The knocks and disappointments of life have weakened her heart. If I spurn this child, she will die. This is the doctor speaking and not the son. Think of it, her brother's daughter, brought up by her, rejected by her son. What shame before society!" (30) In response, Aissatou does not "bow and bear". Bâ also depicts her as denouncing the caste system in Senegalese society. Aissatou leaves, rents a house and continues her studies:

Books knit generations together in the same continuing effort that leads to progress. They enabled you to better yourself. What society refused you, they granted: examinations sat and passed took you also to France. The school of interpreters, from which you graduated, led to your appointment into the Senegalese Embassy in the United States. You make a very good living. You are developing in peace, as your letters tell me, your back resolutely turned on those seeking light enjoyment and easy relationships. (33)

Despite the gender equality achieved by the couple while building up their social position, once a powerful position has been attained, the man falls back into the

traditional ways of patriarchal African society and enjoys all the advantages these offer him. Therefore, it is suggested that while it is easy for post-colonial men to subscribe to notions of freedom and equality in connection with nationalist discourses, they do not uphold them in their personal relations with women.

1.2 Gender, Marriage and Nation: *Anowa* and *So Long A Letter*

Apart from its interrogation of traditional notions of marriage, Aidoo's *Anowa* situates itself within discourses of the nation. Set in the early stages of modern society and the creation of a new breed and class of Africans, the play touches on the themes of modernity, awakening national consciousness and a woman's place within these. In this respect it can be read as being political in a public as well as a personal sense.

It is first of all necessary to consider the meanings of the terms "politics" and "political". According to the *Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus* (1996), "politics" has five meanings: the science of government; political affairs; political methods and tactics; political opinions; and factional scheming for power. As for the word "political", the definition offered is "of, concerned with, or engaged in government, politics", or "of or characteristic of political parties or politicians". According to these definitions, both terms relate to government and the ways and means a country is governed. This definition of 'politics' and especially what is 'political' has been seen mainly in male discourses written against colonialism, for example, James Ngugi's *Weep Not Child* (1964) which describes the colonial conquest of Kenya and the resistance led by the Mau Mau, and Aimé Césaire's *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1958), a violent denunciation of French colonialism and politics.

Following this dictionary definition of “political”, one can wonder, like Susan Andrade at the beginning of her paper “Embodying the Nation and the Problematic of African Feminist Literary Criticism”

why so few women-authored African novels treat expressly political themes, when the engagement of male-authored novels with politics is explicit and visible. While many male-authored novels celebrate nationalism as a response to colonialism, one would scarcely realize from reading contemporaneous women-authored novels that nationalist struggles were being waged in African minds and on African lands. (nd: 1)

I think that this opinion, although widely held, is inaccurate as it fails to acknowledge that politics, and what is considered political in female discourses, are quite complex. For women, it is not only what is related to matters of government and public affairs that may be considered political; the political also relates to the domestic sphere. As Andrade writes, “For women, politics has both a public and a domestic dimension” (*ibid.*). Kate Millet, in *Sexual Politics* (1969), argues that the meanings “politics” and “political” are not only state-related, but also refer more generally to power structured relationships. Thus, marriage is also a site for politics and the bond relating husband and wife, or wives, can be explored as historical, economic and cultural arrangements by which one group (men) control the other (women).

In *Anowa*, the male desire for power is illustrated through Kofi Ako and his ruthless business practices. He buys slaves and rejects Anowa’s arguments, belittling her by saying she is speaking like a woman. (90) The slaves are exploited: “Eight men in a single file carrying skins enter [...] Kofi Ako follows closely behind them [...] He is better dressed than before. He is carrying what seems to be a ridiculously light load.” (94) This ruthless exploitation of animals, by dealing in their skins, and of his fellow countrymen likens Kofi Ako to the white dominating classes, and makes him

complicit in their exploitation of Africa. In the Prologue, the old man speaks of some Africans being against other Africans "from the north" (66). Africans like Kofi Ako work with the Europeans to overcome and dominate their enemies, acquiring wealth for their own benefit.

Anowa and Kofi Ako have very different visions of their joint business, and this reflects their different understandings of the concepts of community and nation. Anowa is happy dealing in skins with a few employees who are properly paid and recompensed for their work. She sees their business venture as a means of earning a decent living and certainly does not envisage profiting from other people's hard work while not doing any work herself. (95) Her strict code of ethics about employing her kinsfolk without a trace of exploitation leads to her disagreements with Kofi Ako, who has no compunctions about exploiting fellow Africans. He sees their business as a means of acquiring power and wealth, and is happy to profit from other people's labour. While Kofi Ako's conception of his place within the community does not take into account the situation of his fellow citizens, Anowa cares about the welfare of her employees and will not exploit anyone's labour for her own personal gain. There are no moral limits for Kofi Ako, and he can sell his fellow citizens to raise his own status in the community. Significantly, he has Queen Victoria's photograph on the mantelpiece, and is surrounded with rich furnishings, plush carpets and chairs. He dresses in fine clothes and is carried around in a sedan chair preceded by men holding raw materials like "skins, copra, crude rubber and kegs of palm oil", or "cheap silks and Madras cloth, muskets, hurricane lamps, knives and enamelware". (104) Overall, he behaves like a representative of the English administration in the colonies, and is more an accomplice of the colonisers than a nationalist with his community's interests at heart.

Anowa's dream reveals her anxieties, which extend beyond her differences with Kofi Ako and encompass her fears for and criticisms of the community's own wider history and sense of nation. Thus, "Mother Africa" reflects the powerless position of Africa as similar to that of African women. Her impoverished state is, at least in part, the result of the dealings and alliances forged by her "sons" with foreigners to exploit her riches: "I dreamt that I was a big, big woman. And from my insides were huge holes out of which poured men, women and children." (106) This woman describes her suffering at the hands of her own sons who did nothing to defend her when strangers abused her and exploited and killed her children. Even worse, they assisted the foreigners in their horrible enterprises:

And the sea was boiling hot and steaming. And as it boiled, it threw out many, many giant lobsters, boiled lobsters, each of whom as it fell turned into a man or woman, but keeping its lobster head and claws. And they rushed to where I sat and seized the men and women as they poured out of me, and they tore them apart, and dashed them to the ground and stamped upon them. And from their huge courtyards, the women ground my men and women and children on mountains of stone. But there was never a cry or a murmur; only a bursting, as of a ripe tomato or a swollen pod. And everything went on and on and on.

(106)

Mother Africa was thus violated, and her children ill-treated and stamped upon through centuries of slavery and colonialism. The big woman, beyond Anowa the dreamer, symbolises Africa and all her women talking about their children being ill treated by European explorers, slave traders and colonisers. The description of the Europeans as half lobster, with heads and claws, points to how de-humanised they have become. The grinding of Africans by these creatures reflects the atrocities committed in the slave trade and colonial periods of African history. However, what strikes Anowa most is the wholesale acceptance of what is going on. There is no

revolt, no fight, no rebellion, and all this "went on and on and on" for years. In this nightmare, the person suffering the most is the woman dreaming and, by extension, all African women and the whole African continent. Instead of resisting, African men, like Kofi Ako, have become accomplices. It becomes clear to Anowa from this moment that the betrayal that the mother suffers in her dream is bound to be replayed in the link between her husband's prosperity and his enslavement of his own people. It marks the collapse of the ideal marriage that she herself imagined: that is, the marriage in which husband and wife share similar views and ideas about their history and the future of their community. For it is at this point that Anowa sees her inevitable separation from her husband, and the collapse of her marriage. Aidoo's *Anowa* thus confronts and interrogates the Akan community at its most traditional through the dialogue she creates between the oral narrative and the story of Anowa, and through the connection she makes between the community's refusal to confront its slave past and its refusal to confront its gender norms.

In Bâ's *So Long A Letter* the interrogation of nation and community is aimed more at exploring the extent to which the new emerging nation translated the ideals of equality, liberation and shared aspirations that the nationalist movement inspired. As in *Anowa*, marriage becomes the arena for working out these nationalist possibilities. As Deniz Kandiyoti (1991) observes, "The integration of women into modern 'nationhood', epitomised by citizenship in a sovereign nation-state, somehow follows a *different* trajectory from that of men." (429) For nationalistic purposes, women are often used as part of a hegemonic discourse against colonialism. The dominant discourse is of human rights and equality for every citizen in the new nation. However, there are different expectations according to the gender of the citizen. Women see in this egalitarian discourse the hope for unconditional equality between men and

women, where women participate in nation building on an equal footing with men, and expect this equality to extend to all aspects of their lives. This is where women's expectations differ from those of men, who see women as equal citizens with another mission to fulfil: they need to be modern and fight alongside men against the colonisers, and simultaneously act as custodians of the local traditions and culture. This issue crystallises around marriage, which is a significant event in the individual woman's life and is at the same time a central institution in society as a whole.

Bâ creates a space in nationalist discourse for women's subjective perspectives on their place within the nation. She situates the marriages of Ramatoulaye and Modou, and Aissatou and Mawdo within two important political periods of Senegal's history: the euphoric period of independence, which corresponds to the ecstatic period of romantic love at the beginning of relationships, and the bitter period of post-colonialism in Africa, which corresponds to the discordant realities of marriage. The period of romantic idealism (nothing could stop their love, neither the disapproval of Ramatoulaye's mother nor Aissatou's inferior caste) reflects the period filled with dreams for Africa's future:

Modou rose steadily to the top rank in the trade union organizations. His understanding of people and things endeared him to both employers and workers. He focused his efforts on points that were easily satisfied that made work lighter and life more pleasant. He sought practical improvements in the workers' conditions. His slogan was: what's the use of taunting with the impossible? Obtaining the 'possible' is already a victory. His point of view was not unanimously accepted, but people relied on his practical realism. Mawdo could take part in neither trade unionism nor politics, for he hadn't the time. His reputation as a good doctor was growing. (24)

These two men rise to top social positions, and their wives, who are among the first educated women in Africa, follow suit. Bâ devotes chapter 10 to this exhilarating

period in African history when all dreams were possible and nationalism was at its peak, and this was all gender inclusive. Bâ's repeated use of "we" reflects the unity felt at the time:

It was the privilege of our generation to be the link between two periods in our history, one of domination, the other of independence. We remained young and efficient, for we were the messengers of a new design. With independence achieved, we witnessed the birth of a republic, the birth of an anthem and the implantation of a flag. I heard people say that all the active forces in the country should be mobilized. And we said that over and above the unavoidable opting for such-and-such a party, such-and-such a model of society, what was needed was national unity. Many of us rallied around the dominant party, infusing it with new blood. To be productive in the crowd was better than crossing one's arms and hiding behind imported ideology (25).

Aissatou and Ramatoulaye represent the women of the time and are confident and aware that they are living in an important and decisive period of their country's history. They want to participate fully in the process of nation building and all the vital political choices that are involved, using their newly acquired status of equal citizenship in the nation to the fullest possible extent. They are conscious that the discussions about far-reaching decisions need to involve every citizen to ensure that the choices are sound and wise, and take into account the real needs of their country. As in their marriages, the idealism of these early days of independence, with all its promises of equality, is unfulfilled.

Chapter 19 focuses on the theme of women in politics, although there are some discrepancies between the time the analysis in it is being made, and the time Bâ is writing about: Ramatoulaye's husband died after thirty years of marriage. (4) The discussion with Daouda Dieng is taking place after Modou's funeral after "nearly twenty years of independence". (61) The discussion is like a report on African

women's involvement in state politics at least twenty-five years after independence in Africa. Newly independent sovereign states, derived from former colonial structures, have not fulfilled the hopes of gender equality, although all the legal rights women have gained, in terms of education, equal pay, job opportunities, voting rights and state protection within marriage through the Family Code are valuable assets which recognize, promote and protect women in the society.

The problematic questions still present in terms of education are raised by Ramatoulaye when she says, "When will education be decided for children on the basis not of sex but of talent?" (61). In fact, education for a woman in Africa is quite difficult because of the many social obstacles that have to be overcome. It is generally thought that money spent on women's education is wasted as they are going to get married and take care of their husbands and, at the most, participate in budgeting for the family. Education is therefore essential for boys, but not for girls. Young men are helped and encouraged in their studies so that they will be able to get good jobs and earn large salaries. The second problem with a women's education is that she may become pregnant during her studies. This not only means that her education is a waste of money, but her marriage prospects are also ruined in a society that expects women to enter marriage as virgins. The third difficulty is posed by the perception that an educated woman may not make a good wife. The more education she has, the more potential there is for problems, as she "knows" too much about everything. Susan Stringer has studied this problem in her book *The Senegalese Novel by Women through their Own Eyes* (1996), in which she discusses in detail all the factors that work against the evolution of women's status. Ramatoulaye's question indicates that the plight of women has not improved in the post-colonial administration. The exist-

ing gender inequality of traditional African society persists under the new administration.

The discussion in this chapter of *So Long A Letter* also covers the involvement of women in politics. Up to now, women have been, as Daouda Dieng states, "decorative accessories, objects to be moved about, companions to be flattered or calmed with promises" (61). This is the image, or rather the role, of the 4 per cent of women members of the National Assembly. However, women "have raised more than one man to power" (*ibid.*) in Africa. The reputation of the market women helping more than one president to achieve power or to hold onto it in Africa is well established. The most interesting aspect of this report-like chapter, however, is in the following passage: "Women must be encouraged to take a keener interest in the destiny of the country. Even you who are protesting; you preferred your husband, your class, your children to public life" (62). This, indeed, points to the core of the problem. Most women are seen to behave like Ramatoulaye. At the start, the beginning of her marriage, which corresponds to the beginning of independence and self-government for all the former colonies, Ramatoulaye and her peers, the pioneers promoting African women, are full of enthusiasm to implement gender equality in their marriages, hold down a career and participate in the political life of their country. A quarter of a century later, the realities of patriarchy and tradition become evident. Only 4 per cent of women have dared to enter politics. The other 96 per cent, like Ramatoulaye, have chosen to play it safe and stay within the boundaries and expectations of a woman's place set by traditional society.

The political discussion started by Bâ through Ramatoulaye in chapter 19 continues in chapter 20, turning to the state and government of Senegal. There is a sense of satisfaction with the current government, which is practising a sort of socialism à

la Sénégalaise, encompassing many different parties. This contrasts favourably with the one-party governments infamous for their autocratic leadership and decisions like Sékou Touré's party in Guinea.

In light of the above discussion, it can be concluded that there is a clear engagement with politics and the political in both these texts. It is however, less overt than in straightforward discussions about colonial and post-colonial governments in Africa in male texts like *A Man of the People* by Chinua Achebe (1966) and *Les Soleils des Indépendances* by Ahmadou Kourouma (1970).

Both texts locate their origins in the African tradition, the first in a folk tale, and the second in the rites and customs traditionally related to widowhood. Through the subversive characters of Anowa, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, both authors succeed in showing, on one level, what gender equality ought to mean for a couple. On another level, they apply their hypotheses of gender equality in marriage to African history, with Aidoo's text providing a new reading of the history of slavery and colonialism, and Bâ's focusing on the post-colonial situation. The latter also provides visions of the political future of Africa based on real gender equality, starting with the institution of marriage.

**Changing Contexts and Changing Perspectives on Marriage:
Aidoo's *Changes* and Bâ's *Scarlet Song***

If, as my introduction has argued, values around gender are socially constructed and can be transformed at least in imaginative writing, it follows then that changes in the political and social world would have a bearing not only on gender values but on the ways they are imagined in literature. As Edward W. Said argues; "The point is that texts have ways of existing that [...] are always enmeshed in circumstances, time, place and society." (Said 1983: 35) Aidoo's *Changes* and Bâ's *Scarlet Song* both reflect the impact of social circumstances, and new movements in ideas and perceptions that give new dimensions to their imaginative engagement with the subject of marriage. Both novels were written in periods of great national and social upheaval that inspired interrogations of old and entrenched ideas.

After the collapse of the great hopes and aspirations of the nationalism of the 1960s, new questions were being raised, not just about the bourgeois nationalism that had heralded the independence movements in the '60s, but about the adequacy of nationalist ideologies to represent the interests of all the people. Hence the emergence of works like Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), which denounce the post-independence corruption in Ghana. This unrepentant corruption is epitomized by Koomson, the minister, and his wife's extravagant lifestyle—big cars, expensive perfumes and imported drinks. The same anxiety is visible in *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) by James Ngugi, about the post-independence government in Kenya. As Caminero-Satangelo argues:

A Grain of Wheat "represents the possibility of betrayal of the ideals and goals of the national liberation movement by those who have gained power in the

newly independent Kenya, precisely because they are still controlled by self-interest and by conceptions of social-political relations". (1998: 142)

But women whose voices and interrogations not only sought incorporation in the national story, but also questioned the very foundation of nationalism and its essentially patriarchal bias, raised the more radical questions of the '80s and '90s. Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) shows disillusion in the ruling elite. Sam, the dictator; Chris, the minister for information; and Ikem, the editor of the National Gazette, are corrupt characters who form the one per cent of the population who are alienated from "the lives and concerns of ninety-nine per cent of the population". (141) But although Achebe goes to great lengths to get women involved in this narrative, the novel is still the story of the male characters.

Narratives by women that appeared in the 1980s and '90s were, however, more focused on women's voices and narratives. Women writers of this period were more engaged with various trans-national and ideological perspectives circulating internationally. The global feminist movement, for instance, had a huge impact on the narratives written by African women. The movement raised issues that most of the writers were exploring in their different ways, and they were thus able to make important links between this global movement and the specific gender-related problems that underlay African feminism. As Carole Boyce Davies argues: "The obvious connection between African and Western feminism is that both identify gender specific issues and recognize woman's position internationally as one of second class status and 'otherness' and seek to correct that." (1986: 10)

Although African women share in the ideas of a global feminist movement⁶, the failure of this movement to take into account specific African issues created new African-centred feminist ideas that shaped literary concepts and representations. In the literary criticism of African literature, critics start to push for a complete re-thinking of literary criticism. Davies states:

African feminist criticism is definitely engaged criticism in much the same way as progressive African literary criticism grapples with decolonisation and feminist criticism with the politics of male literary dominance. This criticism therefore is both textual and contextual criticism: textual in that close reading of texts using the literary establishment's critical tools is indicated; contextual as it realizes that analysing a text without some consideration of the world with which it has a material relationship is of little social value [...] African feminist critics must take what is of value from both mainstream feminist criticism and African literary criticism, keeping in mind that both are offshoots from traditional European literary criticism and in some cases its adversaries. The result then is not reduction but refinement geared specifically to deal with the concrete and literary realities of African women's lives (12-13).

This re-centring of literary criticism on texts as well as on context is taken a step further by critics like Molara Ogundipe-Leslie in her article "The Female Writer and her Commitment", in which she argues that the African female writer "should be committed in three ways: as a writer, as a woman, and as a Third World person" (1994: 63). The African woman writer as defined by Ogundipe-Leslie needs not only to be a good writer, but also one who is gender conscious—testifying or writing about women's experiences—and politically aware of the effects of slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism and global imperialism on African women's lives.

⁶ Ama Ata Aidoo as well as Molara Ogundipe-Leslie participated in *Sisterhood is Global* edited by Robin Morgan (1984) with respectively "To Be A Woman" and "Not Spinning On The Axis of Maleness" (the latter reprinted in Ogundipe-Leslie's *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations* (1994).

The raising of new questions, and critiques of old ideological positions are present in Aidoo's reflections on marriage in an essay entitled "To be A Woman". Along with various examples of personal experiences of sexual discrimination by her male colleagues while she was a lecturer at Legon University (Ghana), Aidoo denounces the acceptance of marriage as it is in Ghana, not to say Africa, and indeed globally. Thus, once married as a man you are entitled to:

a sexual aid;
a wet-nurse and a nursemaid for your children;
a cook-steward and general housekeeper;
a listening post;
an economic and general consultant;
a field hand and,
if you are that way inclined,
a punch-ball. (1984: 261-62).

And, at a more global level, Aidoo's observations are clear and honest. She states:

As the very foundation of the family, marriage has maintained a chameleon-like capacity to change its nature in time and space and to serve the ignominious aims of every society: slave-owning, feudal, or modern bourgeois. Throughout history and among all peoples, marriage has made it possible for women to be owned like property, abused and brutalized like serfs, privately corrected and like children, publicly scolded, overworked, underpaid, and much more thoroughly exploited than the lowest male worker on any payroll. (266)

Although Aidoo's reflections might seem too outspoken, these questions and denunciations generated new myths and symbols that contended with, and challenged, old modes of signification, leading to bolder and more experimental ways of representing marriage in literature. Aidoo has also, for instance, remarked that her particular dimension in *Changes* was a radical reaction to Bâ's conservatism in *So*

Long A Letter. In a presentation at a workshop on gender (2002), Aidoo disclosed that she wrote *Changes* in response to, and in dialogue with, Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*. The various points of similarity and difference between the two novels would seem to confirm the novelist's statement. In *So Long a Letter*, Ramaoulaye battles with the reality of polygamy, a legacy both of Islam and the old traditions. When her husband takes a second wife, Ramatoulaye accommodates herself to the situation, drawing moral strength from her profound faith in Islam. However, her parallel narrative of her friend's radical divorce gives a hint of the narrator's anxiety and uncertainty about her decision. Aidoo's response to this is to show that there are a variety of other options to polygamy, and all these possibilities are full of paradoxes. The main protagonist in *Changes*, Esi, gets a divorce from a non-religious marriage only to find herself in a polygamous marriage in a Muslim household. With Esi, Aidoo appears to push the boundaries of marriage in all directions. Esi's answer to an unsatisfactory marriage is to find a new relationship in a polygamous marriage that allows her freedom but has its drawbacks. How far can Aidoo extend these limits with Esi?

Bâ herself adopts a new and wider perspective in *Scarlet Song*, contextualising her exploration of race, taboo, gender and marriage in placing her text at the time of the French radical movement that began with the rebellion of 1968. This context is important because in France, May 1968 precipitated an onslaught on old, dying and entrenched ideas. In terms of ideology and the radicalising of knowledge it changed perspectives and instigated a questioning of all aspects of culture and knowledge. Indeed, May 1968 stood for endless possible changes in society—any dream could come true. According to Georges Dupeux at the Sorbonne: "Sexuality, publicity, culture, society, art, ideologies, revolution—everything is questioned [...]. A deluge of

words... Demagogy, dreams, mad ideas, powerful ideas, new ideas—all drowned in an ocean of verbosity.” (1976: 258) For women writers like Bâ, exploring unexplored realms of literature as well as women’s boldness in their relations with men was part of the social turmoil of the day.

Yet, in spite of these new interrogative contexts, the contradictory social and gender values that create conflict in the first novels persist in the new worlds created in these later novels of Aidoo and Bâ. Thus, the same basic questions asked in the first novels are again posed in these later novels. In both *Changes* and *Scarlet Song*, new developments and changes in political, social and cultural life determine the nature of exploration. For instance, there is a time lag of more than twenty years between Aidoo’s first play about marriage and her second novel on the same subject. Mariama Bâ wrote *Scarlet Song* two years after grappling with polygamy, betrayal and politics in *So Long a Letter*. Yet we can still argue that both books continue to ask similar questions to the questions they posed in their earlier texts: how do women negotiate spaces, identities and wholeness in worlds in which they are still expected to remain marginal in spite of fundamental changes in social and political structures?

2.1. Aidoo’s *Changes*: Experiencing Alternatives to Marriage

In spite of these similar questions, the world in *Changes* is still very different from the world of *Anowa*. In the time of *Anowa*, the British were endeavouring to pit the Fantis against the Ashantis in what was then called the Gold Coast. Internal strife would help their colonial ambitions in a country already severely damaged by the slave trade. It is against this background that the subversive character of *Anowa* shows the link between colonization, gender oppression, and economic power. As Vincent Odamtten argues:

Aidoo's second drama [...] shows the connection between sexual oppression and colonial domination. She succeeds in delineating the convergence of forces, both internal and external, that accelerated the marginalization of women in colonial and neo-colonial Africa. What comes through in Aidoo's play is that the issues of gender oppression are materially based, that the dominant social relations that arise and are part of the economic production relations of a given society, at a particular historical moment, produce specific modes of behaviour or cultural practices (Odamtten, 1994: 45-46).

In *Anowa*, the focus of exploration is the 'experimental' marriage of Anowa and Kofi. We see the trials and tribulations of this marriage through the perspectives and judgements of the community at large. But because in *Anowa* the play's ideological vision is centred on the protagonist, her problems as a woman are seen as inseparable from her larger concern for the community's own struggle to deal with the impact of history and change. In *Anowa*, gender, history and ideology are inextricably interconnected, and the burden of connection is born by Anowa who holds the play's ideological vision. In *Changes*, the major characters have varying degrees of social perspectives, but no character is as deeply invested with the burden of vision in the way that Anowa is burdened with social consciousness. In this text, the omniscient narrator of the novel takes on this burden. The characters are therefore more easily perceived as individual men and women attempting to adjust to and negotiate shifting values in a fast-changing world. Different classes of men and women as well as different generations thus confront each other as they find new ways to achieve fulfilment and wholeness. Aidoo even warns us (with a great deal of irony) not to expect an ideological and political twist from this text, which is meant to be 'lighter' in comparison with her other writings, including *Anowa*:

To the reader, a confession, and the critic, an apology:

Several years ago when I was a little *older* than I am now, I said in a published interview that I could never write about lovers in Accra. Because surely in our environment there are more important things to write about? Working on this story then was an exercise in words eating! Because it is a slice from the life and loves of a somewhat privileged young woman and other fictional characters - in Accra. It is not meant to be a contribution to any debate, however current.

Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

(Aidoo 1991).

The paradox held within the sentence 'several years ago when I was a little older than I am now' is no mistake. Aidoo is stressing the point that her earlier texts such as *Anowa* and *Our sister Killjoy* consider serious matters like slavery and colonialism which impacted greatly on the lives of Africans in the past, and still do today. Aidoo is joking as she reverses the usual trend that people discuss serious, difficult issues when they are mature and old, since she tackles tough topics in her early texts. This is a playful way to prepare her readers for a lighter theme. So, nevertheless, in spite of her 'confession' to the reader and her 'apology' to the critic, in spite of her apologetic tone and her suggestion that her novel is not 'a contribution to any debate however current', her political and social critiques of the wider world are still achieved. Also, despite her declaration that she writes merely about lovers, the novel focuses on women's education, aspirations, mobility and sexuality, as well as the wider social context of poverty and deprivation. In *Changes*, Aidoo writes about women striving to be whole, powerful and fulfilled, and men struggling to remain dominant and powerful.

Thus whereas in *Anowa*, we have only two marriages paralleled with each other—Anowa's marriage and her parents'—there is a much greater criss-crossing of

marriages, of different negotiations within marriages, and different conflicting and contradictory thoughts about the meaning of marriage. Different classes of men and women, as well as different generations, confront each other as they find new ways to achieve fulfilment and wholeness. The apparently modern marriage of Esi and Oko is implicitly juxtaposed with other marriages, and other thoughts about marriage, as Aidoo probes society to determine whether, in spite of new changes in education and women's mobility, the fundamental notions of gender that regulate relationships between men and women really change. It is from the point of view of the central character's 'modern' conception of marriage, and of woman's capacity for fulfilment and self-development within it, that we should explore the juxtaposition of other marriages and other ideas about marriage in the novel.

The common understanding about marriage in the world of *Changes* is that a wife must be physically weaker than, and economically dependent on, her husband; and that a husband should protect and dominate his wife. But Aidoo chooses to develop a character that goes against this norm. Her protagonist, Esi, is tall, thin and elegant. She is naturally slim, which is contrary to the accepted norm that married women with children are generally plumper, and seldom elegant. Maternity must take its toll, and people subconsciously expect married women to be motherly, having less time to be conscious about their appearance. There again, Esi's first priority is not her child, nor even her husband, but her career. This is the point that Aidoo emphasizes with this marriage. When an educated African woman with a successful career puts her career before her marriage, and wants to fully enjoy it, climbing the social ladder alongside men with similar qualifications, what happens? Aidoo encourages us to visualise and ponder on this situation by analysing this couple. In fact, looking more closely, the old, classic pattern of the equality at the beginning changing as male

superiority gets established becomes evident again. Social expectations help the pieces to fall into their familiar pattern: the maternity/mother and wife/housewife roles are all there at the beginning of this marriage. When they were dating, Oko accepted that Esi would commute between Accra and Kumasi where Oko was a teacher. When they were married and had their first baby, Oko did not want Esi to commute again when she returned to work:

...at the merest hint of that, Oko had made it clear that the subject wasn't even up for discussion. He made it clear that as far as he was concerned they had done enough of that kind of travelling when they were 'just friends'. In fact he had thought one reason why they had got married was to give themselves the chance to be together properly, no? (40).

Finally, she had to accept a local job. She was over-qualified for the post and had a miserable time at work, as the men in the office were unwelcoming. She was discriminated against, as she was too educated for them: "Having to deal with a man who is over-qualified for a job is bad enough. To have to cope with an overqualified woman in any situation is a complete misfortune." (41) Here, Aidoo changes the pattern of women becoming victims of social expectations and not fulfilling their full potential. Esi went back to her job in Accra, and Oko ended up following her with their daughter. Esi had a house with her job in Accra, and this is where they all live. The cultural gender expectations are overturned, as Esi is the one who provides the roof over their heads. Esi earns a good salary, drives her own car, and pays for someone to look after the house and do the cooking. She travels as much as her male colleagues. With Esi, Aidoo describes an African career woman who chooses to use her opportunities within the education system and the job market to the full, contrary to cultural expectations. From the point of view of women's freedom, and women's ability to live in the best of both worlds, Esi seems to have attained new freedoms.

The novel suggests that the new freedoms that women like Esi find in marriage are the fruits of the new possibilities that education affords women. Aidoo's strategy in the novel is to measure and interpret these freedoms, not only in relation to the various gender norms entrenched in the social order, but to the paradoxes of the education system itself.

2.11 Education, Agency, and the Paradoxes of Women's Struggle for Self-affirmation.

Why had they sent her to school?

What had they hoped to gain from it?

What had they hoped she would gain from it?

Who had designed the educational system that had produced her sort?

What had that person or those people hoped to gain from it?

For surely, taking a ten-year-old child away from her mother, and away from her first language—which is surely one of life's most powerful working tools—for what would turn out to be forever, then transferring her into a boarding school for two years, to a higher boarding school for seven years, then to an even higher boarding school for three or four years, from where she is only equipped to go and roam in strange and foreign lands with no hope of ever meaningfully re-entering her mother's world...all this was too high a price to pay to achieve the dangerous confusion she was now in and the country was now in. (Aidoo 1991: 114)

Esi's questions and reflections here reveal a number of directions in the novel. First, we recognise that she has assimilated so much of the values of her Western education that she is often blind to the entrenched values around marriage in a larger social world that is still traditional in its social outlook. She is also at the same time aware of the extent to which the freedom she has acquired through education has alienated her forever from the protective world of family and community. Thus behind Esi's selfishness and determination to compete in the new world of education and power,

there is some regret at all the meaningful things that are lost in the quest for education and freedom. It is against this paradox that the novel explores the various negotiations that women make in their marriage relationships. It is clear that Aidoo has moved from visionary and community-centred characters like Anowa to a more self-centred one with Esi in *Changes*. Whereas Anowa cannot bring herself to enjoy her husband's wealth because of the exploitative manner in which he acquires it, Esi lacks a strong ideological commitment. She is individualistic and selfish and, because she is continually focused on her career, the political and economic issues of the community as a whole are not part of her concerns. But to give a central space to a character like this is to open up other areas of women's struggles and women's negotiations of the social and political world.

The tensions and conflicts that emerge from the responses of the men in Esi's life are the mirror of the male response to the change brought by Esi in her relationships with men. Esi has a sensual appreciation of her body. She has no inhibitions about going around her house naked. (74) All her men enjoy the sensuality, pleasure and aesthetic of her body. Yet at the same time they want to prove their dominance and power over her. In *Changes*, although the world has changed, values around gender have not changed much. A woman's advancement and ambitions still unsettle old notions about masculinity and the old power relations between men and women. With her first husband, Oko, these power relations are disrupted when he has to follow his wife to Accra where she has a better job and a house to go with it. The reverse is normally expected, and this fact casts a doubt over Oko's masculinity. Having to follow his wife because of her career puts him in the position of the emasculated husband, with Esi gaining more power in the couple owing to the economic power she has because of her job. In addition to that, Esi doing

so well careerwise casts a shadow on her husband's ego and prestige because he is seen as less educated. All this goes against social expectations: a husband/man is expected to do better than his wife/woman in his career or whatever he does to earn money and thus have the reins of power within the marriage—and needs to be seen as cleverer, more intelligent than his wife. In this context, the rape scene can be seen as a way for Oke to assert his masculinity in his marriage, and also to convince himself that he is still in charge there. He needs some sort of reassurance since, as he puts it: "My friends are laughing at me [...] they think I'm not behaving like a man." (8) The assertion of his maleness ultimately rests in having sexual intercourse with his wife against her consent.

This act can be read in two different ways. For Esi, who has come to acquire a Western insight and comprehension of her body, this is a rape. Indeed, the definition of rape is: "sexual intercourse performed without the consent of the woman involved." (Shafer and Frye, 1986). But this way of assessing the situation is in opposition to how sexual intercourse between husband and wife is seen in the African culture. Sexual intercourse is a right a husband is entitled to, with or without his wife's full consent. Esi realizes how deeply these 'sexual rights' of husbands are entrenched in the African culture when she is at a loss for a word to translate 'rape' into a number of African languages (11-12). This shows that the concept of rape does not exist as such in most African societies. Indeed, Esi cannot explain what she considers a violation of her person to her grandmother because, as she says: "Remember, my lady, the best husband you can ever have is he who demands all of you and all of your time." (109).

The clash of cultures is seen here in the completely opposite meanings of the sexual act between husband and wife in the two cultures Esi has to deal with. Esi

seems to be too much ahead of her time. Even other educated African women, like her friend Opokuya, think that Esi could "have tried harder to squeeze out some time for him," (50) and put her husband and her marriage first instead of her career, her personal promotion and success. The tensions created by Esi's disruptive behaviour in her marriage show that the social context in the 1990s may be more modern, allowing women like Esi career opportunities, but as far as gender relations are concerned, social expectations are still that the wife/woman/female is inferior/subordinate to the husband/man/male who is supposed to have the power within the relationship/marriage. Yet at another level in the novel, Esi's grandmother, in spite of her seeming disapproval of Esi, is also somewhat proud of her attempts to balance her personal quest against those of the men in her world. For it is very clear to the old lady that men are selfish in their relations with women. She equates them to "devouring gods" (110), and is secretly very proud that her granddaughter can stand up to them.

Despite their apparent balance, there is a gender conflict in Opokuya and Kubi Dakwa's marriage, which crystallizes around the use of the only car in the family. If conflict and resentment do not erupt into open confrontations, it is only because unlike Esi, Opokuya is often too selfless to openly champion her own conflicts and desires. Kubi's refusal to share the family car with Opokuya, though a seemingly trivial matter, is a source of contention in the marriage and the symbol of his desire to retain power over his wife. Kubi does not want to share the car with Opokuya as it represents his power over her. This is the only area in their relationship where he can assert his power. He is attached to the car and wants it used his way. He will drive it to work, park it in the designated surveyor's space, drive to and from home at lunch time, and use it for field trips—but will not help Opokuya. He gives ethical reasons

for her not using the car, such as that it is on a maintenance allowance. He could take the car off the maintenance allowance, but refuses as he regards the car maintenance as one of his benefits as a senior civil servant. These excuses do not conceal the fact that he does not want to share the car with his wife. This car has become a symbol of his power within his marriage, within which gender equality has otherwise been achieved except, of course, for the household chores. The marriage of Opokuya and Kubi also reflects the tension brought by the male response to the woman's changing attitude towards marital commitment. This is seen in the fact that, although the couple agree that Opokuya needs to work outside the house (she is a midwife) she is still expected to fulfil all the usual roles as a wife and mother. Household chores like shopping for groceries and cooking are still fully her responsibilities. Still, Kubi feels threatened in his power as a husband/man in his marriage. His way of claiming and asserting his male power and showing his wife that he is in charge, is shown in the way he wants to be the only one in control of the only car in the household. Although he has no good reasons not to let Opokuya use the car, he insists on holding a tight control over its use because it allows him to still enjoy some privilege and power as the man within the couple.

If tensions are kept to their lowest in Opokuya and Kubi's marriage, it is thanks to Opokuya's will to make all possible efforts to combine her expected role as a mother and a wife with that of a career woman. To succeed in this, she maintains a tight daily schedule, running errands during work time or after work. She also, for the same goal, uses the extended family to her advantage, sending the children to their aunt during school holidays. Unlike Esi, Opokuya sacrifices her needs and desires for the sake of her husband and her children.

The third marriage is that of Ali and Fusena. They have both had the benefit of a good education when they marry. They both have the same diplomas and the same careers as teachers. Despite the seeming equality, the traditional, patriarchal gender expectations are operating as usual for this social community. When Fusena moves to London to join her husband, she has the opportunity to improve her status by studying for an MA, but foregoes this chance. She instead takes the role of the dutiful wife, and serves her husband and mothers her children while her husband takes his MA. As a consequence, the gender equality that Fusena had at the beginning of their relationship is being lost. Things get worse when they return home as he imposes his choice on her, and she works at the job he decides on. Ali does not help or encourage Fusena to return to teaching, the career that she had trained for and followed successfully for three years. Fusena has the biggest shop in town, but no longer has any power in their marriage. Ali is all-powerful now in a society that has remained fundamentally patriarchal. Fusena is in a vulnerable position, and Ali has the opportunity to have extra-marital affairs and a second marriage. Their marriage is also mediated by the marital values of Islam, teaching female subordination within the couple. The pressures of wifhood and motherhood, stressed by Islamic precepts, contribute to her loss of power. She is glad to become pregnant before her husband sets off for England. And she is also happy, when she joins him in London, to stay with him while she is expecting her second child and being a housewife, while he is busy studying and improving himself. As a result, it is Ali and not Fusena who achieves his ambition.

The values around marriage in Islamic culture do not change when Esi enters Ali and Fusena's marriage to make it a polygamous one. Esi, the forceful, assertive character built up by Aidoo, learns at her own expense that the change in gender

relations she is experimenting with only applies to her alone. Men, as well as the majority of women, are still living by the old patriarchal rules.

2.12 The Modern Marriage and the Larger Social World in *Changes*.

At first sight, one can think that Aidoo is only focusing and portraying modern marriages and relationships among educated Africans, but a closer reading shows that her focus on these marriages is continually and simultaneously mediated by her delineation of the larger social world. She succeeds in bringing all the serious concerns of African contemporary life into this 'love story' à la Aidoo. Through these couples' ups and downs, she discusses local government, as well as global politics, social classes, the prevalent poverty, and the entrenched gender values—the mix of all these issues mediating people's daily lives. Esi, Opokuya and Fusena's concerns about equality, sexual rights and right to fulfilment are validated but at the same time, Aidoo insists that they should be seen in the wider context of political exploitation, class divisions and privileges.

In *Anowa*, it is Anowa's consciousness and overwhelming perception and vision that take on the burden of connecting these divisions and embodying them, whereas in *Changes*, Aidoo's narrator takes on this burden of connection. Like a film director, the narrator continually shifts the camera from the concerns of these educated men and women towards the other world of physical and social deprivation, as if to suggest that gender must include not only the power relations between the sexes but the worlds of class as well. Very skilfully, while unfolding the tensions in the different couples, we are shown or given hints of a bigger picture of their problems, first at the Ghanaian and African level, and secondly at the global, international level. Thus, while we get to know more about the different characters

we, at the same time, are led to see beyond the 'love story' in the text. For example, the narrator takes the opportunity when describing the Dakwas' house to remind us about history. The bungalow occupied by the Dakwas was built in the 1930s for the colonial surveyor. Aidoo makes the connection with colonialism, and the exploitation of the local people, and goes full circle when she touches upon the way those colonizers related to their own women and also, at the same time, abusing the Ghanaian women. An aspect of the Western marriage, which these educated, Westernised couples are aspiring to, is revealed. In the colonies, as in present-day Ghana where all these characters are living, marriage and gender relations among the ruling class of the colonial administration is detrimental to all women involved, whether from the mother country and white, or local and black. White husbands, duly married to white wives, cheat and have affairs with other white women and with black women. The powerful men in the British administration abuse women, both black and white. After this flashback, we can see—as if in a film—the Dakwas almost stepping into the shoes of the previous colonial surveyor and his wife and indeed all those—under the colonial administration and also after independence under the ruling African government—couples before them (16). Apart from this snapshot of what marriage was like in the colonial circle, we can see that the Dakwas are among the elite of present Ghanaian society. This indeed is also true of Esi who, as a data analyst, earns a decent salary and enjoys a bungalow, which comes with her job. As for Ali, his house is a "big structure [...] built in the 1940s" (27) by a wealthy local man.

Aidoo, by letting us see that these couples, in which the wives are desperately struggling for gender equality, actually belong to a social class wherein they can afford to have these aspirations, does not belittle their feelings. What she does is to contrast them with people, actually characters from less fortunate classes, within the

same society. Thus, at the same time that we are reminded of the existence of other classes, we get to see that many people in Africa—the majority—are still living according to the traditional values of marriage which include polygamy (whether justified by tradition or Islam), the importance of the extended family, the wife being subordinate to her husband and her family-in-laws, and motherhood in marriage.

In contrast to the world of these educated African characters is the world of Ali's father. By having a closer look at Musa Musa's world we can see a whole set of traditional Muslim values relating to marriage and gender relations. This world in the text encompasses Mma Danjuma's (she is Ali's aunt, who brought him up) household in Bamako, as well as the Muslim community in Nima with whom Musa Musa stays whenever he goes to Accra on business trips. The values concerning marriage here are specifically Northern—meaning from the Sahel parts of West Africa—and Islamic. This Northern specificity is characterized by a nomadic way of life, which impacts on marital relations. Thus Musa Musa, travelling all over West Africa and not taking into account any administrative border, whether Francophone or Anglophone: "had acquired [...] a wife in each of his eight favourite stops on his trade routes." (23) Polygamy being accepted traditionally as well as by Islam, the nomadic way of life creates big families stretching along the husband's business route.

When these Muslim travellers are in another environment, for example with non-Muslims, they always create a settlement, a special quarter in the city known as 'zongo' where the Northern culture, way of life, and all the Muslim values are transplanted. Another interesting point about the marital habits in this Northern Muslim community is the way they adapt to their new environment through marriage. They marry one of the local women to ensure a peaceful co-habitation with the local community; this is seen as a strategic move. As one of the elders in Nima puts it:

“Hadn’t they all committed the crime he [Ali] was also planning to be guilty of? ...Bringing in contamination in the form of a daughter of the infidels? ...Most of them had married women of the South and daughters of the infidels. It was survival.” (105) This strategic marital alliance can be easily understood when we take into account the social class of the majority of this community composed of illiterate door-to-door traders, tailors and the like, whose services are needed by the community for its survival in a foreign environment. But when we move to the elite educated class, and still witness the same phenomenon in the case of Ali and Esi, the survival strategy becomes questionable.

The second world offering a contrast to these highly educated people with new values and the means to implement them is that of Esi’s mother and grandmother. The values surrounding marriage can be qualified as traditional, Southern, Christian values. They are based on the supremacy of the husband over his wife and other traditional values like motherhood. But although these Southern communities adopt Christianity and its precepts, as far as marriage is concerned, they still accept polygamy, with its traditional habits; the husband being impartial, co-wives seeing him in turn and respecting the seniority of the wives in the marriage. Esi’s grandmother is very much aware of that code, and she can see the damage any Western romantic aspect of marriage can cause. To Esi, who argues that love is a good enough reason to marry, Nana replies: “Ah, my lady, the last man any woman should think of marrying is the man she loves,” (42) thus discarding the romance associated with European marriage and monogamy. But above all, the old woman makes the link between women’s misery in relationships with patriarchy and European domination and exploitation of the Africans:

Men were the first gods in the Universe, and they were devouring gods. The only way they could yield their best—and sometimes their worst too—was if

their egos were sacrificed too: regularly. [...] There are other types of gods [...] We Africans have allowed ourselves to be regularly sacrificed to the egos of the Europeans, no? (110)

This traditional, Southern, Christian world also expands in the text to the world of Esi's first husband, and Kubi's family and relatives in Accra. Marital and family values centre on the wife's subordination to her husband and in-laws and motherhood. For them, since Esi's only child, a girl, is not enough, her husband is strongly advised to take another wife to ensure the continuity of the family.

The above contrasting analysis of the situation in which these modern African professionals are moving shows that among themselves, and at an individual level, they may be able to choose to build their personal and sexual relationship the way they feel in pursuit of gender equality and the right to personal fulfilment. But they are soon caught in a web of social values controlling men-and-women relationships, which ultimately boil down to some sort of marital alliance. This class of people, because of their connections (which they cannot cut away) with communities which still live by the old traditional values, cannot get away with new, alternative, relationships. So Esi cannot get any support from her people when she divorces Oko, her first husband, because he has sex with her against her will and he "wanted too much of her...and her time." (38) And neither can her people (meaning the traditional, Southern Christian community) understand that the marriage with her second husband is over, even after he offered her a brand new car and "almost finished paying for an estate house" (165) for her. In addition to this situation, the men belonging to this elite class are not so keen on gender equality, which is a threat to their male privileges and their egos. The modern marriage of Esi, Okpokuya and Fusena is shown to be educated women's dreams. Educated men may pay tribute to

these aspirations or be attracted to these “nicely mad” (74) modern women, although the reality in their private lives is still otherwise.

In spite of these uncertainties and contradictions, Aidoo does not leave the status quo as it is. Her representations of the men are ironic enough to demonstrate a desire to move beyond the existing realities. Through Oko’s aggrieved masculinity and whinings, as well as Ali’s charms, we can see patriarchal dominance. But Esi’s grandmother believes that change is possible in the relationships between men and women, and at another level between Africans and Europeans. As she puts it, things: “can be changed. It can be better. Life on this Earth need not always be some humans being gods, and others being sacrificial animals.” (111) And this change is really what Esi is after. Behind her selfishness is a genuine need to be more than a woman and a wife—a need to realise both her potential for self-development and womanhood. Finally, the grandmother figure is a powerful one. I would like to stress again that although she abides by traditional views about marriage, she secretly admires her granddaughter in her search for self-realisation, as her thoughts about men’s dominance even in the modern world are highly subversive.

2.2. Bâ’s *Scarlet Song*: Marriage, Gender and the Politics of Race

My analysis of *Anowa* and *Changes* showed the circumstances surrounding the writing of these two texts. *Anowa*, being one of Aidoo’s early works, bears all her intentions to anchor it in the traumatic experiences of slavery and colonization. By the time Aidoo wrote *Changes* she had introduced new ideas in accordance with the current times. Aidoo follows the evolution of Ghanaian society from a colony owned by the British in *Anowa* to an independent, self-governing state in *Changes*. She also

gives this evolution a gender and female perspective. Thus, in *Changes*, Aidoo's protagonists are grappling with the problems of the modern day Ghana of the 1990s.

Just as the perception of marriage in *Changes* is influenced by time and context, so also in Bâ's *Scarlet Song* the current political ideas and personal circumstances affect how Bâ examines the changing nature of marriage. *So Long a Letter* is based in the era of independence in the 1960s in the French West African colonies. Gender and women's issues, such as marriage, are dealt with in connection with the nationalist movement of the time. Women had high hopes then of equal partnership within marriage, as well as equal citizenship for all regardless of religion and origin. Bâ's exploration of polygamy in *So Long a Letter* is mainly centred on this fundamental element of freedom and equality in the society. Bâ's context is the crisis of polygamy when set in the politics of decolonisation and national self-determination. Bâ highlights gender and politics revealing a national identity that is not essentialist and undifferentiated, but involving several layers of other identities that are entwined with each other within the larger anti-colonial struggle. However, with *So Long a Letter*, the crisis of polygamy and sexual politics takes precedence over the politics of the day. In *Scarlet Song*, Bâ explores the influence of marriage, gender and the politics of race on people's daily lives. She attempts to push gender beyond sexual politics and into the politics of experience and the everyday.

In *Scarlet Song*, Bâ broadens the debate about gender and marriage by homing in on the previously unexplored areas of race and taboo. She looks at inter-racial marriage in relation to different racial and cultural attitudes, and also to two different generations. This allows for much debate and exploration. Bâ places her exploration of marriage in the wider context of racial and cultural attitudes and shows the taboos that keep these attitudes entrenched and unchanged both in Africa and the West. Bâ

also sets *Scarlet Song* within a new generation of men and women. It is not for nothing that the context of *Scarlet Song* is also the context of the May 1968 uprising in France. Beyond its immediate repercussions, this rebellion showed that social change can happen, and beyond any dreams. As Douglas Kellner writes: "May '68 demonstrates [...] that spontaneous action can erupt quickly and surprisingly, that it can provide alternatives to standard politics, and that a new politics is practical and necessary" (Kellner quoted in Feenberg, 2001). This leitmotiv of change is the centre of this mythical uprising. According also to Daniel Singer in his article "The Ghosts of May", "More generally, the '68ers argued, and not just in France, that if a society cannot provide social justice, equality, a decent life, you don't just conclude [...] If life is unbearable, you don't try to fit in, you change society." (Singer 1993). This discourse on change undoubtedly had a profound impact on Bâ's trans-national theme. It made it possible for her to envisage the possibilities of change in the racial and cultural boundaries that made relations across race and culture difficult to sustain. Thus, in *Scarlet Song*, Bâ experiments with marriage and gender, and tries hard to turn her innermost yearning for equality among all people without any distinction of race or sex into a viable inter-racial marriage: the ultimate trial in racial and gender equality.

The effect of Mireille's dating a black man is like an explosion in her home. Mireille's parents have a sense of 'sacrilege' about their daughter crossing the race divide with her choice of a partner. Mireille realises some painful, hard truths and ponders: "The heritage of what it was correct to do and think had its taboos and forbidden areas. Between preaching the equality of all men and practising it, there was an abyss fraught with peril, and they were not equipped to make this leap" (29-30).

For Mireille's parents, especially her father, the abyss separating the two races is wide, and seems to be unbridgeable. Mireille's father is a diplomat and is happy to preach equality between races in his official speeches, but implementing this equality in his own home is a completely different matter. His old prejudices and preconceived ideas come flooding back into his language when equality of race enters his home. Ousmane quickly becomes an 'object' (25-26), and Mireille can not recognise her own father. "Mireille fell back, horrified. She was staggered at her father's language. Was this the same man who made speeches preaching fraternisation with the indigenous peoples?" (27-28): Most Europeans seem to believe that they are a superior race and this leads to their profound disdain for the black race. The expatriates working for France in former colonies like Senegal still believe in their superiority. This superiority complex is usually well hidden in official discourses and behaviour with black employees, although there is often a paternalistic slant. It is another matter, however, when there is close personal involvement such as their children dating and wanting to marry into the black community.

Similarly, Ousmane's parents find their son's choice of a European wife impossible to come to terms with because of their traditions of race and culture and their religion. Once again, people have deeply held beliefs, preconceived ideas and prejudices. Yaye Khady, Ousmane's mother is convinced that:

A *Toubab* can't be a proper daughter-in-law. She'll only have eyes for her man. We'll mean nothing to her. And I who dreamt of a daughter-in-law who'd live here and relieve me of the domestic work by taking over the management of the house, and now I'm faced with a woman who's going to take my son away from me. (66)

Through Yaye Khady's apprehension and reluctance about having a white daughter-in-law, we can see there is a fundamental difference in the concept of marriage

between these two communities. In the black community, marriage encompasses the two families. The mother-in-law's position is thus secure. In the white community marriage only involves the man and wife. In addition to these racial and cultural differences between the two communities there is the religious difference, increasing the rift between Mireille and Ousmane. Mireille and her parents are Christian and believe in monogamous marriage. Ousmane's family are Muslim, in which men are allowed up to four wives. This Muslim edict reinforces polygamy, which was already part of the customs of the black community. These are yet more difficulties for Mireille and Ousmane.

Perhaps Bâ envisages that this cross-cultural marriage may bridge the gap between the two communities, despite all the pitfalls and taboos based on preconceived ideas and prejudices. As we have seen, the cross-cultural marriage in *Scarlet Song* is set against the background of the French uprising of 1968. In *So Long a Letter*, Bâ sets the marriage of Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, with their dreams of gender equality, at the time of independence, with the associated discourses about freedom and equal citizenship for everyone, regardless of sex and origin. Bâ was fully aware of the impact of the student revolt of May 1968 in France and in French colonies such as Senegal. This revolt boosted the possibilities for freedom and equality for all regardless of colour, class and origin. A mixed race marriage can be a bridge spanning the abyss separating the two communities, the white of the former colonizers and the black, the previously colonized.

Bâ makes direct reference to the French student revolt of May 1968 in *Scarlet Song*. She has Ousmane taking part in the student uprising in Dakar, and Mireille doing a similar thing in France. Combating authority along with their fellow students is good training for them for the difficulties that they will later face with their families

objecting to their marriage. Their participation within their respective universities shows their belief in challenging the status quo and working towards freedom for all whatever their race, class or religion. Mireille is in France on May 10th 1968 when there are violent clashes between the students and the authorities. She writes to Ousmane about how the students succeed in influencing Pompidou's government. George Dupeux writes:

The night of 10th May (*la nuit des barricades*) saw the most violent clashes so far. The minister had refused to negotiate, and this time the riot police went in in force. The Prime Minister, M. Pompidou, who returned from a visit to Afghanistan on 11th May, immediately decided to make all three main concessions that the students had demanded as conditions for negotiation—the reopening of the Sorbonne, the withdrawal of police from it, and the freeing of the imprisoned students. (1972: 253)

Participating with the other students during this time of social unrest allows Mireille to experience feelings of exhilaration about real freedom. While joining in with the riots, she kicks a policeman's face (43), something she would never have dreamed of doing previously. Bâ writes that; "the inferno suited her choice of existence, and became an integral part of her unconventional love affair" (42). Ousmane, for his part, was imprisoned for twelve days for participating in the subsequent unrest at the university of Dakar, which rapidly spread to the city. The university was closed for a while. The students gained some of their demands. This background of the Sorbonne student revolt allowed Ousmane and Mireille to take the plunge into a mixed-race marriage.

Behind Ousmane and Mireille's marriage is patriarchy, which intensifies the divisions in both generations: the couple themselves, and Mireille's parents. Bâ does not show Ousmane's father as a patriarchal figure, perhaps because he is handicapped by losing a leg fighting for France in the Second World War, and feels in some way

diminished compared to his wife. Bâ also makes him monogamous, which is in line with the traditional belief that for contemplating polygamy the man needs to be fit and reasonably well off. Monsieur De la Vallée, Mireille's father, shows no such hesitancy in being the patriarch with his wife and his family. He terrorises his wife, who is almost invisible within the household. She disagrees with her husband when he rejects their daughter for marrying a black man, and rather than confronting him, she faints. She realises the truth about her own marriage, that she is married to a "cold man whom she must wait on, satisfy, applaud till her heart broke" (78). Ousmane tends to play the patriarchal role, just like his father-in-law. This is obvious despite all his agonies about his 'blackness', his 'negritude', and his religion.

The marriage of Ousmane and Mireille realises, to some extent, Bâ's dream of new connections between the two races, or at least partly reduces the gulf that separates them. Reality soon kicks in, however, with the community in Dakar conspiring against this mixed marriage, and Ousmane, himself deciding to contract to a second marriage. Ousmane uses a mixture of negritude, nationalistic and Islamic ideas to justify taking a Senegalese young woman, Ouleymatou, to be his second wife. According to Dorothy S. Blair in *Senegalese Literature: A Critical History* (1984), the main concerns of the negritude movement were:

The preservation of oral literature and indigenous folklore: the rediscovery and presentation to Western readers of an African concept of life, with a universe peopled with and governed by invisible, telluric forces; in poetry, the assumption of African symbolism, rhythms and canons of aesthetics; in novels, the difficulties faced by African society in accommodating an 'assimilated', twentieth-century persona to the traditional, moral, social and spiritual values of their ancestors. (50)

This broadly defined 'negritude' can accommodate any claim. The most interesting and problematic aspect of this literary and cultural movement is the way the African woman is celebrated:

The latter is best expressed in the celebrated '*Femme noire*', the black woman who is, in the first place, the individual loved one and also the archetypal African woman, whose beauty is inventoried in erotic imagery. She is also the '*Femme obscure*', suggesting the dark mysteries of fertility, the fecund symbols of motherhood; so the black woman is also the poet's mother in whose shadow he grew up. Finally, the black woman symbolizes the whole black continent. (65-66)

As far as the negritude literary movement is concerned, Ousmane relies on its ideas to boost or to show his 'African-ness'. Throughout chapter 7, Bâ gives her views on this movement, which echo Leopold Sédar Senghor, a prominent writer of the negritude literary movement. Bâ compares the profound, fundamental gulf between Ousmane and Mireille with the binary divisions of black and white, African and European, and emotion and reason. Everything white and European is constructed around Cartesian 'reason', and has clear-cut concepts. On the other hand, all things black and African are built around 'emotion' and feelings. According to Senghor; "*l'émotion est nègre et la raison hellène*" (emotion is black and reason is white). Senghor, as well as Bâ, uses these binary constructions to revive and boost the confidence of Africans to separate from French colonialism. Senghor and Bâ stress the African cultural heritage, but this is heavily influenced by colonialism and colonial rules, including the racial divide, that are still powerful and followed by Africans. Nevertheless, the creation of this movement empowered African students in France and in the French colonies to shed their inferiority complex *vis à vis* France and everything French, and be proud of their African culture and of being African.

Bâ elaborates about negritude with the polygamous marriage of Ousmane as a whole, and with the specifics of his relationship with each of his wives. Mireille is French and represents white, Western colonial power. Ouleymatou is African from Senegal. She is black and is a symbol of African culture. Ousmane's marriage with Mireille is complex. At the beginning he is struck by all the 'whiteness' about her, which he had thought that he was barred from as a black man. It is as if he is under her spell, like a siren's spell:

her "silky golden hair (....) her long lashes over her grey-blue eyes" (16)

her "milk-white neck" (17)

her "milky skin and golden hair". (63)

He is overawed by all her 'whiteness'. With reference to Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* (1970), Ousmane and Mireille are colonized and colonizer with an added twist. Mireille represents things that are not accessible for Ousmane. Ousmane feels inferior as a black man dating a white woman. Also, he is from a poor family whereas Mireille has a middle-class background. It gradually becomes evident that Mireille represents what Ousmane needs to stop feeling inferior to. When Mireille agrees to marry Ousmane, he feels that he has left his poor, inferior, black roots, and is a little nearer the 'superior' people in society, which is one of his goals. Ousmane is loved and accepted by a white woman, and is thus equal to any white man before society. But there is another side: now that he is married to Mireille, Ousmane also feels deeply uncomfortable with respect to his negritude views about black peoples' self-affirmation and cultural revival:

He must immerse himself in the heart of his own race, to live according to black values and the rhythmic beat of the tom-tom. He was drawn by his past, by his nature, to assume with fervour his own cultural heritage. (92)

Ousmane's excuse for searching out an African woman who shares his background, Ouleymatou, is that he is asserting his own culture and values, and that this frees him from his duties as a husband to Mireille. The character of Ouleymatou, depicted by Bâ, is similar to the black woman described by negritude poets like Senghor.

When Ousmane decides to return to his roots, his relationship with Mireille deteriorates, and he is attracted to Ouleymatou. Ouleymatou is opposite to Mireille in every way. She is a black African woman from Senegal; and Ousmane is in no way inferior to her. With Ousmane's marriage to Ouleymatou, Bâ follows the negritude code. By this code, African women are happy to be placed on a pedestal by their men, where they are sexual recipients for their husbands and a fountain of inexhaustible love for their sons. Ouleymatou epitomises this position. With Ouleymatou, Ousmane is "the lord and master (...) In his home his slightest whims were anticipated." (148) Ousmane is the dominant one in his relationship with Ouleymatou; his authority is never questioned. Ousmane dominates financially by being the breadwinner, and receives the reverence due. Ouleymatou cooks for Ousmane and serves up all his favourite ethnic foods, and gives him the choice morsels from each dish. "The woman picked out the choicest titbits for him, the guest of honour, and piled them up in front of him." (117) Ousmane has had the benefit of education, which was not possible for Ouleymatou, and he dominates intellectually. This reinforces Ousmane's superior position to Ouleymatou as if he were a Messiah. The negritude discourses help to maintain the status of the dominant male and elevate men to a god-like position. Usually, men are depicted as knowing everything, having the power and the money to make things happen. They are bounteous towards their women, as long as the women know their place and never challenge male domination. With Ouleymatou, Ousmane feels the pleasure of being the dominant one in their marriage: patriarchy with an

added twist. "Ouleymatou, [...] Symbol of the black woman, whom he had to emancipate; symbol of Africa, one of whose 'enlightened sons' he was. In his mind he confused Ouleymatou with Africa:

'An Africa, which has to be restored to its prerogatives, to be helped to evolve!' When he was with the African woman, he was the prophet of the 'word made truth', the Messiah with the unstinting hands providing nourishment for body and soul. And these roles suited his deep involvement. (150)

Ousmane is the liberator of Ouleymatou, and has peace of mind as well as the benefits of being the man in their marriage. When African women are amalgamated with the symbol of Africa, the result is a 'motherly' Africa ready to do anything for her sons. This part of the negritude discourses preserves male dominance, and the lowly status of Ouleymatou in her marriage to Ousmane is a testimony to this.

Up to now, I have discussed the racial excuses wrapped up in the negritude discourses put forward by Ousmane to justify his polygamous marriage. Ousmane also uses Islam to excuse his behaviour. Mireille is a love match: she converts from Christianity to Islam when she marries Ousmane; she also embraces polygamy, and abandons the monogamous Christian tradition. There is an ongoing debate in the teachings of Islam about polygamy and the traditional beliefs of African men that allow them to have a number of sexual partners. This discussion is represented by the situation with Ousmane. According to the Koran:

Marry women of your choice / Two or three or four / But if ye fear that ye shall not / Be able to deal justly (with them) / Then only one, or (a captive) / That your right hands possess. / That will be more suitable, / To prevent you / From doing injustice. (Yusuf 1934: 205)

These are supposed to be the teachings of the Koran—the key words are equitability and respect: the husband must try to be equitable to each of his wives, but Ousmane is

not following the religious teachings closely. His main concerns are to have a polygamous marriage, and to have Mireille convert to Islam. Many women in traditional Moslem marriages are unhappy. They believe their lives depend on Allah's will and that they are supposed to bear their fate silently. Ousmane wants to take a second wife, and uses religious precepts: "I can easily marry a black woman. I'm a Moslem. And so's my wife." (86) Ousmane wants to marry a Senegalese woman and has nothing to reproach Mireille for, except that she is white. There is a racist element here, as Ousmane did not merely say that he wanted to take a second wife, but also that he wanted to marry a 'black woman'. Ousmane had attained his goal of proving that he was able to marry a white woman even though he was black. He then wanted to marry a black woman to be true to his race.

As for the conspiracy (sustained by the community) that Yaye Khady approves of her son's second marriage, this is partly to do with their faith since the second marriage can be used as a weapon against Mireille, the white daughter-in-law that she doesn't approve of. Yaye Khady uses religious practices to 'poison' Mireille's life. She complains that: "The toubab does not kneel down to pray," (84) even though Yaye Khady does not always follow religious edicts herself. Yaye Khady is most concerned about her own standing in the Senegalese society as a mother and a mother-in-law. As she says: "Any African woman rather than this white woman. Any African woman would show respect and consideration for me." (126) It is consequently no surprise that when she hears that her son has made a Senegalese woman pregnant she comments, hypocritically: "God is sending me a child to bring Ousmane Gueye back to the right path." (126) Yaye Khady sees the work of Allah's hand when she finds it useful for herself.

Another aspect of the discussion is about mixed marriages seen within this negritude context. There are many stressful areas within Ousmane and Mireille's marriage, including those of ex-colonised/ex-coloniser, black/white, preconceived ideas of gender and male/female prerogatives. Sometimes Ousmane sees his marriage to Mireille as an act of treason against Senegal and against Africa. All this is involved in Mireille's personal destiny. She quarrels with both Ousmane and the Senegalese community that is represented here by Ousmane's friends and family. Mireille rejects African society, and cannot adapt to it. She becomes depressed, kills her mixed-race child, and stabs her husband. Ousmane ends up at the hospital but will survive.

Mireille's private life parallels the politics of a whole nation. Stratton writes: "Woman now serves as an index of the state of the nation." (1994: 41) Bâ, speaks out clearly for African women, and distances herself from the negritude ideology, which equates the African woman with Mother Africa. She writes:

The woman writer in Africa has a special task. She has to present the position of women in Africa in all its aspects. There is still so much injustice. In the family, in the institutions, in society, in the street, in political organizations discrimination reigns supreme... As women, we must work for our own future, we must overthrow the status quo, which harms us, and we must no longer submit to it. Like men, we must use literature as a non-violent but effective weapon. We no longer accept the nostalgic praise to the African Mother who, in his anxiety, man confuses with Mother Africa. Within African literature, room must be made for women ... room we will fight for with all our might. (Cited in Schipper 1987).

Although Bâ complains about the romanticization of African women, to some extent she also conforms to this way of writing. Perhaps the fact that Mireille is a French woman and not an African one has something to do with the way Bâ portrays her. Bâ still seems to conform to some of the literary norms established by male

African writers of the Negritude movement like Senghor. Ousmane's way of conflating his relationship with Ouleymatou with his relationship and duty to Mother Africa is a testimony to this. Bâ uses allegory to develop her principal female characters, and builds them alongside the construction and consolidation of the Senegalese nation. Ramatoulaye starts on an equal footing with her husband, but later relinquishes this position and stops fighting for equality for all the citizens of the society. Mireille also stops fighting for women's position in the African nation by killing her mixed-race son, and then herself. Just like these women's dreams, all the promises of the new nation burst like bubbles. It is hard to see how this supports Bâ's claim for a place for women within African literature. We can hope, as Bâ does, that African women writers can create strong female characters that are able to continue without flinching, and transcend all the limitations that society imposes on all women and African women in particular.

Bâ's pessimistic view of inter-racial marriage may have led to her writing about the failure of Ousmane and Mireille's marriage and the death of their son, Gorgui, at the hand of his depressed mother. But Bâ also has an optimistic side, which we see with the conception of the second mixed marriage in the text. The marriage of Ousmane and Mireille is almost all-consuming in the text, and there is just space for a subtle development of Lamine and Pierrette. Lamine and Pierrette are also from the opposite sides of the divide between black and white. This couple show how, with good will and the ability to compromise, the abyss can be bridged; as Bâ herself puts it, the man's "negritude not sitting heavily on him". (98) Lamine continues with their marriage as a monogamous one and supports Pierrette in their relationship with his family of origin.

As a conclusion to this chapter, we can say that both Aidoo and Bâ have broadened their outlook in *Changes* and *Scarlet Song*. Esi, the heroine in *Changes* is much more individualistic than the eponymous heroine of *Anowa*. Instead of the community, Esi's concern is for her own well-being. Her pursuit of marital bliss makes her experiment with monogamy, and then polygamy, before she finds herself alone at the end of the narrative. We leave her on the brink of a nervous breakdown, realising that her prerequisite of happiness within a marital relationship is not yet acceptable either to men or African society as a whole. As for Bâ, the issue of marriage is taken to a global level when she deals with inter-racial marriage in *Scarlet Song*. Patriarchy and racism are shown to be global, reinforcing women's subordinate position within marriage. With these texts, both writers move thematically towards more modern aspects of marriage in Africa.

**Marriage and New Definitions of Liberation and Freedom:
Tsitsi Dangarembga's, *Nervous Conditions*
and Khadi Fall's *Senteurs d'Hivernage***

In the first two chapters, I examined the different ways in which Ama Ata Aidoo and Mariama Ba politicise issues of marriage in narratives. In a major sense, these two writers began a tradition of locating marriage within the politics of history and nationalism, and making marriage central to the larger public issues of liberation and nationhood. Their perspectives have been central to the overall body of modern African literature because of the way in which they have called seemingly monolithic concepts into question. First of all, their writing has revealed the different ways in which women imagine the nation and how locating individual women's histories in the larger history of the nation raises other questions and issues not raised in male writing. Secondly, these two writers were also pioneers in exploring wider transnational and global ideas about gender, feminism and women's agency, situating the debates of marriage within wider international debates. As already discussed in chapter two, Ama Ata Aidoo engages with the notion of 'marital rape' in *Changes* and Mariama Bâ sets *Scarlet Song*, her second novel, in the context of the uprising in France. This suggests some connection with the radicalism of the French feminist movement during this period.

Tsitsi Dangarembga in *Nervous Conditions* and Khadi Fall in *Senteurs d'hivernage* follow in this tradition of enlarging and politicising marriage in fictional narratives. They follow it in different times and raise issues that are not always included in the larger national debates on freedom and liberation. In their works the domestic sphere of marriage becomes an arena not simply for domestic issues but the

centre of real, public and political debates. Politicising the context of marriage raises several issues, for as Deniz Kandiyoti rightfully observes:

Women's stake in nationalism is complex.[...] On the one hand, nationalist movements invite women to participate more fully in collective life by interpellating them as 'national' actors: mothers, educators, workers and even fighters. On the other hand, they reaffirm the boundaries of culturally acceptable feminine conduct and exert pressure on women to articulate their gender interests within the terms of reference set by nationalist discourse. Feminism is not autonomous, but bound to the signifying network of the national context which produces it. (1991: 432-433)

Kandiyoti draws our attention to the fact that the plight of women in the contexts of freedom and liberation is not a straightforward one, acceptance of women's roles in society generally turning out to be very different from how men see it. This chapter examines *Nervous Conditions* and *Senteurs d' Hivernage* because they locate marriage in new contexts of struggle and liberation that generate conditions different from that of the narratives of Bâ and Aidoo, but similar in their attempts to redefine women's freedoms and agency through marriage. *Nervous Conditions* locates itself in the period of the Zimbabwean liberation movement. There are implicit parallels between the larger freedoms being fought for and the struggles of individual women for peace, freedom and agency. These implicit parallels suggest that stories of women and marriage are equally political and can be public subjects. The first part of *Senteurs d'Hivernages* is located in the period of Apartheid in South Africa, and the different attempts within the black community as well as within the dominant white community to overthrow the Apartheid laws and give the black community equality and freedom in their own country. In its second part, the narrative locates itself in the post-independence period in Senegal and examines women's freedom against the background of nation building in the post-colonial era of the country.

3.1. Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*: Marriage as a nervous condition

Critical discussions of *Nervous Conditions* do not generally comment directly on the subject of marriage. Sugnet (1997), and the various critical discussions in Willey and Treiber (2002) discuss the novel in terms of the psychology of the colonised and the situation of women in colonisation and patriarchy. Most of these critical works stress Fanon's impact on Dangarembga and examine the implications of Sartre's famous statement in the preface of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* that: "The status of 'native' is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonized people with their consent" (1985: 17). The suggestion that the colonised participate in their colonisation has encouraged readings that explore the novel in terms of the psychological traumas of colonisation and colonised people's complicity with their colonisation. Although most discussions of this theme stress women's double colonisation within a colonial and patriarchal world, they do not focus on the institution of marriage as an important context of this double colonisation. For instance, Anthony Chenelles argues that the novel "identifies oppression not only in Rhodesian settler racism but in the conservatism of the Shona patriarchy and its political narratives trace the double denial of power which black Rhodesian women endured". (1996: 61)

Chenelles does not focus directly on marriage. Yet, the double denial of power which he identifies here is more deeply explored in the context of the various marriages delineated in the novel. Interpreting *Nervous Conditions* from the perspective of marriage and gender reveals a broader idea of colonisation and decolonisation in colonial Rhodesia. We are forced to consider political decolonisation side by side with decolonisation in marriage. At the same time as we encounter the general struggle of the colonised to escape the grip of colonisation and create new lives, we also

read the narratives of women struggling with the twin burdens of womanhood and blackness within marriage. In *Nervous Conditions* marriage is central to relationships between men and women because it is within marriage that notions of womanhood, masculinity and femininity not only influence how men and women see their roles in marriage, but also determines the power relations between them. The novel presents us with three parallel narratives of marriage across three generations, and an intertextual examination of these narratives allows us to grasp women's struggles with patriarchal assumptions in marriage throughout the different generations. Examining these different narratives also demonstrates the extent to which the norms and values that define gender have been maintained, modified or changed throughout history.

In *Nervous Conditions*, marriage in the homestead presents an example of a traditional Shona marriage according to the ancient rules of the land. The two older female characters, Tambu's grandmother, Mbuya, and Tambu's mother, Mainini, live in this traditional way. Dagarengba builds a picture of Mbuya's marriage, albeit briefly, and it is important in that Mbuya was formative in the shaping of Tambu's subjective self. Mbuya and her thoughts about marriage influence Tambu both directly and indirectly when Tambu contemplates marriage for herself. Mbuya's recollection of her marriage outlines and reveals all the assumptions, values and gender roles which traditional marriage encodes and which Mbuya accepts without question:

'...I was married to your grandfather. We lived up in Chipinge, where the soil is ripe and your great-grandfather was a rich man in the currency of those days, having many fat herd of cattle, large fields and four wives who worked hard to produce bountiful harvests. (...) Your great-grandfather had sons enough to fill a kraal, all big, strong, hard working men. And me, I was beautiful in those days. (...) I wasn't always this old, with wrinkles and grey hair, without teeth. At one time I was as small and pretty and plump as you, and when I grew into a woman I was a fine woman with hair so long you

could plait it into a single row down the middle of my head. I had heavy, strong hips'. (1988: 18)

This passage shows that gender roles within a marriage and social values were clearly defined. Young men needed to be strong and hard working, and women needed to be beautiful and to have heavy, strong hips. The belief that women with big hips had babies easily emphasises the importance of women's role in reproduction. As well as their important role in reproduction, women had to work hard in the fields. The traditional marriage, as described here, has particular codes and practices. Mbuya talks about Tambu's great-grandfather's household, and puts herself and her husband into the extended family picture. The decisions within a marriage were seldom for the couple themselves, and were more often made by the extended family, and the values attributed to each gender were clear-cut. Men needed to own cattle, fields, women and children, and the women's tasks were to tend the fields and reproduce children.

In her formative years, Tambu's mother, Mainini, also influences her perception of marriage. Mainini's marriage is similarly traditional, but Dangarembga chooses to depict a husband who does not live up to expectations. The general expectation within such traditional marriages is that a man works hard, amasses wealth (land, cattle) and gains prestige and a good position in the social hierarchy with his wife and children. His wife and children are also unpaid workers in his fields. Tambu's father, Jeremiah, does not behave in the time honoured way. Dangarembga shows Jeremiah as a man whose behaviour casts doubt on the nature of his gender. He is portrayed as not being 'man' enough in terms of maleness in his society.

At the same time, Dangarembga builds up a female character who is completely traditional. Mainini joins her husband's household straight after leaving her father's home. She dutifully fulfils all the things that are expected of a woman in a traditional

marriage. She is shown as a victim for whom there is no hope of change and who is resigned to sharing the fate of all traditional women in the society. She says:

This business of womanhood is a heavy burden. How could it not be? Aren't we the ones who bear children? [...] When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who has to make them. [...] And these days it is worse, with the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other. Aiwa! What will help you, my child, is to learn to carry your burdens with strength. (16)

Being a woman appears to be the decisive factor in her life. She can see no escape from the misery of sacrificing herself to the obligations of womanhood. As far as she is concerned, her fate was sealed when she was born female. As a woman, marriage is inevitable, and then bearing children with all the responsibilities of a wife and a mother. Mainini equates the duties with burdens, perhaps partly because there was no escape possible for her.

Dangarembga introduces an ironic twist when she presents Mainini as able to understand the changing situation of African women in the developing modern world of colonial Rhodesia. For instance, she perceives the increasing poverty of African lives and the increased burdens on women that accompany the process of modernisation. Though she remains bound to old concepts of marriage she is perceptive enough to see through the deprivations and losses that the new "Englishness" generates both in education and marriage. Her powerful insights are therefore important windows through which we can read the pitfalls of the modern marriage represented by Babamukuru and Maiguru. For in the exploration of the theme of marriage in *Nervous Conditions* the marriage of Maiguru and Babamukuru presents a powerful as well as an ironic parallel to the traditional marriages in the novel.

3.11 Marriage and the Double Burdens of Women

Unlike Mainini's life on the homestead, Maiguru's life at the mission, in the city, is very different. Babamukuru with his wife, Maiguru, and their two children are examples of a 'modern' African family. Babamukuru and Maiguru derive this status by virtue of their Western education. Education allows to move up in the colonial society. On the face of it Babamukuru and Maiguru appear like a couple who have been successful in modernising their lives and their marriage. Tambu sees them in this light when she comes to live with them:

Maiguru was well looked after by Babamukuru, in a big house on the mission which I had not seen but of which I had heard rumours concerning its vastness and elegance. Maiguru was driven about in a car, looked well-kept and fresh, clean all the time. She was altogether a different kind of woman from my mother. I decided it was better to be like Maiguru. (16)

Maiguru's marriage to Babamukuru appears smooth and successful. But behind this façade it is in fact, a very conservative one in which gender plays the same role as it plays in traditional marriages. Pauline Ada Uwakweh observes that "the basic feature of patriarchy is male power over the female [...]. To a striking extent, Dangarembga creatively illustrates the presence of these patriarchal features". (1995: 77) Thus in the traditional manner Maiguru dishes out food first to her husband before the rest of the family help themselves. Maiguru always ensures that her husband's wishes are carried out, that life runs smoothly, and that her husband is free from any annoyance or frustration. Indeed, the narrative shows that despite his education, Babamukuru has traditional views about his position as the head of his own family and of his extended family. Ironically, his experience of migration and Western ways seems to have no effect on his perception of gender roles.

Dangarembga's novel however, works to introduce several tensions into this seemingly satisfactory marriage. First, we are made to see the regrets and disappointments that lie within the cracks of Maiguru's marriage. Tambu's perceptive observation uncovers both bitterness and helplessness on the part of Maiguru. Her intimate conversation with Maiguru is particularly revealing and should be reproduced at length:

'Do you really have a Master's Degree?' Maiguru was flattered. 'Didn't you know?' She smiled at me over the top of her glasses. How could I have known? No one had ever mentioned it to me. 'But Maiguru,' I answered immediately, emboldened by the thought of my aunt obtaining a Master's Degree, 'did you ever say?'

'Did you ever ask?' she countered, and continued, 'yes, we both studied, your uncle and I, in South Africa for our Bachelor's Degrees and in England for our Master's.'

'I thought you went to look after Babamukuru.' I said. 'That's all people ever say.'

Maiguru snorted. 'And what do you expect? Why should a woman go all that way and put up with all those problems if not to look after her husband?' [...] 'That's what they like to think I did.' She continued sourly [...] 'Whatever they thought,' she said, 'much good did it do them! I still studied for that degree and got it in spite of all of them – your uncle, your grandparents and the rest of your family. Can you tell me now that they aren't pleased that I did, even if they don't admit it? No! Your uncle wouldn't be able to do half the things he does if I didn't work as well' (Dangarembga 1988: 100-101).

It is the sense Tambu has of a woman's continued subordination in spite of her education that makes her doubt whether she can ever free herself from those burdens of womanhood that define her mother's life in the homestead and also regulate Maiguru's life in the city. When Tambu lived in the homestead, she looked on Maiguru's marriage as something she wanted to aspire to. Observing Maiguru's life at

close quarters however, Tambu senses the pervasiveness of a gender norm that cuts across class and generations. For although Maiguru achieves a certain balance in her marriage by dint of hard work and good manoeuvring, she is bitter and frustrated and questions whether she chose the right person to share her life with. The conversation with young Tambu continues:

'What it is,' she sighed, 'to have to choose between self and security. When I was in England I glimpsed for a little while the things I could have been, the things I could have done if— if— if things were—different—but there was Babawa Chido and the children and the family. And does anyone realise, does anyone appreciate, what sacrifices were made? As for me, no one even thinks about the things I gave up.' She collected herself. 'But that's how it goes, Sisi Tambu! And when you have a good man and lovely children, it makes it all worthwhile.' (101-102)

In this passage, Maiguru ponders all the opportunities she missed as a result of marriage and her family commitments. However, the bitterness and anger she feels are still kept within rather than openly confronted and resolved. For Maiguru the progress towards self-knowledge and self-assertion is a long one. It begins in self-deception and reluctance to face the real truths of her marriage and culminates at a point where she finally admits her unhappiness and confronts her husband:

Let me tell you, Babawa Chido, I am tired of my house being a hotel for your family. I am tired of being a housekeeper for them. I am tired of being nothing in a home. I am working myself sick to support [...] And when I keep quiet you think I am enjoying it. So today I am telling you I am not happy. I am not happy any more in this house. (172)

When Babamukuru replies that she can go where she will be happy, Maiguru packs and goes to her brother's home. Five days later Babamukuru goes to fetch her back acknowledging his need of her. Though Maiguru's self-assertion is short lived it begins a process of self-discovery that progresses throughout the rest of the novel:

Maiguru had been away for only five days, but the change had done her good. She smiled more often and less mechanically, fussed over us less and was more willing or able to talk about sensible things. Although she still called Babamukuru her Daddy-sweet, most of her baby talk had disappeared. (175)

From now on Maiguru gains the inner strength to begin to feel equal to her husband and to be important within the marriage. Her views become noteworthy and people start to listen to her. This new and strong Maiguru is visible in the scene where she contradicts Babamukuru about Tambu's education. To Babamukuru's astonishment she speaks her mind without fear or hesitation and declares that Tambu should go to the young ladies college of the Sacred Heart to further her studies. Indeed she reminds Babamukuru of the similarity between Tambu's situation and her own all those years ago when she had to cope with all the critical things people were saying about her in order to stay with Babamukuru and build her life with him.:

'Don't you remember, when we went to South Africa everybody was saying that we, the women, were loose?' Babamukuru winced at this explicitness. Maiguru continued. 'It wasn't a question of associating with this race or that race at that time. People were prejudiced against educated women. Prejudiced. That's why they said we weren't decent. That was in the fifties. Now we are into the seventies. I am disappointed that people still believe the same things. After all this time and when we have seen nothing to say it is true. I don't know what people mean by a loose woman – sometimes she is someone who walks the streets, sometimes she is an educated woman, sometimes she is a successful man's daughter or she is simply beautiful. Loose or decent, I don't know. All I know is that if our daughter Tambudzai is not a decent person now, she will never be, no matter where she goes to school. And if she is decent, then this convent should not change her'. (180-181)

Here, Maiguru highlights the fact that concepts like 'good girl', 'loose woman' and 'decent woman' are fluid concepts that fluctuate through time and must be continually

re-interpreted. She implies that the nationalist struggle for liberation should also involve a re-interpretation of attitudes towards women.

To some extent then Maiguru is successful in opposing Babamukuru, which shows that patriarchal norms that regulate relationships between husband and wife are not set in stone. Indeed, Dangarembga implies that by their silence women act as accomplices in their own domination. Dangarembga's delineation of Maiguru and Babamukuru's marriage is therefore an admission of gender politics within marriage and an illustration of the long drawn out battles that women must be prepared to wage as part of their formal education.

3.12 Radical Moves for Women's Agency: the Unmarried Woman and the Challenge of the *Status Quo*

The fact that Tambu's struggles to be free from subordination are contextualised in a world where education makes little impact on women's subordinate position in marriage is an important irony in *Nervous Conditions*. It gives us the context for imagining how Tambu's own marriage prospects may be seen in the community in spite of her struggles to be educated. Indeed, this becomes clear in the passage in which Babamukuru details his plans for Tambu's education. When Babamukuru says:

Lastly, he explained, at the mission I would not only go to school but learn ways and habits that would make my parents proud of me. I was an intelligent girl but I had also to develop into a good woman, he said, stressing both qualities equally and not seeing any contradiction in this. (88)

Here, Tambu does not find the courage or the will to counter the picture of her future that Babamukuru paints. Her only serious rejection of this is in the subconscious traumas and anxieties of her dreams: "The dream became a nightmare when I realised that my fountain pen was in fact a long smoking cigarette. Nhamo howled with

vicious glee, telling me that I would come to a bad end, that I deserved it for deserting my husband, my children, my garden and my chickens.” (90) Tambu’s dream, then, highlights the repressed way in which she, in spite of her education, will deal with the challenges that even an educated woman would face in relation to marriage. It is in the dream that we recognise all the fears, anxieties and rebelliousness that she cannot give voice to in real life and does not dare reveal to Babamukuru.

Yet it is not as if Tambu has not struggled and questioned marriage throughout her experience as a woman and her observations of her auntie’s marriage. She had long clarified her impatience with everybody’s suggestion that it is marriage that will ultimately fulfil her as a woman:

Marriage. I had nothing against it in principle. In an abstract way I thought it was a very good idea. But it was irritating the way it always cropped up in one form or another, stretching its tentacles back to bind me before I had even begun to think about it seriously, threatening to disrupt my life before I could even call it my own. Babamukuru had lost me with his talk of marriage. (180)

It seems, though, that her critical attitude towards women’s place in society, and her passionate struggle to free herself through education, has not yet extended to the most entrapping institution in the community. Susan Andrade is right when she argues that “unlike Nyasha, she (Tambu) does not question the institution of marriage and indeed, apparently continues to believe in its value even in her older and wiser narrating voice.” (Andrade 2002: 32). I want to argue that Tambu’s own ambition to be educated and to follow in Babamukuru’s footsteps up the ladder of progress becomes a stumbling block. Education as interpreted by Babamukuru, still cannot free Tambu from Maiguru’s fate in marriage. It is because of this contradictory twist that the forthright challenge of Babamukuru mounted by the illiterate Lucia has a significant place in the novel.

Dangarembga develops the character of Lucia to be very different from the other females in the narrative. She is the narrator's aunt, the sister of Tambu's mother. Dangarembga describes Lucia as a subversive woman who is assertive and bold. She speaks up for herself and is prepared to take on Babamukuru, the most important man in her local society and the pillar of the patriarchal establishment. Dangarembga makes Lucia a hard working and strong woman without any of the sexual inhibitions and victim mentality that women often suffer in the community: "She sleeps with anybody and everybody" (126). She dares to confront the patriarchal system, which tries to control her sexuality, and bring her behaviour in line with what most 'decent women' do. It is interesting that, for Lucia, education is a crucial step on the way for her, as a woman, to 'think more efficiently" (160). Is Dangarembga advocating the possibility of a single life as an option for African women?

Within the novel women who play by men's rules and feel like victims in the patriarchal system, secretly admire women like Lucia. As Tete Gladys openly confesses to Maiguru

that woman only missed killing me by a very narrow margin. I nearly died of laughter. That Lucia! Aiwa! That Lucia is mad. And *Mukoma's* face! Truly you'd have thought Lucia had walked in naked!' Tete wiped the merriment from her eyes. 'Ma' Chido! If you'd been there, you'd have had a good laugh!'

'I heard, Tete, I heard.' Chuckled Maiguru. 'But they asked for it. They shouldn't meddle with women like Lucia!' (148)

Dangarembga builds Lucia's character as a woman who despises the general acquiescence of women within the Shona patriarchal society. She presents her as a woman who speaks out against the system and is forthright in her radical views about marriage even when these views oppose Babamukuru's conservative opinions. Her confrontation with Babamukuru over Tambu's disobedience is for instance, a

particular case in point. As Babamukuru justifies why he must punish Tambu, Lucia counters his argument with a perspective that links the institution of marriage directly with the suppression of women's voices:

'My wife here would not have disobeyed me in the way that Tambudzai did.'
'Well Babamukuru,' said Lucia, preparing to leave, 'maybe when you marry a woman, she is obliged to obey you. But some of us aren't married, so we don't know how to do it. That is why I have been able to tell you frankly what is in my heart.' (171)

On the one hand Lucia achieves some measure of independence, and Dangarembga may be suggesting that this is because she is free from the constricting bonds and obligations of women within marriage. On the other hand, the narrative may also be suggesting that Lucia's ingratiating behaviour towards Babamukuru and her flattering praise of him does not really change the patriarchal codes but rather confirms Babamukuru's dominance. Her independent rebellion is thus in this sense, not a substantial one. Thus Dangarembga may be suggesting that what is needed is a broader confrontation that leads to a reorganisation not only of individual relationships but the entire structure of marriage and women's place and relationships within it.

There is a sense, then, in which Dangarembga links decolonisation in marriage with the decolonisation of the nation as a whole. In this thematic thrust, Nyasha's function in the novel is crucial, for she is the only character who tests Babamukuru's ability to move beyond the colonised mentality of the educated African. It is in his dealings with Nyasha that Babamukuru reveals the weaknesses of an education that is still caught between colonialism and patriarchy. For in spite of the benefits of his own education he cannot stand outside himself to recognise the colonised mould of his mind and the traditional gender codes that give him, as a man and patriarch, the right to dictate what others have to do. It is only Nyasha, the radical and uncompromising

daughter who can see the combined colonised and patriarchal mentalities as a fundamental weakness of Babamukuru's story of progress. Nyasha's struggles with her father may appear on the surface as the struggle between the stubborn adolescent and the angry father. But it is one of the most significant struggles in *Nervous Conditions*. Nyasha's opposition to Babamukuru is different from Maiguru's, different from Tambu's, and different from Lucia's⁷. It touches the very core of Babamukuru's colonised person and mind. It also reveals the most important crack in the community as a whole. Nyasha herself becomes almost a modern version of Anowa, the heroine of Aidoo's play, set in 19th century Ghana. Just as Anowa is sharp enough to make connections between her husband's slave trading and the enslavement of women in her community, Nyasha too makes a connection between Babamukuru's colonised mind and the entrapment of women. Like Anowa, Nyasha is the only character who has an insight into hidden aspects of her community's repressed history. Thus Nyasha's refusal to be a good girl is also a refusal to be a colonised person. The incident in which, in her 'apparent madness', she separates herself from the colonised mentality of her father and the community is the most important indication yet in the book that the legacies of colonialism and patriarchy must be interrogated equally:

They've deprived you of you, him of him, ourselves of each other. We're grovelling. Lucia for a job, Jeremiah for money. Daddy grovels to them. We grovel to him. She began to rock, her body quivering tensely. 'I won't grovel. Oh no, I won't. I'm not a good girl. I'm evil. I'm not a good girl.' (200)

Nyasha's struggles, like Anowa's, end in her 'madness', and while we leave Tambu at the exclusive Sacred Heart School, we leave Nyasha at the hospital. Yet, Nyasha's insight into the need to confront both colonialism and patriarchy before we

⁷ Maiguru is unfulfilled, Tambu is rather confused, and Lucia is manipulative and cunning.

can tackle women's equality and self-fulfilment in marriage is ultimately the novel's most important message.

3.2 Fall's *Senteurs d'hivernage*: from Apartheid to Independence, Marriage and Gender Relations as a 'Nervous Condition'

With *Nervous Conditions*, as we have seen in the first part of this chapter, Dangaremba focuses on the period of the national struggle for liberation while exposing the double oppressions of women in marriage and in a colonial world and exploring equally significant battles for liberation. She also makes a thematic link between the struggle for political emancipation, and the struggle for female emancipation through marriage. She skilfully shows the gender bias women suffer no matter their social or class background. Their dreams of social equality in the public as well as the private sphere fostered by education and nationalistic discourses seem to stop short on the threshold of their homes. In the same vein, Khadi Fall contextualizes *Senteurs d'hivernage* in Apartheid, which presents another context for dealing with women's unequal and oppressive location in larger dominant structures. Although Fall focuses on women in Senegal, she examines their struggles in relation to these wider public political issues of race and oppression in South Africa. Fall is at the same time returning to the nationalist struggles of the 1960s, and, in this context, like Dangaremba; exploring women's struggles as part of larger issues of colonial and racial oppressions. In this way, she situates herself intertextually with Mariama Bâ's work *So Long A Letter*, and, after a span of several years, moves beyond Senegal and foregrounds larger issues of race, politics, the black world, and the struggles of women, instead of merely seeing these struggles in a one-dimensional way as a struggle within Islam and tradition. In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangaremba changes the pattern of the classical *bildungsroman* (a focus on the autonomous subject) and instead makes Tambu's

process of education a collective story of women as well as individual stories of alienation and fragmentation. Susan Andrade rightfully points out that:

One important difference between *Nervous Conditions* and the more conventional *bildungsroman*'s assumption of autonomous and heroic self-making can be seen in the relationship between individuality and collectivity. [...] The myth of the exceptional woman is therefore undermined, first by the open acknowledgement that she was produced by a collective, and secondly by the parallel unravelling of her narrative counterpart [her cousin Nyasha]. (Andrade 2002: 36-37)

This feminist re-writing of the *bildungsroman* enables Dangarembga's protagonist to learn and benefit from the great variety of women's experiences that are around her; experiences from her grandmother, from Maiguru, from Lucia and most of all from Nyasha.

In Fall's *Senteurs d'Hivernages* the *bildungsroman* functions in a slightly different way because in the exploration of marriage Fall chooses to focus on conditions and circumstances of one woman's personal journey. Her protagonist's journey takes her physically through many African countries. Like the classical European hero, she makes her journey in stages with each short part representing her development. The mapping of the protagonist's journey in this way enables Fall to compare and contrast the different political choices present in Africa. The long trajectory of her journey thus enables her to compare and contrast different political structures.

In *Nervous Conditions*, people find that their journeys allow them to see themselves and their hopes for the future in a new light. Daniel Kunene writes about the different motives that are involved when heroes leave home, and one of them is education. As he argues, it is sometimes necessary "for the hero to travel for the purpose of obtaining education, which is mostly done with no opposition from the parents, and almost with their assistance" (Kunene 1985:196). This is certainly true;

and it is also true that Kunene's analysis seems unaware of the working of gender since it is assumed that the typical traveller is a masculine hero who leaves home in search of education with his family's blessing. A female heroine, such as Tambu, however, comes up against prejudice about girls and women when she begins her education and when she aspires to start her journey in the hope of working for further education and opening new horizons. Maiguru, in *Nervous Conditions*, fails to make use of the new perceptions that she achieved when she was in South Africa and England. Her mind and consciousness appear to be untouched by contact with societies different from her own. She is shown as following her husband on his journeys to 'cook and take care of him and the family'. Maiguru's personal academic achievements appear to have been an accident rather than a conscious decision to develop herself and have a rewarding and enjoyable life, whereas Nyasha, in England, has a different perspective on things and profits from developing her critical mind. And Tambu's journey from her homestead to the mission is the start of the long and involved process of her self-fulfillment.

It is interesting to note that the *bildungsroman* is often related to the pursuit of happiness. The hero and, in this study in particular, the heroine, leave home in search of more freedom and space, and this hopefully results in a more contented life. Thus she sets off towards self-realization and self-fulfilment, and happiness is the ultimate goal. But the irony for women, living in neo-colonial and patriarchal systems, is that marriage is purported to be a prerequisite for happiness and, in essence, marriage is a limiting factor for a woman's freedom. As Moretti writes:

It has been observed that from the late eighteenth century on, marriage becomes the model for a new type of *social contract*: one no longer sealed by forces located outside of the individual (such as status), but founded on a sense of individual obligation. A very plausible thesis, and one that helps us under-

stand why the classical *bildungsroman* 'must' always conclude with marriages. It is not only the foundation of the family that is at stake, but that 'pact' between the individual and the world [in this case the African communities], that reciprocal 'consent' which finds in the double 'I do' of the wedding ritual an unsurpassed symbolic condensation.

Marriage as a metaphor for the social contract: this is so true that the classical *Bildungsroman* does not contrast marriage with celibacy, as would after all be logical, but with death (Goethe) or 'disgrace' (Austen). One either marries or, in one way or another, must leave social life. (Moretti 1987: 22-23)

The heroine seeking freedom in an ideal world should have celibacy as an option. However, for an African woman to choose to remain unmarried is a big problem. Dangarembga gives us an open ending for Tambu, with her having a period to further her education at the convent. Fall, on the other hand, abruptly serves up marriage for her heroine, and without much conviction. The resolution of the *bildungsroman*, where the hero or heroine finally conforms and blends into society, is achieved assuring social stability for the community.

3.21 Apartheid, Race, and the Mind of a Young Girl

With *Senteurs d' hivernage* we are given an insight into the psychology of the mind of a black woman. Fall describes how Tembi copes practically and psychologically with the trials and tribulations that she has to face. Tembi's ordeals involve her gender, her race, her class and the Apartheid regime operating at that time in South Africa.

Apartheid was the South African government's segregation of its citizens along racial divides. During Tembi's childhood, she experienced, and was affected by, the various different racial discriminations practiced by whites against blacks. As

a black girl, growing up in South Africa, she was subjected every day to what Roger B. Beck calls 'petty Apartheid'.

Petty Apartheid refers to the racist laws affecting one's daily routine, beginning with birth in a racially segregated hospital and ending with burial in a racially segregated cemetery. In between, South Africans lived, worked and played out their lives at racially segregated offices, businesses, schools, colleges, beaches, restrooms, park benches, restaurants, theatres and sport fields.

(Beck 2000: 125).

On another level, young Tembi saw and realized very early in her life that at least some of her miseries were the consequence of a political system that proclaimed the superiority of white people over black ones. As Beck writes: "*Apartheid* in Afrikaans means 'apart-ness' or 'separate-ness'. As a black girl, Tembi was the victim of Apartheid's grand design that she could not fully comprehend. Beck defines this as 'Grand Apartheid':

Grand Apartheid relates to land and political rights. The Apartheid government extended the 1913 and 1936 Land Acts to create ten African homelands as 'independent', or at least semi-autonomous, nations. The goal was for all South African Africans ultimately to be citizens of these 'independent' nations, and South Africa a nation with a white majority. Grand Apartheid also defined where Whites, Africans, Coloureds and Indians could live by race, which required the uprooting and relocation of millions of South Africans. Politically, the rights to vote and to hold public office were reserved for Whites only. [...] The Apartheid system rested on four basic principles. First, there were four official 'racial groups' identified as White, African, Coloured and Indian. Second, Whites were regarded as the only 'civilized' race and therefore exercised absolute political power over the other racial groups. Third, White interests always came before Black interests. Fourth, all Whites, no matter what their European origins, were simply considered White. However, the government refused to recognize the common Bantu-speaking origins of most Africans and classified them into nine separate African subgroups: Xhosa,

Tswana, Zulu, North Sotho, South Sotho, Venda, Swazi, Tsonga and Ndebele. Indians were considered aliens in South Africa.

(125-126)

It is in this context that Tembi grows up as a Sotho woman. It is interesting to ponder on the reasons for Fall, who comes from Senegal, setting the first part of her novel with her heroine, Tembi, in the context of Apartheid. I think that Fall does this to explore the effects of this context on Tembi's consciousness. This serves not only the *bildungsroman* but also the purpose of the journey. It becomes a journey from enslavement and oppression to a relative freedom, which proves to be a good narrative strategy for Fall.

Before Tembi sets off on her journey, Fall presents us with her variations on the form of *bildungsroman* in which Tembi interrogates with different voices in her head. Then Tembi begins her travels to societies with more freedom than South Africa and finally settles and is married in Senegal, which is the country that Fall herself comes from. There are the flashbacks to the experiences and feelings of the little Sotho girl of 11 years (32) and 13 years (79). There is the voice of relative innocence and naivety, and the voice of the fully-grown woman with an adult's consciousness. These flashbacks work like challenges to her maturing mind, reinforcing her resistance to the established system. A similar dialogue with a different strategy is found in *Nervous Conditions* when the older Tambu reflects and tells the story of the younger Tambu evaluating the young Tambu's actions in that earlier time. With Fall, the exchange between the Sotho girl and the grown woman acts like the conscience of the adult woman narrator who challenges the young girl to be strong and refuse any compromise or acquiescence. Fall places her young protagonist in contexts where she is exposed to other people's experiences of the impact of marriage. Tembi's parents' relationship comes across more like a couple together in the service of the white

employer than a marital relationship. They live with the constant threat of being sent back to the homeland, and this results in their appearing primarily like black people employed by a white man, and only as a poor second are they a family with a daughter. Tembi internalises this view of marriage as she grows up, and it surfaces later with her own relationships and marriage. True to the *bildungsroman*, Fall confronts her heroine with another aspect of women's oppression. Rape is shown here as part of the overall violence prevailing in South Africa.⁸ It is a transparent sign of the Apartheid system, which considers black people to be inferior to white ones. Rape and other forms of sexual abuse perpetrated by a white person on a black woman, whatever her age, is part of the overall policy of abuse and exploitation practiced by the Apartheid system. Eileen Julien makes the point forcefully when she argues, while talking about the representation of rape in African texts, that:

Sexual violence in these texts is elucidated, if we read carefully, by the context of political violence. Rape, these texts suggest, is not an aberration, not a singularly sick act, nor an individual problem in an otherwise healthy society. Rape is represented then, not as an isolated, gratuitous instance of violence that can be read *metaphorically* – that is, as an *abstracted* image of human disorder, ugliness and disenfranchisement. It is portrayed rather, as the French term *viol* makes clear, *metonymically*, as a *quintessential* act of violence in a context of rampant abuse, both political and sexual. (Julien, 1991:161)

Thus, Den Brinker, the all-powerful man who employs Tembi's parents, abuses Tembi and her body. He thereby reasserts that Tembi's social status is one of a powerless black female in South Africa. Apartheid, like colonialism, has been shown to cause nervous conditions in women. Fanon focused mainly on the nervous condi-

⁸ Although she deals with only *Le devoir de violence* (Paris: Seuil, 1968) by Yambo Ouologuem and *La vie et demie* (Paris: Seuil, 1979) by Sony Labou Tansi in the article I referred to above, Julien mentions other texts by African writers who deal with rape in a context of violence. For example, *La Carte d'identité* (Abidjan: CEDA, 1980) by Jean Marie Adiaffi; Buchi Emecheta's *Rape of Shavi* (New York: Braziller, 1985); and Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les Soleils des Indépendances* (Paris: Seuil, 1970).

tions of men⁹ in such circumstances, and didn't consider the women who were also affected in this way. For the rest of her life, Tembi will vomit whenever she is stressed and confused, just as she did when she was drugged and raped. This initial violence of rape suffered by a black girl of 13 leads inexorably to more violence. Tembi's father was later executed for killing the rapist and his accomplice. Fall chooses a Xhosa as the accomplice, and thereby shows her determination to denounce oppressed people collaborating with the oppressors.

All these events take their toll on Tembi, who cannot contemplate marriage in South Africa. She is ready to start journeying from violence and oppression to countries that allow more freedom. Paradoxically, however, men and woman do not enjoy the increased freedom equally:

Elle me reprocha d'avoir toujours cherché à chasser le mot 'bonheur' de mon langage. Sans doute dit-elle, parce que je ne savais pas à quel type de bonheur on pouvait prétendre quand on savait qu'on n'avait pas le droit de fréquenter qui on voulait, quand on était obligé de garder en permanence à l'esprit qu'on n'était que des résidents temporaires dans la maison, dans la ville qui vous avaient vu naître et grandir, et qu'à ce titre, il ne vous y était pas permis d'y avoir des relations même de simple amitié, avec des personnes de l'autre sexe, de quelque race qu'elles soient, encore moins de vous y marier ou d'y avoir des enfants. (Fall 1992: 27-28)

[She blamed me for having always looked for ways to ban the word 'happiness' from my language. No doubt, she said, because I did not know any type of happiness that you can have when you did not have the right to see who you want, when you had always permanently in your mind that you were temporary residents in the house, in the town where you were born and where you grew up. For this reason, you were not allowed to have relations even of simple friendship, with people of the opposite sex, no matter what their race, let alone get married or have children in this house or town.]—my translation¹⁰

There was no prospect of happiness or marital bliss for Tembi with the segregation laws that were prevailing under Apartheid. Black people were not allowed to mix with

⁹ Fanon's patients were mostly male.

¹⁰ I have used existing translations in the case of *So Long A Letter*, *Scarlet Song*, and *Loukoum: The Little Prince of Belleville*. I provided my own translation for *Senteurs d'Hivernages*.

white people and certainly not to become friends with someone of the other colour. Tembi's mother worked as a servant living in a white household, and it was considered a great favour that her daughter, Tembi, could live there as well. Tembi is thus very isolated and does not have friends nearby; she cannot talk with the people she lives with except for her mother. She becomes a teacher and works in a white school where, with a scheme of integration, black students and teachers are being introduced gradually. Even in this situation, Tembi doesn't mix much with her colleagues or the students. Tembi avoids men, as she has learned that getting involved with men could be like having a sword of Damocles poised over her head. The inevitable consequences of challenging the established system were highlighted by the fate of Tembi's aunt. This aunt was banished back to her homeland, the reserve for black people.

Elle était sensible à leurs [hommes] signes de sympathie, mais se dérobaient adroitement à leurs silencieuses sollicitations par crainte d'être envoyée dans un coin perdu du rand, comme cela avait été le cas pour une de ses tantes paternelles qui avait eu l'audace de vivre son amour au grand jour. (*ibid* 28)

[She sensed their [men's] signs of interest, but skilfully avoided their silent appeals for fear of being sent to a remote corner of the rand, as happened to one of her paternal aunts, who had dared to live her love relationship openly.]—*my translation*.

Fall shows how Tembi's views on marriage are limited by her restricted upbringing as a black girl in the Apartheid regime.

In addition to that, Tembi was raped at 13, which reinforced her fear of men, black and white, and she avoided them and any thoughts of marriage. The employer with whom Tembi and her parents lived organised the rape with the help of Molinsbury, a black man (33). Tembi was severely disturbed by this whole event; she was depressed and lethargic for a long time, in fact until her mother's death. She had problems relating to men and was confused about herself as a woman, and as a black woman in South Africa. As I have mentioned before, for the rest of her life, Tembi vomits when she is very stressed; just as she vomited on the day that she was drugged

and raped. Apartheid, like colonialism, is shown to bring about nervous behaviour/condition in women which was not addressed by Fanon. Den Brinker is a white man and he employs Tembi's parents. He exerts his power over Tembi and her parents and sets himself up as the untouchable, all-powerful white man. As such, Den Brinker is more important, in that society, than any black person, whatever their age or sex. He abuses Tembi and her body as if he owns every part of her and she has to bow to his will. She feels degraded and powerless and believes that men always lord it over women. Three years after the rape, on his deathbed, Molinsbury confesses to his part in the whole affair. Tembi's father kills his employer along with another accomplice. As a consequence, he is executed—another disaster for her to come to terms with. It is hardly surprising that she is confused and avoids any contact with men. She has no thoughts of marriage in South Africa. Later on, in Senegal, Tembi is able to contemplate being with men and this comes in the second part of *Senteurs d'hivernage*.

3.22 The Traditional and the Modern: Islam, Gender and Education

Fall explores how her heroine's mind develops by using Tembi's journey from South Africa through Botswana, Mozambique, Ghana and Guinea to Senegal. This maturity has an impact on how Tembi considers marriage when she is in Senegal. In Dakar (in Senegal), her life is calmer and more tranquil. She reads law at the university and, after graduating, practices as a magistrate. She exemplifies the situation for an educated black African woman contemplating marriage. Tembi looks for the perfect husband and, through her, Fall explores issues of gender, nationalism, nation building in Africa after independence and religion. These issues are all associated with the concept of marriage.

At first, Fall chooses to concentrate on women who believe that gender equality in society and in marriage is a possibility with partners who have had the benefit of a Western style of education. These are characters who believe that education promotes equality between all human beings regardless of their sex. Fall describes the marriages of Tembi and her friends, and explores the diversity available to women today in Africa with the financial independence that they have developed with education and their careers. These women do not depend on their husbands for maintenance or survival. They are looking for a relationship with mutual respect and support, and this is difficult to find. The African men are from the same social class as the women, and accept the ideal situation of equality between all citizens. Within their own marriages, however, the idea of equality championed by the men often differs from that of their wives. Tembi and her women friends find themselves caught, as educated, young, African, professional women in a web of traditional values about household duties, motherhood, polygamy and sexuality.

Although education can change women's expectations of marriage, the bleak reality is that equality, with respect to rights within marriage, is not on offer, as men want to retain their traditional superior role. Tembi's husband, Badu, justifies his choice of an uneducated woman by saying that he needs peace in his marriage:

"Non! Elle n'était jamais allée à l'école. Et Badu avait encore ajouté: - c'est surtout pour cette raison que je suis prêt à l'épouser, car j'ai envie d'être tranquille." (126)

[No! She had never been to school. And Badu added as well: - this is the main reason for my wanting to marry her, because I want peace.]—*my translation*.

The traditional roles for men and women within marriage are brought into question with the modernization of African society. The clear cut traditional roles of women as homemakers and men as breadwinners no longer apply. African women can now work outside the home and earn a salary. For gender equality to become a reality,

with both partners working outside the home, being the breadwinners, the household chores, traditionally the woman's domain, need to be shared. Without this sharing of household duties, gender equality will stay just a dream and never become real. This dream is unattainable for many educated African women at the moment unless their husbands are willing to see their wives as whole people and relinquish their traditional male prerogatives. Badu is still believing or at least still saying: "Une femme reste une femme, qu'elle soit instruite ou non!" (126) [A woman is a woman with or without education.]—*my translation*.

Despite Badu's hurtful and demeaning remarks about women, Tembi does finally marry him. It appears that her choice is limited since the other suitors are presented as dull and boring. (99-100) The conflict created between them by Badu's beliefs about women and Tembi's views on marriage is not solved in any convincing way by Fall. Badu marries an uneducated woman, Bintu, from the village. This marriage lasts two years, and they have two children. Bintu stays in the village, far away from Tembi, and Badu continues to see Tembi and confide in her. Fall describes the romantic alliance between Tembi and Badu even with Bintu and their first child coming between them. Tembi insists on the impossibility of her having a polygamous marriage, Senegalese style, with all the wives living together in the same house. Fall arranges for Bintu to die after giving birth to her second child. Now Tembi can magnanimously take over the care of her co-wife's son, and start her marriage with Badu, without any loss of face. This child is called Abdul Karim Nelson with the name Nelson being in memory of his mother's South African origins. Tembi is now a mature woman and this is a calm part of her life. She has borne the difficult experiences of her childhood in South Africa, and is settled in West Africa. This is usually the end of a *bildungsroman*, with the heroine surviving her many traumatic

experiences and reaching maturity, strengthened by overcoming her ordeals. The question that may be asked is whether we are now back in the same scenario as *So Long A Letter* in spite of the novelist's efforts to develop Tembi's wider political insights through strategies of the journey and the *bildungsroman*. In the main, although *Senteurs d'Hivernage* was published in 1992, several years after *So Long A Letter* and *Scarlet Song*, it seems that not much has really changed for women since the independence in the 1960s.

Dangarembga's Babamukuru and Fall's Badu, who treat their wives as inferior to themselves in their marriages, represent African men here. Education and the nation building process during the post-colonial period allowed women new opportunities in the emerging African society. However, there were problems, which are shown by the marriages of educated African women and men, here represented by Babamukuru and Maiguru in *Nervous Conditions* (Dangarembga 1988) and Tembi and Badu in *Senteurs d'Hivernage* (Fall 1992). The inherent inequality within marriage is frustrating for women and Nira Yuval-Davis considers this when she argues that:

Women are often constructed as the cultural symbols of the collectivity, of its boundaries, as carriers of the collectivity's 'honour' and as its intergenerational reproducers of culture. Specific codes and regulations are usually developed, defining who/what is a 'proper man', which are central to the identities of collectivity members. Feelings of disempowerment which result from processes of colonization and subjugation have often been interpreted by the colonized men as processes of emasculation and/or feminisation. The (re) construction of men's – and often more importantly women's – roles in the processes of resistance and liberation has been central in most such struggles. (Yuval-Davis 1997: 67)

African women find themselves in great conflicts and contradictions when they try to (re)-define who they are, what they look like, and how they want to behave. This is particularly taxing within the intimate relationship of marriage. No wonder African women suffer frustrations and are caught in dilemmas when they are part of their society presenting a united front to the colonizers and wrestling with the huge task of nation building with equal rights for all citizens. Yuval-Davis continues:

However, as cultures are not homogeneous, and specific hegemonic constructions of cultures closely relate to the interests of the dominant leadership within the collectivity, these hegemonic constructions often go against the interests of women, who would therefore find themselves in an ambivalent position towards these hegemonic projects. (*ibid*)

For African societies that are involved in building new nations after colonization or Apartheid, this is the perspective on the prevailing gender definitions particularly male superiority. Marriage can be a testing ground for this struggle and the two novels both dramatise the implications of this struggle from feminine perspectives.

**Marriage and Motherhood in Autobiography and in Fiction:
Buchi Emecheta's *Head above Water* and *The Joys of
Motherhood***

Analyses and discussions in my thesis have so far focused on marriage as a social institution, and as a relationship between men and women. The texts of Mariama Bâ and Ama Ata Aidoo discussed so far have themselves focused primarily on these aspects of marriage. In Bâ's *So Long A Letter* the emphasis is on the unfulfilled dreams of gender equality and the chance for sharing and companionship promised by the nationalist agenda and the ideals of nationhood. Aidoo's *Anowa* and *Changes* both stress the confinement that women experience in marriage because of norms and values that define womanhood in very limited ways. Dangarembga's focus in *Nervous Conditions* is on the marginalisation that prevents women from self-realisation in marriage.

In all these texts, the central theme is the nature of marriage relationships. In the course of the novels, women give birth, nurture children, or are unable to do so. The question of motherhood as the natural purpose of marriage is accepted as a matter of course and does not become an issue of contention. Thus, in *Anowa*, the issue of childlessness becomes more a reflection of the different perspectives of Anowa and Kofi. Anowa attempts to resolve it in the traditional way by attempting to find another wife for Kofi while Kofi sees Anowa's infertility as the outcome of her restless personality. The matter does not become a major issue because the focus is much more on the ideological difference between the couple and on Aidoo's anxiety to equate slavery and impotence.

In *Changes*, the question of whether Esi will or will not have another child becomes part of Esi's struggles to have the freedom to make choices and take control of her body, rather than see it merely as a vehicle to produce children for the gratification of her husband and his family. But in the trajectory of women's writing, this focus on motherhood as a contest between women's choices and freedom and the control of women's sexuality actually begins first in Nwapa's *Efuru*, and is raised to different dimensions of exploration in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. Emecheta takes the exploration to new heights by attacking the fundamental basis of the values around motherhood and the control of sexuality. In this chapter, I examine Emecheta's particular focus by exploring her intertextual dialogue both with her own autobiographical writing and with Nwapa's novel, *Efuru*. At the same time, I push the thematic dimensions of her novel further by examining it in the context of recent critical writing on marriage and motherhood in African gender studies. It is after reading Emecheta's autobiography *Head above Water* that one gets insights into the inspiration, as well as the biographical imperatives, that underlie Buchi Emecheta's narrative in *The Joys of Motherhood*.

4.1. Marriage and Motherhood in Autobiography: *Head Above Water*

A very important aspect of the discussion that needs to be mentioned here is the context in which Emecheta, as a writer, felt the need to write her autobiography. We get the clue from the dedication and the circumstances in which she wrote *Head Above Water*. As she confesses, she felt the need to "pull herself together"—literally—to stop herself from falling apart with the death of her daughter. It appears then that misfortune and tragedy moved her to re-examine her life and the meaning of

her role as a mother, and this re-examination led to her autobiography, *Head Above Water*.¹¹

“The author of an autobiography”, Georges Gusdorf argues, “gives himself the job of narrating his own history; what he sets out to do is to reassemble the scattered elements of his individual life and to regroup them in a comprehensive sketch.” (Gusdorf 1980: 35)

While it is true that such a re-assembling fosters an objective assessment that gives the author a sense of understanding and order, it is also true that the process is wholly personal and subjective. It is this characteristic of an autobiographical text that makes it a one-dimensional narrative. We do not get the objectivity and multi-dimensional perspectives that we have come to expect in fiction. Thus it is in *The Joys of Motherhood* that we can glimpse the various ways in which Emecheta translates her innermost fears, anxieties, aspirations and contradictions. We uncover in the autobiography the raw feelings that are considered and re-shaped in the novel *The Joys of Motherhood*.

The condition of womanhood in Africa that Emecheta describes, in her own life and in the Nigerian African society that she shows in her fiction, equates with the general situation in Africa that moulded most African women at that time. Roger Rosenblatt, in his article “Black Autobiography: Life as the Death Weapon”, argues that:

¹¹ For Chiedu’s Memory

I am still trying to work out why you suddenly died.
A part of a mother dies with her child. You were no longer
a child, you were then a young woman, and we did make plans and
did have a lot of laughter, and the two of us went through some
bad times together, yet you suddenly left, when I was in a position
to say “thank you daughter” for helping me raise your younger
brothers and sisters. We talk about you every day. You were sometimes
not very easy to understand, but you were my childhood friend who
I had when I was a child myself. (Emecheta 1986)

Black fiction is often so close to black autobiography in plot and theme that a study of the latter almost calls the existence of the former into question. [...] Autobiography as a genre should be the history of individual craziness, but in black autobiography the outer reality in which heroes move is so massive and absolute in its craziness that any one person's individual idiosyncrasies seem almost dull in their normality. (1980: 169/174)

Rosenblatt's suggestion that fiction and autobiography are extremely close in black autobiography may be true, but we should qualify the statement in this case because the problem with autobiography is that it is not fiction. Its one-dimensional narration means that the polyphony of voices and dimensions that we get in fiction is absent. It is, after all, the interaction of different voices and the conflicting pulls between them that shape the outer reality in different directions. Thus the connection that this chapter makes between *Head Above Water* and *The Joys of Motherhood* creates a space for exploring how fiction evaluates and transforms the personal and subjective responses in autobiography.

What is evident when we compare Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood* and Emecheta herself, from *Head Above Water*, are the similarities in their lives, and how they both gradually gain self-awareness and finally question the African patriarchal ideology that equates womanhood with marriage and motherhood. Both narratives challenge the patriarchal construct that is imposed on women, although they tackle the oppressive culture of motherhood in different ways. Both narratives are located in moments of historical change and crisis that open avenues for examining dominant ideologies including norms of gender that have become entrenched as accepted truths.

Head Above Water explores the social changes of the 1950s and 1960s, and the new opportunities for women's education that opened new social and economic doors for women. Emecheta's novel, *The Joys of Motherhood* takes us even further

back in history as it moves the protagonist, Emecheta, from the early 1900s and the colonial city of Lagos, right up to the dawn of independence and the vision of a post-colonial society. Though the two protagonists belong to different historical periods, they confront almost similar dilemmas about marriage and motherhood. Emecheta has herself given several indications that her writing comes from the internalisation of her own early life experiences and her keen observation of the plight of the African women around her. In *Head Above Water* she confesses that her autobiography touches "lightly here and there on those incidents on which I have dwelt in depth in my other books: *Second-Class Citizen*, *In the Ditch*, *The Bride Price*, *The Slave Girl*, *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Double Yoke*" (1). But Katherine Frank has also written that Emecheta's texts about African women are centred around:

three interrelated but also conflicting issues or problems: the oppression—sometimes tantamount to slavery—of African women; their education; and the effect upon their lives of Westernisation or 'development' (the familiar traditional or rural versus Western or urban conflict from a new, female point of view.) It is the clash among these three forces and a faltering but persistent desire for female autonomy and fulfilment that gives rise to the central dilemma posed by Emecheta's fiction. A tragic because seemingly irresolvable dilemma: the African woman, far more than the Western woman or African man, is caught in a terrible bind. In order to be free and fulfilled as a woman she must renounce her African identity because of the inherent sexism of traditional African culture. Or, if she wishes to cherish and affirm her 'African-ness', she must renounce her claims to feminine independence and self-determination. Either way she stands to lose; either way she will find herself diminished, impoverished. (1982: 478)

Although I agree with Frank about the dilemma of the African woman with a Western style of education, I think that the polarization is not so extreme between winning and losing. It is obvious that "Slavery of tradition is for Emecheta the

inherent condition of African women,” while “education [...] is the crucial liberating force in the lives of Emecheta’s heroines, and in fact their degree of servitude is inversely proportional to the amount of education they receive”. (*ibid* 481, 485) Indeed, a close study of *Head Above Water*, which I hope to achieve in this chapter, reveals that Frank’s view is a bit too stark, and perhaps too squarely drawn. In *Head Above Water*, the African woman is not shown as a human being born into a fixed culture with its own particular values that she absorbs through her early years. This individual encounters another set of values about her womanhood and her well-being through Western style education. Thus there is no automatic, clear-cut choice to be made overnight, but rather a balancing of the two sets of values and a re-arrangement of women’s lives around this balance. Most people’s lives are a succession of experiences through which they grow and make choices as their life unfolds. Each decision comes out of the knowledge gained from the wealth of the experiences, and this is true of the African woman, whatever sort of education she has had. Western education will impact on a woman’s self-image, her womanhood, and her well-being, and this is surely not the whole story as Emecheta’s autobiography clearly demonstrates.

Reading *Head Above Water* gives us insight into Emecheta’s own personal life. She recounts her experiences, and we can understand how she has developed into a successful African woman writer. The narrative gives us a clear idea of the ordeals and pleasures of being a woman, a wife and a mother both in Nigeria and in England.

In the chapter entitled ‘What They Told Me.’, there is an account of the circumstances surrounding her birth. As a child, Emecheta heard the story about her birth from her aunt as being a delightful one: however, some important details were highlighted in her memory and she pondered these further when she was older and

knew more about the world around her. She writes: "We clapped and danced that night. And I knew that I was forgiven for being born premature with a big head and small body and for being a girl." (11) However, the older, wiser Emecheta appears not to have forgiven herself for being a girl when the family was hoping for a boy.¹² Her parents had gone to the expense of the white people's marriage ceremony. Their community considered the expensive ceremony irrelevant, and in recompense Emecheta's parents' firstborn child should have been a boy. Hence, perhaps, Emecheta's determination to make it as a boy. She desperately wanted her father to be proud of her being born a girl and, as a girl, succeed like a boy in what she does with her life; this is fundamental in shaping her choices through the years. This fuelled her determination to work hard at school, and eventually be in a position to go to England like a boy from their village had done some time before, and who eventually qualified as a lawyer. The whole community in the village of Ibuza celebrated his achievement for some months. Emecheta saw this happiness in her father, and convinced herself that her duty was to emulate this boy's success:

My father was so happy during this time, and since I had come to realize that my being a girl child had been a slight disappointment to my parents, I made a secret vow to myself.

I made the vow between the two cracked walls at the back of our yard in Akinwunmi Street in Yaba, Lagos, that when I grew up I must visit the United Kingdom, to keep my father happy forever. (27)

And, many years later, as she prepares to join her husband in London, she makes it a goal to succeed like a man in order to please her father, and make up to him for being born a girl: "I would like to know that he is now in the land of the dead saying, 'I am proud you went there as a woman, and a strong and loving woman who tried very

¹² Emecheta's parents were married originally in their village in the traditional way. They moved to Lagos and then had a marriage ceremony "according to the laws of the white people" (10) and the whole community expected the first born to be a boy as a sign of gratitude from the wife.

much to be a good mother and a good wife.” (28) Emecheta clearly grew up believing that it was important for women to be ‘good mothers’ and ‘good wives’, but at the same time wanted her revenge on fate and to succeed in life as well as a man despite being born a girl.

The young Emecheta’s determination to subvert the social and gender norms and expectations of a patriarchal society was made possible by the structural and social changes brought about by the new colonial order. In the late 1950s, when she was a schoolgirl, an entirely new system of formal education had been introduced that directed girls like her towards new horizons and visions of life. Though Emecheta appears to make a definite connection between Western education and the promise of a new African woman, she is never completely overwhelmed by the new world of colonial education. In *Head Above Water*, this new world is constantly paralleled with the world of home. Emecheta continually tries to make connections between the old world and the new perspectives she acquires through her Western Christian education.

In the autobiography, it emerges that the new freedom and opportunity she acquires as an educated woman has both its advantages and disadvantages. The new language she learns embodies a new literature, which is distant and alien, but which she enjoys and tries to relate to. There is therefore a double vision of education in Emecheta’s narrative of her life. Education is a source of freedom, but it is at the same time incapable of rescuing her from the destiny that she has internalised as hers in the patriarchal world of her village and country. This double view of education explains Emecheta’s own contradictory feelings. On one level, she loves the new freedom of school and escapes into the different worlds of English literary heroes and heroines, but on another, she dreams of being the mother of many children, a woman apparently fulfilling her natural destiny as a woman in her patriarchal community.

The situation was circular: I was afraid of leaving school—it was not a beautiful life, but it was at least safe and reliable. As a result of this fear, I began to dream about another world, but the funniest thing about this world was that I was always the mother of many children. And the more I wallowed in my dreams, to the extent of bringing them into the classroom, the more my work suffered and the greater my fear, because if one was on a scholarship and failed an exam, the scholarship would be taken away. I made a good grade in the end, but to achieve this I drove myself almost to the brink, knowing that the alternative was disgrace. (Emecheta 1994: 22)

There is indeed an ongoing controversy about whether Western education is indeed a means for African women's emancipation. Femi Nzegwu actually equates Western education with 'mal-education' for Africans, especially for African women: a remnant of Western education as an artefact of colonization. (2001: 82)

Katherine Frank, in her article in *World Literature* (1982), notices how Emecheta uses her characters to show that African women who have a solid basis of Western education like Adah / Emecheta in *In the Ditch* and *Second Class Citizen*, and Emecheta in *Head Above Water*, together with the traditional African education that they learn at home and from the local society, come to a fuller appreciation of their condition as women in two patriarchal systems pulling them in different directions. But whatever insight the women have into their predicament not only offers them more choices but also, for some contemporary African women, may be a source of agonizing dilemmas.

For Emecheta, education is a crucial part of people's lives, especially women's lives. In *Head Above Water* she writes about her school days:

My mother did one great thing for me: she won agreement to let me stay in school for a while because she knew how much I wanted to, because she too had a little education, and because she knew that some basic education would qualify me to be the wife of one of the new Nigerian élite. But I had other

plans. Without my father to look after me I had to look after myself. [Her father died when she was young.] Secretly I sat for a scholarship examination to the Methodist Girls' High School and I won it. So I went to the missionary school, because if I had stayed at home I would have been forced to marry when I was only twelve. My mother did not understand me and did not see the reason for my wanting to stay long at school (25).

Though it is clear in this passage that education saves Emecheta from an early marriage and offers her the chance of social and economic opportunities, it does not necessarily liberate her from the internalised acceptance of the gender codes that prescribe subordinate and marginalized roles for women. Emecheta finds herself, despite her new-found economic agencies, wanting to appease her father and deserve his approbation. She had to be a 'good wife' and a 'good mother'. She rejects the men chosen for her by her family and selects her own man—reminiscent of the girl Anowa in the tale of the same name. Emecheta writes:

I refused all the men kept for me, and married the man I called Francis in my other books, but whose real name is Sylvester Onwordi—a dreamy, handsome local boy who, though older than myself, thought he, too, would make it big in the United Kingdom. But I soon found out that under his handsome and strong physique was a dangerously weak mind. It did not take me long to realize my mistake, and see that on this score my mother was right. (28)

There were two factors operating here: she wanted to exercise her right to choose her own husband; and the man that she chose was dreaming, as she was, of emigrating to England, thinking that this would lead to success. There are two other similarities with the Anowa tale: that the physical qualities of the man are at odds with those traditionally expected of a future son in law, and that Emecheta's mother is against the match. Emecheta's husband is handsome and lazy, and she realizes later that her mother was correct, to some extent at least, when she is struggling as a wife and

mother in England far from her community, and without the support of friends and relatives.

This is the legacy that Emecheta carries with her when she moves to London to join her husband, and she is continually trying to fulfil the promises that she made to herself about pleasing her father. It was an almost impossible task that she had set herself, and this led to tensions and problems now that she was in a completely different environment with unfamiliar cultural norms. There is a sense, then, in which even in the face of choice, the values that mediate the right choices are still the values of home.

For Emecheta, at this time, being a 'good wife' meant selflessly caring for her husband and producing lots of children, mostly sons. Her own experience was an important reminder here. Emecheta arrived in England with two children and, as she puts it, "I think Jake was conceived the very night I arrived in Britain." (30) Then two more arrived in quick succession. Emecheta's desire to be a 'good wife', as defined by her Ibgo community's traditional norms, ruled her life. She thus overlooked the early signs of unacceptable behaviour shown by her husband, such as finding him with another woman when she returned home with one of her new baby daughters (32). Emecheta remained in the marriage for her children's sake. She remembers all too clearly when her mother left, and she and her brother suffered and grieved as they were left with just their father. Moreover, she then recounts how she "was virtually raped for Alice to be conceived, though looking at her now, I'm glad it happened. My doctor, who told me that I was pregnant, reported the case to the police" (36). Again, she discounts the thought that there were serious problems within their marriage.

On another level, Emecheta was striving for a traditional African marriage and also wanting to live according to the insights that she was given by her education with British teachers:

I was going to practice all those things I learnt at the Methodist Girls' High School. I was naïve then—all I wanted was to be a full-time housewife and mother. I would have been perfectly happy living in Sylvester's reflected glory. I was going to be an ideal housewife with all our meals ready on time. I was going to teach our children to read and write before they went to school, and take them to music and ballet classes, where they would acquire confidence. I was going to take them to elocution classes and they would be taught beautiful table manners. Housework, I told myself, could be very creative if there was a breadwinner. (34)

This ideal wife and mother role that Emecheta chose fitted in with the British society that they were living in, but was not to Sylvester's liking. He wanted a traditional African wife and mother for his children, even though he was not prepared to act the traditional hard working head of the household and supporter of his in-laws when required¹³. He wanted a wife who toiled hard all day for her husband and children, and did not waste time with European educational ideas. Emecheta had always dealt with their financial affairs in Nigeria, and now continued in England, and this enabled Sylvester to give up work and pretend that "he came to England to study, not to work for [Emecheta] to stay at home simply to wash nappies, knit jumpers, and indulge in [her] lazy dreams." (34)

Emecheta's particular perception of herself as a wife and mother was deeply ingrained in her following her traditional upbringing, and was reinforced by her pseudo-Victorian education. Hence, it was a long time before she could look honestly at all the setbacks and decide to end her marriage. She is eventually saved by her

¹³ Traditionally a son-in-law is never lazy. He is supposed to be a hardworking man who takes good care of his family and, eventually, his in-laws.

belief that a husband's duty is to support his family, and that she wants to make the best use that she can of her hard won education. She encourages Sylvester to get a job, and he tries, but the jobs never last very long. In contrast, her determination and abilities mean that she works and provides for the whole family.

While at home nursing her dreams of the perfect wife, African and British style, she completed the manuscript of *The Bride Price*. In the traditional way, she sought her husband's approval and showed him the manuscript. He was dismissive and said: "You don't know much, so how can you write a story?" (34) Despite his discouraging attitude, she implored him to read it. He did eventually read it, and then burnt the manuscript. This was a decisive moment and she started making plans to leave him and take the five children with her.

Emecheta had set herself the unenviable task of surviving in England as a single mother without the support of her own family. As she confesses at the beginning of *Head Above Water*: "As for my survival for the past twenty years in England, from when I was a little over twenty, dragging four cold and dripping babies with me, and pregnant with a fifth one—that is a miracle." (5) Her survival was indeed a miracle with five young children, and needing to do lots of different jobs to support them all. However, the British welfare system helped with her accommodation, and she received benefits when she was out of work. In addition, she eventually continued with her studies with the help of a grant. Adjusting to England when she first arrived was hard, with the weather, the food, and so many things being very different from Nigeria.

Later, she benefited from seeing how marriage and parenthood could be different from the traditional Nigerian way of the community that she grew up in. Newlyweds often delay parenthood, and mothers can combine having a working life

as well as being successful wives and mothers. Nevertheless, Emecheta still falls into the trap of what she called the 'Mock Reconciliation' in *Head Above Water*, and it is clear that her values, acquired in childhood, are deeply entrenched and difficult to confront and change. Any change is slow and painful. Emecheta's marrying Sylvester for the second time, with all the expenses that that entailed, was perhaps in part due to her wish to feel complete and worthy of her father's praise as a wife and mother. Maybe she also thought that, as a woman, no matter what she achieved, she needed a man, preferably a husband, to look up to. Her brother, Adolphus, who wrote to her urging her to take her husband back, reinforced this view. He details what is quite acceptable for a husband in Nigeria, and Emecheta, who at this time has lived as a single mother in London for years, has seen that marriage can be different in England. Adolphus writes: "What horrible sins did your husband commit that are so unforgivable? He beats you, but most men beat their wives; he never worked, but many women cope with that, so what is so bad about him?" (88) Adolphus is showing solidarity with Sylvester and trying to minimize his sister's complaints, and, in so doing, clearly describes the unacceptable situation. Luckily for Emecheta, while she is driving them both back from the wedding celebrations, the true situation becomes evident, and she retracts from her original ideas and they do not live together again:

I had dressed the father of my children in a blue suit, which I paid for with one of my credit cards; I had dressed our sons in flashy suits and our daughters in pretty dresses and had worked myself to a state of near exhaustion, all for what? So that people would applaud me and the father of my children and say how lucky we were to have such a nice family. But I could sense that underneath all the congratulations and prayers, it was my husband they were praising. Why? Because he was the *man*. No one would like to offend him, because with me to work and boost his ego, he could one day be very powerful. Mine was to be the reflected glory. But then, is that not the lot of most women? Why was I feeling differently? Why should I not be satisfied and pleased about

what most people of my sex were looking for and thought they were created for? (91)

This passage shows that Emecheta realises that she has changed and come to new insights about how the traditional view of men and women is that the man is superior and powerful, especially within a marriage, however he behaves. It was finally clear that, married to Sylvester, she would always be in the subordinate role. With these thoughts fresh in her mind, she was able to drive Sylvester, recently her husband for the second time, to his own place rather than her family home, and organise Saturday visits for the children to be with their father. She had to consider the situation again when Sylvester, to everyone's surprise, started work, since his continuing unemployment was one of her complaints. She thinks:

Now I don't know what other excuses to give for his not moving in. I had told him several times that I no longer loved him, but he said most wives don't love their husbands, and that even in the Western world most women stay with their husbands for economic reasons alone. I was really tempted by the latter: then I shouldn't have to worry about whether my £900-a-year grant would feed us; or if I never earned a penny as a writer or became a graduate. But then what would I be? I answered the question myself. A wife and mother. Things I had wanted badly only ten years ago. Why did I not want them now? (95)

Emecheta's values have obviously changed and she no longer wants, above all, to be a wife to please her husband, or to make her father proud of her. It is noteworthy that the representatives of patriarchy are all here attempting to keep Emecheta in her place, as a woman, under the control of her husband. There is the compelling picture of a father proud of his daughter, a brother discounting her complaints about her husband and encouraging a reunion, and a husband stressing that she could not survive without him. Luckily for Emecheta, with all she has been through, she has outgrown her earlier perceptions of gender norms around marriage. She is no longer

satisfied with being just a wife, and she insists on being a woman in her own right. Even Sylvester's mother, back in Nigeria, joins in and pays a large 'bride-price' for her. This was all in vain, and served only to strengthen her resolve to join the other African women who were getting a better deal for themselves. Emecheta pondered:

Here was I in England thinking that the African woman had really progressed, but had she? Then the voice of my 'chi'¹⁴ came and said to me, 'of course she has progressed, a great deal. When your mother's bride price was paid she was happy, very happy, because she was pleased to be owned. When it came to your turn, you were crying because you valued your independence. (94)

Emecheta is no longer prepared to live following the traditional custom of women being subordinate to men. She has found that it is her independence that can support and fulfil her. A woman does not have to be defined in terms of her relationship to her man. She is an individual in her own right, and is on equal terms with men. Emecheta now evaluates herself in this new way and also the progress of other African women. Her journey through life and her stay in England had given her a new vision of herself. She confesses:

What I think saved me was coming to England when I did. I doubt if I would have been able to survive emotionally all the well-meaning advice from family and relatives. I left the husband for whom all sacrifices had been made. Maybe that was my death. Then why in real life was I enjoying my independence?

(166)

Emecheta now feels calm and settled about her wishes around a marital relationship, and there is also her role as a mother to consider. A particular row with her eldest daughter, Chiedu, is the main instigation for her to reflect on her mothering capabilities. The incident ends with Emecheta telling Chiedu to go to her father for the money that she wants. Chiedu then leaves to spend some time living with her

¹⁴ 'chi' refers to 'inner voice' or 'spirit'.

father. The shock of her daughter's ungrateful behaviour affects Emecheta deeply, and she becomes ill. Emecheta's recovery is, in part, probably due to writing *The Joys of Motherhood*. She confesses that: "In a way [*The Joys of Motherhood*], like *Second-Class Citizen* made me accept my lot. The worst that could happen to me was to die by the wayside, with everybody saying, 'To think she gave all her life for her children.'" (239) This incident with Chiedu served to open Emecheta's eyes to the reality of her life as a mother. She reassessed her life, and took stock of what she had and where she was. She finished *The Joys of Motherhood* in six weeks, and now saw her pledge to her father to be a 'good mother' in a new and more realistic light.

At the end of *Head Above Water*, Emecheta sums up the insights she has acquired as her narrative moves from her childhood in Ibuza, Nigeria to her success as a writer and mother in England:

As a child I was brought up thinking that a happy home must be headed by a man, that we all had to make a home for him, not for ourselves, the women. A home without him, "Nnayin, our father", at the top is incomplete, and all those from such a home should go about with this chip on their shoulders. During my marriage, Sylvester and I did not talk much in the evenings; we rowed most of the time. Yet I still felt the nagging guilt of incompleteness just because there was no man to talk to or serve or slave for at the end of the day. Now, suddenly, with more time on my hands to do exactly what I liked, that feeling was disappearing. [...]

I became so busy that I kept wondering how it was that only a few years back I had felt that to be a full human being, I had to be a mother, a wife, a worker and a wonder-woman. I now realized that what I was doing then was condemning myself to an earthly hell. Marriage is lovely when it works, but if it does not, should one condemn oneself? I stopped feeling guilty for being me. (242-243)

The progress towards this realisation makes up the entire narrative of Emecheta's autobiography, and appears to have been a point of reference as she explores some of the issues and contradictions of her own life in the novel form.

4.2 From Autobiography to the Novel: Connecting *Head Above Water* with *The Joys of Motherhood*

In focusing on Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* in relation to her autobiography, my purpose is not only to demonstrate how the biographical material informs the exploration of motherhood in the novel; it is also to explore the limits of autobiography as a narrative medium and the possibilities of the novel as both a narrative and an interrogative medium. Examining the autobiography side-by-side with the novel allows us to recognise how fears, anxieties and tensions that arise from subjective experience are funnelled into art and fully examined in the multi-dimensional worlds of the novel. The advantage here is that certain traits and ways of seeing demonstrated in the autobiography can be fully examined and interrogated in the more objective context of the novel. Removed from the subjective experience of the personal story, these anxieties can be questioned, re-examined and re-thought in a detached way in the lives of several characters. In *Head Above Water* Emecheta gives the background of the personal story that inspired the intense moments during which she wrote *The Joys of Motherhood*. We discover that it was from her sense of disappointment at her daughter's ingratitude that she began to rethink the demands and obligations of motherhood against the interests and happiness of mothers.

I kept on staring at the typewriter. I wanted to think, I wanted to reassess my life, I wanted to take stock. I could do it only on the typewriter. I banged away the whole of Christmas, the whole of January 1977, and by the end of that month, almost six weeks after Chiedu left, *The Joys of Motherhood* was finished. (Emecheta 1986:238)

In re-thinking motherhood from her personal experience, Emecheta also connects with the existing literature on the subject in African women's writing. *The Joys of Motherhood* thus establishes an intertextual dialogue with Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*. Indeed, in *Efuru* (1966), the phrase 'joys of motherhood' is used many times when referring to maternity. In particular, the heroine in the closing paragraph of *Efuru* finds a balance in her life, after many trials and tribulations, by relating to a goddess, as she could not fit into her society, having failed to experience 'the joy of motherhood'. (221) Though the heroine in the closing paragraph of *Efuru* finds other creative options in her life by becoming a worshipper of the sea goddess—the goddess of creativity and prosperity—there is always in her own mind a sense of loss for having missed the 'joys of motherhood'. In her own novel, Emecheta extends Nwapa's perspective by problematising society's assumptions about the joys of motherhood, and the values that equate womanhood with marriage and motherhood. In challenging these perspectives, she appears to take a rather different line of argument from most social commentators and critics. Phaniel Akubueze Egejuru, for instance, posits a different view about marriage and motherhood in Igbo land, the same society that Emecheta critiques in her novel. The Igbo woman, she writes:

accepts the marriage institution and continues to support it because marriage is a type of purgatory through which the woman must pass to reach the paradise of motherhood—the state that confers prestige and permanent power to her. And among the Igbo as among many other cultures, prestige for a woman comes through marriage and child bearing. The Igbo say: 'Ugwu Nwanyi wu di ya', a woman's prestige is her husband. By extension, her self-actualisation comes through reproduction in marriage. Yes, a woman can have a child outside of marriage, but that brings shame not honour among the Igbo. (Egejuru 1997: 16)

Egejuru is clear that for motherhood to be socially acceptable and to confer a high standing in society it has to be within marriage: single mothers who bear children without becoming wives do not have the same high status. Marriage and motherhood are tightly entwined—patriarchy decrees that motherhood is noble only within marriage. Many women find this close association between motherhood and wifehood limiting, and do not want to be constrained by the traditional marriage rules. In addition, some women live with the worry that they may not bear children, which is a Sword of Damocles suspended over their heads.

Surely, when the discussion turns to African women, motherhood often springs to mind. Being a woman and mother are tightly bound up together. Carole Boyce Davies, for instance, observes that motherhood within marriage is an important part of a woman's status:

[...] In many African societies *motherhood defines womanhood*. Motherhood, then, is crucial to woman's status in African society. To marry and mother a child (a son preferably) entitles a woman to more respect from her husband's kinsmen for she can now be addressed as 'mother of --' (Davies 1986:243)

Filomina Chioma Steady also sees motherhood in the same light. She writes:

The most important factor with regard to the woman in traditional society is her role as *mother* and the centrality of this role as a whole. Even in strictly patrilineal societies, women are important as wives and mothers since their reproductive capacity is crucial to the maintenance of the husband's lineage and it is because of women that men can have a patrilineage at all.

(Steady 1981: 29)

Steady and Davies use italics to emphasise the point that motherhood within marriage is paramount to womanbeing in African societies. Aligning motherhood with marriage can be a problem for childless women who may find wifehood hellish, punished for a condition over which they may have no control. Also, women who

wish to attain the ultimate noble status given to mothers may resignedly continue in a marriage, which they detest. This is the scenario that troubles many African writers and critics. Obioma Nnaemeka, for instance, makes a fine distinction between motherhood and mothering when she argues that there is a difference between: “the sexual and cultural politics that construct the institution of motherhood in patriarchy as opposed to the actual experiencing of motherhood (mothering) by women.” (Nnaemeka 1997:8) Choice is the ingredient that allows women to enjoy motherhood and mothering. Women choosing to bear children have that essential part that allows the experience to be fulfilling for the family and the community.

Marriage and motherhood in *The Joys of Motherhood* can be read against these literary backgrounds and against Emecheta’s own experience as narrated in *Head Above Water*. It is possible to argue that it is her experience of both marriage and motherhood that leads to the particular portrayal of marriage in *The Joys of Motherhood*. It seems she was rethinking these institutions from historical and sociological perspectives¹⁵ in *The Joys of Motherhood*. She returns to the 1900s, and creates a variety of different kinds of marriage. Emecheta conceptualises her narrative from the 1900s to the eve of independence in Nigeria, and thus gives herself a larger framework in which to explore her different female characters and their relationships with men. It is as if she is anxious to investigate marriage in history, and determine at what point the norms internalised by Nnu Ego became entrenched. It is significant that Nnu Ego’s mother, Ona, lived at an earlier time than Nnu Ego, and we would expect her to be the more traditional of the two, being more attached to motherhood within marriage. But she is represented as a free spirit who enjoyed her sexuality and was pleased to be in a relationship, as a mistress, with a polygamous man, Agbadi,

¹⁵ Emecheta had a degree in sociology. For more details see “The Sociology Degree” in *Head Above Water*.

with whom she has a daughter, Nnu Ego. By chronologically placing Ona as Nnu Ego's mother, Emecheta demonstrates that, even in the traditional context, some women find a way to live their own lives, despite the seemingly entrenched traditional values. Contrary to the moral code of the time, Ona enjoyed her uninhibited sexuality, and escaped marriage in the patriarchal form. Even as far back as the 1900s, values around gender were not fixed, and women had room to exercise choice.

Emecheta herself, in *Head Above Water* tells us what she intends to achieve with the character of Nnu Ego:

In *The Joys of Motherhood* I created a woman, Nuego, who gave all her energy, all her money and everything she had to raise her kids. She chopped wood for sale, she dealt on the black market. She did everything except whore herself to raise money. She was so busy doing all this that she had no time to cultivate any friends among her own sex.

The children grew up and left. They loved her still, but they were busy with their own lives. So much so that when she was ill they could not come to see her. When she became too tired, she died alone by the wayside with none of her living eight children to hold her hand.

In that book I said that "the joy of motherhood" was a beautiful funeral. Nuego's sons did not give their mother a dignified death [...] but a horrible one. It was only after her death that they all borrowed money from the bank to give her a huge funeral celebration. It took her children years to repay the money they borrowed for that expensive funeral that went on for days. Even in my anger I could see [...] and imagine from what my daughter did the worst death that could ever befall me. (239)

She has created her protagonist with the background of her own life in mind and attempted to deal objectively with those dilemmas and conflicts that she could only write about subjectively in her autobiography. Thus in *The Joys of Motherhood*, she comes up with a slightly complex character and at the same time attempts to

create a historical context for examining ideas and attitudes about marriage and motherhood from the pre-colonial era to the colonial era.

Emecheta chooses to set Nnu Ego's second marriage in the city: the context of the city is very significant. This colonial world in the city is a new one for her, and it is organised in a different way. It is a world in which the position of men as heads of their families changes from the situation in the village. Here, men are subordinate to a larger colonial order, and the nature of their relationships with women is affected, and here, Nnu Ego becomes a different woman. In time, she achieves some economic power that makes her somewhat independent of her husband, and even a breadwinner. She learns new skills, becomes a good nurturer of her children and is able to take control of the household when her husband disappears. Although doing all this by herself made her become a self-reliant and independent woman, it never crosses her mind that the city is a big opportunity in her life to become more than a mother and a wife. In a sense, her situation may be likened to Emecheta's own newly found social advantage in Lagos and in London, which the latter takes advantage of, and which Nnu Ego fails to take up.

Nnu Ego's inability to transcend these values makes her dependent on the whims of her husband; and especially in relation to questions of a woman's right over her body, which she seems incapable of asserting. The question of the sexual rights of a husband, even in intolerable situations, is thus always, in her case, resolved to the advantage of her husband. The first problematic issue within the relationship between men and women in a marriage is what has been termed the 'sexual rights' of husbands. The form is often that husbands demand sex, and wives cannot easily refuse, as the women want to become pregnant and bear children to be valued within the community. In fact, from the woman's perspective, this 'sexual right' is almost a near-

rape experience. Emecheta indicates this situation with a description of Nnu Ego's, first night with her husband:

He demanded his marital right as if determined not to give her a chance to change her mind. She had thought she would be allowed to rest at least on the first night after her arrival before being pounced upon by this hungry man, her new husband. After such an experience, Nnu Ego knew why horrible-looking men raped women, because they are aware of their inadequacy. This one worked himself into an animal passion [...] she bore it, and relaxed as she had been told [...] This man's appetite was insatiable, and by morning she was so weary that she cried with relief and was falling asleep for the first time when she saw him leave the room. (Emecheta, 1979: 44)

In this scene, Nnu Ego's husband demands his marital rights, and has forced intercourse, while Nnu Ego bears it all like a martyr. She is morally obliged to comply with her husband's demands, and the scene can be seen as rape, or sexual assault. This type of misery that women sometimes have to endure, is hidden behind the prescription of motherhood within marriage. As I mentioned above, Emecheta had the misfortune to experience such a situation herself and she describes it in *Head Above Water*. Here again, the sexual violence suffered by women is hidden behind the joy of motherhood. Emecheta admits that she is glad that she was 'virtually raped', as her dearly beloved daughter was thereby conceived and delivered. I understand from this that, at this point in Emecheta's life, she had already internalised that fulfilment for a wife in her society came with motherhood within marriage no matter what it 'cost' for the wife. The experience of marriage is completely different for men, since for them, it is usually a thoroughly enjoyable experience with sex, fatherhood and having heirs to perpetuate the family line.

Nnu Ego continues bearing children, even though her husband, Nnaife, does not play the part of a reliable, conscientious husband and father. His work is spas-

modic, and he is often away from home. He is absent, for example, when he is away working on a boat, when he is fighting in Burma and when he is in prison for assaulting a Yoruba man. Thus, Nnu Ego's life is a precarious one. She is often solely responsible for herself and their family and there is an ever-increasing number of children. She is driven to sell cigarettes, matches, and firewood in order to pay the rent, buy food and pay the school fees. Life is hard, and sometimes they go hungry, but even in her darkest hour, she never considers halting the flow of new babies or even contemplating that fewer mouths to feed would reduce the hardship.

Her conception of motherhood mirrors that of Emecheta herself, who considers it to be the duty of a wife to produce children, and to toil with every ounce of her strength to care for them. Fortunately, Emecheta decides to separate from her husband after she has had all the children that she can tolerate, as she confesses in *Head Above Water*:

I am one of those women to whom nature gave great capacity to breed. I got pregnant very, very easily, and would never have aborted a living embryo [...] A contraceptive pill had never passed my mouth, I don't even know what they look like. (75)

With this fatalistic approach to family planning, Nnu Ego is Emecheta's alter ego. There is an even more striking resemblance between the two when it comes to suffering hardships for their children. Emecheta's superior education, and her living in London rather than Lagos, means that other doors of opportunity than petty trading are opened to her. Even so, Emecheta works at many and various jobs to support herself and her five children before she becomes a respected author. She shares the same predicament as Nnu Ego, when they both have their young families, and then Emecheta escapes from this self-destructive pattern, when she decides to leave her husband and to stop having more children. By choosing this life script for herself,

Emecheta shows that she believes that a woman can live well and provide for her family without a man, and that this is better than staying in an unhappy marriage. This can be read as a critique of Nnu Ego, who never thought about getting out of the marriage. She thus surely succeeds in deconstructing and de-romanticizing the patriarchal construct of motherhood, familiar and imposed on women.

I also note that, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta chooses to have Nnu Ego grapple with horrific circumstances that would push any woman to breaking point. Nnu Ego decides to stay with her thankless husband and to go on having more children. By contrast, Emecheta, in her own life journey, opts for ending her marriage and having no more children. This choice of ceasing to have children earlier can also be read as another of Emecheta's critique of Nnu Ego. Things get even worse for Nnu Ego when her marriage becomes a polygamous one. She seems determined to stay in the victim role, and refuses to use the avenues that are open to her in these circumstances.

In fact, although women generally dislike polygamy they can use it to further their own purposes. In her article, 'Bargaining with Patriarchy,' Deniz Kandiyoti coins the concept of a *patriarchal bargain* which

represents a difficult compromise. It is intended to indicate the existence of set rules and scripts regulating gender relations, to which both genders accommodate and acquiesce, yet which may nonetheless be contested, redefined and renegotiated. Some suggested alternatives were the terms *contract*, *deal* or *scenario*; however, none of these fully captured the fluidity and tension implied by bargain. (Kandiyoti 1988: 286)

There is room for negotiation and the possibility of redefining gender relations in a polygamous marriage, in what might otherwise appear to be a rigid, patriarchal system. Nnu Ego does not avail herself of this although, as the senior wife, she could

have delegated the household chores and the responsibility of bearing more children to the younger wife. She could have focused on gaining financial independence by developing her business. With her own income, she would have been able to invest in her own and her children's future. That was not to be, and we can also read this lack of agency as a further critique by Emecheta. Nnu Ego competes for her husband's affection, bears yet more of his children, and spends her scarce money and energy on producing Nnaife's favourite foods. She also rows with her co-wife, Adaku.

While all this is going on, Epko, Nnu Ego's youngest co-wife, is playing the system for herself. Epko plans ahead and has her sights on securing a better life for herself and her children, knowing that she doesn't want to continue her present miserable existence for any longer than she needs. Epko dutifully respects Nnu Ego as the senior wife in the household and, by the same token, expects Nnu Ego's children to help educate her own. According to tradition, if everything goes according to plan, Epko's children's future is secure, and the responsibility of Nnu Ego's offspring. Epko believes in tradition when it suits her. Epko reveals her hopes and plans when she hears that Nnu Ego's second son, Adim, has passed his 'Junior Cambridge' exam:

'Oh, my dear husband!' [...] 'This is good news. All the children in this family are so clever. And that makes us very proud women. Even the new child I am carrying will not lack anything. Now they have two big brothers who have been to high school. Oh I am so glad, aren't you, Mother [i.e. Nnu Ego]?' (196)

Epko, being the last wife, is in a weak position. She is only seventeen, and young enough to be Nnu Ego's daughter. (197) She is cleverly making the most of her position. She never tries to compete with Nnu Ego, and sows the seeds for a good future for herself and her children, as best she can.

There seems to be no doubt that there is an ideology sustaining the social construct of marriage in the African society. It is a means for procreation, and at the same time it allows men to control women. For wives, the act of sexual intercourse is to lead to maternity, while for husbands sex is for pleasure. Men control women and prescribe that procreation should be within marriage. Marriage becomes the framework within which the group can multiply and safely maintain the community's identity. Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias state that: "Women are (also) controlled in terms of the 'proper' way in which they should have them [children]—i.e. in ways which will reproduce the boundaries of the symbolic identity of their group or that of their husbands" (Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989: 9). For African women, the proper way to have children is within a marriage: child-bearing outside marriage brings shame rather than honour. The identity of a community is safeguarded when children are born into families and the community multiplies with individual family lineage passing to each generation through male heirs—colonialism reinforces that patriarchal view of motherhood through Christianity and missionaries.

Another aspect of *The Joys of Motherhood*, is that Emecheta's challenges many of the constructs of patriarchy relating to marriage and motherhood by creating some unconventional characters. Ona and Agbadi are lovers and enjoy having sex and do not want a child in the near future. Their lovemaking is described in detail, and shows clearly the delight and pleasure that they both enjoy (Emecheta, 1979: 19-20). On the other hand, Agbadi's senior wife is shown as the suffering, 'good wife'. This 'good wife' is quiet and submissive and the mother of sons. The 'good wife' and everyone else in the household can overhear the passionate lovemaking. As a consequence, the senior 'good wife' becomes ill and later dies, illustrating that women want and need satisfaction sexually just as much as men, inside and outside marriage.

Nevertheless, Emecheta shows some ambivalence about the sensuous enjoyment of sex. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego questions the fact that Adaku, her co-wife, enjoys her first night with her husband, in contrast to her own experience. Nnu Ego says: "What did she think she was doing? Did she think Nnaife was her lover and not her husband, to show her enjoyment so?" (124) Nnu Ego has the traditional view that sex in marriage equates with motherhood only and that 'good mothers' do not enjoy sex. The irony is that Nnu Ego, in her first marriage, enjoyed having sex with her husband. It may reflect Emecheta's own ambivalence, due to internalised constructs, about women enjoying sex within marriage, that lead her to make Nnu Ego childless in this first marriage. Also, in *Head Above Water*, Emecheta describes how she does not allow herself to enjoy any sexual encounter whether with her husband or with another man. After Emecheta has been through the breakdown of her marriage, she develops a relationship with Chidi. He is always there for her, and their relationship is a platonic one. Emecheta is like a traditional African woman and shuns sex once her family has been completed. This attitude reinforces the patriarchal definition of a woman's sexuality, as being solely for reproduction, not for pleasure. There is thus a contradiction between Emecheta's exploration of women's sexuality in *The Joys of Motherhood* and her description of how she herself decides to leave sexuality out of her own life in *Head Above Water*. Perhaps Emecheta has deep-rooted constructs about herself as a woman that are at variance with her wishes for fulfilled lives for women both inside and outside marriage, and not limited to motherhood alone.

Just the same, although Emecheta might seem ambivalent about women enjoying sex, by choosing to build up characters like Ona and Adaku she shows that these are possibilities that can be taken up by African women. Ona is the daughter chosen

by her father to continue his family line, which is the traditional solution in Africa when there are no male heirs. She is asked to 'give' all her children to her father, and her sons will therefore carry their maternal grandfather's name. But Ona is a free spirit, and, when she finds that she is pregnant, decides she will give her child to her father only if it is a boy, and if it is a girl, to give her to her lover, Agbadi. The portrayal of Adaku is important here in that she enjoys her first night of marriage, unlike Nnu Ego who found it an unpleasant ordeal. Then, while living together as co-wives, Adaku and Nnu Ego have a disagreement, and the elders of the community take Nnu Ego's side. They argue that Nnu Ego is the senior wife and has born sons, so Adaku must be to blame. For her part, Adaku decides to leave the marriage, and goes during one of their husband's long trips. She rents a house, sets up a business, and occasionally also works as a prostitute, arguing that men can be 'used' just as women can. Emecheta makes Adaku one of her minor characters and, as such, is taking a daring, cautious step towards examining how women can use prostitution in a useful, empowering manner.

The traditional view of motherhood is shown as being within marriage, giving continuity for the society in a prescribed framework. Emecheta is one of the women writers who tries to challenge the traditional views. However, even she reveals some hesitancy about the best way forward for women, probably due, at least in part, to all the ideas and beliefs that she acquired when she was a child in the African society.

Nnu Ego lives her life searching for personal fulfilment through motherhood in marriage. With Emecheta's description of Nnu Ego's life we get the full impact of Igbo society, which is typical of many African ones with respect to the woman's perspective of the prescriptions for women. The tensions between sexuality and motherhood are evident in Nnu Ego's marriage. But eventually she starts to ask herself

questions about the meaning of her own life. In fact, she is quite relieved that this baby girl died and then felt horror and guilt that she could feel relief about the death of a child. (194-195) She has finally understood that motherhood in marriage cannot be all there is to a woman's life:

Men—all they were interested in were male babies to keep their names going. But did not a woman have to bear the woman-child who would later bear the sons? "God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage?" [...] "Yes, I have many children, but what do I have to feed them on? On my life. I have to work myself to the bone to look after them, I have to give them my all." (186)

"The men make it look as if we must aspire for children or die. That's why, when I lost my first son, I wanted to die, because I failed to live up to the standard expected of me by the males in my life, my father and my husband—and now I have to include my sons. But who made the law that we should not hope in our daughters? We women subscribe to that law more than anyone. Until we change all this, it is still a man's world, which women will always help to build." (187)

African society is permeated with images of women as nurturing, and it is hard to escape this social prescription. The expectations for a woman as a mother with her children go even further, as womanhood is equated with marriage and motherhood, as I have shown earlier in this chapter. A woman is expected to bear children and to be prepared to die for them if necessary. Emecheta considers this, with the life of Nnu Ego showing the full extent of this tenet. However, the quotation shows that Nnu Ego has finally reached self-awareness, which may well be the beginning of the de-romanticization of motherhood portrayed by male African writers.

But still, in a sense, this realization came a bit too late in Nnu Ego's life. She died beside the road after a lifetime spent toiling for her children, who were not there for her in her time of need. It is significant to look at the ending Emecheta chooses to

give *The Joys of Motherhood*, which is different from the one she outlines in *Head Above Water*. After Nnu Ego's burial, her children express their gratitude by erecting a shrine in her memory. This deification is an example of their respect for their mother, who needed more assistance in her lifetime. Infertile women praying at her shrine were not granted children. This can be read as Emecheta's trying to change beliefs about women. Not fulfilling the wishes of these childless women, and thus creating more of them, was a way to stimulate these women to be creative about their lives and find fulfilment and happiness elsewhere than in motherhood and marriage. This is also a way of obliging the community to accept childless women into their midst, and ultimately review women's definition as wives and mothers, thus reaching the goal of destabilizing the basis of patriarchy in African society.

In conclusion to this chapter about Emecheta's related texts, her autobiography *Head Above Water* and *The Joys of Motherhood*, a fictional one, I have shown how Emecheta has developed over her own life, and how she translated her autobiography into fiction. Writing a fiction from her own life allowed her to re-think her personal life in creative ways. Although she does not re-write her own story, projecting her own anxieties, fears, and contradictions onto a character in fiction allows her to create new possibilities, and will new realities into being.

I chose to look at *Head Above Water* and *The Joys of Motherhood* simultaneously because analysing both narratives simultaneously illuminates and gives insights into how an African woman writer's personal life can impact on her creative writing, triggering new possibilities and critically examining the taboos and conventions about women in society. Indeed, marriage and motherhood have been designed by patriarchal societies, and thus Emecheta, Nnu Ego and many African women tread the same paths, and have similar experiences. M. J. Daymond writes about this similarity

between the experiences of women under patriarchal systems, and how they may come to the brink of losing their sanity before they re-consider their lives: "The three concepts which Nnu Ego has to re-examine and which must take on new meaning in her life, those of 'women' (in the sense of an individual unit in society), 'wife' and 'mother' are entering Nnu Ego's active reconsideration." (1996: 283) The key to survival and fulfilment for many African women is to reconsider the concept of womanhood in connection with marriage and motherhood. Most African women, as with Emecheta and Nnu Ego, suffer many hardships before arriving at this place.

Chapter Five

**Marriage and Migration:
Calixthe Beyala's *Le Petit Prince de Belleville*
and Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde***

Throughout the thesis, I have explored changing perspectives on marriage within the context of particular societies and communities. This focus on specific contexts has been consistent with the general assumption that it is within their specific cultures that individuals understand their societies and cultures and create a sense of their identities. Within the various contexts of the novels, characters move from one part of a country to another; men and women move out of rural areas into towns and cities. Anowa moves from Yebi to Ogua; Nnu Ego travels from Ibiza to Lagos; Tembi journeys from South Africa to Senegal. In most of these cases there is always a sense that characters are moving through a world they themselves only partially inhabit. Such migratory movements are consistent with the history of migrations on the continent of Africa itself.

However, migrations from communities in Africa into Europe and America are rarely thematized in the contemporary literature of African women. When, in *So Long A Letter*, Mariama Bâ's other female character, Aissatou, moves to The United States, Bâ hardly explores the realities of her migration even though her move is partly generated by the crisis of her marriage, by the prejudices of caste, and by her sense of betrayal. Readers are given no insight into how she resolves her crisis in the situation of exile. All that emerges in this sub-theme is the suggestion that Aissatou has benefited materially from her exile and is in a position to buy a car for her friend.

Contrary to this unfinished, sketchy and apparently successful picture of the educated African woman in exile, the new phenomenon of migration from Africa to

the West, is fraught with trauma and anxiety as well as possibilities. As early as 1977, the very few women writers who took up the theme were pointing to the disorientating experience of dislocation and loss. In Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* for instance, the post-colonial subject's migration to Europe is seen as a source of diminishment. Already weakened by the legacies of colonialism, Aidoo's post-colonial migrants are like migrating birds whose feathers:

Drop
And
Drop
And
Drop
From
Constant flights and
Distances
(Aidoo 1977:20)

Yet, in *Our Sister Killjoy*, the migrant's journey, though it demands his/her return home, is also a source of insight into history and gender. It is through her European journeys that Aidoo's protagonist, Sissie, recognises the universal marginalisation of women and their loneliness in a world that is dominated by men. It is through her experience of journeys in Europe that Sissie gains the critical distance to explore the positive and negative aspects of home. Indeed, the greatest impact that migrancy has on the individual migrant is the effect it has on the usual conception of home. The idea of 'home' as the specific space of the family unit, the community or the nation, and as the focus of personal identity, may be disturbed in the dislocations of migrancy. Iain Chambers posits one possibility of this re-assessment of home and locale when he argues that migrancy:

inevitably implies another sense of 'home', of being in the world. It means to conceive of dwelling as a mobile habitat, as a mode of inhabiting time and space not as though they were fixed and closed structures, but as providing the critical provocation of an opening whose questioning presence reverberates in the movement of the languages that constitute our sense of identity, place and belonging. (Chambers 1994: 4)

Chambers' view of migration as a spur to multiple concepts of belonging and identity is widened further in Homi Bhabha's argument about the various subject positions, which the relocation of 'home' in migrancy inevitably generates. As he argues, "the move away from the singularities of 'class' or 'gender' as primary conceptual and organizational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions—of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation—that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world" (1994: 1). However, Bhabha's suggestion that it is only within the articulation of cultural differences that we can initiate new signs of identity is challenged in Edward Said's dual vision of the simultaneous dimensions that exile affords. In Said's view, exile although by definition a traumatic experience, can offer the exile unsuspected possibilities of new homes and new experiences. The interesting point here is that the exile is not asked to exchange his old culture for something new and unfamiliar. Said points rather to an openness, which can turn the experience of exile into a beneficial one:

Seeing "the entire world as a foreign land" makes possible originality of vision. Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is *contrapuntal*.

For an exile, habits of life, expression, or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring

together contrapuntally. There is a unique pleasure in this sort of apprehension, especially if the exile is conscious of other contrapuntal juxtapositions that diminish orthodox judgment and elevate appreciative sympathy. There is also a particular sense of achievement in acting as if one were at home wherever one happens to be. (Said 2001: 186)

For Said, 'acting as if one were at home wherever one happens to be' means more than just finding a 'home' wherever one is. It involves being open to both old and new environments and creating a sense of 'home' from reorganising an understanding of both worlds. These simultaneous dimensions as defined by Said can give the migrant a dual vision that may transform his/her sense of self without totally discarding a sense of original home.

It is within these varied theoretical perspectives that this chapter examines the contemporary explorations of marriage and migration in recent writing by African women. The focus on Beyala's *Le petit prince de Belleville* (1992) and Emecheta's *Kehinde* (1994) is particularly significant. Both writers have experienced migrancy first hand, in France and in England, and their narratives introduce new dimensions on the theme of marriage by examining the impact that migration has on the social, cultural and gender values that underpin the institution of marriage. The texts of the two writers are also particularly significant because both were written at a time when the ideas of nationhood had been weakened by the failures of decolonisation—a time of national crisis and mass migrations, a time when the nation appears to be no longer the sole authority that determines the individual's identity.

5.1: Calixthe Beyala's *Le Petit Prince de Belleville*: African marriage 'à la française.'

To examine the impact of migration on marriage in Beyala's *Le Petit Prince de Belleville* (1992), it would be pertinent to consider Elizabeth Wilson's observation on Francophone Caribbean women's writing. Wilson has argued that women's 'identity crisis or quest' in Francophone Caribbean women's writing generally ends in a negative way. She observes that:

Central to the depiction of this quest are the metaphors of the journey and the closed space. The journey is an archetypal symbol, but whereas it is most often a journey-as-initiation—to self-knowledge and/or integration into a community—in Francophone female Caribbean writing, the journey [...] takes the form of journey-as-alienation. Self-knowledge often leads to destruction of self. (Wilson 1990: 45)

Calixthe Beyala in her Francophone African text *Le Petit Prince de Belleville* examines similar instances of journeys as alienation and self-knowledge, but her explorations do not always lead to the destruction of self, as happens in Wilson's description of texts by Caribbean female writers. Her narratives of journey involve the destruction of old, entrenched values and have tragic consequences, but self-knowledge for her characters does not necessarily lead to self-destruction. Beyala published *Le petit Prince de Belleville* in 1992 after she had been living in France for several years. In an interview with Narcisse Mouelle Kombi for the African magazine *Amina*, Beyala explains the context of journey and migration that informs the novel:

On retrouve ainsi dans ce livre le problème de la femme africaine transposée dans une société européenne et n'étant plus protégée par son milieu originel. Transposée dans une société complètement hostile, on voit comment elle essaie de s'en sortir. Sa vie quotidienne n'est pas toujours facile. Mais grâce à son ingéniosité, elle réussit à franchir les obstacles (Beyala, *Amina* 1992).

[Thus, we find again in this book the problem of the African woman transposed in a European society and who is no longer protected by her original environment. Trans-

posed into a completely hostile society, one can see how she tries to manage. Her daily life is not always easy. But thanks to her inventiveness, she succeeds in overcoming difficulties]—my translation.

Although the novel's focus is on the closed spaces and marginalisation of migrants, it also presents a context for interrogating norms and values that have been crystallised in the very different patriarchal context of home. Thus, in Beyala's novel, exile also disrupts the correlation between home, values, and identity. Ideas about masculinity, femininity and manhood that have been shaped in the seemingly secure world of Mali have to contest with the new contexts and values in exile. One way in which women writers reveal the instability of the norms that determine attitudes about women and marriage, is by showing how they may be disrupted, or how they may crumble in moments of change and the intervention of new spaces and values. It is because the situation of exile presents such a crisis that Beyala explores the experience from the dialogic interaction of different narrative voices. The crucial point about a dialogic narration is that it does not give the narrative point of view to a single character. In *Le Petit Prince de Belleville*, Beyala withholds the central viewpoint from the patriarchal figure and distributes the narration among all the characters, focussing particularly on the perceptions of Loukoum in the novel. In representing the family displaced from its cultural milieu and home coping with a different environment and set of values, she appears to ask: what happens to traditional values and norms of gender relations in exile? How does polygamy function or survive in the different environment of France? To explore these questions, Beyala could easily have given the crucial point of view to the male figure, since in some major sense the novel focuses on his total disorientation in a world that saps his sense of self and his visions of manhood. The fact that Beyala chooses to structure the text in such a way that we can read three parallel and different perspectives on the issue of exile, home and marriage, is crucial to the novel's underlying vision.

As a collective, all members of the family experience the pressures of being outside the mainstream; all are marginalized and discriminated against in one way or the other. How they respond to these pressures is crucial to Beyala's exploration of marriage and migration. It is significant that though the patriarch, Abdou suffers the greatest inner disturbance: his crisis exists solely within himself and does not constitute the main narrative action of the novel. Written in italics, Abdou's monologues remain a subtext of inner thoughts to an imaginary friend, while the novel's action focuses on his son, a young boy of twelve. It is his son, Loukoum's interaction with the family and with the world outside that forms the main action of the novel. Through the revelations of Abdou's monologue Beyala represents the inner disintegration of a man who continues to clutch a vision of masculinity and authority that is already crumbling. Jean-Marie Volet captures the full meaning and deceit of Abdou's discourse and points out the inadequacy of his response to the new culture:

At first the formalized discourse of the father leads the reader to associate it with wisdom and truth; however, it soon becomes apparent that this very elaborate prose does not establish a blueprint of family behaviour and expectations. Although it is backed up by the traditional power of patriarchal domination, and is framed in terms of a solemn and intimidating discourse, the father's story is one of slow but irreversible degradation and loss; his culture, religion, and family structures are crumbling. (Volet 1993: 311)

It seems as if Beyala's narrative subjects the traditional authority of patriarchal discourse to the destabilising impact of migration and change. In Ayo Abietou Coly's view however, Abdou's crumbling discourse asks fundamental questions about home and exile:

Where is home, for starters? On the one hand, can the country that has colonized your native land and is still refusing to acknowledge your existence be called home? On the other, can the homeland that failed to perform its nurtur-

ing function and that you have left in search of more hospitable places still be called home?" (Coly 2002: 34)

These questions call for the examination of the nature of exile and the notions of home. Abdou sees himself as a poor African exile:

"Fortune has opened its wings, exile has begun. I came to this country in the grip of material gain, expelled from my own land by need. I came; we came to this country to save our skin, to buy our children a future. I arrived, we arrived in bundles with a hope as enormous as memory itself, hidden deep in our hearts." (Beyala 1995:11)

Abdou does not feel at home in France and French society: he sees himself as rejected and certainly not welcome. For Le Pen and his political movement, immigrants are the scapegoats, considered to be the cause of social problems such as housing and unemployment, and Abdou feels this personally. He is also disadvantaged by his work as a street cleaner, which is generally considered, by the French, to be a lowly task and insignificant in the grand scheme of things. "Who am I? An immigrant. A burdensome mouth. An airstream passing through." (111) Abdou is deeply disturbed by this feeling of rejection within French society. He is crushed by the experience of exile: "My steps in the streets raise the barrier walls higher and reinforce the stones of indifference. I am the immigrant, the exiled star, and I go forward with my head turned back." (51) Abdou's monologues reveal a deep nostalgia for his country of origin, Mali, in West Africa:

"I walk the streets. I dream up the past. The tree in the courtyard, my neighbour's cat, the bougainvillea climbing up the wall, the women, the children running through the compounds and the hammock stretched between two mango trees. Memories of a time that has been erased by social impotence, memories I have lived." (78)

Abdou's despair is deepened when his son, Loukoum, is indifferent to his father's tales of Mali and will not participate in the father-son story telling. He senses that the patriarchal bonds are weakening: "But you know, friend, little by little, my son was no longer listening to me." (144) Loukoum's enthusiasm for going to the Mosque with his father and for learning Arabic is waning. Abdou finds it hard, even for himself, to be a Muslim in France: "I've known the tragedies of my religion for too long, I've struggled alone for too long against Christianity" (144). Faced with such antagonism and incomprehension Abdou realises that he is on the verge of a nervous breakdown. He confesses: "I believe I'm going mad" (*ibid.*). He responds to his uncomfortable feelings about being in France in a number of different ways.

First of all he defines his flat as a safe haven where he keeps his family secure, protected from the crushing French system and the xenophobic, unfriendly French society. Ironically, however, even though Abdou works hard to create this safe place, he still does not feel at home there, in such a tiny geographical space. He shares the two-bedroom flat with his two wives and four children. His life in Europe, after his journey from Africa, is effectively in a 'closed space', a flat in Belleville. He is exiled, faced with the dominant, all-absorbing French culture. For him, this flat is successively defined as a territory for his tribe, with him as the uncontested leader, the 'revered father' (1), and 'MY HOUSE' (78, 91), in capital letters, to express the place where he is the husband, a father and a patriarch, who is to be obeyed. He battles to repel the new values, those of the dominant culture that he is living in, which threaten to overwhelm him in the form of changes in his wives' behaviour and the behaviour of other women around him that he considers to be inappropriate.

In Abdou's italicised monologues, he shares his thoughts and feelings about being a poor African exile. He defends himself and thinks that he is adapting to the

new European values although he is struggling and does not notice that his family is drifting away from him. Indeed, there is a discrepancy between how he sees his marriage and how his family view it and are living it. He wallows in self-pity and justifies mistreating his wives by clinging to the old system where men know best for their families. He considers himself to be the revered patriarch whose authority goes unquestioned in his own home. He has a chair reserved just for him, and is always chewing kola nuts and spitting. When he disappears for a week with his new white mistress, Mademoiselle Esther, his wives dare not ask where he has been. He has a romantic view of the women in his life and never considers what is happening for them. He uses women and sex to soften the pain of his physical and psychological exile. At the same time, he feels alienated and finds that his authority and beliefs are crumbling when confronted with the dominant, all-absorbing Western culture. He sees his son losing the Islamic influence and not having much traditional education. Loukoum makes French friends and does really well at his French school.

Abdou's search for solace in sexual relationships leads to even more complications. His affair with Mademoiselle Esther culminates in the birth of Abdou junior. The baby's mother was ready to leave her son with M'am just as Animata, Loukoum's natural mother, had done ten years earlier. M'am refused to comply on this occasion. Abdou revelled in playing the victim, the lost African in a foreign hostile land dreaming of the beautiful Africa and the African way of life. He also wishes for 'understanding' wives, and a life without obligations and the freedom to do whatsoever he pleases. In Abdou's heartfelt soliloquies women are highly romanticized, reminiscent of the poets of the Negritude movement. This is because of the highly poetic writing that Beyala uses for these passages, attributed to Abdou, and to the way the women are put up on a pedestal and entrusted with his survival.

All in all, Abdou uses women to soothe away some of the inadequate feelings that he has when living in a hostile environment, away from Africa. "They. Women. They know how to invent me, they also know how to adopt me, to reinvent me. [...] I travel over their bodies, which open up to my tenderness and I fall asleep, inside the open arms of heaven. Exile moves away" (78). And also Abdou only feels like a man when he is being the head of a polygamous family, a patriarch in his own household, ruling in the traditional way.

But he himself can feel his inadequacy. He does realise that he has become less and less important for his wives and his son. As a result, his space shrinks. He becomes aware that his house has in fact become like a coffin for him (Beyala 1995: 51, 102) but I would argue that, in reality, his space within what he terms his "OWN HOUSE" (91) has become his armchair from where he exerts the remaining patriarchal power that he can feel is crumbling away. But ironically the more he feels his own inadequacy, the more he resists any sense of a change in the meaning of home in the sense in which Chambers describes the impact of exile. He also lacks Said's dual visions of home.

Beyala's representation of him has other implications for gender and change. It reveals that notions of masculinity and ideas of gender are dependent on particular contexts and particular codes. The moment these contexts fall away the gender definition begins to shift. Joan W. Scott in her article "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis." defines gender as follows:

The core of the definition rests on an integral connection between two prepositions: gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power. Changes in the organization of social relationships always correspond to changes in representations of power, but the direction of change is not necessarily one way. (Scott 1986: 1067)

For Abdou and his household, there is in France a context for a change in gender definitions. The relationship between Abdou and his wives, in France, is sometimes so foreign to him that he has difficulty defining his own gender. According to Scott: "Massive political upheavals that throw old orders into chaos and bring new ones into being may revise the terms (and so the organization) of gender." (1073) For Abdou, exile works like a 'massive political upheaval' and results in chaos surrounding gender definitions within his household that he is not able to adapt to. In Mali, according to social gender norms, that work in a binary way, he was the man / rather than the woman; the husband / as opposed to the wife; all-powerful / not subordinate. In sexual matters, he decides and takes the initiative, asserting his masculinity. M'am recalls: "When I first knew Abdou, he needed six women a day. Different ones." (83) But exile has turned the tables for the 'women / wife / subordinate' part of the gender code that existed in Mali. He has lost some of his power economically as well as psychologically. As a street cleaner, his wages are low compared to the average wage in France. On his wages, he cannot afford to spend much impressing his wives. Their home is in the migrant ghetto of Belleville, and they feel marginalized. Psychologically, his job, sweeping streets and collecting rubbish, diminishes his self-esteem. Sweeping is a woman's job where he comes from and, in France, where he is now, it is considered a dirty job that no one wants to do. Thus, Abdou feels robbed of his economic and social status, in exile in France, and moreover, unfortunately, his sexual potency and power is diminishing as well:

And they take the initiative. They make love to me and I'm ashamed. They're impaling this little tortured body with love and pleasure. Since when, friend, and in what country, do women govern? I am a fertile field, am I not, friend? There's no doubt about the appearance of things, that is to say, my sexual organs, is there now, friend? (91)

Abdou feels insecure now that his wives are taking the assertive role in sexual relations. He even doubts the existence of his sexual organs. He is almost confined to the armchair in the flat because, even in the bedroom, he feels emasculated, robbed of his male power since the women now make love to him and he does not feel in charge even during sexual intercourse. Loukoum shrewdly observes his father who, from his armchair, enjoys the remnant of the male power that he still has issuing orders to his wives: "This has got to be washed, that ironed. Find me this, get me that," (27) or "Bring me a glass of water." (58) But playing the perfect role of a victim, Abdou blames his fate on his wives' buying into women's liberation ideas: "Since the women have started serving glasses full of independence in my house, since they've been drinking that sap, I am learning how not to be a man any longer." (111) And he is incapable of changing his perspective on his predicament since he is convinced women's liberationist ideas are against the best interests of their men. He sinks even deeper into his victimhood: "But you know, friend, women's independence is a bad seed which man must throw in the dustbin. If he misses the first throw, it will fall and grow no matter where. Even between her legs!" (117) Nevertheless, the young boy is well aware of the symbolism of his dad's chair in the house. While Abdou is away in prison and Loukoum and M'am become the breadwinners making and selling bracelets, Loukoum declares: "I am the man of the house. I sit down in my dad's armchair after work." (168)

Although he likes sitting in his father's armchair, Loukoum is not set to replace his father in the house, and just repeating his behaviour. It is because Abdou is unable to deal with his exile and re-organise himself in his new home that the novel's narrative focuses more on his young son. Loukoum as the narrator is a shrewd observer of what is going on around him in the community. His observations help him to

detect contradictions in people's behaviour at different levels. He notices the community's behaviour as a group when they agree to send a member's French wife to have sex with the police officer in exchange for the release of some members of the group who are in prison with the excuse that "your papers are in order, you're a woman, you're white, so everything is in your favour." (75)

On another level, he looks closely at his father's behaviour with his wives at home and with the women outside, often commenting candidly, but without any complacency, on the relationship between men and women within the community. He comes out as the unbiased observer and the character who really demonstrates his ability to take in aspects of French culture, while at the same time keeping his core values and experiencing those 'simultaneous dimensions' that exile can afford the immigrant. In fact, he is the one successful at that because he looks at French culture and tries to accept what is offered, while at the same time taking into account his own background, what is taught to him at home through what his father says, and what he observes.

Although his observations do not always make sense to him, he remains open to every eventuality. He manages brilliantly to mould himself in the culture, making friends at school and successfully learning the French language. In his personal life, his openness and adaptability help him to overcome many potentially distressing situations. For instance, after the initial shock of discovering that M'am is not his real mother, he accepts her as his mother. Likewise, when his natural mother suddenly appears in his life, he manages to accept the fact that she can at the same time be a prostitute and his mother. He does not reject her when she mothers him during the time he spends with her. She cooks for him, and also leaves food for him in the fridge

before going to work as a prostitute. (159) With the same openness, he accepts swimming lessons from his father's white mistress, Mademoiselle Esther, a prostitute.

Despite Loukoum's openness and flexibility, the one situation that proves hard to comprehend is his father's discourse about womens' liberation, and the French feminist social worker Madame Saddock, preaching to M'am and Soumana about what a marriage is supposed to be. Indeed when he once asked his father what a liberated woman was, the latter's reply was: "Listen, Loukoum, [...] That sort of woman is bad news, spreads her legs for anyone. Never listen to them. Never!" (58) At the same time, he would hear Madame Saddock telling M'am and Soumana how to take action against his father. His frustration and irritation get the best of him in the following passage:

"And Madame Saddock frets. She yells: 'In your place I'd go here, I'd do this, I'd do that.' That's just it, though, she isn't in their place, she has no business sticking her nose in what's theirs. African marriages – she doesn't have a clue what they're all about. She doesn't understand the first thing about the way we live." (80)

And in a fit of anger he symbolically points at her with his finger and pretends to kill her. (81) This incident demonstrates that even in his worst moments, Loukoum still has the ability to see events objectively. Although he is receptive to French culture, and although he would not believe every word his father says about liberated women, he is able to see the inadequacy of Madame Saddock's teachings and foresee the misery she is bound to provoke in their household. By symbolically 'killing' her, Loukoum shows that it is up to the women themselves to work their way through the challenges of the new culture.

As we can see, Loukoum's point of view constantly interacts with the stories of the women. Volet contrasts Loukoum's story with his father's, but he fails to read

the women's story as the third story "which run their different courses but are nevertheless related to each other" (Volet 1993: 311). For the women, when the patriarch crumbles and disintegrates, the space is then open for women to experiment with new ways of being women. Although we can argue that for them they move from one context of marginalisation in Africa to another one in France, the new society with its different values for women offers a new space for these women to expand. New concepts like monogamy and ideas of equality between men and women propagated by the women's liberation movement will lead to different redefinitions of womanhood, motherhood and sexuality. Indeed, for M'am and Soumana, most things happen in the kitchen in their flat. Beyala describes how these African women adapt differently to the new, dominating, rejecting society while mostly being confined in the small kitchen. The two women also approach their roles as wives and their own sexuality in very different ways.

Beyala depicts, with M'am, a strong African woman making the journey across continents, and thoughtfully tackling all the ordeals in the new European society. M'am develops her own new dimension to motherhood in marriage from the one that she had back in Africa. She came to France because of her husband, Abdou, and lives as his dutiful wife. She brought with her from Africa her ideas of what a 'good wife' should do. Her life revolves around her husband and the house. Her infertility is a disaster in her life. This is underlined by her insistence on bringing home the seven kilo tumour removed from her womb, and by comparing this with French celebrities: "'Think about it', she says to them, 'a tumour of seven kilos. Even our great men didn't weigh that much at birth. At the most they were three kilos. De Gaulle, Mitterrand, Alain Delon, Johnny Halliday, Mireille Mathieu, Dalida.'" (Beyala 1995: 4) M'am cannot be a mother herself, but she can use the French laws to her

advantage. She dutifully recognises Abdou as the incontestable head of the family. She respects him, without question, and skilfully, imperceptibly exploits her role as the traditional first wife co-operating with co-wives and satisfying all her husband's whims. French laws do not recognise polygamy and the usual practice is to have just the first wife represented on the '*livret de famille*'¹⁶. All the children of the family are recorded as hers alone, despite their true parentage. Therefore, M'am is the mother, under French law, and her co-wife, Soumana, although the biological mother, has no official place in the family under French law.

Soumana, unlike M'am, tries openly to get more for herself, and asks for more recognition as her husband's wife and demands more sexual fulfilment. Abdou dismisses her claims even though she has born his children. Amazingly, Soumana seems to be more trapped in the kitchen and flat than M'am is. Ironically, Soumana also finds herself cornered between her husband, whom she is beginning to hate, and M'am's discourses about Allah's precepts of goodness. It is revealing to follow the conversation between M'am and Soumana that comes after a moan about African men expecting to be waited on hand and foot by their wives:

'...little did I know then I would be living the same dog's life.'

'*Inch Allah!*' M'am says.

'That's all you can say. But tell me, M'am, how do you manage to stand having Abdou around?'

'It's the survival instinct,' says M'am,

'It gives you strength which you draw from inside, deep in your gut. And anyway for me it's so deep down now, my hatred, it doesn't even surface any more...' (34)

¹⁶ This is a family record book in which the date of marriage, the dates of births and deaths are registered.

Soumana lacks this survival instinct. Instead of directing her wrath at Abdou, she turns it inwards and is consumed by anger, jealousy and her inability to break free. Her resentment is fuelled even more by Mme Saddock, who encourages Soumana to stand up for herself. Mme Saddock's advice falls on deaf ears when it comes to M'am. Soumana's attempt at rebellion is partially thwarted by M'am's manipulative attitude in the confined space of the kitchen; M'am is always the winner. It is important to note the way she uses silence effectively. Whereas, on the one hand, Irene Assiba d'Almeida is right in asserting that "silence creates an emptiness generated by the knowledge that a woman may never realise or develop her full potential" (d'Almeida 1994: 2), there are times in women's lives when silence also becomes a strategy of subterfuge and secret strength. To say this, however, is not to diffuse d'Almeida's very strong thesis that women's social possibilities are linked with their ability to articulate their experiences, and that these may not be achieved until the silence imposed on them is destroyed. On another level, Mme Saddock supports Soumana's attempt at freedom. From her position as an outsider of the marriage, and as a woman from the dominant culture, she teaches Soumana what she thinks is right in a marriage. A parallel is to be seen here with the ongoing debate about Western feminist values, which are not necessarily appropriate for African women. Sometimes Western women with honourable intentions may do more harm than good with African women struggling within an African family.

Beyala's own views about polygamy are ambivalent. She states that she can understand polygamy, and finds that polygamy in Africa is a reasonable and honest tradition. However she dodges the issue with her theory that a man is not even worth one woman. In Kombi's interview with her, her ideas about polygamy that she discusses in her novel are:

'...Un homme ne mérite pas plus d'une femme. D'ailleurs, pour moi, une femme, c'est déjà beaucoup.'

-Vous le croyez vraiment?

-Oui. Parce que j'ai toujours prôné la supériorité de la femme.

(Kombi, Amina, 1992).

[...A man does not deserve more than one wife. Besides, for me, one wife is already too many.

-Do you really believe that?

-Yes. Because I have always advocated woman's superiority]—*my translation*.

Beyala considers, in this interview, that men do not deserve to be the husband of a wife in either the African or the French patriarchal systems. She also describes the practice of a monogamous man with a mistress as polygamy in disguise. But she does not offer a sustainable alternative for a relationship where a woman's superiority can be acknowledged and that would replace the current patriarchal traditions.

These forthright ideas are unusual and surprising. Unfortunately, they are not backed up with sustainable discourse, and I tend to agree with Kenneth W. Harrow when he argues that: "[Beyala] has created a public persona whose words shock only to comfort, whose home truths are safe half-truths, functioning like public pronouncements" (Harrow 2002: 114). As for Soumana, she is tormented and torn between traditional precepts about marriage and modern, French pronouncements on marriage and has a dismal life ending in a premature death. She is victimized, and cannot escape her stifling wifely role.

With M'am, however, Beyala shows how a woman who is determined to survive can challenge and subvert the deeply rooted patriarchal definitions of a woman as a mother and a wife. The example of M'am demystifies all these ideologies. She is self-sacrificing, uses agency and quietens her own sexuality, leaving Abdou to Soumana. She sustains herself with Islamic precepts and cares for her husband's children, from Aminata and Soumana, in a quiet, unobtrusive manner. She has carved

out 'a real mother's' place for herself. And, as Brière remarks: "[M'am's] identity is assured by her social role, and not by her fertility [...] Finally judged for her human qualities and not for her fertility, Beyala's character is freed from the weight of the African past" (Brière 1994, 71; quoted and translated by Cazenave 2000: 112). This becomes a new definition of 'motherhood' without actually bearing a child, which was previously the *sine qua non* for motherhood, and ultimately womanhood. This is a social definition of the value of a woman. M'am achieves the status of a valid mother figure, although biologically sterile. Beyala builds up a picture of a real survivor who knows what she wants, and works hard to achieve it. M'am usually comes across as a traditional woman bowing to her husband's every whim. However, when Loukoum's prostitute mother demands to take her son and, for several days, Abdou wants to keep him, M'am confronts him (147). Likewise, she unexpectedly refuses to accept the child that Abdou's had with Mademoiselle Esther because she is 'fed up with Abdou's mistresses and with his foolishness', adding: "I do not need a child, is that clear?" (169) M'am's new-found confidence can be read as the assertiveness that she acquires from the breakdown and disorientation of the patriarchal figure, Abdou.

On another level, Beyala considers the theme of prostitution along with the situation of African women's immigration and adaptation to a new set of values in Europe. Aminata, Loukoum's mother, has come from Africa, and is also in a 'closed space'. She only has her flat and her work as a prostitute, under the strict surveillance of Monsieur Mohammed Ben Sallah. Beyala has her own particular approach to prostitution, which she treats as any normal job from which a woman can make a living. Beyala looks tolerantly on women who resort to prostitution as a means of

survival in a difficult situation. In addition, Animata is in a relatively independent position and she can stand up for herself when talking with Abdou, her son's father:

'What's wrong with you, dressing up like a whore?' my dad asks.

'None of your business,' she answers.

'You have to behave like a responsible woman', he retorts. [...]

'Take that off immediately.' My dad orders the creature.'

'Don't overdo it, Abdou. I'm not your wife.'

'But you are the mother of my son.' (98-99)

Aminata can be assertive, since they are in France and not in Africa, and her best defence is that she is not his wife. Abdou, on the other hand, wants to exercise his patriarchal power and subdue Aminata, and fails in the attempt. It is clear that she is not completely happy with being a prostitute, however, and by the end of the text she is ready to marry Uncle Kouam. Animata avoids marriage with Abdou and escapes a dominating husband, only to be controlled by a pimp. It is not clear from the narrative whether she demands her own terms with her marriage to Uncle Kouam. It might be that she continues to work as a prostitute with her husband's approval.

It seems that in *Loukoum: The Little Prince of Belleville*, the women's narratives are paralleled with Abdou's in such a way that they reveal his particular escape into nostalgia and the dominant values of patriarchy. For indeed Abdou's vision is a nostalgic one, while the ongoing reality for himself and his wives is the suffering brought about by their dislocation and the need to adjust to new ways of life. He grieves over the loss of their native land and desperately clings to his male privileges. His escape into sexual comfort is a form of escapism, playing the ostrich, rather than real adaptation. In contrast, the women are adapting to their new environment with determination, especially M'am.

All in all, Abdou needed a shock to bring him back to the reality of his situation and for him to review his relations with women. First there was Soumana's death, and then his imprisonment for cheating on child benefits. When he returned home, he found that M'am, with the help of Loukoum, was efficiently running the home and making and selling bracelets. Abdou started to work for M'am and became more loving and appreciative of her, perhaps because he is no longer the breadwinner. He now has added the new dimension of caring and sharing his feelings to his traditional way of loving M'am.

In M'am, Beyala has created an example of a strong forthright woman asserting herself in the face of adversity with or without a husband. This is reminiscent of Beyala's interview with Kombi when the picture is of Abdou, who is not worthy of such a wife. All is not peace and happiness at the end, despite the reunion that Beyala describes between Abdou and M'am. The latter confesses to the repentant Abdou: "I don't have any feelings any more, Abdou. It's as if I'm dead." (174) Also, after turning away Abdou junior, the child of Abdou and mademoiselle Esther, M'am asks: "Where, dear Lord, can I get a rest from my suffering? And then she spat." (170) It isn't clear whether M'am is disgusted with herself or voicing Beyala's conclusion that for women such as M'am, marriage with men like Abdou is a totally unsatisfactory and unfulfilling situation.

While in her portrayal of Abdou Beyala sees the entrenched notions of gender and marriage crumbling in a new world, her representation of Loukoum and M'am demonstrates that migrancy can create a space within which the old values can be interrogated, evaluated and transformed.

5.2: Marriage in Exile: Dislocation and Simultaneous Dimensions in Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde*

In Beyala, the dislocation of exile is both an opportunity for re-examining the traditions and values that determine gender roles, and at the same time a chance to redefine the meaning of marriage and the relationships of men and women within it. It seems that what Edward Said sees as the simultaneous dimensions afforded by exile are possible for most of the characters in Beyala's *Loukoum The Little Prince of Belleville*, but are resisted, distanced or utilised in different ways by characters according to their ability to negotiate change.

Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde*, which deals with a similar subject of marriage in exile, also foregrounds the multiple insights that migration, affords characters willing to look beyond inflexible notions and definitions of marriage. Emecheta wrote *Kehinde* in 1994 when she had been living in London for several years and had published two novels about immigrant life in London to great acclaim. There is a sense, then, in which *Kehinde* not only connects with themes and insights in the novelist's earlier novels, *In the Ditch* (1972) and *Second Class Citizen* (1974) but also develops new perspectives on the gender values built into the meaning of marriage in the conflicting contexts of exile and home. The new social order in London, so different from the rural communities from which the migrants have made their journey, creates an extreme disturbance in Emecheta's male protagonist and his sense of self and identity. Yet, like Beyala's Abdou, Emecheta's male character responds to the new space and social order with a mixture of nostalgia and resistance. His sudden desire to return home after creating a new kind of marital relationship in exile is inspired by uncertainties about masculinity and a desire to regain the kind of male power that he believes the old rural community still has in place for males. In giving her male character these uncertainties and desires, Emecheta provides a similar gender angle to

Beyala's, even though she constructs a different narrative. Unlike the characters in Beyala's novel, Emecheta's characters are allowed to experience both a return home and a chance to measure the experience of exile with the old contexts of home. First, Okolo's hidden desires for the return home are exposed to reveal anxieties about change and ideas about the continuing dominance of the male: like Abdou, his hidden desires are laid open to the reader.

There is a major sense, then, in which the decision that Emecheta's male protagonist Okolo takes to return home is layered with memories of an old world in which male dominance and superiority were entrenched social values. His homecoming is accompanied by poignant memories of his father as a man and husband: "On Sundays, his father and his mates would put on crisp *agbadas* which their wives had spent the greater part of the week bleaching and starching. They would go from house to house visiting friends, drinking palm wine, eating kola nuts and dried fish." (Emecheta 1994: 35) It is this vision of the man served by his wife that makes Albert decide to go back to Nigeria. He clearly states: "I want to go back to the way of life my father had, a life of comparative ease for men, where men were men and women were women, and one was respected as somebody. Here, I am nobody, just a store-keeper. I'm fed up with just listening to my wife and indulging her." (35) Albert expects that returning to Africa will automatically lead to him being able to again assert the full status of the respected husband that is rightfully due to him. Both Albert and his wife, Kehinde, dream of Africa with a relaxed and easy life style:

The picture of the life he would lead at home was very vivid in their imagination: taking his ease in a large, airy white bungalow, with white verandas shaded by palm-fronds, a long drive, with easy laughter and more friends than you could count. The country was virtually swimming in oil, and oil meant money. (37)

Emecheta sets the stage for exploring the reality for migrants returning to their African homes. She builds up the picture of the gender relations with Albert's ideas about a proper husband, learned from his father, and his yearning to enjoy the same male prerogatives. There is also the assumption that he will be wealthy in post-colonial Nigeria. The complexities of these issues put together are bound to create tensions within the marriage.

It is noteworthy that here Albert seems not to view his exile as an opportunity to explore the new environment, to attain the 'simultaneous dimension' exile can offer to the immigrant; yet at the same time retaining what Said calls his 'core values', in this case his African values. Albert has not realigned himself according to a sense of 'self' and 'home' that is appropriate in exile. Albert seems to have just shifted location. His interaction with English society is minimal, mostly through his work. He resents the new gender definitions, such as his wife having a better-paid job than himself. He aspires to the male prerogatives that his father enjoyed in Nigeria, and feels robbed in this foreign situation. "Here [in London], she was full of herself, playing the role [...] but did not allow it to go to their heads." (35)

Kehinde's bringing more money into the household each week than Albert grates against his sense of how the family should run in an African way. Albert cannot express this deep sense of injustice when he sees around him, in England, many examples of wives earning more than their husbands and still living happily as a married couple. Gender equality has not been achieved completely in England, but the society has moved further towards it than in Africa. Albert feels frustrated and emasculated. However, unlike Abdou, Albert holds onto his sense of self by focusing on his homecoming. He looks forward to enjoying life as a man in Nigeria, with all the male prerogatives that have been denied to him in London. Abdou has no plans to

return to Mali and this may have contributed to his despair and depression. Albert is angry with his wife for her assimilation into English society and her initial refusal to return to Nigeria. Eventually she accedes to his wishes and goes back to Africa to join him.

Kehinde feels at home in London, in accordance with Bidy Martin and Chandra Mohanty's definition of "'being home', which refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries." (Martin and Mohanty 1986: 196) She seems to have everything that a woman sometimes wishes for: a good job, a husband and two children. Albert, on the other hand, is unhappy. Emecheta seems to be showing the link between Albert's resentment at his wife's success, and his thoughts and memories of the life in Nigeria that his father lived and which he, himself, hopes to find. In Nigeria, the society is set for men to dominate, and it is unlikely that Kehinde would enjoy a more highly paid job than himself, but he would again feel his true masculine heritage.

While still in London, Kehinde is happy and fulfilled, thinking that a woman's security, reputation and social identity are upheld while being in a family with her husband. She sneers at Mary Elikwu, because "Mary had recently left her husband because, she claimed, he beat her." (Emecheta 1994: 38) The plight of battered wives is not often highlighted in male-authored works and can be trivialised, as in Emecheta's own case, by her brother in *Head Above Water*, and by women, such as Kehinde, who have not suffered domestic violence in their own marriages. By trivialising Mary's story, and being condescending towards her, Kehinde is complicit with many men and upholding the current system of patriarchy. She also supports Albert's superior status when she accepts his 'possession' of her own successful position within the English system, and behaves in the traditional African way at Albert's

party before he returns to Nigeria. "In the course of the evening, she changed clothes ten times, as rich men's wives did in Nigeria, to advertise their wealth and boost the ego of the man of the house." (37) Kehinde's happiness is lessened when she realises that her husband is not feeling at home in London in the way that she is. Furthermore, her sexuality and her appreciation of her own body are uncomfortable around her husband. She dislikes his selfish lovemaking, and regrets having an abortion so that she can stay in employment and increase Albert's 'going home fund'.

Emecheta explores marriage in post-independence Nigeria through Albert and Kehinde's story, when they return to Nigeria. Emecheta describes a society with no social order and a lot of corruption. Kehinde witnesses a robbery and a fight between an unemployed university graduate and a rich man, watched by a bored policeman "who yawned and looked the other way, provoking laughter." (96) Kehinde was at first reluctant to join Albert in Africa, but then convinced herself that life in Nigeria could be fun and no "Nigerian girlfriend would be able to stand the presence of a rich, been-to madam." (47)

Unfortunately, Kehinde's worst fears do come to pass and, by the time she arrives in Nigeria, Albert has married another woman, and has a child by her with another on the way. This marriage is now a polygamous one. When Kehinde arrives home, "a very beautiful, sophisticated, young, pregnant woman with a baby on her left hip, stood in the doorway, wearing the same white lace material as Albert. [...] She scrutinised Kehinde insolently, smiling in a mild and unenthusiastic way." (68) Kehinde's life has changed drastically from being the only wife, with a close relationship with her husband, in a British-style, monogamous marriage with children in London, to the new rules of a polygamous marriage in Africa. One of Albert's aunts is complacent with the patriarchal system and explains to Kehinde about the place of a

wife in a polygamous marriage and within the extended family. "You are the senior wife of a successful, Nigerian man, the first wife of the first son of our father, Okolo." (73) She soon learns that there are new rules surrounding her relationship with Albert. She no longer has automatic access to her husband and cannot call him Albert; he is now to be addressed as 'Joshua's father' or 'our husband'. With her children away in boarding school, she feels isolated and, even worse, she has to ask her husband for money when she needs it, for the first time "in over eighteen years of marriage." (94)

When Kehinde refused to kneel before her husband when asking for housekeeping money, her sisters-in-law, taking the role of guardians of patriarchal customs, "levied a fine of one cock. Paying the fine took half the housekeeping." (*ibid*) Kehinde soon acknowledged, bitterly, that she now fully understood Albert's obsession with returning to Nigeria. "It is a man's world here. No wonder so many of them like to come home, despite their successes abroad." (*ibid*)

Emecheta explores the plight of the African, career woman with Rike, Kehinde's co-wife. With her career, Rike resembles Esi, the central character in Aidoo's *Changes*. Both are portrayed as selfish women who have no sense of sisterhood with their co-wives. Rike is different from Esi, in that she continues to believe in the patriarchal definition of a respectable woman as one who is married and thus continues to support the superior position of men. Despite her education and her position as a university lecturer, she is frightened of losing Albert and thus, in her eyes, her social respectability. To this end, she prays fervently and is enslaved by the church, which is part of her mother's life and the church promises her that Albert will stay with her as long as she prays.

Esi, on the other hand, does not play the patriarchal game and tackles the system head on in order to achieve her goal of an equal relationship with a man. She

experiences first a monogamous marriage, then a polygamous one, followed by a partnership without marriage and is finally on her own, lonely and depressed. Rike plays along with the system while Esi in Aidoo's *Changes* confronts it and genuinely tries to change things. Indeed Esi's genuine attempt to find a satisfying balance between fulfilment in marriage and personal agency earns her her grandmother's secret respect, even though she is also a strong critic of Esi. Kehinde, in her turn, escapes her polygamous marriage by returning to England. Her friend is her saviour and sends her the aeroplane ticket. As Kehinde leaves, Albert is getting a third wife and Rike hysterical, seeks refuge in her mother's support and the church community. Although Aidoo and Emecheta deal here with the way African career women cope with the problem of polygamy, we can see that their approach to the theme is different. This is a testimony to the fact that African women's writing is diverse and multifaceted.

The issue of polygamy in Africa is a controversial one. Emecheta rationalizes it in an interview with Thelma Ravel-Pinto, published in 1985:

In a polygamous society every woman has a husband whom she shares with a number of other women. This gives her more freedom in some respects: she has the opportunity of pursuing a career as well as having children [...] The children belong to an extended family with a number of mothers, and the women, after the initial jealousy, share a kind of sisterhood. (1985: 51)

There may well be some truth in Emecheta's views on polygamy. The wives share the responsibility of providing for the husband's needs and therefore have some freedom to lead their own lives as well. They can follow a career or trade, and have the benefit of childcare from the extended family. I highlighted this aspect of polygamy with respect to Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood*.

Emecheta wrote *Kehinde* some years later than *The Joys of Motherhood* and her treatment of polygamy is somewhat different. In *Kehinde*, polygamy is not shown as working in women's best interests all the time. Ifeyinwa, Kehinde's sister, only survives her polygamous marriage thanks to her petty trading. Emecheta's treatment of her female protagonist reveals how much her views of the value of sisterhood working for women in a polygamous marriage have moved on since the 1980s. This is in line with how general opinion has changed over the past twenty years. There is no sisterhood between Kehinde and Rike, her co-wife. Kehinde's children are sent to boarding school, and the only childcare that Rike does for Kehinde is that which is just sufficient to maintain her position as a 'good wife' in Albert and his sisters' eyes, and certainly not to help Kehinde. However, there is sisterhood, aside from that of a polygamous marriage, between Kehinde and her friend, Moriammo. When Kehinde's marriage becomes polygamous, Moriammo sends her the ticket to return to England and rebuild her life. Kehinde can pursue her dreams of self-realization and self-fulfilment away from the confines of her polygamous marriage. Emecheta's own views of women in marriage have evolved into self-realization and self-fulfilment, with a stress on the 'self' to ensure women's happiness in their relationships with men.

Nevertheless, the issue of polygamy remains more complex than it seems at first sight. Elinor Flewellen states that polygamy is crucial in African women being self-reliant. For Flewellen:

The Western view of polygamy seldom considers a fact that seems incontestable: polygamy has made it necessary for the African woman to be self-sufficient. Whether single or married, polygamous or monogamous, the modern African woman, especially the younger and more educated, believes in doing something about her own situation. (Flewellen 1985: 17)

The example of Rike is a case in point. Flewellen's concept of 'self-reliance' seems to be necessarily related to marriage, whether polygamous or monogamous. As a university lecturer earning sufficiently for her to live a comfortable, independent life, she knowingly opts for a polygamous marriage with Albert. It appears that the woman's perception of marriage as a necessary part of life for her to feel complete self-fulfilment will need to change before there can be any alteration in the views held by men. Kehinde herself was judgemental about Mary Elikwu, prior to her own homecoming to Nigeria. Kehinde regarded Mary Elikwu condescendingly because she left her marriage when her husband continued to beat her. At that time, Kehinde could not understand: "a woman who refused to work at her marriage" (39) and in disbelief she wondered:

'What is the matter with this woman? [...] Not wanting to be called 'Mrs.', when every Nigerian woman is dying for the title. Even professors or doctors or heads of companies still call themselves 'Professor (Mrs.)' or 'Dr. (Mrs)'. This woman must be crazy. Is she bigger than all of them then? I don't understand her.' (39)

Kehinde could understand Mary Elikwu's predicament after her own experience in Nigeria when they returned from their exile in Europe. Kehinde refused to accept marriage in the form that Albert was offering it in Nigeria, which was called 'home' for her as well as for him: within her estranged marriage, Kehinde feels exiled even though she is in her home country. She is physically exiled in her one room, and it does not feel secure for her; she is psychologically exiled with her children away in boarding school and being separated from her husband.

Kehinde feels back home when she is again settled in London where she redefines 'home' as the place where she can be herself and realize her full potential. As a consequence, London, which was initially exile has now become home for her. With

the geographical shift of 'home' comes also a wider definition for her relationships with men. Kehinde can enjoy being with men without the restrictions of their background or any social expectations such as marriage. Her relationship with her former tenant, a man from the Caribbean, is testimony to the new Kehinde. She is a self-reliant African woman who has, in the words of Elinor Flewellen, done 'something about her own situation'.

Furthermore, we get the feeling that Emecheta has built the plot so that we can support Kehinde's move back to Britain where she feels at home in her London house. It seems obvious that the plot has a binary construction. Albert goes back to Nigeria, the new polygamous marriage is unbearable for Kehinde; she comes back to London where she finds peace and contentment in a new relationship with a new man. The character seems to have been drawn to fit Emecheta's agenda that a woman does not have to stay in an unhappy marriage. In an effort to make this point it seems as if the vision of the two homes become simplified. Kehinde leaves Nigeria and returns 'home' to London as if 'home' in London is a binary alternative to the 'home' in Nigeria and not at all problematic.

Christine Wick Sizemore in *Negotiating Identities in Women's Lives: English Post-colonial and Contemporary British Novels* explains the true situation when she points out that "returning to London only resolves one of Kehinde's multiple oppressions, however. She still has to face economic hardships and racial prejudice in Britain." (Sizemore 2002: 67) Hazel Carby also warns against taking too simplistic a view of the situation. In her article "White women listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood", she cautions against the view that "when black women enter Britain they are moving into a more liberated or enlightened or emancipated society than the one from which they have come". (Carby 1997:48)

Emecheta's account of her own life is a testimony to the hardships facing a black, single mother in Britain, at the moment. Kehinde's life, when she returns to Britain, mirrors Emecheta's own one, which she describes in *Head Above Water*, struggling with jobs, money worries and studying for a degree in sociology. Nevertheless, Emecheta is clear about the situation and talks about it in an interview with Umeh, Davidson and Marie:

"The comparative ease with which the women in Europe move around became clear. One can live alone; one can have children. The women in Britain have much more freedom than Nigerian women. It is when you're out of your country that you can see the faults in your society." (Umeh 1985: 22)

With Kehinde back in a more liberal society, Emecheta develops her character whereby she experiences a relationship with a man other than marriage. Kehinde is now ready, after her own painful experiences, to understand and accept the social status of unmarried women. Her view of the world encompasses more possibilities, and is in a wider frame than the restricted one prescribed by her Igbo community and culture. She accepts an invitation from her Caribbean lodger to go to a restaurant (135), symbolically implying that she is ready to try another way of living. When they eventually become lovers, she has definitely outgrown the 'contented wife' model, in which she has believed up to this point.

Kehinde has definitively thrown off another of the patriarchal Igbo rules when she explains to her son that the family house in London is her house, because she pays the mortgage, and she can do what she wants with it until it passes to him as his inheritance. "This is *my* house, though it may be yours one day." (137) This is in sharp contrast to her attitude at the beginning of the narrative, when she used to say 'our house', to play the subordinate woman so that Albert could feel like a true 'man', even though her salary was more than his and she bore the greater part of the family

expenses and, when she returned to London, she paid back the debts on the house that was a home for their children. And he, in return, would play the modern man, who accepts his wife as an equal partner.

It was because of her position in the bank that they had been able to get a mortgage. But a good wife was not supposed to remind her husband of such things. When Kehinde said 'your house', she was playing the role of the 'good' Nigerian woman. Conversely, when he said 'our house', he was being careful not to upset her. (4)

As well as enjoying having a house of her own, Kehinde sheds some of the shackles of motherhood. She refuses to be like Nnu Ego, always working selflessly for her children, and possibly dying alone in miserable conditions. When her son, Joshua, said: "I thought you were supposed to live for your children." She replied, "I did, when you were young. My whole life was around your needs, but now you're a grown man! Mothers are people too, you know." (139) She is now clear that she will live her life on her own terms, for her, free from the patriarchal edits that define women narrowly as only wives and mothers.

Thus, in both novels Beyala and Emecheta use the dislocations and simultaneous dimensions afforded by exile to redefine not only the meaning of marriage and the nature of womanhood, but also the very meaning of home. As it emerges in both novels, marriage in migrant communities as depicted by Beyala and Emecheta often becomes a battleground with men desperately longing for the old power of males in patriarchal communities. Abdou represents many African husbands who desperately cling to their male prerogatives in an effort to recreate, in their own homes in exile, the life of the revered husband that would have been theirs in Africa and doesn't truly exist in Europe. Albert is an example of another form of adaptation, that of adopting a Westernised family life in their migrant community abroad with the prospect of a

homecoming that will allow them to regain all that they have lost as African men living in Europe. Exiled women fare differently: they manage in various ways, showing that they themselves can make choices within their marriages at the same time as having to deal with the challenge of surviving day by day in the new society. Some of these women, unfortunately, die having felt like victims of the situation, as is shown by the fate of Soumana. Others, such as M'am, become strong, and confront and subvert concepts like motherhood in marriage. Kehinde stands for those who can change their whole vision of marriage '*à l'Africaine*'.

Conclusion

This thesis began with a number of assumptions about the significance of women's entry into the deliberations of African written literature and about the different perspectives they bring into representations of marriage. My analysis and interpretation of the selected texts have revealed the great variety of contexts, positions and styles from which African women writers have explored the subject of marriage. The commonalities and differences that the thesis reveals justify the selection of texts from the different regional, linguistic and generational divides of African women's writing. For while in general all the selected texts centre women's experiences in their explorations of marriage, the meaning, implications and representations of marriage often differs from text to text. This is because representations are influenced by contexts, perspectives and language; all of which impact on the kind of meaning that texts produce. Mariama Bâ and Ama Ata Aidoo are for instance, both pioneer writers whose first texts may have been influenced by the early West African nationalism of the 1950s and 1960s. Both writers sought equality and respect between men and women in marriage. Yet in Bâ's *So Long A Letter* and Aidoo's *Anowa* the contexts and implications of marriage as well as the medium of representing it in literature reveal both similarities and differences that have yielded good critical insights in the thesis.

So Long A Letter, Bâ's first novel, thus problematises and, at the same time, widens concepts of independence and nationhood by focusing on issues and themes related to marriage that are often ignored in the writing of men. As this study demonstrates, women writers have experimented with several ways of representing domestic and political issues in fiction, and they have, as a result, explored new forms of narrative in the novel. For instance, the epistolary form of *So Long A Letter* enables

Bâ to examine different perceptions and responses to polygamy in marriage. It allows her to incorporate the main plot and the sub-plot in the single narrative medium of the letter. The letter thus operates as a medium through which she recalls the personal histories of Aissatou and herself as well as the histories of all those around them. Principally, the letter also becomes a vehicle for autobiography that can hold Ramatoulaye's different emotions and thoughts and record her development as a character.

The confluence of Islamic religions culture and the aspirations of a new post-colonial society influence Bâ's conception and representation of marriage while in Aidoo's *Anowa* Akan matrimonial systems are the basis for exploring and rethinking the meaning and possibilities of marriage in a changing society. Bâ's focus of exploration is polygamy but she does not reject the institution as such. Rather, she is concerned with the respect, consideration and equality which women could achieve even within the context of polygamy. For this reason, Islamic rites often structure her protagonist account of her personal experience of marriage while the epistolary form in which her novel is presented dramatises the new written medium and the new spaces it opens for women's exploration of subjectivities. The new genre, the oral traditions, Wolof and the Islamic rituals that structure representation colour both the context and perspectives of Bâ's focus on the theme of marriage. In foregrounding her protagonist's individual experience of marriage, Bâ is able, through the structure of her work, to present other situations, experiences and choices made in marriage while at the same time, highlighting her central focus on equality, respect and sharing even within polygamous marriages. Indeed while dealing with the experiences of Ramatoulaye her main character, she is able to intertwine the parallel story of Aissatou to reveal the different and complex choices that each individual woman has to make. We imagine Aissatou's experience as we follow Ramatoulaye's narrative and can see it as

another variant of the betrayal of nationalist ideals. As it emerges in Ramatoulaye's letter, both friends lived through the trials and euphoria of the nationalist struggle; both experience similar feelings of betrayal but respond in different ways. In combining the two experiences in Ramatoulaye's letter, Bâ succeeds not only in showing the similarity of women's stories, but also the different tensions and conflicting responses that women experience within marriage.

The fact that in *Anowa* Aidoo explores the theme of marriage with the medium of drama has different implications for the thrust of representation. Drama is basically a mode of performance that enacts interaction between author, actor and audience. As drama, the story of Anowa's marriage, and the drama of other marriages become a performance in which actors, audience and readers are all implicated. The audience is directly involved in the action taking place on stage and the dramatization of women's conditions in marriage makes a bigger impact on audiences than reading the play alone. Ama Ata Aidoo also situates her representations of marriage within the two major issues of slavery and male domination. Aidoo's achievement in linking slavery, male domination and gender is manifold. First of all, she brings slavery back into the debate in *Anowa* and shows how men's thirst for power and domination at a public as well as private level pushes them to become accomplices in the destruction of African communities through slavery and colonisation. She also demonstrates the power struggle that goes on in men and women's relationships since men's main focus is on asserting and reinforcing their domination through patriarchal rules.

The thesis has revealed other implications of marriage as experienced in the context of colonial and patriarchal oppression. Dangaremba's focus in *Nervous Conditions* is on revealing the oppressions of women in marriage and the various ways in which women collude with exploitation and oppression. Mainini, Tambu's

mother, and Maiguru, Nyasha's mother, by failing to stick up for their daughters while their fathers maltreat them, reinforces a patriarchal system, which is detrimental to women. The decisions not to send Tambu to school and Babamukuru's fussing over Nyasha's reading *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, or going to dance with white boys, show that the silence of the mothers help the fathers to perpetuate patriarchal rules more than it helps the daughters to blossom. It is these different stories and responses of women more than the development of the individual protagonist that structure the bildungsroman in *Nervous Conditions*. The narrative of liberation in the text, allows Tsitsi Dangaremba to combine the struggle against colonialism and a confrontation with patriarchy. She demonstrates that women's liberation from patriarchy cannot be separated from the nation's fight against colonialism, and she shows how the domestic and political realms are seldom distinct. By focusing on the intertwined stories of women in a male dominated world, rather than on the liberation war that spans most of the novel's chronology, Dangaremba contests the perceptions of national liberation in the contemporary war narrative.

Thus like Bâ, Dangaremba also demonstrates the complex and conflicting nature of women's responses to gender oppression by examining a series of related but different responses to subordination and oppression in Shona society. Her two major women characters may appear to represent two different and distinct ideas about liberation. It may seem as if Tambu focuses solely on freedom from patriarchal domination, while Nyasha views patriarchal oppression in the wider context of colonial domination. But the novel brings these different perspectives together by presenting the two characters as 'doubles' that share each other's perceptions and responses. As Nyasha herself confesses: "But the fact is I am missing you, and

missing you badly. In many ways you are very essential to me in bridging some of the gaps in my life, and now that you are away, I feel them again.” (196).

It is only by looking at Tambu and Nyasha from this perspective of ‘double but one’, that we get the full scope of Dangarembga’s use of the *bildungsroman* to serve the purpose of demonstrating how complex women’s lives are, and how there are no clear and safe choices offered to them. In looking at the representations of Dangarembga and Fall together in one chapter, the thesis also demonstrates how the two Southern African contexts present similar yet different themes and narrative strategies. While Dangarembga focuses more on patriarchal violence with the combined oppressions of colonial and Shona male dominance, Fall’s more political emphasis locates the theme of women and marriage within the violence created by the apartheid system and its psychological effects on black women.

For Buchi Emecheta, marriage is experienced both in the context of patriarchy and in terms of women’s experience of motherhood in patriarchy. Marriage in patriarchy is essentially connected to motherhood and motherhood outside marriage is not acceptable. This opens up the possibility for men to control women’s destiny through maternity once they are married and since motherhood outside marriage is frowned upon, there is almost no escape route for women. Marriage as well as child bearing within marriage becomes inescapable for women. Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* is the only text in my study that examines motherhood as a specific dimension of marriage. In exploring *The Joys of Motherhood* from the context of the novelist’s autobiography, the thesis gains crucial insights into how novelists translate subjective experience into novelistic form. Emecheta’s personal dilemmas and contradictions in her autobiography are critically evaluated in the novel form, demonstrating—as Gikandi has argued (Gikandi; 1991: 4)—that the novel offers limitless possibilities of

inventing new realities. Indeed, Emecheta shows that the essential connection between marriage and motherhood is a patriarchal invention. Women can successfully enjoy motherhood without marriage and motherhood can be re-evaluated to allow women more possibilities to fulfil their lives in or outside marriage.

African women writers have also mirrored the contemporary experience of migration in their thematic explorations of marriage. The new wave of massive migrations from Africa to Europe and the United States is a new dimension of African migratory patterns, and women writers have been quick to note its impact on relationships within marriage. Beyala shows marriage in the context of migration. In migrant communities outside Africa, the fundamental characteristics of the African marriage such as the supremacy of the husband, polygamy, motherhood as a validation of a woman's status as a wife and indeed as a woman, are confronted directly with a completely different definition of marriage which promotes different values like monogamy and gender equality in the couple. All these new values call for a compulsory revision of marriage and motherhood in migrant communities. Calixthe Beyala presents a new and bold approach to the theme in *Loukoum: The Little Prince of Belleville*. In this very contemporary novel she deals with the experience of migration and the way this dislocation impacts on marriage within the communities concerned. Her literary narrative technique simultaneously shows three different stories representing three different aspects of the impact of dislocation on a migrant family in France on one level; and on another shows how the adjustment to their new environment makes the whole concept of the African polygamous marriage fall apart. Beyala achieves a context wherein women are offered the possibilities to re-write their roles, and re-invent themselves in marriage.

Another dimension of the discussion is that analysis and interpretation in the thesis have also demonstrated that while societies may change and women's access to education and opportunity improve, the implications of marriage, particularly in relation to women's conditions in marriage may not change. Even in such cases, as the thesis demonstrates, women writers still continue to imagine new social conditions and possibilities in the exploration of marriage. This is particularly the case in the thesis' comparative focus on the early and later works of Mariama Bâ and Ama Ata Aidoo. The comparative analysis of Bâ's *So Long A Letter* and *Scarlet Song* and Aidoo's *Anowa* and *Changes* reveals for instance that in spite of new social changes in both societies, attitudes towards women's situations in marriage have not changed much.

In spite of this, both Bâ and Aidoo continue to find new ways of re-imagining alternative perceptions of marriage. Indeed, the thesis's focus on different phases of individual women's writing has been significant in revealing how writers respond to social changes and new ideas and how their responses impact on the themes and forms of their representations. For instance, Aidoo wrote about marriage in *Changes* in 1994 almost thirty years after her drama of marriage in the context of the 19th century Ghana. Certainly, the difference between her representations of her two central characters reveals the extent to which Aidoo was exploring the themes of women and marriage rather differently. Esi, the central character in *Changes*, is selfish and self-centred. She wants her career, wants to affirm her sexuality, and also wants to stay in a marital relationship with Ali, but not with Oko. But at the same time, Aidoo, by also offering other women's stories of marriage within the same narrative, widens the arena of possible responses available to African women. For instance, Opokuya's marriage and Fusena's are different responses to the issue of

relationships with men. But above all, Aidoo succeeds in conveying a realistic portrayal of one woman, Esi, who at least attempts, however unsuccessfully, to create a balance between women's agency and self-fulfilment in marriage. The thesis also reveals similar shifts in perspective and narrative representations in Bâ's first and second novels. As with Aidoo's *Anowa* and *Changes*, a gap separates Bâ's *So Long A Letter* and *Scarlet Song*. Whereas in *So Long A Letter* Bâ's focus is more on the plight of 'modern' African women within traditional and Islamic traditions of marriage, she widens her context in *Scarlet Song*, globalising issues of women's subordinate status in marriage. Mme de la Vallée is a French aristocrat but, even so, is still not immune to being dominated and silenced by her husband, thus allowing Bâ to make the point that gender inequality transcends class and race.

A striking point of the comparative perspectives on these Anglophone and francophone female writers is a unifying one: there seems to be a consensus to demonstrate how detrimental to women the opposition between the private and the public is on the one hand and on the other how the private can also become 'political'. This consensus, which transcends the linguistic divide, proves Spivak right in her analysis about women or any feminist project:

"The political, professional, economic, intellectual arena belong to the public sector" and it is the "emotional, sexual and domestic" that are relegated to the private sector... [But]... "the public sector [can] also operate emotionally and sexually". Rather than devote feminist energies to endeavouring to reverse the public (male)-private (female) hierarchy, Spivak, ... places her emphasis on what she terms "a shifting limit" and the belief that it is possible for a woman to "shuttle" between the public centre and the margins and thus narrate a displacement". (Yousaf 1995: 93)

Thus, *Anowa*, *Elsi*, *Tembi*, *Nyasha*, *Ramatoulaye* and the other leading female characters of my selected texts show women "who occupy the shifting ground of

individuals in a state of transition” (ibid) navigating with various success the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ spheres allocated to each gender in the society.

Selecting texts from Anglophone and Francophone women writing has also yielded new and interesting insights that have implications for questions I have raised about language and translation. Whether they are Anglophone or Francophone, the writers translate across at least two languages. The vernacular languages of these women writers impact on their style of writing in the European language they use. Nuances and expressions from their first languages intersect with European languages in their writing. The spoken and conversational tone of verbal exchanges between the women in Bâ’s *So Long A Letter* and Aidoo’s *Changes* are for instance, ways of transposing the spoken forms of the vernacular into written English and French. It is possible to conclude then that though contemporary women writers write in both English and French, they use these languages differently from standard English and French users. It seems also that in their manipulation of English and French, Anglophone and Francophone writers still show the after effects of English and French policies. While Francophone writers are more inclined to write standard French, Anglophone writers leave themselves more room to shape the English language in a variety of ways that makes English their own language.

However, in spite of these differences, there is a consensus which transcends the linguistic divide which is that these women put forward in their creative writings subjective experiences of African women in marriage and by the same token suggest new possibilities to women, widen the theme of marriage in African literature and bring much valuable insights to debates on postcolonial subjectivities.

Finally, the thesis has revealed different positionalities that have implications for how we interpret writing by women. A feminist perspective is a political position

that does not only expose the workings of gender in society but also struggles against all forms of oppression of women. The thesis has shown that the mere fact of these African women writers making women's experiences in marriage visible in representation is in part, a feminist project since such experiences are often over looked in representations of society. Yet feminism means more than this, and the thesis has revealed different feminist positions. African women and their interpretations of feminism, from the perspective of marriage, bring back points I have made in the introduction about African women having a different understanding of feminism. As my thesis has demonstrated, African women writers, for example, do not reject motherhood, but they do call for a re-definition of it, stripped of its patriarchal prescriptions. Most of these assumptions have been fruitfully explored in my introductory chapter and in the thesis as a whole. But the most significant assumption that has a direct bearing on the changing faces of marriage in fiction is my hypothesis about the impact of social change on writers' perception and literary transformations of gender values. What this exploration of women's fiction has revealed is that even when social and gender attitudes do not change with new developments in society and women's access to education, women's writing still continues to imagine new social conditions and new possibilities in marriage. My thesis has demonstrated that the entry of African women writers in great numbers into the literary scene from the 1960s to the present has been instrumental in focusing attention on women's experience and specific histories in African literature. As the five chapters of the thesis demonstrate, these deeper dimensions on marriage have diversified the themes of African literature and created new forms of representing African experience in literature. And, as the thesis suggests, this emphasis questions the ways in which the

literary history of modern African literature has been understood and represented in literary criticism.

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