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CHALLENGING HIERARCHIES IN ANGLOPHONE CAMEROON LITERATURE: WOMEN, POWER AND VISIONS OF CHANGE IN BOLE BUTAKE'S PLAYS

NAOMI EPONGSE NKEALAH

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN AFRICAN LITERATURE

JOHANNESBURG, MARCH 2011

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own un-aided work. It is submitted for the degree Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Naomi Epongse Nkealah

Signed ……

Date …….....

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the NKEALAH family
(Papa Nkealah, Mami Nkealah, Obed, Mbah, Serah and Prisca)
to whom I pay tribute for the elasticity of their patience and the bounty of their love.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Perhaps I should start by s aying that the order in which I have presented these acknowledgements has nothing to do with hierarchy, for challenging hierarchies is a project I engage in beyond academia. I owe many thanks to many people, all of whom might not be acknowledged here, but I am sure there will be opportunities beyond the printed page to assure them of my heartfelt appreciation for their support.

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ABSTRACT

Through an in-depth analysis of selected texts, this study engages with the ways in which the Anglophone Cameroonian playwright, Bole Butake, interprets questions of gender, sex and female power. The study traces the evolution of Butake's vision of women from his first play *Betrothal without Libation* (1982) to his latest play *Family Saga* (2005). The analysis focuses on how women construct power in the imaginary worlds of Butake's writing and how, in turn, power is constructed through them. Questions of femininities and masculinities are probed in an effort to determine the writer's ideological leanings. Using a feminist framework, particularly that postulated by acclaimed scholar Florence Stratton (1994), this work engages with Butake's nine published plays with the simple objective of deconstructing the different layers of meanings embedded in the dramatic narratives' construction of power politics within urban and rural spaces.

This study aims to critique not only Butake's use of imagery, allegory and other narrative techniques in his creative imagining of women's identities, but also the gender implications of hierarchical formations within the worlds of Butake's plays. Essentially, the thesis looks at Butake's constructions of female power and women's agency and the implications these have on feminist discourses.

The research project begins with a general introduction outlining the body of Cameroon literature, especially Anglophone Cameroon literature, which forms the background to Bole Butake's drama. Also included in this first chapter is a discussion of gender, the central thrust to the study, and the relevant literature review. Thereafter, a closer inspection of Butake's early plays, *Betrothal without Libation* (1982) and *The Rape of Michelle* (1984), is pursued. Chapter Three explores the discourse of female empowerment in three other plays, *Lake God* (1986), *The Survivors* (1989) and *And Palm Wine Will Flow* (1990). In Chapters Four and Five, the image of women as absented presences and negotiators, respectively, is interrogated. The study concludes with a discussion on the evolution of Butake's vision of women over the years.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APEC	Association Nationale des Poètes et des Écrivains Camerounais (National Association of Cameroon Poets and Writers)
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CCAST	Cameroon College of Arts, Science and Technology
CPDM	Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement
CRTV	Cameroon Radio Television
CWF	Christian Women's Fellowship
DAAD	Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst (German Academic Exchange Service)
GCE	Government Certificate of Education
KNC	Kamerun National Congress
KNDP	Kamerun National Democratic Party
NW	North West
SDF	Social Democratic Front
SW	South West
TFD	Theatre for Development
UNO	United Nations Organization
UPC	Unions des Populations du Cameroun

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

ANGLOPHONE CAMEROON LITERATURE AND THE QUESTION OF GENDER

1.1 Preamble

Gendered representation is a subject that has engaged the minds of many literary scholars in the 21st century. Critiquing popular notions on gender, patriarchy, sexuality, identity and other dominant discourses is a process that illustrates shifting paradigms in people's consciousness. New perceptions emerge to replace established ones and even these ones are re-defined over time. What constitute relevant subjects for literary writing and criticism cannot be pinned down to race and class issues. Addressing the need for writers to produce works that go beyond the scope of what has come to be known as protest writing, Ndebele (1989: 48) argues that no aspect of society is irrelevant in a writer's re-imagination of his/her society, for 'no aspect of that society can be deemed irrelevant to the progress of liberation'.

In this quest for liberation, personal or collective, writers have employed both the written and spoken word to engage with various topical issues in their societies. Many contemporary African literatures have experienced an evolution, shifting focus from the evils of colonialism to the disillusionment that followed the attainment of independence in the 1960s. Andersson (2004: 14) notes that canonical African literature 'has been on its pilgrimage from writing back to colonialism, experiencing post-independent disillusionment and finally opting for growth and regeneration amid the contradictions

and continuing class, race and gender struggles of the postcolony'. This supports the view that African literature has indeed evolved.

Although in many African works social concerns tend to be couched within political statements as in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) and Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii's *I Will Marry When I Want* (1982), it is refreshing to note that these works do not read merely as propagandist literature. Anglophone Cameroon literature has likewise been predominantly concerned with state politics and issues of dominance, as opposed to socially oriented concerns such as family breakdown and female abandonment. The question of identity is foregrounded in many of the works published in the 1990s, and within this broad framework arise issues of nationalism, gender and culture. For example, in a play such as Bate Besong's *Requiem for the Last Kaiser* (1991), issues of unemployment, women's oppression and the marginalization of the arts are situated at the heart of nationalist endeavours to oust an imperialist regime. Although just one example, the play indicates that identity politics has become an umbrella term encompassing a wide range of themes, including gender, sexuality and class.

One starts to wonder then whether the subject of women's empowerment had not engaged the minds of Anglophone writers well before the publication of Bate Besong's play. A quick survey of Cameroon literature reveals that as early as 1982, with the completion of *Betrothal without Libation*, Bole Butake had begun to write plays that foregrounded women's influence over various spheres of society. Women and their construction of power had thus already been considered a relevant discourse in Anglophone Cameroon literature. It is for this reason that this study focuses on the corpus of Butake's plays in a concerted effort to unravel, through an in-depth analysis, the diverse constructions of gender and women's power within Anglophone Cameroon literature.

1.2 Rationale for this Study

The choice of Anglophone Cameroon literature for this research project is predicated on certain historical developments. Cameroon literature, like many African literatures, has

evolved thematically, moving from preoccupations with colonial policies in Africa to concerns about the gains of independence. Early Cameroonian writers such as Mongo Beti, Ferdinand Oyono and Francis Bebey wrote mainly novels and poems that captured the flaws of the colonial administration in Cameroon and drew attention to the exploitative nature of missionary activities.[1] Even after the attainment of independence in French Cameroon in 1960, these writers continued to denounce Western imperialism, but this time they gave attention also to some of the conflicts that arose in relation to socio-cultural issues such as the acquisition of education, romantic relationships and marriage.[2]

Early Cameroon literature was dominated by male Francophone writers whose works received immediate acclaim from Western scholars, thus putting "Cameroon literature" in the international literary market. Writing by and about Cameroon women, however, only began to receive international attention in the 1980s with the arrival of Calixthe Beyala onto the literary scene.[3] Beyala's novels, which centre mainly on women's lives and experiences in urban societies, are significant additions to Cameroon literature in that they capture the dynamic power play within male-female relationships and vividly portray the various strategies women deploy to negotiate power with men and to rise above patriarchy.[4]

---

[1] Two of Mongo Beti's early novels, *Le pauvre christ de Bomba* (1956. Paris: Laffont) and *Le roi miraculé* (1958. Paris: Éditions Buchets-Chastel-Corrêa), are well known for their severe attack on missionary activities in Cameroon, which activities were geared at exploiting the local population and making the establishment of a colonial administration more feasible. Ferdinand Oyono's *Une vie de boy* (1960. Paris: Éditions Julliard) satirizes the French policy of Assimilation by which Cameroonians were groomed to act French, speak French and live as if they were French.

[2] While Beti and Oyono addressed the problems arising from colonialism, Francis Bebey shifted emphasis to the socio-cultural realities of the day. Bebey's *Le fils d'Agatha Moudio* (1967. Yaounde: Éditions CLÉ) interrogates love and marriage in traditional society, presenting the conflicts within individual lives as a symbol of the greater struggles within a colonized society. Bebey's second novel, *La poupée d'Ashanti* (1973. Yaounde: Editions CLÉ), also focuses on love and marriage but is set in Ghana where Bebey worked before moving to France.

[3] Throughout the 1960s and 1970s Francophone writing was dominated by male writers. A few women had succeeded in publishing, but their works did not receive much attention. Some of these early women writers were Marie Claire Matip who published an autobiographical novel entitled *Ngonda* in 1958 (Yaounde: Au Messager), Jeanne Ngo-Mai whose poetry collection *Poemes sauvages et lamentations* appeared in 1967 (Monte Carlo: Palais Miami), and Thérèse Kuoh-Moukoury who published a novel, *Rencontres essentielles*, in 1969 (Paris: Imprimerie Edgar).

[4] Calixthe Beyala has published several novels to date. Her first three novels, *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée* (1987. Paris: Éditions Stock), *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* (1988. Paris: Éditions Stock) and *Le petit prince de Belleville* (1992. Paris: Éditions Albin Michel), are groundbreaking not only because they interrogate the commodification of women in post-colonial Cameroon and highlight the many problems of immigrant life encountered by Africans in France, but also because they provide a woman's perspective on issues such as polygamy, prostitution, sex and sexuality.

Up to the 1970s, writing by Anglophone authors remained a very minute part of Cameroon literary production. Although writers such as Sankie Maimo and Bernard Fonlon started publishing as early as the 1960s, much of what they wrote was given little critical attention. By the 1990s, however, Cameroon literature had experienced a radical change as Anglophone writers became significant actors in the national quest for identity and liberation. Anglophone writing focuses on the need for true democracy and seeks to promote a spirit of nationalist consciousness. Prominent male writers such as Bate Besong (*Beasts of No Nation*, 1990), Bole Butake (*And Palm Wine Will Flow*, 1990), Linus Asong (*The Crown of Thorns*, 1990), Francis Nyamnjoh (*Mind Searching*, 1991), Victor Epie Ngome (*What God has Put Asunder*, 1992) and Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh (*The Inheritance*, 1993a) have addressed the problem of neo-colonialism and its impact on the political and socio-economic development of the country. The most prominent themes in these works are the clash between tradition and modernity, the legitimisation of state violence by authoritarian regimes of power, the incompatible marriage between Anglophone and Francophone Cameroon, and the erosion of culture with the increasing influence of Western education.

In recent years, women writers such as Makuchi,[5] Anne Tanyi-Tang and Vivian Sihshu Yenika have joined the campaign against dictatorial regimes, but more importantly they have denounced the patriarchal manipulation of women. Books by these women writers are extremely hard to find in bookstores, but a number of complimentary reviews have been written on them. In an introduction to Makuchi's short story collection, *Your Madness, Not Mine* (1999: xiv), Eloise Brière states that the writer 'wields her pen like a pioneer's axe in the forest, clearing new spaces in literary discourse that invite us to consider realities we would otherwise never know'. Anne Tanyi-Tang has made her presence felt in the Cameroonian theatre scene through a number of short plays depicting women's realities in a politically corrupt society. Her plays include the collections *Ewa and Other Plays* (2000) and *Visiting America* and *Marinuelle* (2006). In a public address

[5] Makuchi is the name Cameroonian scholar Juliana Nfah-Abbenyi prefers to use in her creative writing.

given at a book launch in Yaounde in December 2006,[6] Bate Besong stated that in Tanyi-Tang's plays the reader comes across 'the story of the Cameroonian woman both in traditional and contemporary settings and her struggle to grapple with issues of survival in an environment where patriarchy has been uncompromisingly established'.[7]

The reason for limiting this study to Anglophone writing is simply that there is a considerable volume of critical response to works by Francophone writers such as Calixthe Beyala, Mongo Beti and Ferdinand Oyono, whereas many Anglophone writers remain unknown outside Cameroon. Richard Bjornson's *The African Quest for Freedom and Identity* (1991), for example, which is one of the most comprehensive works on Cameroon literature, contains a detailed analysis of many works by Francophone Cameroonians – some being allocated whole chapters – whereas the discussion of works by Anglophone writers is often tangential to the mainstream discussion. The impression one gets is that Anglophone writing has little to offer the international literary scholar in terms of critical discourse. This study posits the counter-argument that Anglophone literary production presents valuable insights into post-colonial realities and thus demands critical attention. In recent decades, a number of profoundly engaging studies have been conducted on various aspects of Anglophone Cameroon artforms, notable among which are Emelda Ngufor Samba's *Women in Theatre for Development in Cameroon* (2005a) and John Tiku Takem's *Theatre and Environmental Education in Cameroon* (2005). Perhaps the most comprehensive work on Anglophone Cameroon drama to date from an insider's perspective is Hilarious Ambe's *Change Aesthetics in Anglophone Cameroon Drama & Theatre* (2007), not only because it draws on a variety of works for its arguments, but also because it shows Anglophone Cameroon literature as having reached a state of maturity – moving from being mere propagandist literature to becoming a thematically engaging literature with aesthetic qualities.

[6] Because this is an English study, I have chosen to write the name of the capital city of Cameroon as Yaounde and not Yaoundé (the French equivalent).

[7] Women's struggle for survival in a socially hostile environment is also the centrepiece of Vivian Sihshu Yenika's three books, *Real Mothers*, *Honeymoon & Other Stories* and *Childhood Games* (no dates of publication). In a review of these books published in *The Post Online* (see http://www.postnewsline.com/2006/05/book_review.html), Azore Opio sees Yenika as a courageous writer who, albeit being 'an apprentice of sensational fiction', succeeds in making her female characters appealing to all classes of people and to all types of minds.

Focusing on female representation as a major determinant of the evolution of Anglophone writing, this study intends to critique Bole Butake's plays within the framework of post-structuralist theories on power and sexuality. But why the choice of female representation, one may ask. It is important to state that before the advent of a multiparty political system in Cameroon in 1990, the role of women in the socio-political development of the Cameroonian society was given little attention. Women remained marginal to the process of development: either they were not given a chance to prove their worth or their activities were not recognized. The minor role played by female characters in early Cameroon literature attests to this cloak of insignificance with which women were dressed. As Mutiso (1974: 3) observes, and this claim is still as true today as it was many years ago, writers play a crucial role in explaining and interpreting the nuances of their societies to those outside it. Thus, 'enlightenment concerning the values and activities of a society' can be gained by studying its literature (Mutiso, 1974: 3). Early Cameroon literature reveals a society in which gendered differentiation characterized every aspect of life. Right up to the 1960s, the Cameroon literary scene was predominantly male. These male writers focused mainly on the quest for independence and the effects of colonialism on the Cameroon peoples. Many of the works of these writers present female characters that are either objects of colonial exploitation as in Mongo Beti's *Le pauvre christ de Bomba* (1956)[8] or pawns on the chessboard of patriarchy as in Francis Bebey's *Le fils d'Agatha Moudio* (1967).[9]

The feminist critic Nana Wilson-Tagoe (1997: 14), speaking about African literature in general, draws a pertinent distinction between female representation in men's writing and that in women's writing:

> While in earlier reconstructions of colonial society in the works of male writers, women characters often appeared fixed in roles that remained unproblematized, the works of the early women writers countered fixed images of women through narrative strategies in which their women characters appeared in shifting and seemingly contradicting poses, giving the writers leeway to present them as complex and subtle.

[8] Translated into English by Gerald Moore as *The Poor Christ of Bomba* (1971. London: Heinemann).
[9] Translated into English by Joyce Hutchinson as *Agatha Moudio's Son* (1971. London: Heinemann).

Such representation of women in fixed roles can be seen in early Anglophone Cameroon writing in which female characters tend to play minor roles and to conform to stereotypical images of feminine behaviour: the prostitute (Mbella Sonne Dipoko, 1968); the "con woman" (Victor Elame Musinga, 1976); the adulterous wife (Nsanda Eba, 1977); and the rebellious virgin (Joseph Anchangnayuoh Ngongwikuo, 1980). These are just a few examples drawn from Cameroon literature, but of course there is a significant amount of African literature that also stereotypes the woman as a kind of "mother of the nation" figure. With the advent of writers like Bole Butake into the dramatic scene in particular, it was felt that Anglophone writing had begun to reflect recognition for women's activities within and beyond the family circle. There were celebrations of a creative transformation which was said to mark a change in writers' perceptions of women as valuable contributors to social reformation. Butake was instantly embraced by several scholars, including women scholars such as Nalova Lyonga, Roselyn Jua and Asheri Kilo, who wrote articles acclaiming the visibility of women's agency in his plays.

This study has taken a stand contrary to that of these scholars, and by re-visiting the empowerment discourse in Butake's plays it will show that Butake's drama hardly deviates from the tradition of stereotyping women that Dipoko and his contemporaries so effortlessly put in place. Central to the rationale for this study therefore is the need to critically evaluate the ways in which Butake's dramatic constructions reproduce images of women that have come to mark the male literary tradition in African literature. Ultimately, the purpose is to show that in the world of criticism there is always a need to look beyond the fine print, especially in cases where men write about women from their perspectives as males, as such writing is often tagged by a range of notions that are sexist and chauvinistic in many disguised ways.

1.3 Aims of the Study

This thesis aims at investigating constructions of femininities and masculinities in Anglophone Cameroon *written* literature, with a focus on the plays of Bole Butake. Butake has written a number of plays which capture both rural and urban life in Cameroon, past and present concerns of Cameroonians, and perennial issues affecting men and women. Many of his plays have been performed by various theatre groups in

Cameroon (e.g. The Flame Players), and some have been translated into European languages such as German (e.g. *Shoes and Four Men in Arms*). The following plays, which constitute the known corpus of Butake's writing at the time this research was started in 2007, are the focus of analysis: *Betrothal without Libation* (1982), *The Rape of Michelle* (1984), *Lake God* (1986), *The Survivors* (1989), *And Palm Wine Will Flow* (1990), *Shoes and Four Men in Arms* (1992), *Zintgraff and the Battle of Mankon* (1993), *Dance of the Vampires* (1996), and *Family Saga* (2005).

In the course of analysing the nine plays listed above, specific questions relating to gendered notions of women's identities are answered based on evidence from the texts. The following questions have guided the analysis:

> 1. How do women in Butake's plays negotiate recognition in the male-dominated societies in which they find themselves? How do they construct power and how different is this from a female perspective of reality? How do they construct themselves as actors in an evolving society and how do readers and audiences, in turn, construct their identities based on their actions?
>
> 2. What strategies of women's empowerment are visible in Butake's plays? Do these strategies enhance women's visibility or do they actually enforce patriarchal conceptions of women?
>
> 3. What narrative techniques does Butake employ to depict women's agency? Do these techniques operate to deprive women of subjectivity?
>
> 4. Are women always visibly present in Butake's plays? Are they always at the centre of nationalist struggles?
>
> 5. Is there evidence that Butake subverts dominant constructions of femininities in his plays? Is there a progressive vision of women in the nearly three decades of his writing?

From these questions emanate other sub-questions which are looked at in the four chapters that constitute the core of this study (Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five). The above questions point to a distinct interest in feminism as it informs and influences fictional re-creations of human societies. Essentially, the study subjects Butake's plays to a feminist analysis in which conventional models of female representation are

interrogated with a view to unravelling the stereotypical and masculinist conceptions of women's identities, women's power and women's contribution to nationalist endeavours.

The study draws mainly from feminist and post-colonial theories to question the writer's association of women's sexuality with ritual power and women's political power with sexual power. A considerable portion of the analysis focuses on the ways in which the female body is centred in nationalist discourses and how nationalisms, in turn, expunge the female subject from equal visibility as her male counterpart. In reading Butake's plays, the thesis explores what Liz Gunner calls the 'ambiguous relation between woman and nation', by which she means the various modalities that emerge about the 'place of women in the discourse of nationalism' (1994: 4). It also looks at the question of agency. In other words, it asks how women construct power in patriarchal societies and how their power is being undercut by colonial and post-colonial structures. What modes of agency do women employ to make their voices heard and how successful are they in their attempts? What limitations does the writer impose on them by his choice of empowering agencies? These are all crucial questions that are addressed in the analysis.

In the questions listed above mention was made to social constructions of femininities and masculinities. Such constructions relate to gendered notions on the intrinsic characteristics of women and men. This study analyses Butake's plays in terms of how they exemplify and sometimes enforce these gendered notions. The following notions are examined in the analysis:

- the notion of man as the dominant sex and woman as the 'less noble sex' (Tuana, 1993)
- the notion of man as the self and woman as the other (Cameron, 1990)
- the notion of penis envy (Heath, 1987)
- the notion of woman as predominantly a sexual being
- the notion of woman as an index of the state of the nation (Stratton, 1994)
- the notion of female agency as located within the sexual space
- the notion of women's power as body-centred
- the notion of women as daughters of Eve (Mullins, 1985)

- the notion of women as victims – powerless bodies through which male power is legitimized.

These notions are explored from the perspective of social drama – drama that holds a magnifying glass up to society, illuminating all its faults in their various guises. The study shows how Butake's drama enforces, endorses and legitimizes these notions and ultimately presents a masculinist vision of women. Attention is also paid to how Butake's constructions of women adhere to a male literary tradition developed on gender-biased lines. The various media through which women are subjected to cultural and colonial patriarchy are looked at, with emphasis on the writer's response to patriarchy as a primary source of women's oppression and marginalization. The in-depth analysis of texts ultimately illustrates how patriarchal structures are kept in place by both men and women. It must be mentioned that the study is not intended as an attack on Butake but rather as a critique of what are perceived as anti-feminist sentiments in his writing. It is also important to state that the study began with a hypothesis regarding Butake's vision of women that is markedly different from the one that the study has revealed to be more accurate.

1.4 Key Terms of the Study

There are a number of key terms that are used throughout this study that warrant definition at this stage as a precaution against ambiguity. The study explores the ways in which gender is played out in the area of sexuality, in the quest for dominance, and in the struggle for change in the imaginary worlds of Bole Butake's drama. Power is therefore a key term in this discussion. As much as it can be understood in many ways, its definition here has been limited to the exercise of control and/or authority and the performance of dominance. This definition is not as simple as it sounds, for embedded within these terms is a set of conditions that point to complex relations between those who wield authority and those over whom that authority is wielded. As is illustrated in the chapters that follow, power relations are complex and heterogeneous. Michel Foucault (2004: 29) sees power as something that is exercised through networks, and 'individuals do not simply circulate in those networks; they are in a position to both submit to and exercise this power'. This study, however, does not adopt Foucault's conceptualisation of power,

although it makes reference to it from time to time. The conceptualisation that informs the use of the term in this study is that propounded by Eleanor Leacock in her article 'Women, Power and Authority' (1986). Leacock proposes a distinction between power and authority. She sees the exercise of authority as 'decisions enacted through publicly recognized institutions' and power as 'influence exerted through informal channels' (1986: 109). Interestingly, Leacock acknowledges that there is no hard and fast line dividing the two, for most decisions entail formal and informal considerations (1986: 109-110). Adopting this understanding, this study looks at how women exercise power and authority within formal and informal structures in the imaginary societies of Butake's plays and how power within these structures is, in turn, exercised over them.

Gender is another key term in this study. The term gender as used here is understood as distinct from sex, for while sex is biologically conditioned as to one's being born either male or female, and in very rare cases hermaphrodite or perhaps less rare as trans-sexual, gender is socially defined. It refers to 'a group of attributes or behaviours, shaped by society and culture, that are defined as appropriate [or inappropriate] for the male sex or the female sex' (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997: 16). Generally, gender studies centre on masculinities and femininities and how these relate to power. The relationship between gender and power is one of interdependence because on the one hand gender constructs power, as gender divisions point to different power levels operating between men and women, and on the other hand power operates through gender as it is through gendered divisions that power gains its position of dominance.

Empowerment is a term that features many times in this work, especially in Chapter Three which looks at the strategies of female empowerment that Butake proposes in *Lake God*, *The Survivors* and *And Palm Wine Will Flow*. Being a term having the word "power" as its root word, empowerment basically refers to the process by which individuals, groups or communities attain control over certain personal inhibitions, over segments of society or over the problems that impede their development. Endeley (2001: 39) puts it simply as the process of transforming unequal gender power relations. The movement for the empowerment of women therefore refers to the ongoing struggle for an equalizing of the power relations between women and men such that women's needs and

interests stand on an equal footing with those of men, which is not the case under patriarchal structures. Any discussion on women's empowerment thus inevitably involves a reference to patriarchy and the multiple ways in which it operates to subjugate women.

Patriarchy has been defined in many ways by different authors (see Kwatsha, 2009), but these definitions boil down to one thing: the domination of men over women. It need not be stated that patriarchal values are transmitted not only by men but also by women who tend to internalize these values and accept them as *the* norm. By its very nature, patriarchy is resistant to de-normalization. It is pervasive and intrudes in all spaces: the urban and the rural, the colonial and the post-colonial, the traditional and the modern. Its values and ideologies tend to permeate without difficulty every aspect of human society. Hence the need for gender and feminist studies.

Other key terms in this study include vision, the male literary tradition, and of course women's agency. According to Odhiambo (2009a: 161), vision is the definitive essence of every work of literature and it refers to 'those possibilities imbued in the fertile imagination of the creative writer as part of his conscious desire to invest his identifiable worlding with new and alternative interpretations and meanings to project the future'. The male literary tradition as inferred from Florence Stratton's use of the term (1994) refers to a tradition or mode of writing by men by which women are represented in binary terms: usually as evil or virtuous, predators or prey, prostitutes or virgins. This tradition, as is shown in the analysis of the plays, tends to either denigrate or idealise women, the result of which is a limited projection of women's realities and/or a downplaying of their agency. What then is agency? In feminist politics, the term agency has to do with women being proactive in changing the material conditions governing their existence rather than waiting until there is a need to respond to crisis situations. Women's agency comes to the fore when women's response to social, economic, political and cultural oppression is characterised by strategic planning and careful organization. It is visible in their unflinching commitment to a cause and in their persistent efforts to bring a particular project to fruition. Agency is evident not only where there are progressive women in regressive societies but also where such women step up and effect changes that secure them greater recognition as significant actors within their societies.

A number of hierarchies are challenged in this study. These hierarchies are foregrounded in the plays of Butake, hierarchies mirrored and endorsed through enactments of power, gender, class, ethnicity, sex and sexuality. These are challenged for the simple reason that they undermine, subjugate and marginalize women not only in the imaginary worlds of the texts but also in the larger context of the plays – the real world. Before delving into a review of the existing literature on gender politics in Cameroon, it is appropriate first to provide a background of Anglophone Cameroon literature.

1.5 Background to the Study: Anglophone Cameroon and its Literature

Colonial rule in Cameroon has left its indelible mark on the literary production of the country. The argument for a "national literature" cannot be sustained without tackling issues of ethnicity, language, exile and migration, which create differences in worldview and thus undermine the unity of the country. As with South African literature, which is inevitably marked by demarcations of race, class, ethnicity and language, Cameroon literature does not lend itself to uniformity of any kind. In fact, the expression "Cameroon literature" raises a number of questions. Does Cameroon literature presuppose a literature of French expression? What about writing by English-speaking Cameroonians? Can this literature be adequately recognized in a country that is predominantly French? To what extent does literature by French-speaking Cameroonians mirror the experiences of English-speaking Cameroonians? These questions highlight some of the problems that confront a researcher of Cameroon literature, central to which is the question of identity.

It is important to state here that identities, whether of individuals or communities, are fluid rather than fixed. In Cameroon, for example, people's political identities are constantly changing. A person who belongs to one of the opposition parties today may switch allegiance to the ruling party tomorrow with relative ease, especially if there are promises of greater financial or material rewards or if the move will mitigate threats from ruling authorities. The case of the famous musician, Lapiro de Mbanga, who joined the ranks of the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) after receiving threats for producing songs that lambasted corrupt government officials, is well known (see Breitinger, 2001; Sone, 2009). Thus, political identity, like social, sexual and ethnic

identities, is not a statutory concept but one that evolves with the passage of time and the evolution of which is dictated by prevailing circumstances.

In the Cameroonian context, national identity is based on official language affiliation rather than on ethnic affiliation. Schröder (2004: 152) observes that 'in Cameroon identities are established on the basis of official language background' and that at a national level Cameroonians define themselves as Anglophones or Francophones rather than as Meta or Bamvele, for instance. This then means that where English-speaking and French-speaking Cameroonians are pitted against each other, ethnic identities tend to take second-place, thus privileging the Anglophone-versus-Francophone identity.[10] The significance of the question of identity to both Anglophone and Francophone people is evident in the tensions and hostilities that have come to characterise relationships between these two groups. The origins of what has come to be known as the Anglophone/Francophone conflict are deeply rooted in the colonial history of Cameroon.

1.5.1 The Genesis of the Anglophone/Francophone Conflict

Emmanuel Konde (2005: 1) provides an apt summary of the Cameroon historical experience when he states that

> Cameroon stands apart from other modern African states in terms of the uniqueness of its history since the late-nineteenth century when the territory was colonized by the Germans. It is the only African country that passed through the colonial administrations of three European powers: Germany, France, and Britain. The country is also the only bilingual African state in which French and English are the (two foreign) official languages. But Cameroon is similar to most contemporary African states in one important respect: it, too, is a product of European colonial incursion.

Prior to the establishment of colonial rule in Cameroon, European interest in the territory was mainly commercial. It was only in 1884 that Cameroon was officially annexed by Germany and given the name "Kamerun". The Germans ruled Cameroon from 1884 until 1916 when they were defeated by the British and the French during the First World War.

[10] This, of course, does not mean that ethnic identities become trivialized. Within both Anglophone and Francophone communities, ethnic divisions are very strong. Within the Anglophone community, for example, tensions and hostilities exist between the South Westerners and the North Westerners, with the South Westerners often accusing North Westerners living in the South West Province of usurping their land and dominating economic activities (see Piet Konings and Francis Nyamnjoh, *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity: A Study of the Politics of Recognition and Representation in Cameroon*. 2003. Leiden: Brill).

The territory known as German Kamerun was thereafter split in two by the League of Nations (1918). The western part was given to Britain and the eastern part to France, both to be administered as mandated territories under the League of Nations, and thereafter as trust territories under the United Nations Organization (UNO).

While the eastern part was governed by France directly, the western part, further divided into British Northern Cameroons and British Southern Cameroons, was administered by Britain from 1916-1960 as part of its Nigerian colony (see DeLancey, 1989: 15). In 1960 the eastern part gained its independence from France under the name *La Republique du Cameroun*. Moved by demands for independence from the peoples of the British Cameroons, the UNO conducted a plebiscite in 1961 in which Cameroonians were called upon to decide their fate by vote. The result was that British Northern Cameroons chose to join Nigeria, which had already gained its independence in 1960, while British Southern Cameroons opted to re-unite with the then independent *La Republique du Cameroun* (see Eyongetah & Brain, 1974: 157; DeLancey, 1989: 44). A federal government was formed in which the former British Southern Cameroons became known as West Cameroon and the former French Cameroon as East Cameroon. In 1972 President Ahmadou Ahidjo changed the federal system of government into a unitary one and renamed the country the United Republic of Cameroon. In 1983 his successor President Paul Biya declared the country to be known simply as the Republic of Cameroon. Commenting on this historical development of Cameroon's official term of reference, the Anglophone critic Alobwed'Epie (1993: 51) notes that the change from a federal to a unitary government is what led to the introduction of the words "Anglophone" and "Francophone" as a means of identifying the two language groups of people who formed the United Republic.

The history of Cameroon reveals two main factors that account for the present-day Anglophone/Francophone conflict. The first is the division of Cameroon after the defeat of the Germans in 1916 and the second is the change from a federal to a unitary state in 1972. When the Germans were ousted from Cameroon, four-fifths of the territory went to France while the remaining one-fifth was given to Britain. The unequal partition of the territory laid the foundations for the domination of the majority group over the minority

one. In addition, the colonial policies applied by Britain and France in their respective territories had little in common, for while Britain employed the policy of Indirect Rule whereby local authorities were maintained and used in enforcing law and order within the different communities, France practised direct rule and implemented the policy of Assimilation which projected French culture – music, dance, dress, language, food, drink – as superior to indigenous ways of life. In effect, Cameroonians in the east were groomed to appreciate French culture and Parisian life whereas those on the western side came to see the British way of life as the ideal. Thus, 'separate colonial state formation and the development of territorial differences in languages and cultural legacies laid the spatial and historical foundation for the construction of Anglophone and Francophone identities' (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003: 10).

The reunification of British Southern Cameroons with *La Republique* in 1961 could be likened to the bringing together, under one roof, of two children raised by different parents who applied child-raising techniques so dissimilar from each other that the children could hardly be expected to forge a peaceful co-existence. The agreement on a federal system of government after the 1961 plebiscite was premised on the knowledge that the two Cameroons had had different systems of administration and therefore could never really function as a unified whole without friction. Thus, the move to a unitary system of government in 1972 was seen as a strategy by the Francophones to "colonise" the Anglophones. This then fuelled tensions between the two groups.

Over the years, many Anglophones have felt sidelined in political affairs and they can only conclude that 'the criterion for exclusion is the Anglophone identity' (Mbuagbo, 2002: 436). In recent years, the conflict has escalated, with Anglophone Cameroon threatening to break away and form an independent Southern Cameroon republic. In spite of the repressive techniques used by the ruling government to quell the secession, the Southern Cameroon elites have maintained their stance to gain victory by using 'the force of argument and not the argument of force' (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003: 202). Such is the argument Butake presents in one of his plays titled *Family Saga*, which is discussed in Chapter Five of this work. But what exactly is Anglophone Cameroon literature?

1.5.2 Towards a Definition of Anglophone Cameroon Literature

Richard Bjornson, referred to earlier, has noted that one of the most far-reaching results of the modernization process has been the emergence of literate cultures in African countries (1991: xi). He sees Cameroon as an excellent example of this process, for 'confronted by a particular set of historical circumstances several generations of Cameroonian writers have created a detailed record of issues that have preoccupied the country's literate population', and 'among the most important of these issues are the desire for freedom from various forms of oppression and the need to forge a viable sense of individual and collective identity' (1991: xi).[11] A survey of Anglophone written literature reveals writers' preoccupation with the political and social realities of the times, which is perhaps what moved Bate Besong to state that 'writers are inspired by the adversity of their day' (1993: 17).

The use of the expression "Anglophone Cameroon literature" throughout this study is deliberate. There is a marked difference between Anglophone Cameroon literature and Cameroon literature in English. To speak of Cameroon literature in English is simply to indicate that the novels, poems or plays were originally written in the English language. By contrast, to talk about Anglophone Cameroon literature is to talk about literature by Anglophone Cameroonians, written primarily for Anglophone citizens, and addressing Anglophone concerns. Thus, while the former expression simply denotes the language of writing, the latter foregrounds the question of identity. In other words, Anglophone Cameroon literature is an embodiment of the Anglophone people's 'historical, social and political metamorphosis' (Doh, 1993: 77). It is a literature that addresses problems and concerns peculiar to the Anglophone region, which comprises the North West and South West provinces of Cameroon, as already noted. As the Anglophone poet Emmanuel Fru Doh aptly describes it, it is a literature that reflects the 'trials and tribulations which mark the Anglophone Cameroonian's existence from the earliest beginnings in his encounter with the white man until today when he finds himself in a disheartening union with his Francophone counterpart' (1993: 82). In this context, therefore, a playwright such as

[11] Richard Bjornson was appointed a Fulbright Professor to the University of Yaounde in 1977 (see *Cameroon Literature in English: An Appraisal* by Nalova Lyonga and Bole Butake, p. 71). Over the years he has conducted extensive research on various aspects of Cameroon literature and has published his findings in several publications, including journals and books.

Guillaume Oyono-Mbia cannot be classified as an Anglophone writer, because although he writes his plays in French and then translates them into English himself, he is not an Anglophone by region of origin.[12] Addressing his audience at the Goethe Institut in Yaounde where the first workshop on Anglophone Cameroon writing took place in 1993, Doh, quoted earlier, stated emphatically that 'we cannot, therefore, incorporate works in English by Francophone writers into the bulk of Anglophone Cameroon Literature just because they are written in English, because our worldviews, couched in the experiences we have and are still going through, are not the same' (1993: 82).

Anglophone Cameroon literature can be defined as works of art written *originally* in English by people *originating* from the North West and South West provinces of Cameroon, the Anglophone part of the country. One major concern that arises from this definition, however, is whether it accommodates Anglophone Cameroonians who grew up in Francophone territories and hence have imbibed French culture, something that would surely come across in their writing. To what extent can a man whose parents were Meta but who was born in Douala, raised in Yaounde, went to French schools in Ngoundere, did further studies in France, married an English-speaking Canadian woman, and published a novel in English about gay relationships among Cameroonians in Paris be considered an Anglophone writer? Would he be classified as an Anglophone simply because he hails from the North West Province (region of origin) and writes in English (language of expression) or because his novel addresses "Anglophone concerns"? This would depend on the extent to which the subject matter of his novel can be seen as promoting an Anglophone culture, however that culture may be defined. The extent that the novel itself can be embraced by the Anglophone reading public, which is still largely prejudiced against homosexual relationships, is a question for debate. Questions like this highlight seeming loopholes in the definition of Anglophone Cameroon literature. Anglophone scholars have a challenge to come up with a more nuanced definition if their literature has to be given the recognition it deserves. The contention of this thesis is that a separatist approach would weaken rather than strengthen their struggle for recognition. Of course, as with other literatures, including African literature and African American

[12] Guillaume Oyono-Mbia is originally from the French-speaking part of Cameroon, which makes him a Francophone by region of origin (see Arnold, 1983, p. 514).

literature, definitions often tend to evade precision. It is hoped that as writers expand their creative horizons, definitions of what constitutes Anglophone literature would become clearer and better conceptualized.

1.5.3 The Evolution of Anglophone Cameroon Literature

Anglophone Cameroon writing has experienced dramatic increase over the years – from a handful of plays and poems in the early 1960s to a collection of works in all genres by the late 1990s. In their introduction to *Cameroon Literature in English: An Appraisal*, Lyonga and Butake (1980: 1) present an overview of the status of Anglophone writing at the time as follows:

> The scarce contribution of Cameroon writers of English expression to the corpus of Cameroon literature is a matter of much concern to English-speaking Cameroonians. Apart from one or two names, the English-speaking Cameroonian has not yet made a lasting impression on literary critics or the general Cameroon reading public, whereas there is a remarkable study of Cameroon writers of French expression.

The question that arises is whether Anglophones were not writing at all or whether they had not published works which by Western literary standards could be said to have literary merit. It seems that the problem was critics' lack of interest in the existing works. Commenting on Bjornson's assertion that on an international level scholars and critics tend to regard Cameroon writing primarily within the context of Francophone African literature (see Bjornson, 1991: 303), Lyonga, Butake and Breitinger state in their foreword to *Anglophone Cameroon Writing* (1993) that Bjornson's intention was not to imply that Anglophone Cameroon literature did not exist, but his statement was correct in the sense that Anglophone Cameroon literature had been unduly ignored by scholars, critics and fellow writers outside Africa. Thus, from 1980 when Lyonga and Butake highlighted the paucity of criticism on Anglophone Cameroon writing right up to 1991 when Bjornson reiterated this concern, very little research had been done by local and international scholars to give Anglophone writing as much recognition as Francophone literature. This thesis thus attempts to address a perceived gap in literary criticism to date and so add to scholarly debate on a hitherto largely ignored area of critical focus.

In an article entitled 'Literary Creativity in Anglophone Cameroon', Curtis Keim and Karen Keim (1982) provide a synopsis of several articles written by Anglophones in which they attempt to identify the factors responsible for the dearth of literary creativity in Anglophone Cameroon. They go on to outline a series of debates that followed the publication of Patrick Sam-Kubam's article 'The Paucity of Literary Creativity in Anglophone Cameroon' in *ABBIA* 31-33 (February 1978: 205-208). The debate involved spontaneous writing in which educators, journalists, university students, government administrators and creative writers put forward various arguments and counter-arguments using several media, including scholarly journals such as *ABBIA* and local newspapers such as the *Cameroon Tribune* and the *Cameroon Outlook*. Among the factors that emerged from the debate as being responsible for the comparatively low level of literary output in Anglophone Cameroon were the British colonial system which invested little in education (argument by Bernard Fonlon), the limited access of Anglophones to publishing houses (view of Sankie Maimo), and the poor standard of English owing to the linguistic interference from French and Pidgin English (opinion of Richard Ngwa-Nyamboli). According to Keim and Keim (1982: 220), the significance of this debate lies not only in the ideas it set forth but also in the degree of self-consciousness and self-evaluation it created. They concluded by stating that further study on the reasons for the deficiency of literary creativity in Anglophone Cameroon was needed.

As if acting on this suggestion, Stephen Arnold in 1983 published an article entitled 'Preface to a History of Cameroon Literature in English' in which he not only reiterated the major arguments in the debate mentioned above but went one step further to analyse a number of issues relating to the Anglophone situation. These issues, which had been listed by Keim and Keim (1982: 220), were colonial legacies, educational policies, language acquisition and proficiency, opportunities for recognition of talent, freedom of expression, and the demands of a bilingual society. What makes Arnold's research particularly relevant to the debate is that it provided a comprehensive list of Anglophone writers and their works, grouping them under the four traditional genres of literature – poetry, drama, the short story and the novel. The particular significance of this study is that there was more that was available as Anglophone writing than critics had realized.

It is not clear exactly when Anglophone Cameroon literature as it is known today came into being. Before 1980 when Lyonga and Butake produced what they called a tentative list of all published and unpublished works by Anglophones, Bjornson had published a report on the first colloquium on Cameroon literature and literary criticism which took place on 18-22 April 1977 at the University of Yaounde campus.[13] Organized by the Dean of the Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences, Professor Francis Mbassi Manga, the colloquium brought together 157 novelists, poets, dramatists, scholars, editors and journalists who for the first time openly exchanged views on the state of Cameroon writing. According to Bjornson (1978: 80), the colloquium laid the groundwork for an inclusive bibliography of Cameroon literary output and generated impetus for a number of projects calculated to stimulate future literary and scholarly activities, such as the creation of a national archive at the University of Yaounde library which would hold copies of all works by Cameroonian writers, the encouragement of national and regional theatre groups, the compilation of anthologies of Cameroon literature to be used in schools, the expansion of publishing opportunities, and the establishment of local lending libraries throughout the country.

Although the colloquium was on Cameroon writing in general, with the majority of the speakers being Francophone writers, a number of Anglophone writers featured prominently in the discussions on poetry, drama and literary criticism. In his paper entitled 'The Rough Edges of Cameroon Writing', the poet Buma Kor made an attempt to define the nature of Cameroon poetry. Bjornson (1978: 82) affirms that the merit of Buma Kor's presentation lay in the fact that it made Francophone Cameroonians more aware of the 'burgeoning literary activity' in Anglophone Cameroon. The playwright Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh presented a paper entitled 'The Future of Drama in Cameroon' in which he emphasized the need for Cameroonian dramatists to draw extensively from traditional art forms. The commission on literary criticism was chaired by Bernard Fonlon, a poet and critic who was also editor of the cultural review *ABBIA* published by the University of Yaounde. Bjornson (1978: 83) reports that the 'interest and animation of this commission undoubtedly reflected the participants' growing conviction that an

[13] At the time, the University of Yaounde was a single university. It was later divided into the University of Yaounde I (commonly known as *Ngoa ekele*) and University of Yaounde II (also known as SOA).

intellectually probing criticism practiced [*sic*] by knowledgeable critics will be crucial to the development of a national literature'.

Although the participation of Buma Kor, Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh and Bernard Fonlon in this colloquium may seem like an indication that Anglophone Cameroon writing was recognized as a distinct category at the time, this was not the case. Buma Kor himself later stated that at the time of the colloquium no one could dare speak of Anglophone Cameroon literature: 'the expression used then was "Cameroon Writings of English expression" which today does not mean the same thing' (1993: 60).[14] Thus, while there was a considerable volume of works by Anglophones as early as the 1970s it would seem that the writers had not yet impressed on their readers the concept of an Anglophone literature. At the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the *Association Nationale des Poètes et des Écrivains Camerounais* (APEC) which took place on 19-29 November 1980 in Yaounde, there was hardly any part of the programme dedicated to the celebration of Anglophone writing. In fact, according to Karen Keim's report (1982), the only Anglophone writer who featured prominently as a participant in the debates was Bernard Fonlon. This shows the extent to which Anglophone writing was marginalized, considering that this was an anniversary of the *national* association of Cameroonian writers.

The first major event that focused exclusively on Anglophone writing was the "Workshop on Anglophone Cameroon Writing" held at the Goethe Institut in Yaounde in 1993.[15] It brought together poets, novelists, playwrights, critics, journalists, gender activists, educators and university students, all concerned with the status of Anglophone writing in Cameroon. The more than 110 participants were involved in different

[14] I dare say that even academic institutions in Cameroon have been wary of using the expression "Anglophone Cameroon Literature". In 2001, in my second year as a student in the Department of English at the University of Buea, one of the compulsory courses students had to take was entitled "Cameroon Literature in English", which was perhaps a more conciliatory expression to use than Anglophone Cameroon literature. I am certain that academics in the department, who were predominantly Anglophones, knew the difference between the two.

[15] Many literary events were organized in Yaounde partly because it was (and still is) the capital city, but more especially because the Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences at the University of Yaounde had created for itself a vibrant literary community through book clubs, theatre groups, literary magazines, and radio programmes showcasing writing by young aspiring poets. The presence of the American Cultural Centre and the Goethe Institut, both keen on promoting Cameroon literature, was an added advantage.

workshop groups and round table discussions focusing on a wide range of topics, including the definition of Anglophone writing, the relationship between writing and education, the development of Anglophone drama, the role of oral tradition in literature, the role of the press in consciousness-raising, the role of Anglophone writing in the democratic process, and women's contribution to democratic change in Cameroon. The success of the workshop can arguably be said to be its culmination in the creation of an academic journal called *WEKA: A Journal of Anglophone Cameroon Writing and the Arts*, which was intended to encourage critical research into Anglophone writing.[16]

It becomes evident at this stage that Anglophone writers have had to fight a huge battle for their literature to be recognized as a category of its own. However, if one were to limit Anglophone writing to *published* works only, then one would be missing out on a good number of works which were not published in the traditional sense of the word but were instrumental in the foregrounding of an Anglophone literary culture. Before 1960 the only published work by a n Anglophone Cameroonian was Sankie Maimo's *I am Vindicated* published in 1959 by the Ibadan University Press. This, however, does not mean that there was no literary creativity before the publication of Maimo's play, for Bernard Fonlon had been writing poetry since 1951 a nd Vincent Nchami had written short stories which were broadcast over Radio Nigeria (see Lyonga & Butake, 1980: 2). According to Arnold (1983: 505), Vincent Nchami sold nearly twenty stories to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) but never published any of them, one of the earliest evidences of Anglophone writing being his story 'Mrs Dark Samuel' sold to the BBC in 1949. Thus, it can be argued that Anglophone writing was in existence long before the appearance of Maimo's play in 1958, a lthough little or none of it was in published form. It was only in the late 1960s that Éditions CLÉ, the major publishing house based in Yaounde, began accepting works written by Anglophone Cameroonians.[17]

[16] Sadly, it seems that *WEKA* did not live for as long as it was intended. The first issue is the well known collection of essays entitled *Anglophone Cameroon Writing*, edited by Lyonga, Butake and Breitinger, which was published in the Bayreuth African Studies series in 1993. I have not yet come across a second issue.

[17] Sankie Maimo's play, *Sov-Mbang the Soothsayer* (1968), is the first English work published by Éditions CLÉ.

Anglophone writing in the last decade of the twentieth century is marked by radical and revolutionary sentiments, most visibly expressed through drama which, in Lyonga's view, 'has dominated the literary scene from 1990 by its quality of vision rather than its volume' (1993: 175). Writing about the impact Anglophone writers have made on drama in Cameroon, Lyonga (1993: 175) asserts that from Bole Butake and Bate Besong to Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh and Victor Epie Ngome there exists a repertory of about ten plays which are shaped in the avant-garde mould – new, bold, a step ahead of the political process in Cameroon – and which, in her opinion, embrace a new vision where 'women's influence is no longer curbed by warped, myopic and anachronistic views'. This change in vision is said to be apparent in dramatic productions in which women work in partnership with men to create better conditions for their peoples. Theatre for development (TFD) has gradually gained roots as writers and social workers recognize its instrumentality in educating people at the "grassroots" level. In spite of the patriarchal nature of many communities, a number of campaigns have been launched, through TFD projects, to conscientize women on various aspects of life such as education, contraception, land rights, widowhood rights and environmental protection (see Samba, 2005a; Takem, 2005). The following literature review examines the status of female representation in Anglophone writing against a backdrop of contemporary initiatives geared towards gender equality.

1.6 Literature Review: The Gender Question in Cameroon

In their introduction to *Challenging Hierarchies: Issues and Themes in Colonial and Postcolonial African Literature*, Leonard Podis and Yakubu Saaka (1998: 1) note that one overarching feature that connects much of post-colonial discourse and debate is the persistent challenge of pre-existing hierarchies. These critics identify gender as one of such hierarchized domains, noting that 'much of the significant contemporary literature is concerned with women's issues and with challenging not only colonially inspired domination of women but also traditional patriarchy, with its lingering effects in postcolonial societies'. Gender discourse has thus become a major area of scholarly research in many disciplines, including literature, law, theology and history. In the field of literature, both writers and critics have challenged existing hierarchies that force women into obscurity. African literature in particular has witnessed the emergence of

women writers such as Buchi Emecheta (Nigeria), Mariama Bâ (Senegal), Margaret Ogolo (Kenya), Nawal el-Saadawi (Egypt) and Sindiwe Magona (South Africa) who have not only succeeded in creating for themselves 'a space of power', to borrow Podis and Saaka's terms (1998: 4), by virtue of their literary accomplishments but also made the unveiling of women's realities the central focus of their writing. For decades, female representation in African men's writing was for the most part stereotypical. In a doctoral thesis in which she chose to analyse selected texts by women in oral and written literature, Lyonga (1985: 58) argues in her literature review that the female character in African literature was often portrayed for male ends: as a symbol to the male on the brink of cultural alienation and emasculation (Senghor); as a "paragon" of African traditions (Achebe, P'Bitek, Amadi); as an appendage to a male visionary whose role is, however, blotted out once she has served her function of producing 'the strong breed' (Soyinka); and, not least significant, as a flat whore (Ekwensi). Lyonga states, and rightly so, that the male writer's persistent portrayal of females in such conventional roles is what led to the woman writer's revolt to 'trace an alternative of the African woman' (1985: 58). Sadly, women's writing has not always been applauded in the world of criticism, which itself has been largely dominated by men. Odile Cazenave (2000: 10) affirms that it was in response to the marginalization of women and women's literature by male critics that women writers began to portray typically marginalized female characters in a favourable light, thus creating 'a privileged gaze and a greater space from which to freely express criticism of their society'.

1.6.1 Gender Politics in Cameroon and its Implications for Contemporary Writing

Cazenave's assertion quoted above holds true for Cameroon women's writing which seeks to secure a 'greater space' by depicting ordinary women in their day-to-day struggles with political and socio-economic hardships. However, while Francophone women writers such as Calixthe Beyala and Werewere Liking have received recognition for their works which have become the focus of scholarly research in many parts of the world, the same cannot be said of Anglophone women writers, many of whom remain unknown outside their home environment. To date, Anglophone women's writing is miniscule in terms of what is available in the market. As with the case of Anglophone writing in general back in 1978, it is now time for critics to begin to ask why there is a

relatively low rate of literary creativity among Anglophone women. The obvious answer would be the inaccessibility of education to women under traditional and colonial structures of governance. After all, it is not without consequences for women's education that the first secondary school for boys, St. Joseph's College, Sasse, was established in 1939 while the first secondary school for girls, the Queen of Rosary College, Okoyong, followed only 18 years later, in 1957 (see Gwei, 1993: 33). This notwithstanding, it is disheartening to know that, after more than fifty years since education was made available to girls, there is only a handful of Anglophone women who have published *creative* literary works. This pushes one to look beyond women's late access to education by asking the fundamental question: why did the colonial administration follow the patriarchy in privileging men's education over women's? Emmanuel Konde's book *African Women and Politics: Knowledge, Gender, and Power in Male-dominated Cameroon* provides a starting point in resolving this issue, because it not only traces the roots of women's exclusion from political activity back to the discriminatory nature of colonial educational policies but also underscores the superiority/inferiority ideology that characterized relationships between men and women in pre-colonial and colonial times. The following quotation is particularly relevant:

> The absence of women from the political structures of colonial Cameroon resulted from the fact that access to western education was opened to them very late. Colonial reforms introduced to benefit women were few, half-heartedly implemented, and slow in materializing. A major factor that contributed to this outcome was the strong opposition that emanated from the indigenous male community. Cameroonian men were strongly opposed to any reforms that would lead to achieving any semblance of equality between the sexes. The colonial state obliged to the men's wishes because it did not desire a confrontation with them. (Konde, 2005: 3)

Konde's study shows that educational policies in colonial times favoured men who received formal training through schools, while women were considered to be homemakers and therefore excluded from this system of knowledge dissemination. But his study gains greater significance when he notes that men were opposed to the education of women, owing to patriarchal ideologies on women's place in society. Thus, the discriminatory educational policies of the British and French colonial administrations were backed by prevailing patriarchal beliefs denying women access to any form of power beyond the domestic, which meant that women were prevented from gaining

access to education and acquiring the skills needed to engage in male-dominated activities, such as politics and writing.

Even where women were given access to higher education, the form and structure which their education took inevitably disempowered them in the public sphere, as they were not adequately equipped to perform any kind of leadership roles. The British colonial administration in West Africa as a whole relied mainly on missionaries to provide education for women and such education equipped women only with skills useful within the domestic sphere:

> Through the use of missionaries and colonial policy the British constructed an educational system in which women were educated about the domestic sphere while men focused on developing their skills in the areas of science, medicine, and economics. During colonial rule, formal education became a cultural capital that afforded men access to a higher economic status considered valuable in the eyes of the British colonizers. Inevitably, women were excluded from medical studies and were forced to participate in a less valued educational system that focused on home economics, often provided by missionaries. (Jabbaar-Gyambrah, 2009: 209)

This discrepancy in the educational system points to inequalities within the colonial system that privileged men over women and therefore consigned women to a less visible and less socially productive space. The view that gender inequities are embedded within the legacies of colonialism and patriarchy and are representative of the intellectual culture of the institutions themselves (see Jabbaar-Gyambrah, 2009: 212) is one that is consistent with the Cameroonian experience where colonialism and patriarchy joined forces to exclude women from the domain of public politics, from active social engagement with their communities through the provision of professional skills, and from making signal contributions to arts and culture through the writing and publishing of books.

While colonialism may have given way to political independence and independence in turn to educational opportunities for both men and women, patriarchy has dragged on into post-colonial times, posing a major barrier to women's access to power. According to a study conducted by Joyce Endeley in 1999, the concept of women's empowerment was still considered as Western, foreign or imported by both men and women in many parts of Cameroon (see Endeley, 2001: 35). Endeley's research findings on the Moghamo and

Bafaw societies foreground women's lack of economic empowerment as a result of their inability to own or control monetary assets. The following report reveals aspects of gender discrimination against women:

> Women in Cameroon live in a predominantly patriarchal society in which their economic dependency on men is reinforced by discriminatory laws and policies in public institutions. For example, women lack equal marital and property rights with men. Most women lack control over property, including land, which leads to their inability to operate profitable businesses requiring collateral and to lack of access to banking and financial institutions. (Endeley, 2001: 34-35)

Endeley's report suggests that the success of the struggle for gender equality in Cameroon depends largely on the regulation of government laws on women's rights and the transformation of patriarchal cultures. However, it has been several years into the 21st century and major concerns about women's position within Cameroonian public and private spheres still arise. Although women now feature in parliament and other top-ranking government positions, it is hardly time to celebrate the attainment of gender equality since these women themselves represent only a tiny fraction of the female population. Moreover, there are a number of gender discrepancies evident in posts of responsibility held by women and men. According to statistics quoted by Samba (2005a: 19), of the six Ministers of State appointed to the August 2000 Ministerial Cabinet, none was a woman; of the fifteen Secretaries of State, none was a woman; of the twenty-three Ministers, only two were women; of the six Minister Delegates, only one was a woman; on the whole, only three women were part of the forty-six member Ministerial Cabinet. It cannot be denied, therefore, that gender discrimination against women in Cameroon has persisted in spite of claims to the contrary.

On a general scale, the majority of Cameroonian women in both rural and urban spaces still suffer patriarchal oppression in all its guises. The urban woman's quest for economic independence makes her a direct target of urban patriarchy, because 'the more she attempts to assert herself economically, the stronger the force of oppression impacted on her, and the more forceful the attempt to push her back into her traditionally designed role of the silent listener' (Samba, 2005a: 20). Compared to men, many Cameroonian women still experience significant job discrimination and restrictions on other opportunities, and this is 'either because it is assumed that men are more physically

suited to certain jobs or because of broader cultural restrictions' (Orock, 2007: 95). By contrast, some have argued that although the concept of gender equality is still relevant to modern Cameroonian women, it has been appropriated by urban "elite" women to further their own rise to power (Orock, 2007: 95). The result then is that gender activism has become nothing but a political slogan. With few government projects genuinely aimed at elevating the status of rural women, it can rightly be said that the gender equality initiative has changed little for women at the grassroots level who continue to bear the brunt of unequal gender power relations.

The question then arises as to what rural women have done to ameliorate their conditions and educate their men folk on the values of mutual respect between the sexes. Anne Tanyi-Tang carried out field research in the Mundemba Sub-division (Anglophone region) in 1990 and reports that the women in this area resorted to theatre as one of the media through which they could draw the attention of their oppressors – notably men and government administrators – to the plight of women and articulate their views on political, economic and socio-cultural matters affecting women. As a researcher, Tanyi-Tang observed and participated in performances by the Fabe women of the Bima ethnic group and by the Christian Women's Fellowship (CWF) of Mundemba Town.[18] Her analysis of these two performances reveals that although cultural taboos prevent women in the Mundemba Sub-division from expressing their opinions in the presence of men, they have used theatre performances to good effect in voicing their views in public spheres:

> The women in Mundemba Sub-Division have realized that the major problem some of the women face is financial dependency on their men. Because of their dependency, they perpetuate the ideology of female subordination. They have realized that they could be instrumental in challenging and transforming this ideology, and in order to achieve their ambition they have turned to theatre as one of the means. … The women were not asking for equality; rather, they wanted men to recognise women's potential and thus treat them like responsible human beings. … Men should believe in complimentary roles. Men should understand that women have certain strengths and men have theirs. These complimentary roles should merge for the benefit of a community. (Tanyi-Tang, 2001: 35)

[18] I was born and raised up in this part of the country and can attest to women's use of performances to raise awareness on serious matters affecting communal well-being. The Presbyterian Church in Mundemba was (and still is) situated directly opposite my house and rehearsals by the CWF women on Saturday evenings in preparation for Sunday services were a common sight.

The use of theatre by women in rural areas is not particular to the women of Mundemba Sub-division. In 2004 Samba and Cynthia Henderson conducted a workshop in Ndop (NW Province) which involved participatory theatre designed to educate the Ndop people about the contraction, prevention and management of HIV/AIDS (see Samba, 2005b). Samba has been involved in numerous projects in the Anglophone part of Cameroon in which theatre was used to reach local communities where printed matter, public speeches, religious seminars, radio programmes and television dramas had failed to reach. Her experiences and findings, as well as the challenges she encountered in the field, are what constitute the subject matter of her book *Women in Theatre for Development in Cameroon* (2005a). Another researcher who has used theatre to conscientize rural communities on issues of democracy and human rights is Gilbert Doho. Doho's TFD projects in the Muslim-dominated northern part of Cameroon have had significant impact on how women re-appropriate power within rural communities (see Doho, 2003).

Over the years, theatre workshops have been organized in different parts of Cameroon in keeping with the tradition established during the Kumba Workshop in which many theatre performers, development agents and village community leaders came together to be groomed into the practice of theatre for conscientisation and mobilization (see Eyoh *et al*., 1986). Bole Butake for one has moved into theatre for development as a more effective way of reaching people at the "grassroots" level. He states that he has been able to influence such ones 'through the organisation of numerous theatre workshops in urban slums and villages on such diverse issues as women's and children's rights (including property ownership, widowhood, female genital mutilation, early marriages and pregnancies, etc.), human rights and democracy, minority rights, corruption in public life, environmemtal sustainability, good governance, conflict resolution, HIV/AIDS, etc.' (Butake, 2008: 9). In a semi-formal interview conducted with Butake on 7 January 2008 at the University of Yaounde I, I asked Butake the following two questions:

> 1. In your foreword to *Lake God and Other Plays*, you state that your aim in writing short plays for the television programme *Women and Development* was to 'further improve on the status of our womenfolk by awakening and empowering them in various spheres of life' (1999: 4). To what extent can you say you have achieved this goal?

2. To what extent can you say that theatre for development has succeeded in empowering women in Cameroon?

To both questions, Butake responded that he has achieved considerable success as his efforts to educate rural women on their rights and prerogatives have yielded much fruit in many parts of the country. Using the TFD approach, he has been able to conduct a series of successful workshops with women in the NW Province of Cameroon. An example he gave is the case of the Mbororo women of Ndonga-Mantung Division with whom he worked for some time in 2007. As he told me, by the end of the first day of the workshop he realized that the women had already overcome their shyness and had become skilled at improvising. Of course, his success with women in the TFD field does not necessarily translate into positive depictions of women in his printed plays.

This notwithstanding, the examples cited above indicate that theatre has been more effective in educating rural women on gender equality than any form of formal education. As Tsitsi Dangarembga shows in her widely acclaimed novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988), women's acquisition of higher education does not necessarily translate into an acquisition of gender power, for patriarchal oppression is so pervasive that it affects women of all class, rank and social status. The difference lies only in the degree and intensity of the oppression. Even as artists, Anglophone women have had to brave the tides of patriarchy in order to question society's construction of woman and woman's place therein. In response to the widespread consumption by Anglophone Cameroonians of Nigerian films depicting women as symbols of familial and social disintegration, Joyce Abunaw scripted a film entitled *Potent Secrets*, shot in Yaounde in 2001, in which her intention was to critique female representation in Nigerian films by presenting the same 'familial issues from a woman's perspective' (Abunaw, 2004: 44). Abunaw confesses to a number of doubts and questions she had to come to terms with as she wrote the script for her film:

> What does writing from a woman's perspective mean? How significant are these issues I want to raise? Do they disturb the general peace? What if the director finds my concerns trivial? These doubts are real, and they will confront any serious-minded African woman who has been made to look at the realities of womanhood as trivial and too parochial to be of "national" interest. Thus confronted with writing "woman", there is always this anxiety laced with the fear of rejection in the African cultural market place. Despite the growing number of African women writers, writing one's self as subject is still like standing naked in front of the mirror with others watching. What you see, they see. Writing thus

> becomes an interpretation of one's self, a presentation of one's reflection from the self. (Abunaw, 2004: 47)

Abunaw's experience not only shows the extent to which social mores inhibit women's creativity but also underscores the courage needed to overcome such cultural barriers to women's emancipation.

That Anglophone women need extreme courage to reject popular opinions in favour of individual views is not a groundless statement. Asheri Kilo (1993: 114) affirms that social taboos inhibit women's participation in theatre and women have had to work hard to overcome their fears and become more involved in public activities designed to improve their status. She states:

> The most fertile of such taboos lingered for a long time on sex and also on female related issues. It was taboo for a decent woman to expose herself through acting. This reduced female participation in the theatre in the early sixties. Also the kind of roles attributed to female characters in the plays made women shy away from performances because actresses suffered prejudice from society, which could hardly differentiate role-playing from reality. Today, women have become aware of the irrelevance of these taboos and societal opinion and are playing quite challenging roles in performances. Today, married women make some of the best performers in some theatre companies such as The Flame Players.
> (Kilo, 1993: 114)

As a lecturer of drama and theatre arts, Kilo has written and directed several plays at the University of Yaounde I and later at the University of Buea, and therefore her assessment of the factors responsible for women's reservation to participate in theatre performances can be accepted as well-founded. As shown above, it all boils down to social values informed by patriarchal norms. The good news is that women are gradually overcoming their inhibitions and taking a more active part in the creative arts, as Kilo notes. Butake's experience with the Mbororo women of Ndonga-Mantung Division referred to earlier is an indication of this forward movement. This dynamism of women's participation in TFD projects calls for increased scholarly research on Anglophone Cameroon artforms. It is a challenge to Anglophone scholars of *written literature* to begin to question the trivialization of gender issues in the works Anglophone writers and to challenge the gender hierarchies in contemporary writing that not only legitimise the existing

patriarchal structures that women are working hard to transform but also undermine women's efforts in the transformation process itself.

1.6.2 Critical Perspectives on Bole Butake's Drama

In an article entitled 'Women's Role in Democratic Change in Cameroon', Roselyn Jua (1993: 180) comments in passing that although women have been actively involved in the quest for practical democracy in Cameroon their contributions often go unacknowledged in the literature, for 'they remain forever in the background, hazy characters who furtively appear and then disappear without any worthwhile mention'. This view is consistent with views expressed by other African women scholars, such as Lyonga (1993) and Cazenave (2000) quoted earlier, as well as Flora Nwapa (1998), in relation to the gendered representation of women in African men's writing. Anglophone Cameroon writing with its emphasis on nationalism is no different from most African literatures where the female presence is either shrouded in invisibility, sunk in voicelessness or confined to symbolic representation. Nonetheless, Butake has been lauded as one of the few Anglophone Cameroonian writers who has made a concerted effort to centralize women in his plays, plays which basically aim at articulating the need for a political revolution in Cameroon.

It is, however, interesting to note that most of the notable literary critics of Butake's work are male: Alembong (1993), Ambanasom (1993), Doh (1993), Eyoh (1993b), Breitinger (2001), Takem (2002), Jick and Ngeh (2002), Ngwang (2004), and Odhiambo (2009b). Although each of these scholars focuses on different aspects of Butake's writing, there seems to be a general consensus among them that Butake depicts powerful women shaping and re-shaping the political landscapes of their communities, be it through ritual, violence or sex. In 'Female Empowerment and Political Change: A Study of Bole Butake's *Lake God*, *The Survivors*, and *And Palm Wine Will Flow*', Ngwang (2004) explores the reversal of roles in three of Butake's plays in which women invade the public space and take control, while men are rendered powerless by authoritarian rule. He argues that in this case women effectively become "men", the wielders of power, and men are forced to adorn the cloak of "femaleness", which is the equivalent of powerlessness in a patriarchal society. His major contention is that the three plays 'reveal

how far Butake was ahead of his contemporaries in depicting a new woman, one who could rise out of the ashes into a position of imminence' (Ngwang, 2004: 13). Although reading Butake on similar lines, Odhiambo (2009b) however seems to think that it is not so much the women's efforts as the men's abuse of power that gives women the chance to take control of the power space. Using four of Butake's plays, he illustrates the ironies of power in Cameroon, arguing that the abuse of power by men in authority is what forces other men into a position of impotence, literally and figuratively, thereby giving women the opportunity to step in and initiate the 're-arranging and re-ordering of power relations' (Odhiambo, 2009b: 166). Regardless of the difference in approach, both Odhiambo and Ngwang intimate that women's power is central to Butake's envisioning of the Cameroonian society.

Several women scholars have also argued that women are empowered in Butake's plays. Notable among these are Lyonga (1993) and Ngongkum (2008). The tendency that one notices in most of the critiques on Butake's works is one of glamourizing the sexual power of women and heralding this as the ultimate evidence of women's empowerment. In his book *Education of the Deprived: A Study of Four Cameroonian Playwrights*, Shadrach Ambanasom (2003) devotes a chapter of his work to the empowerment of women and the masses as depicted in Butake's plays. He seems to see in Butake's deployment of politically conscious women a drastic overturning of patriarchal structures of dominance. In his own words, 'in most of Butake's dramas women have moved from their traditional back-seat role of passive players to the foreground as a powerful force to be reckoned with if any significant social change is to take place' (Ambanasom, 2003: 64). However, as informative as Ambanasom's study is, it shies away from engaging with Butake's deployment of female power in ways that provoke intellectual debate. For the most part, the author merely refers to women's empowerment, whereas much of his criticism centres on the dramatic techniques employed in the plays to convey the writer's worldview.

A survey of the existing literature on Butake reveals that the most widely discussed plays are *Lake God*, *The Survivors* and *And Palm Wine Will Flow*, perhaps because of their embeddedness in oral tradition and their profound articulation of popular feelings of

discontent with the ruling elite in Cameroon. According to Takem (2005: 53), Butake has effectively employed oral tradition 'in mediating a revolutionary political vision, which for him inhabits a viable alternative to the present hegemonic system in Cameroon'. Many critics have analysed the three plays listed herein from differing perspectives. Ambe (2007) looks at the first two plays within the context of tragedy, for he sees them as 'a history of human wastage and an oppressively bleak representation of human existence in a society at the threshold of change' (2007: 52). Ambanasom (1993) focuses on the effectiveness of the use of oral art forms in the plays. Alembong (1993) expands on the theme of orality by looking specifically at spirit possession as a dramatic technique in *And Palm Wine Will Flow*. Using all three plays, Eyoh (1993b) launches his argument from the angle of theatre as a vehicle for social emancipation and consciousness-raising, projecting Butake as one of the precursors of 'that powerful clamouring for change that has been manifested more through Anglophone Cameroon drama than through its Francophone counterpart' (1993b: 104). While Eyoh identifies change as a central theme in Butake's drama, he limits his arguments to a more general appraisal of the texts, with no specific reference to change in gender relations.

Considering the political climate in Cameroon where an outright condemnation of corruption, dictatorship or neo-colonial exploitation means inviting the wrath of the powers that be, it is a marvel that Butake has continued to write and produce plays that read both as a commentary and a verdict of guilt on corrupt rulership in Cameroon. In '"Lamentations Patriotiques": Writers, Censors and Politics in Cameroon', Breitinger (1993) charts Butake's struggle to pursue literary creativity in the face of government censorship. The article projects Butake as a brave writer who, despite living within a political system that brands non-conformist writing as subversive, chooses to remain the voice of the masses through theatre performances depicting the injustices of authoritarian rule in Africa. Butake himself admits to the dilemma of the Anglophone writer when he states:

> The writer in Cameroon, like elsewhere on the African continent, cannot live only on his art. He must have another job because even if he is published his books do not sell well enough for him to have royalties when he was published conventionally. But very often the writer has to pay for his book to be published or printed and this puts additional pressure on his very narrow pockets. So, in order to survive, the writer must strategize either by transforming himself into a

> praise singer for the ruling class or by joining them in order to gain favours and so pull himself above the poverty line or go into exile where he is likely to find more sympathy in the North either in some university or as a political refugee. (Butake, 2008: 5)

Yet, Butake did not choose any of these options:

> I have made the decision to live and work in the country against all odds. I have so far succeeded because I do believe very strongly that the confrontational approach is not the best; especially when you are dealing with a regime that has bought the consciences of law enforcing organisations by awarding them higher salaries and other benefits. (Butake, 2008: 7)

Butake has continued to live and work in Cameroon and his conciliatory approach to the Anglophone/Francophone conflict in particular is perhaps most visible in his pursuit of projects in the field of theatre for development which target people at the "grassroots" level in both Anglophone and Francophone parts of Cameroon.

Having highlighted some of the pertinent literature on Butake, it is now time to answer the important question of how this study distinguishes itself from other studies on Butake. The current study differs from the ones outlined above on four main counts. First, unlike many studies which use for the basis of their analysis mainly the six plays in the collection, *Lake God and Other Plays*, this work examines, in addition to these six plays, three other plays, namely, *Family Saga*, *Betrothal without Libation* and *Zintgraff and the Battle of Mankon*. Besides Odhiambo, few scholars of Anglophone Cameroon literature have paid attention to these three plays. Yet, there is a marked difference between this study and Odhiambo's approach to Butake's plays. Odhiambo studies Butake's work from the point of view of theatre whereas my analysis is undertaken from the perspective of literature, and the difference is that in literature the text is indispensable whereas in theatre it is the performance that matters. Odhiambo is essentially a theatre scholar, although he has a fine grounding in literature.

Secondly, this study distinguishes itself from many others in that it presents a woman's perspective on Butake's engagement with masculinities and femininities. As noted earlier, few criticisms on female representation in Butake's plays are from women's perspectives. It is ironic that the bulk of the critiques that argue for women's agency in

the plays is written by male rather than by female scholars. Apart from the few women who have commented on Butake's revamping of the theatre world through energized women, not much exists that could appropriately be seen as a *feminist* reading of Butake's plays. Studies by Emelda Ngufor Samba (2005a) and Eunice Ngonkum (2008) are great additions to the rather limited literature on the place of women in Anglophone drama and theatre, but then their focus is not exclusively on Butake. It is within this context that I believe the current study has a significant contribution to make to research in Anglophone Cameroon literature.

Thirdly, and more importantly, this study looks at the corpus of Butake's plays from a point of view that is unconventional, counter-argumentative and possibly subversive. It refutes the dominant argument that by centralizing women in his plays Butake empowers them. Rather, it argues that the centralization of women in *some* of Butake's plays serves not so much to empower women as to standardize hetero-normative power structures, while the absence or near absence of women in other plays underlines male ideologies of power constructed on gender lines. Contrary to the popular view that women in Butake's plays are significant actors in the re-ordering of their societies, this study argues that Butake's centralization of women tends to disguise oppressive structures that operate on maintaining male power. The ritual activities of women's secret societies in Butake's plays which many scholars have referred to and explored to defend their arguments on women's political activism in traditional societies are analysed in detail using a different set of binoculars that reveals that ritual power in itself is steeped within patriarchal notions of male superiority and female inferiority.

Lastly, while many scholars tend to read political power within the sexual and body-centred exploits of women in Butake's plays, this study questions and challenges the very conception of female power as essentially "bedroom power". It is in its challenge of many sexist notions in the texts that have been widely accepted without criticism that this work may perhaps be seen as subversive. More significantly, it is in its independent, pro-feminist and perhaps unorthodox reading of Butake's plays that the work hopes to break new ground in the criticism of Anglophone Cameroon literature in general and drama in particular.

1.7 Theoretical Framework: Re-visiting the Feminist Discourse

As mentioned in preceding sections, this study reads Butake's plays from a feminist point of view. It has to be admitted that the mere mention of the term feminism raises a number of questions. What is feminism? How does it relate to studies on African women? What practical goals and objectives does it hope to attain in the emancipation of women in general? These questions underpin some of the controversies surrounding feminist discourse in African literature. Some of the major debates on feminism have been centred on the origins of feminism itself, whether it is adopted from the West or whether it has always been a practice among African women, albeit not formally conceptualized. A number of scholars, including literary scholars and social anthropologists, have argued that feminism has its roots in African cultures, although the practice varies from one culture to another. As historical evidence to support their assertions, these scholars make reference to powerful African women leaders within micro and macro socio-political landscapes who can be considered feminists in their own right (see Ifeka-Moller, 1975; O'Barr & Firmin-Sellers, 1995; Urdang, 1995; Aidoo, 1998; Nwapa, 1998; Ryan, 1998). There is a considerable volume of literature on what is perceived as the powerful role women played in pre-colonial societies and the perceived erosion of their power by colonial and neo-colonial systems of governance (see Lebeuf, 1963; Sofola, 1998). Nigerian feminist scholars in particular have perpetually invoked the case of the Igbo Women's War of 1929 as well as numerous examples of apparent power sharing in traditional African political and religious systems to posit arguments on feminism as an indigenous practice (see Nnaemeka, 1995; Sofola, 1998).

Another major debate centres on the definition of feminism. In an earlier article (Nkealah, 2006), I looked at how varying definitions of feminism tend to create factions among Western and non-Western female scholars. These differences, as several studies have shown, arise from differently conceived notions of women's oppression, where gender discrimination is sometimes privileged over problems of race, ethnicity and class – problems which the so-called third world woman also has to contend with (see Ogunyemi, 1985: 68; Kaplan, 1986: 18; Johnson-Odim, 1991: 315). The attempt to propagate other terms such as *stiwanism* (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994), *womanism* (Walker,

1983; Ogunyemi, 1985; Williams, 1990; Kolawole, 1997), *Africana womanism* (Hudson-Weems, 1998) and *African feminism* (Ekpa, 2000) has not detracted from the objectives of feminist discourse, as the term feminism is still widely used in scholarship that addresses the marginalization of women on the basis of gender.

Irrespective of ideological differences between Western and African feminisms, one would agree that feminism as a movement and theoretical construct provides a rallying point for women seeking the transformation of patriarchal cultures into egalitarian structures in which men and women work on t erms of partnership rather than subordination (see Nkealah, 2006: 137). While different groups of women may use different approaches, depending on their cultural or religious backgrounds, the ultimate goal is change in gender power relations. Muslim women, for example, have pursued a form of feminism based on the Islamic faith and its teachings (see Nkealah, 2008b). The South African Muslim feminist Sa'diyya Shaikh (2003: 155) observes that although some Muslim women still eschew the term "feminist", increasing numbers have begun to utilize the term to describe themselves:

> The value of retaining the term "feminism" is that it enables Muslim women to situate their praxis in a global political landscape. This in turn creates greater possibilities for alliances, exchanges, and mutually enriching interaction among different groups of women. These connections enable varying groups of women to share and learn from each other's experiences, whether this is an exchange of feminist tools of analysis, or of varying ways of implementing activist initiatives, or simply an exposure to other forms of justice-oriented gender praxis. Furthermore the use of feminist language is helpful in that it creates a finely tuned vocabulary for a constellation of ideas that are linked to a critical consciousness surrounding gender politics. To accept feminism as a Western concept is in the last analysis to concede the most visible discourse around women's rights and gender justice as the property of the West and to marginalize the indigenous histories of protest and resistance to patriarchy by non-Western women.

Shaikh's argument thus places feminism within a global post-colonial context in which women of all races, classes and nationalities have something to contribute to the struggle for gender equality and justice. It is this wider view of the concept that this study argues makes it a suitable theoretical framework for this study.

Thus study thus maintains the term "feminist", because it allows room for multiple approaches to gendered representation. As Katherine Frank has stated, feminist criticism covers a broad spectrum, ranging from the 'sociological, prescriptive and polemical to the formalist, rarefied and aesthetic' (1984: 35). Chris Weedon (1987: 4) also asserts that different ways of perceiving patriarchy result in different forms of feminist politics – liberal, separatist and socialist. Thus, feminism becomes a multifaceted concept that could easily be applied to different texts and contexts and can be appropriated and redefined to acquire meaning in any given culture.

As a point of emphasis, this study reads Butake's plays from the point of view of *African feminism* and not *African womanism*. The difference between the two lies in the ultimate objective each hopes to achieve in the struggle for women's space in a world of men. Yuleth Chigwedere (2010: 23) states: 'unlike African feminism, which focuses mainly on gender empowerment, African womanism is concerned with the elevation of the African race, and community is the centre of consciousness for the African womanist'. The womanism proposed by African scholars such as Kolawole (1997) is in my view defeatist as it keeps pinning women down to the very practices that make women vulnerable to patriarchal manipulation. I do not believe that investing energy in fighting for the preservation of the whole (the community) when a good part of that whole (the male sector) is already solidly established as a dominant force is in any way advantageous to women who are in constant threat of being kicked back into the confines of domesticity. Without the pursuit of a radical strategy to change gender power relations, it is highly unlikely that women would overcome the threat of male chauvinism that lurks within every forum in both public and private domains.

1.7.1 Feminist Criticism

The purpose of feminist literary criticism is to interrogate socially-constructed images of women and to propose alternative portrayals of female behaviour. It focuses on the 'relationship between literature and patriarchal biases in society and on the potential role that literature can play in overcoming such biases' (Booker, 1996: 89). The relationship between literature and feminism is explained by Pam Morris (1993: 7) in the following words:

> It has traditionally been believed that creative forms of writing can offer special insight into human experience and sharpen our perception of social reality. Literary texts may, therefore, provide a more powerful understanding of the ways in which society works to the disadvantage of women. In addition, the strong emotional impact of imaginative writing may be brought into play to increase indignation at gender discrimination and hence help to end it. Positive images of female experience and qualities can be used to raise women's self-esteem and lend authority to their political demands. Utopian literature may figure a new ethical order projected on 'feminine' qualities…. Feminist critics have looked at literary texts, especially those written by women, with all these possibilities in mind.

Morris here shows that fictional writing is one avenue through which women can interrogate the power imbalance that governs relations between the sexes. Fictional narratives can be used to provide positive alternatives to dominant stereotypes of women that tend to infiltrate many cultures, from Africa to Asia, Europe to America. Thus, literature serves as a major conduit by which patriarchal structures oppressing women can be challenged and possibly overturned. Although some can claim that feminist criticism is not about dethroning men, a good de al of it often does exactly this. The target, however, is not men but patriarchy; it is about bringing to the surface those deeply entrenched patriarchal values that constantly force female human beings to play second fiddle to their male counterparts.

Feminist criticism does not necessarily operate from the premise that *only* female writers can write literary texts that project positive images of female experience. It does acknowledge that men have the capacity to write literature that engenders female self-esteem, self-expression and self-fulfilment. The Senegalese writer Ousmane Sembene is said to believe that 'the degree of emancipation of African women is the mirror and the measure of the general emancipation of Africa from its colonial and neo-colonial fetters' (Pfaff, 1984: 160). South African novelist and dramatist Zakes Mda is reported to see women as 'being at the centre of reshaping and rebuilding a post-colonial, post-apartheid South Africa amidst a nationalist discourse struggling to articulate an African Renaissance' (Mazibuko, 2009: 116). Thus, literary texts of male authorship that give unbiased recognition to women's material and spiritual contributions to the sustenance of a progressive and productive society are readily embraced by feminist critics. But the question still remains: to what extent can a male writer record with accuracy, insight and

empathy women's experience of patriarchy? It is hard to accept that one who has not lived the experience of second-class citizenship by virtue of his being *male* can genuinely sympathize with the problems of *the other* – the female. For the most part, his depictions of women would be those of the outsider, the observer or the spectator. Although these days it is not uncommon to find male scholars involved in feminist studies, I still have to agree with Stephen Heath (1987: 1) that no matter how sincere or sympathetic men may tend to be towards women, they are 'always in a male position which brings with it all the implications of domination and appropriation, everything precisely that is being challenged, that has to be altered'.

While feminist critics generally apply themselves to texts by men and women alike, in recent years they have tended to focus more on women's writing. The American feminist Elaine Showalter (1987: 131) argues that this guarantees recognition for women's points of view which can easily be subsumed under a male literary tradition: 'the material conditions and contexts of women's writing have to be repeatedly stressed, because the patriarchal literary canon has a centripetal force and a social power that pulls discussion towards its center; women's writing gets left out unless feminist criticism insists that, historically speaking, the question of whether a man or woman wrote a text is of primary importance'. This form of feminist literary criticism which concentrates on the particular styles, themes and structures of women's writing has been termed gynocriticism by Elaine Showalter (see Weedon, 1987: 155; Wilson-Tagoe, 1997: 11). This study, however, does not take the gynocritical approach, since the texts under analysis are plays by a male writer. Having come to appreciate the need for a feminist reading of Anglophone writing by men, it was necessary to explore this avenue of research rather than engage in one for which there was little primary material available at the time.[19]

When it comes to theories of feminist criticism, there can be no homogenous framework. Within feminist critical discourse, as indeed it is within Marxist and other post-modernist critical discourses, there are moderates and radicals, conservatives and revolutionaries.

[19] At the time I started my research in 2007, there was very little primary material on Anglophone Cameroon women's writing. The only woman writer whose work I had at my disposal was Makuchi whose short story collection *Your Madness, not Mine* (1999) intrigued me but was hardly substantial enough for a doctoral study.

Theories are constantly being redefined to reflect existing realities. What is important, in my opinion, is to find similarities between different theories and use these to create a platform of complementarity, the final product of which would likely be similar to Obioma Nnaemeka's *nego-feminism* – a feminism of negotiation which involves finding a meeting point between feminist theory and African cultural practices (Nnaemeka, 1995: 112; Nnaemeka, 2003: 360). Nnaemeka's nego-feminism, however, falls short of providing an appropriate feminist critical lens for examining the works of Butake, as it offers limited insights on the persistent gendering of women's realities in the male literary tradition. The feminist framework that has been used in the analysis of the chosen plays in this study is that proposed by F lorence Stratton in her various critiques of African fictional narratives. It is what I have termed in this study Strattonian feminism. Of course, this does not mean that Stratton's feminist framework has been applied to the exclusion of all other theories. Other relevant feminist points of view have been employed throughout the study to deconstruct aspects of the narratives that require an engagement with feminism beyond what Stratton offers.

1.7.2 Strattonian Feminism

In her well-known critical work *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*, Stratton (1994) provides an illuminating discussion on t he ways in which African men's writing has often marginalized women in its representation of African societies from pre-colonial to post-colonial times. In her feminist critique of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in particular, Stratton asks the pertinent question: how could things fall apart for whom they were not together? She shows that in this most celebrated African novel, Achebe tries to reinstate the dignity of the African peoples but fails to elevate women from their undignified position, because throughout the text women are mostly excluded from the political, economic and judicial life of the community, or where they happen to feature their role is so trivialized that its impact is hardly felt (see Stratton, 1994: 25). This type of female representation, as Stratton shows, constituted a trend within African literary expression which was dominated by male writers throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and even beyond. Most of the canonical African texts by writers such as Achebe, Soyinka and Ngugi reveal a male, biased perception of women, for

stereotypical characters abound in these works, as several studies have shown (see Boyce-Davies, 1986a on Soyinka; Smith, 1986 on Achebe; Stratton, 1990 on Ngugi).

Stratton's views that central to the male literary tradition is a gendered construction of women within a patriarchal space that inevitably places them on the periphery of active politics and that women's works have for the most part been neglected within critical discourse are views shared by many other African women scholars (see Lyonga, 1985; Schipper, 1987; D'Almeida, 1994; Wills, 1995; Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997; Cazenave, 2000; Amin, 2002). As stated earlier, the desire to make the female voice a part of the African literary tradition is what has led African women scholars to engage in that particular aspect of feminist criticism termed gynocriticism. This has resulted in a growing body of writing by women, in both the creative and critical arts, the significance of which lies in its redefining of the African literary tradition by creating space for an African women's literary tradition (see Boyce-Davies, 1986b; Andrade, 1990).

It is envisaged that a women's literary tradition will create room for a more rigorous investigation into women's realities than writing and criticism by male authors tend to do. The objective is not only to present women's realities as experienced by women themselves but also to move away from the dominant trope of representing women as either saints or sinners, what Stratton identifies in the male literary tradition as the good woman/whore dichotomy within the sexual politics of the Mother Africa trope (1994: 53). In fact, Stratton wrote *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* as a response to earlier studies by feminist critics which tended to praise the works of Achebe, Ngugi, Farah and other prominent writers for their perceived contribution to emancipatory identities of women in fiction. Such studies, which in Stratton's view work against women in their acceptance of the Mother Africa trope, find a perfect voice in Jennifer Evans' 'Mother Africa and the Heroic Whore: Female Images in *Petals of Blood*' (1983). It is because of the originality of her criticism of canonized African texts as well as her bold challenge of orthodox modes of thinking that Stratton remains, in my view, the most perceptive feminist thinker and the most instrumental in proposing a feminist framework that holds promise of re-arranging the hierarchies evident in the contested spaces of literary criticism.

One of the major tropes of the African male literary tradition that Stratton has called to question is the Mother Africa trope. The Mother Africa trope has two strands. The first is that which identifies woman as the embodiment of a glorious African past and the second projects her as the reflection of a changing nation (Stratton, 1990: 112). The first strand has its roots in the Negritude movement championed in the 1930s by Senegalese writer and political leader, Leopold Sedar Senghor, and his co-architects, Aimé Césaire of Martinique and Leon Damas of Guadeloupe, both from the French West Indies (see Jones, 1971: 14). Negritude envisioned Africa in its primeval beginnings as an almost perfect society – that is, before the advent of colonialism. As Stratton puts it, 'Senghorian Negritude celebrates African culture, defining it as the heritage of African values, a pre-colonial African essence as yet uncontaminated by western culture' (1994: 40). This "perfect" image of Africa was projected in the form of a beautiful black woman, naturally endowed with nurturing and nourishing capabilities necessary for the spiritual enrichment of her children. Woman, in the figure of Africa, was elevated to glorious heights and the colour black was praised for its intrinsic beauty.

Besides Senghor, other Negritude writers such as David Diop and Birago Diop, also from Senegal, wrote poetry that almost deified woman and blackness. The collection of poems from *black* Africa edited by Soyinka could well be seen as part of the drive to sustain black aesthetics, even though Soyinka is known to have severely attacked the Negritude poets for stating what he perceived was an obvious fact (see Elimimian, 1994: 22). Notable poems in this collection which magnify the Mother Africa trope include 'I Thank You God' by Bernard Dadie, 'Long, Long Have You Held Between Your Hands …' by Senghor, 'Black Mother' by Viriato da Cruz, and 'Woman' by Valente Malangatana (in Soyinka, 1975). For Stratton, such depictions of women validate a trope that ultimately works against women in its objectification of their bodies:

> For the trope defines a situation that is conventionally patriarchal. The speaker is invariably male, a western-educated intellectual. The addressee is always a woman. She is pure physicality, always beautiful and often naked. He is constituted as a writing subject, a producer of art and of socio-political visions; her status is that of an aesthetic/sexual object. She takes the form of either a young girl, nubile and erotic, or of a fecund nurturing mother. (Stratton, 1994: 41)

Evans (1983: 58) upholds the idealized construction of woman in Negritudian writing in her article mentioned earlier on. In it, she notes that Ngugi's first three novels, *The River Between*, *A Grain of Wheat* and *Weep Not, Child* extol female characters who, despite the harsh realities around them, retain an indisputable innocence, enduring nobility, incorruptible purity and irrefutable virtue – qualities that keep them on par with the venerated image of Mother Africa. She, however, does not critique the distinct sexism encoded in such portrayal of the characters. Her analysis of women characters in *Petals of Blood* goes further to endorse the notion of woman as a nation, in what it signifies as an embodiment of the decline of a people's values. Her projection of the whore as a heroic figure in *Petals of Blood* is directly challenged by Stratton who sees Ngugi's conflation of the figure of Africa as mother and whore in one body (that of Wanja's) as a mere reinforcement of the 'old Manichean allegory of gender' (1994: 51), an allegory that, in defining woman in terms of her sexuality and her body, distorts and limits her range of political expressions.

This gendered allegory can be traced in Anglophone Cameroon writing. Early Anglophone fiction centred mainly on the conflict between Western values and traditional belief systems, the gradual decline of moral values, and the obstacles tradition poses to romantic love, as seen in the works of Maimo (1968), Dipoko (1968), Musinga (1976) and Ngongwikuo (1980). In these early Anglophone constructions of the Cameroonianian society, women are made to conform to patriarchal notions of female subordination to male authority, as they are defined mainly by their sexuality and their roles centre on the preservation of tradition and custom. Their representation is specifically gendered for the purpose of launching satirical attacks on prevailing attitudes and practices. They become allegorical modes by which writers project their own perceived sense of morality.

In several of the early Anglophone Cameroon texts, women's roles are confined to those of subservient housewives, sexually exploited servant girls, prostitutes and victims of tradition. In Ngongwikuo's *Taboo Love* (1980) the major female character, Iyafi, is portrayed as a victim of tradition. In Dipoko's *Because of Women* (1968), Ewudu is at once the irresistible village damsel and the source of anguish for men. She is every man's

dream lover and every woman's dreaded enemy – loved by men for her beauty and despised by other women for her sexual freedom. Not only is she portrayed as a symbol of deteriorating womanhood (since she receives society's moral indictment while her male sexual partners remain "un-prosecuted") but she also surfaces as an embodiment of the notion that defines active female sexuality as a danger to the social order.[20]

Other early fictional narratives may not centre on the prostitute woman as such but still fall short of imagining women beyond their gendered roles. In Kenjo Jumbam's novel *The White Man of God* (1980) in which Christianity is pitted against traditional religion, Yaya is portrayed as the custodian of traditional values, but even this patriarchy-enforced responsibility which she cares for with utmost diligence is downplayed when, in the end, she accepts a Christian baptism, succumbing to pressures from her son-in-law. The trivialization of women's role is not peculiar to pre-colonial and colonial Anglophone literature; it is a pattern that can be traced in most literatures of Africa. In an article on the male heritage in African literature and criticism, Mineke Schipper (1987: 48) refers to examples in Nigerian and Kenyan fiction of the 1980s in which the modern woman was 'continually associated with the evils of the city, such as drinking, violence, temptation and prostitution' and almost relentlessly depicted as 'a contemptuous parasite against the cherished background of the ideal traditional mother image'.

Without claiming that the above selective exemplification of female figures is indicative of a predominantly gender-biased representation of women in early Anglophone writing, it cannot be denied that like most literatures in Africa of the colonial and post-independence eras, early Anglophone literature is equally guilty of the debasement of the female subject, the sexualization of women's roles and the objectification of women's bodies. With its authorship and readership being almost exclusively male, the literature engenders certain chauvinist attitudes towards women. It surfaces as a prototype of the male literary tradition in African fiction which, as Stratton shows, has many characteristic features, including

[20] This notion is fully explored by Stratton in *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (1994) and by Fatima Mernissi in *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (1987).

> the portrayal of women as passive and voiceless, images that serve to rationalize and therefore to perpetuate inequality between the sexes; the romanticization and idealization of motherhood, a means of masking women's subordination in society; … the assignment of different roles in the anti-colonial struggle to men and women – the allocation to the former of the task of mending the breach in the historical continuum and to the latter of embodying African cultural values; the assumption of the primacy of the male subject; the objectification of women; their identification with tradition and with biological roles; the representation of female sexuality as dangerous and destructive; and the resolution of narrative tension with the theme of redemption through repatriation to the village.
> (Stratton, 1994: 172)

Although Stratton uses mainly prose narratives to illustrate her arguments on the biased representation of women in some African men's writing, evidence of such bias can also be found in African dramatic literature. Speaking about Egyptian drama, Dina Amin (2002: 15) notes that 'unless the female roles depicted on stage are sacrificing mothers or highly venerated historical and/or religious figures, male dramatists have perpetually portrayed women as mindless, irrational, jealous, hysterical, materialistic and, at times, downright ridiculous'. In its gendered construction of female characters, Butake's *The Rape of Michelle* is no great deviation from the kind of Egyptian male-authored dramatic texts Amin had in mind when she made the above statement. The play underscores Butake's uncritical acceptance of uneven power relations between women and men, and especially so within the context of sexuality. It therefore exemplifies narrative modes within the male literary tradition which Stratton describes as working against women.

It is important at this stage to highlight a few points about the perception of female sexuality in many African societies, especially because much of what has been said in the literature on sexual politics surfaces later on in the analysis of some of Butake's plays, particularly *The Rape of Michelle* and *Betrothal without Libation*. In patriarchal cultures, power over women's bodies is exercised through the stringent regulation of their social behaviour. Women are not expected to socialize in public with men to whom they are not married. They are expected to conform at all times to established codes of acceptable female conduct, which codes are intended to maintain a male order of domination. Dorothy Wills (1995: 164) shows that in traditional Senegalese societies both women and men are expected to marry only within their caste, but while there is greater restriction on women, 'men who wish to marry outside their caste can do so either by making a "good

marriage" first or by becoming so old, so high in status, that no one will dare say anything to them about it'. Referring to the Lebanese situation, Evelyn Accad (1991: 245) points out that women's lives are regulated by denominational laws, rites, practices, and sexual pressures intended to keep women from a particular community exclusively for the men of that community. In such situations, the public behaviour of women is highly restricted according to prescribed gender codes. This is succinctly captured in works of North African women writers. In El-Saadawi's *Two Women in One*, for instance, when Bahiah walks into the dissecting room and stands 'with her right foot on the edge of the marble table and her left foot on the floor', it is seen by her classmates, male and female alike, as 'a posture unbecoming of a woman' (El-Saadawi, 1985: 7). The posture in itself is 'normal and permissible – but only for males' (El-Saadawi, 1985: 8). Thus, social behaviour for males and females are clearly demarcated such that what is considered masculine cannot be practised by females and what is defined as feminine is prohibited for males.

Women's sexual behaviour is also strictly censored for its capacity to destabilize the male order of power. Speaking about Muslim society in particular, Moroccan scholar Fatima Mernissi (1987: 33) associates Islam's fear of *fitna* – disorder or chaos – with its fear of the power of female sexual attraction over men. Kenyan gender activist Mumbi Machera (2004: 167) summarizes the African perception of active female sexuality in the following words:

> In Africa male and female sexualities have been patterned by cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity. Female sexuality is seen as something to be contained and controlled; this can be traced in the well known dichotomy of labelling "good" women as virgins and "loose" women as whores. Such labels depict female sexuality as evil and dangerous if not constrained and imply that "good females" should repress their sexual feelings.

Thus, Machera poses the question: whose body is the female body? (2004: 165) In other words, societal pressures on the female body, in terms of what it is allowed to do and what it is *not* allowed to do, tend to be so intense that in most cases the body can hardly act of its own will, especially where sexual desire is concerned. So then, if a passive sexuality enforces sexist notions of female passivity, then an assertive sexuality should reinstate woman as a desiring subject, as opposed to a desired object. However, this is not

always the case. In Butake's *The Rape of Michelle*, Michelle's assertive sexuality is depicted as transgressing established norms of feminine sexual behaviour and therefore destructive to the social order.

In her analysis of the portrayal of women in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, Stratton (1994: 85) asserts that for Amadi it is 'the pernicious influence of female sexuality that threatens to destroy the social order' and that his 'tragic vision' is of a world in which men are under the malign influence of women. Although George Nyamndi (2004: 220) attempts to neutralize attacks on Amadi by feminist critics such as Naana Banyiwa-Horne (1986) and Stratton (1994), he nonetheless concedes to the idea that central to the actions of characters in *The Concubine* is a 'patriarchal superintendence that suffocates the women out of any meaningful existence'. The association of active female sexuality with a collapsing social system evident in Amadi's novel surfaces with a distinct anti-feminist ring in Butake's *The Rape of Michelle* which is analysed in Chapter Two of this work. Essentially, then, Strattonian feminism, with its lucid explanation and criticism of the Mother Africa trope in African men's writing, provides a valid framework for the critical analysis of Butake's plays, which are deeply embedded in an African male literary tradition that valorises a *male* brand of African womanhood.

1.8 Methodology

Qualitative research thrives on a researcher's ability to observe social phenomena and make interpretations that are crucial to an understanding of those phenomena. The key qualitative research methodology employed in this study is content analysis. In the book *Practical Research: Planning and Design* (8th Edition), Paul Leedy and Jeanne Ormrod (2005: 142) define content analysis as 'a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, or biases'. They note that this form of research is usually performed on forms of human communication, such as books, films, art and music. Thus, research studies investigating thematic or stylistic patterns in literary works by default employ the content analysis methodology. This study is a critical analysis of selected literary texts in order to deduce patterns of female representation that offer insights into women's conformity to or subversion of patriarchal norms. It is purely a text-based study and no formal empirical

research or field work has been pursued in the collection of data. Nonetheless, three interviews were conducted where the opportunities for such arose. These are two interviews with Bole Butake, whose works are the subject under analysis, and an interview with Eckhard Breitinger, who is a renowned scholar in the field of Anglophone Cameroon literature. Information gleaned from these interviews has been incorporated into the body of the analysis. Owing to the constraint of space, only one of these interviews – that with Bole Butake in November 2008 – has been included in the Appendix section. On the whole, both primary and secondary material for this study has been collected mainly from libraries, archives and computerized databanks. Because the analysis is predominantly text-based, it excludes any form of participant observation in the theatre performances of the plays. As a point of noting already stated, the plays have been read as dramatic literature rather than as theatre. Nonetheless, insights have been drawn from video recordings of live performances of some of the plays to enhance the arguments.

1.9 Organization of Work

This study comprises six chapters in total, with Chapter One being the introduction and Chapter Six the conclusion. The four chapters that follow the introduction and precede the conclusion constitute the core analysis. They are the chapters in which Butake's plays are analysed in detail using the feminist framework outlined earlier on.

The introductory chapter presents the aims of the study, the rationale, some background information on A nglophone Cameroon literature, a review of pertinent literature on gender politics in Cameroon and critical perspectives on B utake, the theoretical framework that guides the analysis of texts, the method of data collection and analysis, and the scope and limitations of the study. Essentially, it sets the stage for the in-depth analysis that follows, not only by clearly stating the focus of the study but also by dispelling any ambiguities that may arise in the use of specific terms, expressions and coinages.

Following the introduction, Chapter Two delves directly into the analysis of texts, looking at Butake's vision of women in two of his early plays, *The Rape of Michelle* and

Betrothal without Libation. These two plays mark the start of Butake's dramatic career and thus the vision presented in them is problematic in many ways. Focusing on the plays' depiction of women as "daughters of Eve", this chapter interrogates sexist notions of women which are backed by patriarchal ideologies. It especially critiques the plays' endorsement of the notion that sees women as sources of social disintegration and the cause of man's degeneration into moral darkness (see Stratton, 1994).

In Chapter Three, focus is on the theme of empowerment in Butake's plays, and the three plays that have been looked at are *Lake God*, *The Survivors* and *And Palm Wine Will Flow*. The central question in this chapter is on whether Butake subverts gendered conceptions of masculinities and femininities by projecting femininity as a tool for women's agency or a medium for the re-appropriation of gender power. Other questions revolve around the exploitation of the female body for male political ends and the sexualisation of women's political activities. In the end, the important question that is answered is whether what emerges from the plays in the final analysis is a culture of female empowerment or one of disempowerment or both.

In some of Butake's plays, one notices the complete or near absence of women, which may be deliberate or unconscious. In *Shoes and Four Men in Arms* and *Dance of the Vampires*, which are plays that dramatize the struggle for power and domination, there are few or no female characters. Thus, one is compelled to ask if this exclusion of women from the power space is a reflection of the real world where women are often sidelined in politics or if it is intended as commendation for women for not taking part in power struggles driven by greed and lust. In Chapter Four, an attempt is made to answer this question using the two plays mentioned above. The discourse of disempowerment highlighted in Chapter Three is taken a step further in this chapter in which women's place within nationalist discourses is examined against the backdrop of a general suppression of the female presence within historical nationalist movements. Drawing on feminist readings of male nationalisms, this chapter explores the question of woman's body as a site for contesting national politics. It looks at the symbolic/ideological meanings of the absence or near absence of women in Butake's narration of the nation.

In Chapter Five, the theme of nationalism is further developed, this time with specific focus on the female body as a mediating or negotiating body in nationalist struggles. The two plays that provide material for discussion are *Zintgraff and the Battle of Mankon* and *Family Saga*. Butake's depiction of female characters as negotiators of peace and reconciliation is explored, with specific interest in the tools with which the writer arms the characters for the negotiation process. The key debate is on whether women in these two plays break free from the stereotypes of women in the rest of Butake's plays and whether their empowerment holds out any promise to Cameroonian women of today.

It is important to state that in all the chapters, the analysis of texts does not necessarily follow the chronology of publication but deals with specific aspects of women's empowerment and/or disempowerment as they relate to relevant themes and debates previously identified. In other words, the plays have been paired or grouped not according to dates of publication but according to trends in the visions they present. In all the chapters in which an in-depth analysis of texts has been undertaken, emphasis is on the ways in which Butake defines women's power and projects women's agency. The concluding chapter then traces the evolution of Butake's vision from his earliest play written and performed in 1982 to his latest play published in 2005.

1.10 Scope and Limitation

This study is limited to an analysis of Bole Butake's plays within the framework of Strattonian feminism. It explores issues of female identity, the relationship between nationalism and masculinity and women's role in national politics. While the question of masculinity is addressed as a mode of comparison with femininity, emphasis is laid mainly on the writer's uni-dimensional representation of femininity. The study centres exclusively on Anglophone Cameroon literature and no reference is made to works by Francophone writers, except for purposes of comparison where there is a direct relation to the text under discussion. Of course, in a literary study of this nature, there is always a need to situate the chosen texts within the broader framework of African literature and post-colonial studies in general, and this has been done where appropriate.

While this study may claim that it provides an alternative way of reading Butake's writing, it certainly does not suggest that it will make any difference to the lives of real women battling with gender oppression on a daily basis. Neither does it claim that it will bring about real changes in the political situation in Cameroon. This is purely a literary study that may only have an impact on s cholars in the field and only in terms of understanding or re-conceptualizing theories of literary criticism. Nevertheless, I certainly do hope that the subject of this research will attract readers within and beyond academia.

CHAPTER TWO

"DAUGHTERS OF EVE": EARLY VISIONS OF WOMEN IN *THE RAPE OF MICHELLE* AND *BETROTHAL WITHOUT LIBATION*

> Man's retaliation to woman as a man-eater is to damn her as a sinner. Her sexual appetites threaten his manhood, his supremacy over her, even his life: therefore in self-preservation he must cast her out like a devil. She is bad. A sexual woman is a bad woman…. The weapon enabling man to rise again from impotence to power is the unchallengeable authority of the Bible. The finger points at Eve – the first woman, pilot of man's downfall and disgrace. That original transgression permits any fault or flaw of character to be placed to woman's account; and the charge is unanswerable. A woman is … whatever man chooses to label her: she cannot deny it because there, first in her line of ancestry, stands Eve – guilty, naked, and ashamed. (Mullins, 1985: 57)

2.1 Introduction

The quotation above lucidly captures the ideology that sees woman and everything associated with her – her sexuality, desires, aspirations, decisions and actions – as dangerous, deadly and counter-productive. This ideology has been inscribed on to literary texts of both Western and African authorship, with the result that there is one group of imaginative writing that perpetuates its pervasiveness and another that counters its sexism. As shown in Chapter One, feminist scholarship in the last two decades of the twentieth century adopted an antagonistic approach in an effort to reject the patriarchal biases underlying the representation of women in reductive terms and the suppression of female sexuality in literary discourses.

This chapter interrogates aspects of the male literary tradition in African fiction, particularly its representation of *active* female sexuality as dangerous to the social order and female docility as ideal for society's stability. It explores the various stereotypes of women that emerge in Butake's early plays and how such images limit the possibilities available to women to engage in serious political struggles aimed at bringing positive change to their societies. The chapter uses as the basis of its analysis *The Rape of Michelle* and *Betrothal without Libation*, two plays written in 1984 and 1982,

respectively, and performed in many parts of Cameroon by various theatre groups directed by Butake himself and by other playwrights such as Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh.[21] Drawing on Stratton's lucid reading of the Mother Africa trope – the embodiment of Africa in the figure of a woman – as a conventionally patriarchal trope in African men's fiction (1994), this chapter argues that Butake's portrayal of women predominantly as "daughters of Eve" in these early plays creates multiple avenues for questioning the gender ideologies that inform his earlier envisioning of the Cameroonian society.

2.2 Women in Urban Spaces: *The Rape of Michelle*

The play presents a young girl, Michelle, who helps her mother, Rufina, run a chicken parlour.[22] Rufina's customers are mainly men, a factor which seems to cause tensions between herself and Michelle as they both vie for the men's attention. Rufina's anxieties about her age also tend to incite petty jealousies directed towards Michelle whom Mikindong's friends find sexually attractive. Mikindong is the schoolteacher accused of raping Michelle, and who in denial of the accusation turns around and accuses Michelle of sexually harassing him. The case goes to court and through bribery of the magistrate Mikindong is released on bail, awaiting the magistrate's final decision. The play ends without a pronouncement of the court's ruling, but the celebration of Mikindong's appointment as principal of his school in the final scene of the play, coupled with the magistrate's participation in the celebrations, symbolically marks Mikindong's victory over Michelle and her "scheming" mother.

The setting of the play is far removed from a small traditional village where cultural patriarchy is usually a norm, and yet the sexism belying much of the metaphors and symbols hits the reader with a forcefulness that provokes a feminist reaction. In Cameroon, chicken parlours are mainly operated in urban centres, such as towns and cities. The presence of a police station, a magistrate's court and a hospital (from which a medical certificate is procured in support of Michelle's case) all create visual images of an urban setting. In fact, the stage direction introducing Rufina's chicken parlour in the

[21] Butake states in the Foreword to *Lake God and Other Plays* that *The Rape of Michelle* was directed by Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh in a 1985 production (see Butake, 1999: 3).

[22] In Cameroon, chicken parlours are perceived as semi-brothels, perhaps because they are mostly run by unmarried, middle-aged women on whom society puts the tag of prostitution almost unrepentantly.

opening scene states that '*the furniture is typical of such places in Yaounde and around the country*' (176).[23] Yaounde, the capital city of the Republic of Cameroon, is more likely the play's setting. But why the city and how does Butake's choice of setting help formulate the gender ideologies evident in the play?

The image of the city captured in this play is no different from that in Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* (1961). It is an image of a deteriorating society peopled by the good and the bad, the powerful and the powerless, the victimizers and the vulnerable, the morally upright and the corrupt. The general atmosphere is that of squalor, putrefaction and social disintegration. At the heart of this "messy" environment stands the chicken parlour as a symbol of the morally corrosive dimension of women's quest for economic independence in post-colonial Cameroon. The business of chicken parlours is one of the ways by which Cameroonian women sought to become economically self-reliant, thereby breaking the hold that traditional patriarchy had on them through male control of financial resources. Considering the increasing cost of living in urban centres, the persistent salary cuts of civil servants and the resultant severe economic hardship, women had to assume greater responsibility for providing the material needs of their households and this entailed engaging in some form of business or trade, such as the sale of second-hand clothes (commonly known as *okrika*), the operation of kiosks or small market stalls and the running of restaurants, through which extra money could be made to augment poor salaries from formal-sector jobs (Niger-Thomas, 2008: 42-44). Wallman (1996: 9-10), writing about Uganda, notes that the upsurge of rural-urban migrants in the 1970s and 1980s plunged cities into a crisis in the sense that not only were there acute problems of providing and maintaining urban services but also that 'individual and family problems [could] be met only by recourse to complex sets of survival strategies'. The Ugandan crisis mirrors the situation in Cameroon. For Cameroonian women, engaging in informal trade and other forms of service provision, such as compiling dossiers for people seeking entrance to any of the country's institutions of professional training, was a way out of the stagnating economic situation. Sadly, chicken parlours, which constituted a part of informal sector activities signalling female entrepreneurship in urban regions, came to be

[23] Unless otherwise indicated, all textual quotations and page references are from *Lake God and Other Plays*, 1999, Yaounde: Éditions CLÉ.

seen as a camouflage for other socially unacceptable practices that went on behind the scenes. Chicken parlours had a power of their own to pull people towards them – perhaps for the pleasure of the company and the delicacy of the food – but paradoxically this made them subject to what Foucault calls surveillance in *Discipline and Punish* (1977). In this book, Foucault shows that certain institutions such as asylums and hospitals tend to be under the surveying or watchful gaze of society. The upshot of surveillance is that it enacts a disciplinary power that brings citizens in line with what society desires: 'the perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes*' (Foucault, 1977: 183). Rufina's chicken parlour, like the asylum peopled by persons on the margins of society, is constantly under surveillance. It is a site of public censure.[24]

In *The Rape of Michelle* (henceforth referred to as *The Rape*), Rufina is cast in the role of a city woman who through her daily activities contributes to the filth of the city. Reflecting on her portrayal, one notes a correlation in identity construction between chicken parlour madams in Cameroon and women singers and actresses in Zimbabwe, both of whom are perceived as "loose" women mainly because they operate in an urban space which 'for historic reasons relating both to colonial and indigenous patriarchy has been officially defined as the territory of men' (Chitauro, Dube & Gunner, 1994: 111). In line with this argument, Butake's play depicts the urban space in Cameroon not only as one dominated by men but also as one from which women's "corrupting" influence must be evicted. In addition, by depicting the city as a wasteland, a place devoid of a moral order, Butake seeks to reinstate a value system that is presumably threatened by urbanization.

[24] In her book *Journey of Song: Public Life and Morality in Cameroon*, Clare Ignatowski cites studies by social scientists that show that 'culture is fundamentally public and that moral orders are constructed through the enactment and manipulation of symbols' (2006: 3). She notes that among the Tupuri of Northern Cameroon, song in the context of dance is a site of public censure and a space through which competing moral orders are dynamically reworked and renegotiated. It is understood from her study that morality and values are designed as systems of control by which society ensures that people adhere to what is considered right and acceptable. Thus, symbols can be manipulated to achieve that effect. In *The Rape of Michelle*, the chicken parlour is symbolic of what Ignatowski calls the 'public control of morality' (2006: 8) particularly because of the negative attributes society associates to its owners.

Butake's construction of Michelle and Rufina against a backdrop of deteriorating socio-cultural values seems to suggest that women are the destined initiators of social disintegration. Both Michelle and Rufina are foregrounded in the play by their "evil activities" as "daughters of Eve": they are sexual predators, lustful creatures, scheming witches, destructive forces and vindictive elements. In the book *The Painted Witch: Female Body, Male Art*, Edwin Mullins (1985), quoted at the beginning of this chapter, describes the many ways in which Western artists have captured the sexuality of women, and it is interesting to note that a good portion of medieval and renaissance paintings portraying "the fall of man" made it a point to showcase Eve as the indisputable cause of this fall: 'since the first disobedience was Eve's, not Adam's, it is inevitably she who carries the blame once that first disobedience is interpreted as a sexual sin. The accusation of lust is laid firmly at her door. She is the temptress, Adam the innocent dupe who trusts her and is led astray' (Mullins, 1985: 58). Mullins here highlights the point that, because the first sin has been interpreted as a sexual sin, Eve is inevitably blamed for using her body to lead man into temptation, the consequence of which is the damnation of humankind. Schipper (1987: 39) has cited examples of myths from different parts of Africa which 'illustrate the degree to which woman was blamed for what went wrong' in Eden.

Thus, throughout history woman's sexuality has been seen as dangerous and has been treated with distrust, suspicion and sometimes disdain. This often has a direct impact on how women's bodies are inscribed on texts. In Butake's *The Rape of Michelle*, two kinds of women are portrayed: the one kind that emerges as champions of manipulation (Rufina and Michelle) and the other kind that features as the very epitome of docility (Akwen, Mikindong's wife). The following discussion on Butake's portrayal of these three female characters would illustrate not only patriarchal sentiments but also strong tendencies towards what Deborah Cameron (1990: 16) describes as policing the boundaries of acceptable female sexual behaviour.

2.3 Michelle: The Literary Incarnation of Potiphar's Wife

The Rape of Michelle is, in fact, not a play about Michelle's misfortune but about Mikindong's near demise at the hands of Michelle and her co-manipulator, Rufina. The

play seems to echo the injustices suffered by the biblical Joseph at the hands of Potiphar's wife.[25] The biblical account reports that Joseph had found favour in his master's eyes to the extent that Potiphar had appointed him as overseer of his household. He was second in command to Potiphar himself. But a disjuncture in the relationship between Potiphar and Joseph was soon created by Potiphar's wife (whose name we never get to know) when apparently she tried to get Joseph to have sex with her but failed because Joseph fled her room, leaving behind his garment. The garment was used as substantial evidence later when she claimed that Joseph had tried to rape her instead. With this "convincing" proof of sexual assault presented to the judge of the case, Potiphar himself, Joseph was thrown into prison where he endured severe hardship.

This biblical narrative portrays Joseph as a g od-fearing, hard-working young man victimized by a cunning and lustful woman – a true daughter of the first temptress, Eve. Our sympathies are completely bestowed on Joseph, while Potiphar's wife is the recipient of curses for causing his fall from grace. Often, there are no questions asked as t o whether the narration of this incident from a male perspective (the book of Genesis being attributed to Moses) may have distorted or silenced certain aspects of the encounter between Joseph and Potiphar's wife which may move Christians to begin to see relations between the sexes in ancient times as one that was frequently gendered. It is often taken as a given that Joseph was the innocent victim of a conniving, evil woman.

Without necessarily subjecting the bible to a feminist study, it is important to mention that its depiction of women often conforms to certain binaries, such as moral/immoral, virgin/prostitute, innocent/guilty, forgiving/vengeful, that are designed to give clear prescriptions on qualities that make a "good" or "bad" woman. A good example is found in Proverbs 7: 1-27. The entire chapter is a strong warning to men to guard against the prostitute woman whose mission is to entice and destroy. Woman is described in these verses as boisterous, sly, deceptive, murderous, seductive, unfaithful to her husband, disgraceful to her sex, and definitely treacherous to the general male population. She represents everything undesirable in "woman" as a patriarchal sign. In contrast to the "bad" woman of Genesis, Proverbs 31: 10-31 describes the "good" woman as one who

[25] The account can be found in Genesis 39: 4-20.

performs her wifely duties with diligence: cooks, cleans and works hard in the fields; learns a trade to generate income for her household; shuns the talkative and lazy lifestyle of other women; and pursues godliness rather than vanity. Her attributes are outlined exclusively in relation to her usefulness within the domestic space. No meaning is attached to her life beyond the fulfilment of her culturally prescribed roles of wife, mother and sister.

The image of Potiphar's wife emblematizes the notion of female sexuality as dangerous, destructive and destabilising, a sexuality that initiates man's crashing descent from the heights of power and eminence. *The Rape* tends to be patterned after this view of woman as a seductress, a destroyer of homes and a vindictive manipulator when things do not go her way. Michelle appears to embody the "Potiphar's wife" pattern as she not only attempts to have sexual relations with Mikindong but also lays claims of rape when her attempts are unsuccessful. This pattern suggests a desire on Butake's part to create an image of a happy marriage about to be disrupted by the forces of evil. Michelle epitomizes the notion of *femme fatale* – a French expression that literally describes a dangerous woman capable of wrecking a man's life and from whom every sane man should keep away.

A twist in the biblical analogy, however, is that while Michelle and Potiphar's wife share common character traits, Mikindong is not as virtuous as Joseph is shown to be. True, he does suffer unjustly, seemingly, because he is arrested and locked up in a cell where he endures cold and deprivation. But unlike Joseph, Mikindong is portrayed as having a deep-seated weakness – his inability to resist the pull of the chicken parlour. His friends also exhibit flaws that deny them claims to a superior morality. Ngenge's flirtatious attitude towards Michelle indicates a disregard for the very moral principles he claims to uphold. He sees Michelle as a corrupt young girl with loose morals and yet has no qualms about making sexually explicit passes at her. In fact, his statement 'I don't mind having Michelle … I prefer mine very succulent' (177) reveals an intended desire to exploit the situation of Michelle's presumed sexually active state to his own advantage. The fact that Michelle's character is stringently patterned after that of Potiphar's wife while Mikindong's and his friends' deviate slightly from that of Joseph suggests not so much a

deliberate attempt to subvert the biblical narrative as an unconscious awareness of the complexities surrounding male-female relationships.

This notwithstanding, *The Rape* amplifies numerous biases against women. The whole play is relayed through the eyes of a male narrator; his is the dominant voice through which the events are conveyed to the reader/audience. The constant intrusion of the authorial voice also creates a sense of male conspiracy against the female characters. In the court scene, Michelle's account of the rape scene is *narrated* by Michelle while Mikindong's is *dramatized* or *re-enacted* as a flashback, projecting it as the "true" version of the incident. In the cross-examination of Michelle by Zende (Mikindong's lawyer), Michelle is put on the spot with questions pertaining to her paternity, her educational qualification and her sleeping conditions in her mother's house, and her silence in response is interpreted by the magistrate and Zende (both of whom are males) as a sign of her guilt. Nowhere does the play evoke any feelings of sympathy for Michelle or Rufina; they are both condemned to whoredom. The economic conditions under which Rufina lives, which perhaps necessitate her sharing a room with her teenage daughter, are of no significant importance to the participants in the courtroom.

Like Potiphar's wife, Michelle and Rufina are depicted as the "conniving bitches" who forge a medical certificate attesting rape in order to destroy Mikindong's supposedly good reputation. Both Michelle and Rufina are portrayed in the play as "loose" women, because they refuse to subject themselves to a patriarchal order which sees women only as the *objects* of sexual desire and never the *subjects*. Michelle's venturing into the sexual space is seen as a transgression of social norms, first because she is considered too young to indulge in sexual activities and second because she demands sex from Mikindong, as opposed to him luring her into it. The portrayal of Michelle directs one's mind towards Foucault's repressive hypothesis clearly outlined in *The History of Sexuality* (Vol. I). As Foucault claims, European history moved from a period of relative openness about the human body and speech to an ever-increasing repression and hypocrisy (Foucault, 1979; see also Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982). It is as a result of such repression that sexuality emerged in the nineteenth century as a taboo subject. What was perceived as the 'precocious sexuality of children' was especially in need of control and state intervention,

because there was a widely accepted 'assumption that this sexuality existed, that it was precocious, active, and ever-present' (Foucault, 1979: 27-28). In Butake's play, we note that the social system imposes what Foucault calls a 'ponderous silence' on the sexuality of children and adolescents (1979: 29). Michelle embodies rebellion and moral corruption from the perspective of the other characters, including Mikindong's wife.

Granted, one has to admit that Michelle's behaviour can be perceived by some as shocking for a fourteen-year-old. It is also in many ways naïve for someone who wants to gain access into the world of adults where sense and sensibility presumably overrule passion and impulse. Since we cannot completely dissociate the text from the social context of Cameroonian day-to-day life, we must then acknowledge that Michelle cuts an image of a minor that is not so much self-assertive as she is blindly rebellious. However, towards the middle of the play, we begin to see Michelle as a character with many facets to her personality. First, she plays the victimizer and innocent victim simultaneously and weaves a web of conflict around Mikindong and Rufina. Secondly, even though she tends to elevate herself above the average young girl of her age, she still adheres to the rubrics of domesticity when she boasts about her ability to roast chicken and resents Rufina for not allowing her to do so. However, she has fully imbibed attitudes prevalent in the city, attitudes related to male-female relationships. She has moved beyond the shyness peculiar to young girls in the villages and now carries herself as a modern young woman who knows how to negotiate recognition from men. Hers is a precocious sexuality that refuses confinement to a "virtuous" space, and she does not hesitate to articulate her own self-consciousness.

It is very important to note that Butake's writing of this play was inspired by an incident he had witnessed in a public eating place, an incident which in his mind reflected the moral degeneration of the youth of the 1980s. In an interview with Odhiambo and myself (2008), Butake admits that the play was his critical reaction to an incident involving a young woman courting an older man:

> **Odhiambo:** I'd make a very quick comment with regard to what motivated you to write *The Rape of Michelle*, given your vision about women. In *The Rape of Michelle*, the two women seem to be quite manipulative, the daughter and mother. What was the motivation behind that kind of writing?

> **Butake:** Actually, it was a real experience. At the time when I wrote the play we had a lot of chicken parlours in Yaounde. Lots and lots of chicken parlours.… Yes, I went to one of these … In fact, it was not a chicken parlour. I went to some place, some kind of supermarket. I think you could also drink in the place. So I was sitting there. I was having a beer and this beautiful girl …. First, some gentleman came in, quite a mature man, but in my opinion the girl was too small, and the way this girl was behaving towards this gentleman I could see that there was something wrong, not with the gentleman but with the girl, 'cause she was actually trying to, to to … she was courting the man, right? And that's where I got the idea to write *The Rape of Michelle*. It is not something that happened to me personally.

The incident had such a great impact on Butake's perception of women that he eventually captured it with all the negative traits usually attributed to the female sex – lustful, seductive, promiscuous and loose. The play itself extends the horizons of the experience by bringing in the young girl's mother through the character of Rufina, herself portrayed as a lustful and predatory woman. The young girl's "shortcomings" are exaggerated in the play as a way of conveying the moral decadence associated with the lives of women in the city.

As Butake admits above, he found it outrageous that a young woman should be courting an older man. His discomfort with the situation is twofold: first, it stems from the age difference between her and the object of her desire; and secondly, it arises from the fact that he felt it unusually indiscreet that the female should initiate the courtship act. The norm is usually the opposite – men have the prerogative of wooing. Thus, a woman who does not adhere to this norm attracts to herself retorts of disapproval and rejection.[26] Not surprisingly, Michelle is presented in the play bearing her name as a social outcast: a child who does not know her father; who shares a room with her mother and is the unwelcome participant in her sexual dalliances; who frames an "honest" man for rape; and who lacks a sense of belonging to either the community of women (Rufina and Akwen) or that of men (Mikindong, Ngenge and Eno), since they both alienate her at some point in her life. Michelle's alienation from traditional culture is indicated by her possession of a non-traditional name. While Mikindong, Akwen, Ngenge, Eno and Zende all have names that can be affiliated to some ethnic group in Cameroon, Michelle is given

[26] It is hard to predict if Butake's reaction would have been as critical had it been an older man courting a young girl of fourteen.

a French name. Considering Cameroon's colonial history outlined in Chapter One, such a name would suggest that she has been assimilated by French culture and has therefore lost her roots. Her alienation stems not only from her de-tribalized state but also from her adoption of a cultural lifestyle that is considered unwholesome by the proponents of tradition. Thus, she lives on the margins of her world – rejected by her own society and yet not fully a part of French culture.

Butake's critical response to the real-life experience could also have been propelled by the fact that the young girl made a move on an older man in a public environment, which perhaps explains why in *The Rape* the actual seduction of Mikindong by Michelle is moved to the private space of Mikindong's house. Thus, the public/private dichotomy also becomes a significant dimension in the drawing of boundaries between what is considered as acceptable and unacceptable female sexual behaviour. In other words, female sexual advances on men are intolerable, but even more so when they are initiated in public spaces. The exact encounter between Michelle and Mikindong in his house is not known as both parties tell different versions of it, but it is inferred from the manner in which Mikindong's version is played out and the way the play ends that his side gets the court's acceptance. The ambiguity is effective in that it points to the unpredictability of what happens in the intimacy of a home between men and women (an echo of the Jacob/Potiphar's wife account). So many possibilities exist and none can ultimately be taken as the one and only "truth". [27]

However, because Michelle fails to keep her sexual desires in check as society would expect of her, she is made to wear the cloak of a child prostitute; she is called the 'daughter of a bitch' by Mikindong and admits to possessing a 'devil' inside of her (192). Her English expression is poor, as evident in the court scene, and her articulation of love expressions is clichéd. These all contribute to the negativity of her portrayal. She is

[27] This relates to the notion of multiple truths in postmodernist theory. With specific reference to the nature of truth and justice in court trials, Emmanuel Yewah (1994: 72) asks the following pertinent questions: 'Can the court effectively carry out its legal duties … when the courtroom has become a stage for a dramatic presentation of a farce in which the actors or multiple witnesses produce multiple stories? Can the court synthesise these disparate and incomplete truths to a version of truth acceptable to all parties in the trial?' These questions highlight the difficulties inherent in deducing truth from a multiplicity of "stories", all recounted as the "truth".

referred to by different characters as a 'child', a 'little sister', and a 'girl' (176-177). In these instances, her woman-ness is obliterated, defaced, shadowed and made redundant. But it is that same woman-ness that is resurrected in the courtroom when it is deemed useful for male purposes, for Zende acknowledges Michelle's physical development when it suits his purpose to do so – to show the court that Michelle is not as innocent as she purports to be.

The image of a child used in reference to women is a deliberate trivialization of their make-up as rational beings. Ngenge's statement that 'a girl is a woman and a woman is a girl' (177) is pertinent in its elucidation of sexist views about women. The association of women with children is a reflection of society's placing of women at the lowest rung of the ladder of mental development, with traits of irrationality, impulsiveness and irresponsibility tied closely to children's, and thus women's, actions. By implication, women are portrayed as grown-up children. Butake seems to endorse a sexist view of women prevalent in eighteenth century England, as elucidated in the letters of Lord Chesterfield.[28] The following quotation, albeit ancient in certain respects, nonetheless highlights some of the ways in which women have been perceived and therefore portrayed in both European and African fiction:

> Women, then, are only children of a larger growth; they have an entertaining tattle, and sometimes wit; but for solid reasoning, good sense, I never once knew in my life one that had it, or who reasoned or acted consequentially for four and twenty hours together. Some little passion or humour always breaks in upon their best resolutions…. A man of sense only trifles with them, plays with them, humours and flatters them, as he does with a sprightly, forward child; but he neither consults them nor trusts them with serious matters; though he often makes them believe that he does both; which is the thing in the world that they are proud of. (Chesterfield, in Strachey 1901: 261-262)

Lord Chesterfield clearly had a distorted view of women, for he felt that even though they grow to maturity physically and physiologically, their mental maturity or thinking processes remained that of children. Reflecting on this slighting of women's capacity to think as rational beings and reading *The Rape*, one cannot help but ask why Mikindong keeps frequenting Rufina's chicken parlour since he knows that he is the sexual target not

[28] The letters of Chesterfield were edited by Charles Strachey and published by Methuen as a collection of two volumes in 1901 under the title *The Letters of the Earl of Chesterfield to His Son*. The particular letter referred to in this context is Letter CLXI, dated September 1748.

only of Michelle but also of Rufina. Could his frequent visits not be an outward manifestation of his desire for the "entertainment" he hopes to get from Michelle? At Rufina's chicken parlour, he puts up a coy front and pretends to be uninterested in the discussion, but in fact he fuels it with little innuendos and plays Rufina and Michelle against each other. He 'trifles' with Michelle, 'plays, 'humours' and 'flatters' her in subtle ways – words and gestures – that suggest that he sees her as no more than a toy designed for his entertainment. He and his friends seem to find it exciting to compliment Michelle on her beauty just to make Rufina jealous. To them, this is a pleasurable encounter: it is a sport, a hobby, a pastime.

As Annie Gagiano (2004: 46) shows with reference to Unity Dow's *Juggling Truths*, women are believed to do violent damage as a result of thwarted passion, an echo of the case between Potiphar's wife and Joseph. Butake projects Michelle and Rufina's actions as a vindictiveness precipitated by unreciprocated desire, but he does not interrogate the gender power imbalances within the society that create room for such socially disruptive practices. Michelle is branded a social misfit because she flouts established norms and makes sexual advances on someone of the opposite sex. In the court scene, Zende tries to get the magistrate to believe that Michelle's "loose morals" are as a result of her "loose upbringing", since she does not know her biological father and still shares a room with her mother who often entertains male visitors in her presence.

In contrast to Calixthe Beyala's novels where the child of the prostitute rejects the model set out for her in order to discover her own way in life and to find a means of escape other than prostitution (see Cazenave, 2000: 54), Butake's play does not provide any room for Michelle to explore a life outside of her mother's shadow. The difference in vision between Beyala and Butake is thus glaring: for Beyala, the prostitute's child can attain an individuality not defined by the patriarchal social system; for Butake, she is doomed to be a replica of her mother. This difference in vision between two Cameroonian writers, albeit from two separate linguistic regions, gives credence to Banyiwa-Horne's argument that by women writers' shared experiences with the characters they depict they are often able to create African womanhood in more realistic terms, with greater insight, and in more meaningful interaction with their environment

than their male counterparts do (1986: 119-120). Butake's female characters in this play can hardly be appreciated beyond their stereotypical roles as loose women, bad girls and irresponsible mothers.

The narrative tone of *The Rape* is explicitly condemnatory of Michelle's sexual inclinations, for it entrenches certain dichotomies of morals and values: good/bad, innocent/guilty, honest/corrupt, saintly/evil, forgiving/vengeful etc. We therefore ask: is the play a propagation of sexual ethics? The underlying references to codes of sexual morality that should be respected by women point to this conclusion. But what about moral codes for men? The male characters do not seem to receive any moral indictment for their flirtatious attitudes and they tend to enjoy a greater privilege of sexual freedom than the female characters do. The playwright's stigmatization of female sexual freedom thus points to an elevation of heterosexuality that is prejudiced in its ethical intention: sexual desire, or rather the acting on one's sexual desires, should be patterned after "acceptable" norms that define the specific roles of each gender. The deduced outcome of the trial endorses the patriarchal thrust. Such is Butake's delimiting vision in this play.

2.4 Rufina: The "Prostitute" Woman

The image of the prostitute woman is not new to African literary expression of both male and female authorship and it is certainly not new to criticism on both Western and African literature (see Senkoro, 1982; Kishtainy, 1982; Bell, 1994; Chukukere, 1995).[29] Stratton (1994) has done a feminist reading of this female figure as portrayed in several African texts of male authorship, including Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* (1977), Mongo Beti's *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness* (1978), Wole Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* (1980) and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977). Her conclusion is insightful: 'in these texts, prostitution is not related to the female social condition in patriarchal societies. Rather it is a metaphor for men's degradation under some non-preferred socio-political system – a metaphor which encodes women as agents of moral corruption, as sources of moral contamination in society' (Stratton, 1994: 53). Concentrating on the same prostitute figure in women's writing, Cazenave (2000) uses

[29] While Fikeni Senkoro and Gloria Chukukere's books explore portraits of the prostitute in African literature, Shannon Bell's and the collection of essays by Khalid Kishtainy focus on the prostitute figure in Western literature.

the works of three Francophone women writers, Angèle Rawiri, Calixthe Beyala and Ken Bugul (a pseudonym for Mariétou M'Baye), to illustrate the ways in which women writers have subverted the literary nature and function of the prostitute. In her view, the prostitute takes on a new appearance in these women's writing in that the character now embodies the 'commodifying nature of human relations in general' and 'each person's insidious slide toward some form of prostitution as a way of life' (Cazenave, 2000: 12).

The following statement by Stratton (1994: 53) is pertinent to the discussion on Rufina's character: 'as it operates intertextually, the main function of the prostitute metaphor, the flip side of the Mother Africa trope, is to reproduce the attitudes and beliefs necessary for preserving the otherness of women and hence to perpetuate their marginalization in society'. In line with this assertion, it is argued that the elements of *negation*, *marginalization*, *exclusion* and *otherness* are intrinsic signifiers of the prostitute's social identity in men's writing of women's bodies. Like Michelle, Rufina is not portrayed in *The Rape* in a positive light. In fact, Michelle's "waywardness" is blamed on her. In defence of Mikindong, Zende argues in court that Michelle's attempt to seduce Mikindong is a direct influence of her mother's sexual escapades with men:

> **Zende**: Your Worship, Sir, I am satisfied. This little girl is not as little as my learned colleague has made this court to believe. I am inviting this court to look at her carefully: her dress, her gait, her manners. I am also inviting this court to look at her mother. Michelle's birth certificate says her mother was seventeen when she had her. Michelle herself is fourteen this year. Rufina has brought up her daughter in her own footsteps. We have a saying that when mother-cow is chewing grass, its young ones watch its mouth closely. (195)

Zende's words echo the writer's thoughts on acceptable models of female behaviour. A woman's dressing and grooming is expected to conform to society's expectations of her. Marriage is elevated in these lines as the only approved milieu for the conception of children. Because Rufina bore a child in her teenage years, she becomes a "transgressor" of her society's values. The play does not outrightly call her a prostitute, but implies that she is one because she fails to meet up to the ideal of a "good" woman. She is projected as a negative model for her daughter. Zende uses her anti-model status to superimpose his own sense of decency on the court. As Ignatowski argues, public evaluations of morality and values are legitimizing discourses through which local actors attempt to solidify their

social positions (2006: 3). Zende certainly seeks self-glorification by making Rufina a bad role model for Michelle.

In the quotation above, Zende uses the analogy of a calf that learns from its mother how to eat grass in order to project Michelle's assumed moral relapse as a direct consequence of her own mother's "moral bankruptcy". The image of the mother-cow is emblematic of the sexual maturity of Rufina while that of the calf signifies the amateurish state of Michelle's sexual advancement. The analogy, therefore, suggests that Michelle's precocious sexuality is the result of her careful observation of her mother's sexual escapades. The imagery invoked in the analogy translates into a "like-mother-like-daughter" scenario, one which implicitly defines woman as immoral, disgusting and repulsive and thus anything that is closely affiliated to her is inevitably tainted with filth. The analogy also suggests that the mother is the only reference of morality for her child and once that morality is absent the child is inevitably plunged into moral darkness, because the model herself is faulty. It thus conveniently exonerates the absentee/unknown father from any responsibility relating to the child's moral development.

Butake's representation of woman in *The Rape* illustrates the way in which Anglophone men's writing has generally failed to perceive woman's identity beyond the confines of her sexual/social identity as a prostitute. The "prostitute" in Butake's play is not the Saadawian prostitute that subverts male perceptions of her sexuality (see *Woman at Point Zero*, 1983) but the conventional prostitute that embodies the destabilizing power of female sexuality. In the play, one notes with interest how the stigma of social irresponsibility is attached to the unmarried woman. The only "responsible" woman in the play is Akwen, because she is married. It does not matter whether she is married to a man of questionable character. Rufina is armed with all the paraphernalia that accompanies her portrayal as a she-devil: she is an unmarried woman, she has an illegitimate daughter conceived at the age of seventeen, and she runs a chicken parlour. These three factors conjoin to make her the perfect anti-model. Her anti-model status is heightened by her actions which are by no means saintly: first, she is a predator because she targets another woman's husband; second, she is a villain because she frames him for the rape of her daughter when she could not have her way; and third, she is a danger to

society at large, because she obtains a medical certificate by fraud to support her case in court and bribes the commissioner to keep her "enemy" in jail for longer than is legally required. Rufina's role in the play seems not to lend itself to any complex interpretations of women's identities, for she surfaces as a mere stereotype created by the playwright to justify his one-sided moralistic outlook on society.

The relationship between Rufina and Michelle provides further insights into the writer's gendering of the sexes. At the beginning of the play, it is a relationship of open confrontation: both women are depicted as vying for Mikindong's attention. The tensions that erupt between the two when Mikindong is present make the mother-daughter conflict one based on selfish sexual interests. Mikindong is given the status of a "prince charming", an ideal, noble figure attractive enough to pit a mother against her daughter. He adopts the stance of the uninterested party but nonetheless helps fuel the conflict. The following except from the play illustrates how the different characters are cast in their distinct roles as either feminine or masculine:

> **Rufina:** I am asking if old women are ever beautiful. *(She sits on the arm of Mikindong's chair)*. Especially when there are young girls around.
> **Mikindong**: What do you mean? I come here for two things: the taste of your chicken and the fact that we are neighbours.
> **Rufina**: You think I haven't noticed? The way you flirt with Michelle is just disgraceful.
> **Mikindong**: Oh, come on! Michelle is just a little girl.
> **Rufina:** And me? I am just an old woman, not so?
> **Eno**: If he doesn't like you, I can always take his place.
> **Ngenge:** And I don't mind having Michelle either. I prefer mine very succulent.
> **Mikindong**: Michelle, my friend wants you.
> **Michelle**: Have you looked at me well? I think I know what I want.
> **Rufina**: Didn't I say it? It's you she wants. Go and tidy up the kitchen. (177-178)

Mikindong conforms to perceptions of masculine behaviour in the face of an overpowering female sexuality. He feigns disinterest in Michelle. When confronted with his flirtatious attitude towards her, he resorts to using language that belittles her physical and sexual development. Pushed to the wall, he sidesteps a confession of his feelings by trading Michelle off to his friend, as if to say, 'Here, that should tell you that I'm not interested!' Rufina, in contrast, is ascribed certain attitudes conceived to be synonymous to *femaleness*: she is concerned about her looks; she is anxious about getting older; and

she is jealous of Michelle who seems to be receiving all the male attention. Mikindong's attempt to "pass" Michelle over to his friend and Michelle's rejection of the offer only confirms Rufina's suspicion that Mikindong is the object of Michelle's desire, a confirmation that immediately provokes a harsh reaction from her as she commands Michelle to retreat into the kitchen. The desire to maintain youthfulness and attractive physical looks becomes an obsession for Rufina. In this instance, one finds a correlation between Butake's play and Ekwensi's novel, *Jagua Nana*, because both writers tend to endow the prostitute with a duality of character in that on the one hand she is a tough, assertive woman who gets her way, but on the other hand she is volatile and in constant need of assurance from men. Just as Jagua needs Freddie to reassure her that she is not old after all (see Senkoro, 1982: 47), so does Rufina need Mikindong to relieve her of the agony of an assumed old age.[30]

Sue Bruley (1981: 63) has argued that 'in any patriarchal society women are turned against each other in their attempts to achieve status and social recognition via a relationship with a man', and that rivalry for men is the one great factor that divides women and mutilates any meaningful relationship they could have with each other. The rupture in the relationship between Rufina and Michelle renders Butake's play non-sympathetic to female solidarity (unless of course in a negative sense, as when Rufina and Michelle team up to destroy Mikindong's reputation in court). Rufina is highly resentful of Michelle's beauty and even threatens to kick Michelle out of the house if she gets to hear of any sexual encounters between her and Mikindong:

> **Rufina:** Every time my customers come here you want to show them that you are young and more beautiful. But I am telling you that if I ever hear that you and teacher have done anything … that day you will go.
> **Michelle**: But it's you who say he likes me!
> **Rufina:** I don't care. But I am telling you now that I like him. If he doesn't like me and prefers you, we will see. (178)

What is apparent here is a rhetoric enforcing the 'transgressive power of female passion' (Wolfson, 1994: 34). Rufina's determination to fight Michelle over Mikindong is no doubt a re-inscription of the playwright's association of femininity with jealousy and

[30] Hers is an assumed old age because she is only thirty-one years old, if we add up her seventeen years at which she fell pregnant with Michelle and Michelle's fourteen years.

passion. Contrasting this portrayal of Rufina and Michelle in a socially discursive relationship with the "sporting" behaviour of Mikindong and his friends, it is evident that the playwright feels that female passion creates roadblocks to meaningful female bonding.

The subsequent events of the play, however, reveal an irony that is situational. We find a situation of expectation versus outcome when Rufina forges a m edical certificate to convict Mikindong of the rape of her daughter when it becomes public that Mikindong prefers neither her nor Michelle. One would expect her to feel triumphant at Mikindong's resistance of Michelle's charms, but instead she makes it her mission to punish Mikindong for this or for not succumbing to her own charms. From this perspective, her reaction to the situation is projected as retaliation against Mikindong for rejecting her daughter – a rejection of whom is a rejection of herself. The notion the play seems to propagate is that vindictiveness and revenge are intrinsic to women's nature and that women react in a calculative, manipulative manner when their desires are unreciprocated. In this context, therefore, they become incarnations of Potiphar's wife, a metaphor which, to re-echo Stratton's words, 'encodes women as agents of moral corruption, as sources of moral contamination in society' (1994: 53). The implication of a male playwright writing about women is that too often the image of her socially interactive self, as projected on to stage, is painted with dubiousness, inferiority and low self-esteem.

After the first scene, Rufina's role in the play is completely effaced. While Akwen is introduced as the loving support Mikindong needs to cope with the traumas of his being charged with rape, Rufina is physically evicted from the play and her presence is felt only in the form of a piece of paper – the medical certificate she procures in defence of Michelle's case. She hovers in the background of the actions. We do not see her despairing over her daughter's supposed rape but are told by the policeman and Akwen, respectively, that she is 'always in the Commissioner's office' (179) and is 'bent on sending [Mikindong] to jail for as long as the law demands' (181). Thus, she is kicked off-stage as an irrelevant character but is projected from backstage as an embodiment of the corruption that thrives within the legal system. Her association with the Commissioner echoes that of Jagua Nana and Uncle Taiwo in Ekwensi's novel. This

association between two prostitute women and powerful political figures highlights the commercial nature of the search for social and economic security in the city.

2.5 Akwen: The Model Wife

As shown earlier, the female characters in this play tend to be constructed after biblical portraits of women. While Michelle and Rufina become circumscribed within the "bad" woman category represented by Potiphar's wife, Akwen emerges as a concrete representation of the "capable wife" described in Proverbs 31: 10-31. She is the dutiful housekeeper, the supportive wife, the diligent cleaner, the perfect cook, and the cheerful entertainer. Her first appearance in the play is when she visits her husband in a cell at the police station. The stage direction introducing her appearance reveals some noteworthy aspects of her role both within her marital environment and within the play itself:

> *Policeman goes out and soon returns with Akwen, a strikingly beautiful woman in her twenties. She is carrying a basket. She is angry, but when she sees the state in which Mikindong is her features soften and she becomes anxious for his sake.* (179-180)

The impression one gets of Akwen from these lines is that she is the dutiful housewife who always puts her husband's interests ahead of hers. At this stage, she knows nothing about his claim of innocence but is immediately concerned about his wellbeing when she finds him enduring the despicable conditions of jail life. She is 'anxious for his sake', not worried about herself as the offended party, should the rape charges against her husband turn out to be true. She brings him warm clothes to wear and some tea to drink so he should not catch pneumonia, and even promises that she will 'do anything to make him comfortable' (180), all of these before asking him the obvious question 'Why did you do it?' (181). When the question is finally asked, Mikindong offers no response except the angry retort: 'Stop it! Stop it! ... You will never understand. Nobody will understand' (181). He sidesteps the question by assuming the position of a grossly wronged individual, and yet Akwen feels no inclination to insist on a satisfactory explanation for the scandal, nor to reprove him for it. Within the play, her role is that of a mouthpiece for the playwright's perceived image of the ideal wife – one who is beautiful, dutiful and submissive under all circumstances.

From the stage direction, one also notes a pertinent difference between the portrayal of Akwen and that of Rufina. Akwen is said to be in her twenties, and is already married. Rufina, in contrast, is in her thirties and besides being anxious over her age she is still unmarried. The difference in the age and marital status of the two women is a deliberate encoding of socio-cultural values that dictate desired and non-desired models of femininity. Akwen is introduced only towards the middle of the play and the timing of her appearance is effective in that she comes as a significant contrast to Rufina. She is everything the latter is not: younger, married, submissive, enduring and quiet in her disposition. She seeks not revenge and asks no questions but responds to life's unfortunate situations with a benign acceptance and with faith in God's ability to rectify them. She cares for her home with diligence and even tolerates her husband's preference to eat chicken at their neighbour's when she can prepare it for him at home. Her womanhood is thus elevated as the ideal to be emulated by African women while Rufina's is castigated as the anti-model.

Akwen's status as the model wife is further enforced through the words with which the playwright entrusts her. Before leaving the cell, she promises Mikindong not to join the police and others in 'torturing' him by demanding a reason for his actions. How can she promise without even knowing whether he is innocent or not? As if this was not baffling enough, she makes a statement which shows that her husband's being in jail bothers her not so much because it has to do with his alleged sexual violation of another female (whom she knows to be a mere child) as it is because of the 'loneliness and the embarrassment' (181) it has caused for her as the teacher's wife. She states: 'Don't worry too much. God will show the way. I will try and see the presiding magistrate. *I can't lose a husband only after six months of marriage*' (emphasis mine, 182). The question is: not even if that husband is a rapist? She shows no interrogative interest in the rape charges keeping her husband in a cell but is determined to get him out simply because she cannot afford to live without a husband. She relies on the power of God and of the presiding magistrate, both male figures, to get her husband out of jail. Unless Butake's apparent poor mastery of verisimilitude here is deliberate, it is hard for one to believe that there can be women like Akwen in real life.

It is not without significance that Akwen's physical beauty is placed on a pedestal. When on seeing Akwen the policeman exclaims: 'A man with such a beautiful wife raping a mere child!' it becomes clear that Akwen is perceived as a sexual asset to Mikindong and thus it is unthinkable that Mikindong would sacrifice this asset for a liability such as Michelle. Ironically, in this context, Akwen is placed on par with Michelle – both of them being perceived by the policeman as objects of Mikindong's desire. Throughout the play, there is much emphasis on the physical beauty of Akwen, with her beauty being depicted as what enriches her asset-like status in her husband's eyes. It is a beauty which exists 'to be possessed by the male' (Boyce-Davies, 1986a: 76). Her physical beauty enforces the objectification of her body, as evident in the policeman's statement to Mikindong:

> **Policeman:** Teacher, let me tell you something. Whether you did it or not does not really matter. If you do not make contacts, you are going to stay in prison for a good part of your life. And what will happen to your beautiful wife and your work? She will become the woman of some powerful man. But with money… you can move mountains. (186)

As a 'beautiful wife', Akwen is seen as only one of the "possessions" that Mikindong would lose should he go to prison. She would become the "property" of another man. Hence to keep that "property" to himself, Mikindong would have to use money to buy his way out of jail. And Akwen comes in handy in this project because, as the policeman tells Mikindong, she has the right resources to accomplish such a task: 'You are even lucky that you have such a beautiful wife. She will get the money for you' (186). Details of how Akwen eventually gets hold of the money are not revealed but with so many references to her beauty there is a possibility that she had sex with people higher up to obtain it. The commercialization of women's bodies is quite glaring here: a woman's beauty is a commodity that could be traded for something more valuable – for freedom, in this case.

The final scene of the play, which is an epilogue, presents snapshots of Akwen in her home (the domestic space) and, just as in Scene Two, she is seen playing the model wife. The stage direction states that she is '*constantly serving drinks and chewables to the men*' (197). These men are in her house to celebrate her husband's release from jail and his simultaneous appointment as principal of his school. This display of hospitality in itself does not make Akwen a subservient wife, but the words Butake puts in her mouth make

her the mere parody of an insecure wife. Her contribution to the discussion is limited to her interest in protecting her domestic space. She endorses the biased views expressed by the men she is entertaining not only by echoing their sentiments about Rufina and Michelle but also by suggesting that the rape charge was a deliberate plot to sabotage her husband's name in view of his impending appointment. The following conversation is informative in several respects:

> **Mikindong:** We cannot be too sure that the case is over until judgment is delivered. This appointment might even put one into more problems.
> **Akwen:** What problems, dear? You have my love and you are principal. You know, I am even beginning to suspect that she might have known that this was coming and so decided to spoil your name. All sorts of people go to chicken parlours; she might have overheard your name being discussed.
> **Ngenge:** That is really possible, Akwen. But why would she want to spoil a thing like that?
> **Eno:** What a question! I am surprised that you people have not yet realized that Mikindong is replacing her country-man as Principal of that college.
> **Everybody:** Ah yes! You are right! You are damn right. (197)

As the words above illustrate, Akwen blames Rufina and Michelle for her husband's near demise, for she, like the men, sees the two women as predators. She ascribes to them traits of lust, promiscuity and vindictiveness. It seems convenient for Butake to use a fellow woman to say the things that most men would like to say about women. In this way, he can establish his ideology of male superiority without feeling much guilt.

A critical look at this final scene, though, reveals something else about Akwen, namely that she is not as unperceptive as the writer would want us to believe. Although she sides with the men in condemning Rufina as a whore, she is not blind to their own weaknesses, especially those of her husband. Consider her words as the conversation continues:

> **Mikindong:** I never looked at it that way. And I didn't know about this at all.
> **Ngenge:** Now I know she is a real devil. If anyone ever sees my foot in her place again, let them cut it off. Can you imagine that she presents Michelle as her small sister?
> **Akwen:** She doesn't want to be thought of as an old woman. That is why she and her daughter have been fighting over my husband. I don't really know what you men want.
> **Mikindong:** But we only went there for the chicken and a drink! Nothing else.
> **Akwen:** Don't I cook for you in this house? Can't you drink at home as you are doing now? But, of course, you must go to chicken parlours where mothers and

their daughters will fight over you and throw you into jail. And I have to suffer trying to get you released.
Ngenge: Don't be angry, Akwen. You know your husband is an honest man.
Akwen: Indeed, he is! (197-198)

Akwen reveals, albeit unconsciously, a distinct reality about her husband's reason for patronizing Rufina's chicken parlour. In fact, her question 'Don't I cook for you in this house' immediately annuls Mikindong's argument that he goes there for the chicken only. It is not so much the chicken itself that draws him to Rufina's as it is a special kind of "chicken" that he cannot have at home. Inferring from his own argument, Rufina's "chicken" has a special flavour, taste and attractiveness to it. He is, therefore, irresistibly drawn to this "chicken" even though he knows the dangers associated with it. The chicken then comes to symbolize Michelle – the young, tender, "succulent", attractive and enchanting girl whose titillating words and coquettish moves enslave him to her. He is drawn to her like a dog to a meaty bone. The corollary of his desire is personified in his jail time – the "danger" he subjects himself to because of his flagrant preference for Rufina's "chicken" as opposed to his wife's. Akwen seems to be conscious of Mikindong's weakness in the face of an overpowering female sexuality, but her feelings of inadequacy in comparison to Michelle make her respond to her husband's continued visit to Rufina's with benign acceptance. In this context, therefore, what she begrudges most is not his stubbornness but the fact that she has to 'suffer trying to get [him] released' (198). So intense is her devotion to him that the sexual implications of his stubbornness pale into insignificance.

Throughout the play, Akwen surfaces as a one-dimensional character, for her role does not change; neither does it offer possibilities for re-defining women's position within the private space. She is the model wife forever concerned with domestic chores, and obviously in this role she becomes the writer's ideal of African femininity.

2.6 Women and Depictions of the State

Butake's construction of woman in this play draws heavily from socio-cultural practices and ideologies that operate to downplay women's quest for independence from social structures of power. As illustrated above, the play subscribes to a 'long-standing tradition

of polarizing reason and passion as masculine and feminine, respectively' (Wolfson, 1994: 32), for in its association of women with the irrationality of children it endorses a hegemonic masculinity that inevitably espouses the muting of the female voice. In addition, its portrayal of women as "witches" whose primary task is to rob seemingly pious men of their virtue consigns it to the category of African plays deeply entrenched in the male literary tradition.

On a larger plane, women seem to function in this play as vehicles through which Butake comments on state politics and its associated practices. When one looks at the theme of corruption so glaring in the play, one begins to see the duplicity that accompanies the portrayal of the so-called good characters. The problem that confronts Mikindong is twofold in that besides Michelle and Rufina conspiring against him, there is a judicial system that runs entirely on the wheels of bribery and corruption. The policeman on duty at the cell in which Mikindong is confined demands of him a bottle of red wine and money which he has to share with his three other colleagues. As an insider, the policeman understands the system better than Mikindong does and is thus able to advise him and Zende on the procedure to be followed if they want to stop the magistrate from finding him guilty.

> **Policeman**: That is the right word. Contacts. A telephone call from above to the magistrate! An envelope from below to the magistrate! And the deed is done. The case is closed or simply thrown out of court. Contacts!
> **Zende**: I see you are a very practical philosopher.
> **Policeman**: Oh yes! We must be practical and realistic. You think the magistrate eats truth? You think the prosecutor eats truth? You think the commissioner eats truth? Nobody eats truth. But people need a drink now and again. They need money to do things. That is what I call practical philosophy. (186)

In an environment where corruption thrives and moral values are pushed to the margins, the boundary between truth and falsehood collapses. To prove his innocence, it is not enough for Mikindong's lawyer to discredit the medical certificate presented to the court by the prosecuting officer or to narrate a personal experience showing that Rufina and Michelle are known to flirt with men who patronize their chicken parlour. His innocence can only be declared by a magistrate who has been given a bribe big enough to make him feel that it is worth his while to keep the man out of jail. Thus, bribe-taking has become a

practice on which the judiciary thrives and law and order are enforced only for those who can pay generously for such services.

Butake here paints a depressing picture of the Cameroonian society, a society in which corruption pervades every component of the country's socio-political structures, from moral to legal practices. Telephone calls have to be made and envelopes have to change hands for justice to be served. In the courtroom can be found liars and cheaters; from the accuser and accused to the magistrate sitting in judgment of the case, there is no one untainted with guilt of performing some unacceptable act. Even Akwen the idealized "heroine" who comes to the rescue of her husband can only succeed by playing the "game" of the state – bribing the magistrate to release Mikindong on bail. So then, the courtroom, like the decrepit bus in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, is symbolic of a deteriorating socio-political system that houses citizens who through their individual indecencies contribute to its filthy and declining state. However, more vivid than this symbol is the prostitute metaphor which provides an 'index of the state of the nation' (Stratton, 1990: 117). Like the perceived morally bankrupt Michelle, the nation is projected as devoid of any moral integrity on the part of its citizens. In addition, just as Rufina targets Mikindong as the object of her desire, so the desperate and gullible are preyed upon by the high and mighty in society who extort from them for their own political and economic enrichment.

What Stratton calls the analogy between prostitution and national degradation (1990: 119) is implicit in the depiction of Michelle and Rufina as morally degenerate and corrupting forces. As noted above, almost all the characters in the play carry the smear of corruption at some stage of their interaction with one another, but in the end they seem to achieve some redemption and escape from moral indictment because they congregate in Mikindong's house in celebration. Only Michelle and Rufina are missing from this assembly, suggesting not only that they are the losers but also that they are the principal initiators of the corruption that has eaten deep into the roots of society. Through these two characters, woman is thus made a metaphor for a corrupt nation that is not only in a state of decline but has lost its intrinsic values. The play ends on a note of despondency as evident in the following exchange between Mikindong and Zende:

> **Mikindong:** But why should a man suffer so much and lose so much money even though he is innocent?
> **Zende:** That is the problem. Until a revolution takes place, we will continue to function through the telephone call from above and the envelope from below, as your friend, the policeman, put it. And, you know, now that you have been appointed principal he is expecting a sizeable envelope. He now knows that you have everything to lose. (199)

In portraying women as agents of men's demise and society's relapse into moral degradation, the play envisions a society that is as devoid of any hope of positive change as it is peopled by corrupt government officials. So then the play, like the nation it depicts, is stunted or unprogressive in its vision. It seems that, to the writer, national degradation is unavoidable, because prostitution is inescapable for women. It is difficult not to agree with Gloria Chukukere (1995: 80) when she states that 'when women in fiction are consistently reduced to a set of stereotypes, the approach reflects a writer's unsure vision as well as it does his lack of imagination'. Butake's vision in this play certainly leaves much to be desired.

Essentially, the portrayal of Rufina and Michelle in this play raises a fundamental question: what implications are there for gender discourse when a man writes about women's sexual desires from his perspective as a member of the opposite sex? It can rightly be said that some degree of bias and age-old prejudice is likely to creep into the narrative. Support for this assertion is perhaps evident in audience response to a production of the play by the Yaounde University Theatre directed by Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh in 1985. From an interview Eyoh conducted with Butake shortly after the production, there is indication that the play received more of a negative response than a positive one. It was widely critiqued on radio, television and newspaper media and the controversy it sparked went beyond the media to private homes, causing such dissension among couples that there were threats of it being banned from public performance (see Eyoh, 1991: 13).

Some severe attacks that were launched against it came from different groups of people with different reasons: (1) academics criticized it for being below what was expected of university lecturers, for many felt that it lacked literary aesthetics and addressed a

mundane subject, and still others felt that it was not bold enough and failed to propose future directions for society; (2) patronizers of chicken parlours resented it for portraying their social joint in a negative light; (3) the feminists rejected it for endorsing a masculine order and for stigmatizing single mothers (Eyoh, 1991: 10-14). It seems that the latter group was particularly vociferous in its attack on Butake for it labelled him as chauvinist (see Eyoh, 1991: 14). In spite of Butake's denial of the accusation that he was anti-feminist, it is evident from the audience response that the play had little to offer to urban Cameroonian women who were contending not only with patriarchy in all its forms but also with post-colonial disillusionment. The play's envisioning of women then, as has been illustrated in this chapter, is condescending and at best uninspiring. A less myopic vision, but nonetheless a chauvinist one, can be seen in *Betrothal without Libation*, Butake's other play which is discussed in the next section.

2.7 Women and the Marriage Metaphor: *Betrothal without Libation*

Another of Butake's early plays which captures his vision of women is *Betrothal without Libation*. This is, in fact, his first play and it marks the start of his writing career as a playwright.[31] Although the play was written as early as 1982, it was only published in its full length in 2005, the same year as his latest play *Family Saga*. According to Butake, this gap between the time of writing and publication indicates the 'problems of publishing in Cameroon' (2005a: 5). The analysis in this section focuses mainly on the female space as defined in this play, the reason being that the play presents a more holistic picture of the many challenges women face in both traditional and urban spaces than *The Rape* does. Nonetheless, it reproduces condescending images of women as seducers, home-breakers, social misfits and prostitutes.

The play is about a young couple, Elissa Eyong and Fointam Ngong, who decide to get married but meet with strong opposition from the latter's family because of the cultural differences between them. Fointam, who is Bikom (an ethnic group in the NW Province), wants to marry Elissa, a Bayangi girl (from the SW Province) with whom he has been in

[31] The play was originally written as a short story and transformed into a drama script in 1982. The script was then published and distributed in pamphlet form (Butake in Foreword to *Betrothal without Libation*, 2005). Prior to this time, Butake wrote mainly short stories which were published in magazines such as *The Mould*.

courtship for seven years.[32] Elissa's parents, Mr and Mrs Eyong, are delighted about the marriage, especially her mother who now experiences the 'pride a mother feels when her daughter finds a good husband' (12).[33] Fointam's parents are, however, opposed to the marriage, because Elissa is not Bikom and in their view women from her ethnic group are notorious for prostitution. Fointam's attempts to explain to his father, Bobe Ngong, that love is what matters in a relationship meet with severe resistance and in the end he decides to walk out of his father's compound for good, determined to marry Elissa even without his father's blessings: 'I will marry without your libation' (55). In due course, he and Elissa get married and have four children. It is only after the birth of their fourth child that they eventually reconcile with Fointam's family when a delegation from the village visits them to ask for forgiveness on Bobe Ngong's behalf. The play ends with song and dance as Fointam, Elissa, Bobe Chia and 1st Woman all join in dancing to the rhythm of the *njang*.[34]

Butake confesses that the play came as a result of his concerns about the internal divisions that wrecked Anglophone Cameroon and the prejudices directed towards people from certain cultural backgrounds (2005a: 5-6). Konings and Nyamnjoh (2003) have argued that one of the contradictions of the post-colonial state in Cameroon, which defeats the struggle for an Anglophone identity, is the existing ethno-regional cleavages between the coastal people in the SW Province and the Grassfields people in the NW Province. This long-standing struggle for domination between the peoples of the two regions continues to influence political and social relationships in Cameroon and such compartmentalization founded on prejudice and ethnic bias hinders any successful attempt by the Anglophone community to canvass more rights for its people. In his attempt to expose these prejudices to ridicule, Butake hopes to create in his audiences/readers a greater awareness of the rewards of national integration and the possible benefits of retaining a united front as a nation. Thus, from as early as 1982 questions about the potential of the nation-state in post-colonial Africa had begun to

[32] Although people from the Manyu Division belong to different ethnic groups and villages, at the national level they are generally referred to as Bayangi, or Nyangi for short. The capital town of the Manyu Division is Mamfe.
[33] All textual references are to *Betrothal without Libation*, 2005, Yaounde: Éditions CLÉ.
[34] The *njang* is a dance performed by the Bikoms on very special occasions. It could be used to welcome an eminent visitor or to celebrate a significant event such as the birth of a child.

preoccupy Butake's mind. The political undertone of the play is evident in the references to state politics, ethnic separatism and other divisions that affect the progress of the Cameroonian people as a whole.

In spite of the fact that the play reproduces stereotypes of women, one has to acknowledge that Butake is a social realist. It is a social reality in Cameroon that even at present people from the NW Province tend to be opposed to marriage unions between their sons and women from the SW Province.[35] The Bayangis especially suffer this prejudice because their women have been stereotyped as prostitutes, perhaps because many sex workers in urban areas such as Douala and Yaounde were known to be from the Manyu Division. As in many cases of stereotyping, a handful of "Bayangi prostitutes" have ended up ne gating an entire nation's perception of an entire ethnic group. It is perhaps the need to rectify or at best offer an alternative way of viewing these misconceptions that Butake premised his play on marriage. Marriage in the play is a metaphor for an Anglophone Cameroon that has bridged the gaps dividing its cultures, as the following quotation shows:

> **Fointam:** If everyone in this country did like your grandfather, and us, this would soon become a tribeless nation. And we will have gone a long way in solving some of the numerous problems that are plaguing this country. (20)[36]

The marriage between Elissa and Fointam thus symbolizes, for Butake, a desired union between the Bayangis and the Bikoms, between the peoples of the SW and NW Provinces, and by implication between Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians.

[35] The hostility is not so intense if it is a South West man wanting to marry a North West woman. In such cases, families may initially oppose the union but usually they give in at some stage without so much of a rupture between the two families. One could attribute this to women's second-class status within the family arrangement. To illustrate: If a Bikom woman marries into a South West family, "nothing" is lost, so to speak. Rather, her family will gain because her husband will invest in her family and in her hometown. But, if a Bikom man marries a South West woman, it is considered a big loss to his family because part of his material assets will go to his wife's family and his children may grow up "estranged" from their roots. It is important to note that the matter of succession is very important in North West cultures and children from an inter-cultural marriage are likely to be deprived of their inheritance on the basis of their mixed heritage.

[36] In Cameroon, the word 'tribe', commonly deplored to refer to the various ethnic groups, is used without shame or self-consciousness and it carries no derogatory implications. Thus, Butake's use of the expression 'tribeless nation' is intended to project the image of a new Cameroon without the geographical, political and socio-cultural borders separating the people of one tribe from those of the other.

2.8 Hierarchical Formations in Urban and Rural Spaces

From the first scene of the play, one can easily draw parallels between this play and *The Rape*. First, they both feature entertainment spots run by women in urban spaces. Rufina's chicken parlour shares affiliation with Paulina's palm wine bar, because both have largely a male clientèle. However, the character of the two proprietresses differ in that while Rufina is boisterous and flirtatious towards her male customers, Paulina has a quiet demeanour and responds to calls from her customers with a respectful "Sah", the Pidgin word for "Sir". This seems to hint that the morally corrosive power of the urban space has not completely robbed women of their supposed virtues; that like Akwen there are many women in the city who can re-direct their "rebellious" sisters towards the path of acceptable *feminine* behaviour as well as teach them respect for tradition.

The second significant parallel between the two plays is that they both privilege the home setting for family discussions, as opposed to male-male discussions which in both plays take place outside the home – in public places and specifically in entertainment spots (the chicken parlour in *The Rape* and the palm wine bar in *Betrothal*). Within this disparity lies an evident dichotomy between what is suitable for the public space and what is not, between topics for discussion that should be kept strictly for the private space and those that can transcend this boundary. Male-male conversations are privileged over male-female ones because they take place within the public space. By consigning conversations in which women are involved to the private space, Butake consigns the women themselves to a female space that limits their voice in matters of public interest.

A third point is that Mr and Mrs Eyong in whose home the events of the opening scene take place are both introduced as qualified teachers in a local high school. Elissa and Fointam also end up as teachers in a secondary school. Mikindong and Akwen in *The Rape* (written after *Betrothal*) are also high school teachers. The re-introduction of the teaching profession in *The Rape*, while it may suggest a limitation in the writer's creative imagination, more especially highlights socio-political realities about life in Cameroon. The teaching profession attracted many high school graduates, because too often access to other more lucrative professions such as medicine and engineering was either non-

existent or strictly controlled by the politics of ethnicity.[37] Thus, many young people went to teacher training colleges as a way of making use of what was available, in the absence of alternative opportunities.

A fourth noteworthy point is that chicken features again quite prominently in this play as a delicacy. Because what we have here is a shift between an urban and a rural setting, the dynamics of class come into play, especially when one recognizes that chicken is a meal that mainly middle class families can afford on a regular basis. To kill a chicken in honour of a special guest is a practice of both traditional and modern societies. Mr and Mrs Eyong kill a chicken for Fointam, because he is their honoured guest – a future son-in-law. Bobe Ngong also plans to do the same for Fointam in the village, because he is not only his educated son visiting from the city but more so because he is coming home to present his proposed wife to the family, an act that is given great importance. But in both the traditional and urban spaces, what determines whether a chicken can be slaughtered in honour of a guest or not is the economic viability of the host. Too often, a lower class status handicaps the host in performing this ritual. Class, therefore, determines and defines the hierarchical orders within society and the kind of social relationships that are possible and can be maintained.

Beyond class or social status, however, an important factor to be considered is the gender of the person in whose honour a chicken is being slaughtered. In *Betrothal*, the masculine gender is privileged, because in both the urban and rural spaces it is Fointam who is seen as deserving of this special honour. Elissa is deemed ineligible for the privilege because, as a woman, she falls short of the masculinist standards of tradition and culture. When Bobe Ngong tells his wife, 'I don't want some prostitute to come and eat my cock' (40), it is evident that the Bikom culture reserves the "special chicken" – the cock – for males, and only in exceptional cases allows women with unquestionable virtue and standing to

[37] As shown in Chapter One, Cameroon is handicapped by ethnic and linguistic divisions which cause unequal development in many parts of the country. The Anglophone community in particular (North West and South West provinces) feels that its people are deprived of many opportunities in the public service mainly on the basis of their Anglophone identity. Studies by Konings and Nyamnjoh (2003) and Anyefru (2008) show that Anglophone Cameroonians are resentful of the unequal power structures in the country, which privilege the Francophone majority, and they have vented their grievances through various media, including print media and cyberspace.

partake of it. There is a significant reversal in the chicken metaphor in that in *The Rape* chicken is the symbol of women's vulnerability to predatory men whereas in *Betrothal* it is made a symbol of man's superiority over woman as prescribed by tradition. Either way, the ideology that is encoded is that of cultural patriarchy as a given, a standard, an indomitable structure that women must simply accept and accommodate.

Another major parallel between the two plays is the stigmatization of women as prostitutes. In *The Rape* it is not stated but implied. In *Betrothal* it is clearly assigned to the feminine gender as a characteristic of women from a particular ethnic group. Elissa embodies the prostitute figure, not necessarily in the manner in which she is portrayed, as in Rufina's case, but in the way the Bikoms stereotype her. They assume she is a prostitute, because they have heard stories of Bayangi prostitutes in Mankon. It is also assumed that she must have used black magic to charm Fointam, because no Bikom man in his right senses would want to marry a Bayangi woman. Only Bikom girls raised in the village are deemed respectable enough for "sons of the soil". Besides the obvious fact that Fointam's family is prejudiced towards Bayangis, its rejection of Elissa is also linked to her township upbringing.[38] Traditional society associates virtuous conduct only with girls raised within its borders. The city and the township symbolize moral decadence and are thus incapable of producing honourable women. The following argument by Heather Henderson (1999: 225) highlights the link between cities and female sexuality:

> What is the nature of the connection between cities and sexuality? For one thing, maintaining control over women's sexuality is a lot harder to do in a sprawling urban environment. And so the threat to traditional society is envisioned very specifically as a threat to and through female sexuality. Women will become prostitutes, and even child-murderers, and their "fall" will be a keystone of a larger social breakdown. Thus, the man who strolls city streets is a *flâneur*, as the French say. The woman who does so is a streetwalker. The very expression "to walk the streets" is synonymous with prostitution.

One could read Butake's play in this light, because not only is Elissa branded a prostitute but she is also thought of as lacking the prospect of having children, probably on the assumption that she has "murdered" many a child in the course of her "career". Her

[38] In Cameroon, the township is a term commonly used to refer to the big towns such as Kumba in the SW Province and Bamenda in the NW Province. It holds an attraction for those living in smaller towns and villages around it and a trip to the township is as good as a trip to the city except that the city (mainly Yaounde and Douala) pulls a bigger crowd because of its position as the centre of government activities.

affiliation to the city makes her a prostitute by virtue of the city's perceived propensity to corrupt women through unrestrained sexual indulgences.

The conflict between tradition and modernity is a major thematic strand in *Betrothal*. It is a common subject of concern among Anglophone writers of both the prose and dramatic genres. Both Asong and Eyoh highlight it from the perspective of succession in *The Crown of Thorns* (1990) and *The Inheritance* (1993a), respectively, while Jumbam looks at it from the point of view of religion in *The White Man of God* (1980). In these works, individual characters' perception of tradition is often at variance with the way other characters see it, for what is traditional tends to be seen as backward, unprogressive and inhibiting, while the modern carries with it connotations of moral decay, loss of identity and rebellion against social norms. Where the play or novel juxtaposes women in a rural community with those in an urban setting, the tendency is to depict the modern woman as being educated, exuding affluence, striving to be more Western than African and indifferent to African values and ideals (see Uko, 2004: 26). In *Betrothal*, both Elissa and Mrs Eyong are depicted as educated, socially advanced and open-minded women in contrast to whom the village women stand condemned for upholding traditional values.

The conflict in the play is staged through the differing perceptions of marriage by two groups of people. On the one hand, there is Elissa, Mr Eyong, Mrs Eyong, Fointam and Sama who believe that 'marriage is not a question of tribe but rather character and love' (76) and, on the other hand, there is Bobe Ngong, Nandoh Bih, her co-wives and the rest of the villagers who feel that 'it is the family which looks for the woman from a good family that is well known to [it]' (39). Fointam's decision to look for his wife by himself, to get one from a family that is not known to his family, and to propose marriage to a woman from a different cultural background is what catalyzes the conflict in this play. The climax is reached when he confronts his traditionalist father and boldly denounces the "ignorance" of traditional ways. His statement: 'I will marry without your libation' (55) is an affirmation of his Western education and, by implication, progressive outlook on other peoples and cultures. The falling action begins to set in when he and Elissa are seen preparing for their wedding. Eventually, the play reaches a resolution when the two

of them accept the peace offering from Bobe Chia and 1st Woman, signifying a re-institution of cordial relations between them and the family in the village.

On the whole, the play seeks to propagate an ideal – a united Anglophone state – which is utopian in vision. The ideal itself is laudable but the vision is 'romanticized', as Odhiambo (2009a) puts it, because it will take more than the dismantling of ethnic barriers to ensure the ethno-cultural unity of Anglophone Cameroon. In this play, Butake's vision is that of a new society characterized by cultural pluralism and ethnic unity; it is a vision of a new world order that accommodates differences and relegates biases to the past. However, that new world order is conceived not in women's revolutionary acts but in men's individualistic quest for personal fulfilment. The women go with the choices the men make and although the writer attains his vision, in the end that vision fails to conceive women in new dimensions of social expression. Throughout the play, women tend to act as dictated to them by tradition, by the men through whom tradition is actualized and by other women who see themselves as custodians of traditional values. The following section looks at how the play enunciates Butake's narrow vision of woman's space in society.

2.9 Defining the Female Space: Women, Marriage and Motherhood

In her book *Gender and Identity in the Works of Osonye Tess Onwueme* (2004), Iniobong Uko prefaces her analysis of the works of Nigerian playwright Tess Onwueme with a discussion of what she calls the 'phenomenal sacred space' of the African woman. This is the space society allocates to woman on the basis of tradition and custom. Uko sees the 'female space' in Africa as one limiting women's self-expression because 'the girl is conditioned to believe and accept that her space is always adequate and that she should adjust her activities and fit in the space rather than seek to expand the scope in which she finds herself' (2004: xiv). This claim suggests that an attempt to expand the female space will no doubt lead to repercussions, while efforts to contract it are likely to be lauded as noble. The scope of the female space is directly determined by the male through his "superior" self-appointed position as the executor of tradition:

> Though the male obviously influences female space, he does so more effectively and efficiently, in fact legitimately, within the metaphysical context as a self-appointed representative of tradition, the one through whom tradition is

> actualized. There are also traditional standards of expectations for men in the society, but the difference is that since men also ensure that these are met, many of the standards and expectations are compromised for convenience, self-interests and aggrandizement. This fact makes it easy for the African man in the African continent to enjoy boundless space unlike his counterpart in the Diaspora and at the expense of the African woman. This argument does not imply that the African man and woman are in a contest to gain space but it means that one has boundless opportunities, and prefers that the other be stifled and relegated so far behind that there exists no meeting ground between them. (Uko, 2004: xiv-xv)

Uko argues that one major aspect of tradition that clearly defines the female space is marriage. The subject of marriage has a dedicated place in feminist discourses not only because it is one of the major avenues of female subordination to male authority but also because many times, particularly in traditional societies, it is more an expression of patriarchal control over women's bodies than an expression of a woman's love for a particular man. This gains relevance especially in cultures where women's choice of spouse is often undermined and parental control over that choice is given supremacy. Closely linked to marriage is motherhood, another 'sacred space' that is expected to bring numerous joys to women (see Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood*) but which sometimes falls short of such expectations. African scholars' concern with the interrelated themes of womanhood, wifehood and motherhood is evident from the number of critiques that were generated on the subject from as early as the 1980s.[39]

What Butake presents as the female space in *Betrothal* is as constricting as that postulated in other fictional works by Achebe and his contemporaries, Ekwensi and Amadi. Uko (2004: xvi) notes that in *Things Fall Apart* can be found a classic male definition of the female space, because in this novel the marriage institution illustrates the 'absolutism of female exploitation in the claustrophobic and asphyxiating ambience of male dominance, dictatorship and terrorism'. What she means here is simply that the patriarchal order dictates man's domination over woman, in which case women who are in conjugal relationships tend to lose a sense of freedom or independence since the confines of marriage make them vulnerable to all sorts of exploitation – physical, sexual and

[39] In *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature* (1986), for example, three noteworthy articles on these themes are 'Motherhood in the Works of Male and Female Igbo Writers: Achebe, Emecheta, Nwapa and Nzekwu' by Carole Boyce Davies, 'The Grandmother in African and African-American Literature' by Mildred Hill-Lubin, and 'Marriage, Tradition and Woman's Pursuit of Happiness in the Novels of Mariama Bâ' by Edris Makward.

emotional. On his part, Butake defines the female space in *Betrothal* as a solidly fixed space in which marriage takes on the ambience of a desired goal towards which every woman strives, irrespective of whether she finds herself in an urban or rural environment. The play tends to project marriage and motherhood as twin pillars that form the defining purpose of woman's existence. The special attention Elissa pays to her appearance just before Fointam's visit, her mother's frantic attempts to impress the visitor with her cooking as well as Fointam's own pre-conceived notions of proper female behaviour are all aspects of the play that illustrate this point.

On the day Fointam is expected to visit, Elissa is given time off domestic chores to attend to her looks because 'a man always wants his woman to look smart' (11). Whether the woman wants to look smart for herself is another affair. To keep the relationship aflame, she must suppress the desires of the *self* and privilege the wants of her partner. She is thus made a public spectacle. Like Akwen in *The Rape*, Elissa must be made beautiful and young to fulfil her role of the ideal woman. Added to her beauty and youthfulness is her supposed superior morality, which contrasts sharply with the "perverse" inclinations of Michelle and Rufina. *Betrothal* gives the idea that Elissa succeeds in winning a "good" husband because she behaves "properly". This is evident in Fointam's response to Elissa's claim about her friends' jealous reactions towards her marriage: 'Tell them to behave like you and they will soon find husbands too' (64). By implication then, Elissa becomes the model of femininity and her success in finding a husband is the natural result of her morally and socially acceptable behaviour.

In her article, '"Woman" as Sign in the South African Colonial Enterprise', Dorothy Driver (1988) shows how women were shipped to colonial South Africa as a way of getting rid of what was considered 'surplus women' in England. Driver notes that these women were considered the 'dregs of British society' (1988: 6) and one can infer from this that they were passed on to the colonies as a means of ridding the family institution of possible pollutants. While in the colonies, the women still had to maintain their 'proper place' because, as Driver states, 'the place of women in the colonies was carefully defined and circumscribed within what was an avowedly masculine enterprise' (1988: 6). This notion of eliminating 'surplus women', or the surplus bodies of women, that Driver

highlights is encoded in the practice of *giving* women in marriage. In simple terms, for a man to *give* his daughter in marriage is for him to get rid of the surplus body in his house – a passing on of the "burden" to someone else, to another male. In *Betrothal*, marriage is portrayed as a way of getting rid of "excess" females. The play seems to suggest that a woman's space is either her father's house or her husband's, for outside these two spaces she has no space of her own. Elissa seems to have overstayed her allotted time in her father's house. Although Mr Eyong is convinced that Fointam will not receive a positive response from his family once he reveals to them his plans to marry Elissa, he nonetheless encourages him to go ahead because he is 'tired of seeing a full-grown woman around the house' (16). His words suggest that a full-grown woman belongs to her husband's house; singleness and, by extension, spinsterhood, is not an option. His sentiments on marriage reveal the general expectations society has of women in many patriarchal cultures. Ify Achufusi (1994: 105) notes that in the Igbo world-view generally, 'a grown up woman earns the respect of her people if she is married. She becomes fully integrated into her husband's family if she bears children. But she becomes entitled to any material inheritance only through her male children'. While this remains an Igbo worldview, it can be traced to many African societies today and rings as a reality in the world of Butake's play in which society tends to resist the need to accommodate a woman once she has reached what is often termed "marriageable age", however that age is defined.

The concept of 'surplus women' expounded by Driver resonates in this play in the relationship between Elissa and her mother. Driver makes a succinct observation about this concept as a legitimization of patriarchal discourse:

> The social threat of "surplus women" was precisely that the "surplus" in "woman" was threatening to break free, the "surplus", that is, which is at odds with the Symbolic Order which dishes up human beings in their categories of masculine and feminine, and identifies female sexuality with reproduction. About to overwhelm and disrupt the signifying system, the surplus or excess in "woman" was being excised, and the word "woman" was being firmly redefined as "feminine", thus having its status confirmed as (patriarchal) sign. (Driver, 1988: 7)

Following this argument, Elissa's maturity or ripeness for marriage becomes an excess in her that must be excised, without which excision it is bound to disrupt what Foucault

calls 'the order of things' (1991), or the Symbolic Order of pre-defined masculinity and femininity. Elissa would become not only a burden but also a threat to her mother in particular. She must, therefore, marry and have children so that her status as the feminine gender can be re-confirmed. Her subsequent marriage to Fointam and production of four children not only re-defines female sexuality as the equivalent of reproduction but also re-establishes the term "woman" as a patriarchal sign.

It has to be noted that Mrs Eyong is particularly excited about Elissa's marriage prospect, because it means re-appropriating her space as the woman of the house. Note her response to the news of the visit to Fointam's village:

> **Mrs Eyong:** That's good news, darling. The day is drawing near, at last. There is nothing as annoying as a home being run by two women. The sooner she leaves this house the better for me. (17)

This highlights the point that Elissa represents an unhealthy competition for Mrs Eyong and marriage seems to be the most convenient way for her to rid herself of this unwanted rival. Her domestic space may allow for other females, such as daughters, to co-exist with her but not when they are grown women who can easily usurp her "power" within this space. Such ones need to be *given* a space of their own and that space can only be in their husbands' houses where it can be carefully monitored and regulated by the male gaze. Mrs Eyong's desperate desire to dispose of Elissa is evident in Act Three Scene One when she, without much thought, quickly gives her consent for the marriage to proceed, in spite of the obvious rejection of Elissa by her prospective family-in-law:

> **Mrs Eyong:** Yes, Darling. I approve. Darling, you seem to be forgetting that they have been dating for seven years! You didn't date me for seven years, darling. I give my approval. (62)

She premises her decision on the length of the relationship between Elissa and Fointam as if to tell Elissa: 'If after dating a man for seven years he does not marry you, no one else will'. It is more because of this phobia of Elissa remaining unmarried and thus continuing her stay in her house than a desire to refute the prejudices of the Bikoms that Mrs Eyong advocates a wedding between the two. It must be recalled that this is a woman who has received some education to the level of becoming a high school teacher, and yet the

degree to which she has internalized patriarchal norms highlights the disparity between education and self-emancipation. The two are not necessarily complementary.

If an educated woman like Mrs Eyong is anxious to get rid of the 'surplus' in her house, what can one expect of village women like Bobe Ngong's wives for whom a daily intercourse with patriarchy is inescapable? These women enforce the objectification of women in the manner in which they aggressively support the proposed marriage between Fointam and Bobe Waindim's daughter. It is 5th Woman who states with apparent indignation: 'Why do they go and carry women from so far off when we don't know what to do with girls here?' (45). These words elucidate again the notion of 'surplus women' and the apparent need to dispose of them. 1st Woman is also appalled at the thought of Fointam marrying a woman other than the one prepared for him: 'This is worse than death for us all. And to think that we have all the while been grooming Bobe Waindim's daughter, that poor innocent girl, who is already in Class Four, for him!' (50). Both women's outbursts of "righteous anger" underscore a patronizing attitude towards female children who are seen as "excess baggage" – "goods" to be disposed of at the earliest opportunity. It shows the extent to which women have internalized patriarchal values and consequently become complicit in the commodification of their own bodies.

That female children have a lower status than the males in this society is evident in the manner in which Bobe Waindim's daughter is seen as nothing more than an article to be sold off to the highest bidder. Custom and tradition are the forces that keep the wheels of patriarchy turning and Bobe Ngong exploits them to keep women in their proper place, as it were. Because tradition empowers him to choose a wife for his son, he decides to choose one that is still young, innocent and naïve enough to present the least resistance to male domination. This explains why he is so upset when he receives Fointam's letter: 'How did you expect me to believe that my own son will be coming to show me his future wife? It is I to tell him "This is the woman I have bought for you"' (40). Encoded within these words is the notion of marriage as an economic transaction in which the female body becomes an object of trade between two families. The possibility of men "buying" women for their sons signifies not so much the horrors of arranged marriages as the space of *silence* occupied by females in this masculine enterprise.

When Bobe Ngong tells Fointam that Bobe Waindim's daughter is in Class Four and adds, for emphasis, 'Class Four, and that is enough book for a house-wife' (53), we understand that in such a traditional society the education of the girl child is suppressed through an early marriage, because it is considered irrelevant in her fulfilment of her wifely duties. Her silence is couched in her inability to contest the decision of the men over her fate. This is an imposed silence designed to keep her within her prescribed space of domesticity. Neither Nandoh Bih as the first wife of a polygamous household nor her co-wives have the right to participate in the family's decision-making process. In their society, decision-making is an exclusionary practice in which the female voice is consciously muted. Note Nandoh Bih's response to Bobe Ngong when they discuss Fointam's letter:

> **Nandoh Bih:** Do you know the woman? I mean has he ever discussed the affair with you?
> **Bobe Ngong:** Which me? Sometimes you talk as if there is wine in your head.
> **Nandoh Bih:** I was just asking; *because when you men discuss your things you never tell us. We know we are there to carry out instructions and obey orders***.** [my emphasis] (38)

This last statement by Nandoh Bih highlights the hierarchical order that prevails in Bikom society and which in turn determines relations between the sexes. The men make the decisions, the women execute them. The men are the lords and masters and the women the servants and workers. The one group exists to be served by the other. This ideology becomes a matter of feminist concern especially when one recalls the notion of man as the 'self' and woman as the 'other' and therefore the subordinate. Patriarchal ideology stipulates that woman exists not as a distinct human being but only in relation to man. She is what the Lacanians call the *jouissance au-delà* – the defining limit of man's horizon (Heath, 1987: 13). In other words, her existence is secondary and lacks validation in the absence of the male sex. Within Butake's play, women's contribution to societal growth is limited to a passive acceptance of decisions made by the menfolk. Women are classed as the "invisible" presences because, as Sama notes, 'they can only grumble but their opinion does not really count for much' (28). This does not mean that women are completely silent, since they do make their voices heard within their assigned female

enclosures, but it does elucidate their exclusion from established masculine structures to which admission is dependent entirely on gender.

The exclusionary dimensions of male discourse come to the fore not only in traditional society but also in urban spaces, for one notes with interest Mr Eyong's statement to Fointam immediately following Mrs Eyong's retreat into the kitchen: 'Now, Fointam, let's have a little man-to-man talk before the women come in' (14). Why is the subject of Elissa's marriage to Fointam catalogued a "man-to-man" talk when serious questions about the intercultural nature of the union have to be ironed out, and why is it made a "family" talk when other mundane aspects of the union are the focus? This pattern of excluding women from active participation in matters germane to their pursuit of happiness (see Makward, 1986) not only signifies a conscious slighting of their capacity to make wise decisions for themselves but also denotes the conscious silencing of women's voices in both urban and rural spaces. Theirs is a sustained marginalization that effaces all possibilities of transforming the status quo. What Butake does is to portray the challenges women face in traditional society without proposing any strategies for overcoming the inequalities that keep them at the periphery of active engagement with their communities.

In *Betrothal*, marriage is elevated as the gateway to happiness and motherhood as the ultimate crown of that happiness. This is seen in the play's projection of Elissa and Fointam as a happily married couple even after several years of rebelling against tradition. Their happiness is enshrined in the children they have borne, three boys and one girl. The playwright could not afford to leave Elissa without children, because it would have meant that tradition had triumphed over modernity. In fact, he presumably could not have made his point if he had not given Elissa male children who would perpetuate Fointam's name and thus carry on the family tradition despite living in a modern society. If we recall Achufusi's revelation about the Igbo worldview, then we begin to see that it is hard for African societies to dissociate motherhood from wifehood, or marriage from child-bearing, because they have not yet 'internalised the notion that the woman's self actualisation is no longer dependent on her biological role of reproduction' (Achufusi, 1994: 101). Butake certainly had not yet recognized that the proof of womanhood did not

lie in motherhood but in a conscious re-definition of self that replaces gendered identity formations with emancipatory, individualized constructions of femininity.

As shown in *Betrothal*, it seems inescapable for women to attain self-fulfilment through a medium other than reproduction. Women's reproductive role is elevated above any other role they may play as marriage mates or partners. When Fointam tells Elissa that his mother would be happy to have a daughter-in-law, because she had been pestering him about 'taking a wife and beginning to make children' (21), it is evident that from both his and Nandoh Bih's perspective marriage and childbearing are not mutually exclusive processes. More indications of Fointam's view of marriage as more of a procreative venture than a commitment to friendship is apparent when he tells Sama about his decision to marry Elissa: 'Yes, after all these years of friendship I think we should marry and settle down to making children' (24). The point Butake seems to make in this play is that marriage with its function for procreation is the ideal medium for preserving strong societies that will continue to uphold African values.

The association of marriage with child-bearing is further echoed by Mr Eyong towards the end of the play when he performs the ceremonial handing-over of Elissa to Fointam:

> **Mr Eyong:** Elissa Eyong, as the head of this house, and as demanded by tradition, I Itoh Eyong, rightful heir of Agbor Eyong, give you in marriage to Fointam Ngong, and *may God grant you children as numerous as the stars in the skies of this country*. [my emphasis] (63)

Reading his last words one wonders if Fointam and Elissa would cope if by some misfortune, or perhaps fortune, they end up having children 'as numerous as the stars'. The hyperbole indicates that the happiness of their marriage is predicated on the children they will have in the years ahead. But why does Butake put the words above into Mr Eyong's mouth? Why does he have Mr Eyong utter a request specifically for children and not for happiness? Perhaps it is because in his worldview if such happiness comes without children or if children are absent from the package, then the marriage will inevitably be unhappy. It is expected that children be a necessary part of the marriage because, as Boyce-Davies states, 'in many African societies *motherhood defines womanhood*' (1986c: 243). Butake employs the dream technique to further articulate this romanticization of motherhood, for in Fointam's dream Nandoh Bih tells Bobe Ngong

that she had a dream in which Elissa's child had 'a long penis like this' (67) and she uses her hand to illustrate the length. The dream within a dream foretelling the birth of a son effectively validates the institutionalization of marriage as a child production unit. It also proposes the notion that the birth of a male child is the ultimate evidence of the success of a marriage.

It has to be noted that while much of the talk connecting marriage to child-bearing is done by men, notably Fointam and Mr Eyong, Elissa herself says very little about the subject. Her opinion on the matter is completely obliterated, for it is taken as a given that she must desire children, or even if she does not, she still has to bear them because Fointam needs them to validate his manhood and to sanction his rebellion against tradition. The fact that Fointam wins the bet over the sex of the children three times consecutively points to the recognition society accords to him as the dominant sex. Elissa is merely the medium by which he enshrines his manhood, establishes his independence from his father, and dictates the terms of relations between him and his family.

The most striking irony in this play is that it is women who ensure that no extension of the borders of their designated space takes place. The female space as defined for them by the menfolk is accepted and endorsed through various prejudices directed towards other women who seek to go beyond the prescribed space. When Fointam, Elissa and Sama arrive at Fointam's birth village, it is the women who welcome them first, with much glee and jubilation. But on learning that Fointam's proposed wife is not Bikom, they adopt a hostile reaction towards the trio, but especially towards Elissa. Their reaction is tantamount to a defensive strategy launched to protect a value system that is under threat of dissolution. The following lines from the play are informative:

> **5th Woman:** Why do they go and carry women from so far off when we don't know what to do with girls here? How is she going to speak to us now that we can't speak grammar?
> **Fointam:** She will learn our language. That is not a problem at all.
> **1st Woman:** "She will learn our language". When will she learn our language? Let me pass. I am going to cook my soup. What women!
> **5th Woman:** My fire must have gone out already. Let me go and see. What women!
> **2nd Woman:** Let me go and wash my baby. What women!
> **3rd Woman:** I am going to fetch water from the stream. Stay with your women!

> **4th Woman:** I had already predicted that this woman will come from outside. Let me wash my feet and go to the market.
> **Sama:** Fointam, you see what I told you? (45-46)

More arresting than anything else in this excerpt is the fact that in their declared rejection of Elissa the women each go off to perform some domestic chore that they deem more important than entertaining the thought of an "outsider" becoming a part of their community. Their retreat into the domestic space is an affirmation of their acceptance to stay within that space. The kind of activities they run off to engage in – cooking, washing children, getting water from the stream and going to the market – are suggestive of their society's distribution of tasks according to gender where what is considered as "feminine" tasks remains the exclusive domain of females.

It is quite conspicuous that the play dismisses the possibility of female solidarity in the interest of maintaining an order of male dominance. Among the five women who are "privileged" to be given a numerical identity (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th Woman), to distinguish them from the lot of Bobe Ngong's wives, only 5th Woman eventually suppresses her biases and begins to appreciate Elissa more as a fellow woman than as a "Bayangi woman", but her attempts to plead Elissa's case experience a stillbirth owing to the overpowering voices of her co-wives. While she believes that the Bayangis are 'women like us' (49), 1st Woman insists on seeing Elissa as a Bayangi with devious powers: 'Every Nyangi woman lives in the bush in the form of some animal. And all of them, without exception, go around with frogs in their arses' (49). Nandoh Bih holds the same prejudiced opinion of Bayangis and is convinced that Elissa has used black magic to entice her son. Her song of lament includes numerous images – images of the grotesque – which are intended to convey the deviousness she ascribes to the Bayangis:

> **Nandoh Bih:** A kite has flown away with my only chick; and people say I should not lament? Oh! Woe is me! The leopard has caught my only goat; and people say I should close my eyes? A thief has seized a basket from my waist, and they say I should not lament? … It were better to remain barren as the rocks than to have children whose heads are controlled by foreigners. Where has it ever been heard that a man was controlled by a woman? …Where did you pick her, my son? Where did she lay the trap, my father? Where did she throw the hook, my husband? Oh! Woe is me! Woe is me! Woe is me! And people say I should not cry? How can I not lament when the kite is sailing off with my only chick? How

> can I not cry when the thief has seized my waist-cloth? How can I not lament when I have been bitten by a deadly snake? (47-48)

The image of kites and leopards preying on chicks and goats, respectively, suggests the perceived predatory nature of Bayangi women. They are conceived as snakes that bite, traps that ensnare and fish hooks that catch. In totality, the images used in this song of lament project Fointam as Elissa's victim, gained through the use of her seductive body, which makes her a temptress *par excellence* – another "daughter of Eve". Her relationship with Fointam is also attributed to the magical powers presumably common among people from her ethnic group. In fact, her descending from a family that also has Bakweri roots intensifies her status as a witch in the eyes of the Bikom women.[40] The following lines are informative:

> **1st Woman:** … I am telling you that this Nyangi woman has cooked our son in a medicine-pot. He is lost. *(Nandoh Bih moans even more)*. Not to talk of the Bakweri! They say her mother is Bakweri. We are even lucky that he had already built this ramshackle of a thing he calls a house before he met the she-devil. From now on every anini [penny] of his goes to the Bakweri woman. Don't you all see how he came in today empty-handed? Has Fointam ever come to see us with empty hands? This is worse than death for us all. And to think that we have all the while been grooming Bobe Waindim's daughter, that poor innocent girl, who is already in Class Four, for him! We will hear more of it when Bobe comes back. But if Wallang Yisa [the soothsayer] says "yes" to this thing, I will sooner die than live. (50)

This long diatribe is a classic illustration of a mother's despair over the loss of a son to a coastal woman who is perceived as a worthless addition to a Grassfields family.[41] It is rather too melodramatic as 1st Woman makes claims for which she has no proof. She claims that Fointam came home empty-handed, which is untrue because we know that he

[40] There is a historical link between the Bayangi and the Bakweri which points to a common interest in witchcraft. Edwin Ardener (1996: 250) reports that in 1955 and 1956, in an attempt to curb the spread of *nyongo* in their territory, Bakweri villagers sought the services of *Obasi Njom*, a witch-finding association among the Bayangi. The result was that 'with the new advanced ritual technology they began to clear the *nyongo* witchcraft from the villages' (Ardener, 1996: 250-251). Arderner (1996: 248) explains *nyongo* as a kind of witchcraft: 'a person with *nyongo* was always prosperous, for he was a member of a witch association that had the power of causing its closest relatives, even its children, to appear to die. But in truth they were taken away to work for their witch-masters on another mountain sixty or seventy miles to the north: Mount Kupe in the territory of the Bakossi people'. While Ardener's explanation captures this phenomenon of *nyongo* as it is known in Cameroon, in my experience *nyongo* was a cult associated more with Bamileke and Grassfields tribes (in the Western and North West provinces, respectively) than with the Bakweris and Bakossis in the South West.

[41] This point relates to an earlier section of this chapter in which I outlined the dynamics that come into play when a man from the NW Province decides to marry a woman from the SW Province.

brought a piece of washing soap for each of his father's fifteen wives, as is customary. The melodrama notwithstanding, 1st Woman's attack on Elissa is illuminating in that it indicates that Elissa's combined Bayangi and Bakweri ancestry leaves her beyond redemption from ethnic prejudice.

Besides the image of a witch, another image that emerges from Nandoh Bih's song of lament is that of Elissa as a prostitute. When she says 'Where did you pick her, my son' (48), she deliberately implies that Elissa is a streetwalker. This recalls vividly Henderson's argument noted earlier that a woman who walks the street is identical to a prostitute. Nandoh Bih's choice of words is intentionally derogatory. She refers to Elissa as a 'foreigner' and a 'strange woman', to alienate her further from the Bikom culture into which she is trying to make an incursion. Essentially, she denies Elissa space in her world. In this way, she executes beforehand Bobe Ngong's rejection of Elissa as his future daughter-in-law.

It must be recalled that even before laying eyes on Elissa Bobe Ngong had iterated his rebuff of the union between her and Fointam. When he receives Fointam's letter about his visit home, he promises to kill a rooster for him. The rooster symbolizes the honour he intends to bestow on Fointam for becoming a "man" in a sense, since marriage is one of the avenues that define manhood in traditional society. But while he welcomes the prospect of Fointam getting married, he is skeptical about the person he is marrying. He gives Nandoh Bih the following instruction:

> **Bobe Ngong:** Alright, you ask the children to catch my big cock; the one my Chong brought from Bobe Yibain's funeral. *But don't kill it until they arrive. I don't want some prostitute to come and eat my cock*. [my emphasis] (40)

In these lines, the cock comes to represent a phallic order, especially if one recalls that the term "cock" is also the obscene English term for penis. Bobe Ngong's words, evidently uttered with emotion, symbolize his rejection of the possibility of a "prostitute" and "foreigner" emasculating the head of the household. Significantly, Elissa and Fointam arrive at the village and leave without eating the promised chicken. The image of the cock (as opposed to a hen) also emphasizes masculinist ideologies that govern social institutions such as marriage.

On the whole, then, *Betrothal* shows that although women's oppression is the direct result of patriarchal values which place man as the dominant sex, women too are often accomplices in their own oppression. In pitting themselves against Elissa, the Bikom women fail to sympathize with her particular predicament as a victim of tradition, ethnic prejudice and ethno-cultural conflicts. They lack a sense of solidarity and hence engender their own oppression. While the play elucidates the different media by which women's oppression is effected, it is silent on the avenues of change that could be explored by women to reverse their situation and thus extract a more humane treatment from men. Moreover, the women's perception of themselves leaves the feminist reader highly dissatisfied, as they tend to lack a sense of willpower. They accept, endorse and preserve a status quo that consigns them to an inferior position and to a confined space. Essentially, *Betrothal* depicts female characters that are at best uninspiring. By perpetuating images of women disempowered by tradition, Butake directly enforces an institutionalization of female subjugation to patriarchal manipulation.

2.10 Daughters of Eve, Sons of Whom?

In the two plays discussed in this chapter, women characters tend to function only within the space allocated to them by tradition and social mores, as seen in the case of Akwen, Nandoh Bih and even Mrs Eyong. Within family life, woman's position is clearly defined. As wife, she is the cook, cleaner, bearer of children, and entertainer of visitors. As a mother, she is the one who ensures that her children toe the line. If they do not, she gets blamed for their waywardness. Sometimes, she suffers the punishment intended for them. For the women who venture into spaces beyond the given, such as Rufina and Michelle, social ostracism becomes a reality. Talking about the gendering of space and women's mobility in Northern Tanzania, Liv Haram (2004: 213) makes the following observation:

> In terms of the gendered dimension of space, unmarried women in towns are conceived of as being socially and economically misplaced and are commonly seen as sexually loose…. In contrast to the rural wives, idealised as hard-working women and the caretakers of the family and children, townswomen, on the other hand, are stereotyped as "bad", wasting time just gossiping, dancing, and drinking, and often using their bodies immorally to support themselves.

Haram's statement resonates with Stratton's claim about the good woman/whore dichotomy which marked much of female portrayal in literary works of the 1960s. In the two plays discussed herein, Butake duplicates this trend and portrays women who embody the polarities embedded within the Mother Africa trope. If it is not temptresses such as Michelle, Rufina and Elissa (the "daughters of Eve"), then it is good housewives like Akwen, Nandoh Bih and her co-wives who maintain the order of things. The question that begs answering, therefore, is: if rebellious women are the daughters of Eve, then rebellious men are the sons of whom – Adam or God?

Although Butake's plays highlight some of the media through which women's oppression is effected, such as arranged marriage and enforced silence, they fail to challenge the sexist stereotypes of women that may have inspired the narratives in the first place. In these two plays, there is no evidence of female militancy and revolt against patriarchal and colonial structures that deprive women of equal rights with men. Neither is there any movement by women from an apolitical stance to a united female front that engenders new agencies. Women's agency is sorely missing from these plays and that leaves the plays deficient of a women's political agenda. Significantly, *The Rape of Michelle* appears right at the end of the *Lake God* collection of plays. Perhaps it is Butake's awareness of the play's ideological weaknesses that dictated this positioning of the play as the last in a collection that principally aims to show his commitment to the women empowerment project in Cameroon.

For his three subsequent plays, *Lake God*, *The Survivors* and *And Palm Wine Will Flow*, Butake has been celebrated by critics as a pacesetter in women empowerment discourses in Anglophone Cameroon literature (see Lyonga, 1993; Ngwang, 2004; Odhiambo, 2007). The following chapter looks at the female body as a central icon in these three plays, with the purpose of making a slightly different argument from those of the critics listed above – namely, that through the creation of assertive, politically-driven female characters Butake endows women with power (political, social and sexual) but at the same time the masculinization of the women characters in the plays and the sexualization of the political space raise two fundamental questions: at the end of the day, whose empowerment is the playwright advocating, the women's or the men's? Is female

empowerment in these plays just an ‘attractive packaging’, as Stratton puts it (1990: 123), or does it really serve the purpose of elevating women above the status of daughters of Eve? An attempt to answer these questions is made in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

DIS/EMPOWERING THE FEMALE BODY IN *LAKE GOD, THE SURVIVORS* AND IN *AND PALM WINE WILL FLOW*

> Men's relation to feminism is an impossible one. This is not said sadly or angrily (though sadness and anger are both known and common reactions) but politically. Men have a necessary relation to feminism – the point after all is that it should change them too, that it involves learning new ways of being women *and men* against and as an end to the reality of women's oppression – and that relation is also necessarily one of a certain exclusion – the point after all is that this is a matter *for women*, that it is their voices and actions that must determine the change and redefinition. Their voices and actions, not ours: no matter how "sincere," "sympathetic" or whatever, we are always also in a male position which brings with it all the implications of domination and appropriation, everything precisely that is being challenged, that has to be altered.
> (Heath, 1987: 1)

3.1 Introduction

The view that men cannot be feminists is one that has undergone serious re-assessment over time, as African feminists have come to appreciate the need to accommodate men's voices in the ultimate quest for a more gender-sensitive and egalitarian African social system. Mary Kolawole (2004: 261) maintains that for women's conditions to be ameliorated men have to be taken on board the feminist wagon since they constitute a large percentage of policy makers and political office holders (see also Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997: 13; Ekpa, 2000: 35). As noted in a previous chapter, male writers such as the Senegalese Ousmane Sembene and the South African Zakes Mda have been acknowledged in feminist scholarly writing for their sympathetic and less chauvinistic approach to the question of women's exercise of power within both traditional and modern society. Nevertheless, some degree of scepticism still needs to be maintained when looking at male writers' construction of the female body in most of the literatures of Africa. As Stephen Heath admits in the quotation cited at the beginning of this chapter, no matter how sympathetic a man can be about a woman's plight, he is always in a male position, a position which comes with ideologies of domination and appropriation – the very things that feminists are challenging. Butake rightly acknowledges that placing

emphasis on women in his plays does not automatically make him a hero to women, because being a *man* means that women would always take what he writes about them with a 'pinch of salt' (see interview under Appendix III).

Butake's writing embodies a rhetoric intended to conscientize readers and audiences on the role women play within power structures in Grassfields societies (NW Province of Cameroon). The writer has made a significant effort to depict powerful women in his plays, as several scholars such as Lyonga (1993), Ngwang (2004) and Odhiambo (2009b) have shown. However, a more nuanced reading of Butake's writing reveals that in his most celebrated plays there tends to be a simultaneous empowering and disempowering of the female body. This chapter focuses on the ways in which women in Butake's plays negotiate power in male-dominated societies and how, in their response to the exercise of power by men, they seem to gain entrance into the politics of the public space. Portraits of empowered women are explored against the backdrop of a new vision, one that encompasses socio-political change as brought about through the collective action of women and men. The three plays under discussion in this chapter are *Lake God* (1986), *The Survivors* (1989) and *And Palm Wine Will Flow* (1990), plays in which Butake engages with discourses of power in both the public and private domains. In both spaces, the female body is placed at the centre of significant events but not always does it function as the subject of power (as opposed to the object of it). Ways of writing woman's body are examined from the point of view of the body itself as the 'principal locale of the idioms and fantasies used in depicting power' (Mbembe, 1992: 7). By the end of this chapter, it will have been illustrated that while the playwright makes a significant effort to elevate woman above the daughter-of-Eve status identified in Chapter Two and to give her a different kind of power – one that is geared towards the communal good, he also ensures that her possession of power is confined to the sexual space – with sex featuring as a political weapon – so as not to destabilize the symbolic order of male dominance.

3.2 The "Women Empowerment" Plays

Although Butake has stated that the plays *Lake God*, *The Survivors* and *And Palm Wine Will Flow* are simply reflections of socio-political realities in Cameroon (see interview

under Appendix III), there is a great deal of utopian vision in these plays, which is perhaps his attempt to re-create his society in alternative ways. The women in these three plays stand in contrast to the manipulative Michelle and Rufina and the submissive Akwen portrayed in *The Rape of Michelle* discussed in Chapter Two, not only because they are seen to be actively involved in the re-ordering of their society but also because they are united in their stance against male domination. All three plays were written and published at different times but were re-published in 1999 by Éditions CLÉ as part of a collection of plays by Butake. According to the foreword to this collection, *Lake God* was shot for television in studio and was broadcast several times on the Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV). *The Survivors*, originally published by Éditions SOPECAM, was also broadcast on CRTV, while *And Palm Wine Will Flow*, also published originally by Éditions SOPECAM, made its first appearance on stage in March 1990.

3.2.1 *Lake God*

Lake God dramatizes the anger unleashed by a supernatural force on the residents of a village whose leader abandons the traditional ways of worship, converts to a new religion and marries a woman from another clan. There are indications of an impending calamity right at the beginning of the play when a voice, later revealed to be the voice of the priest of the lake god, is heard warning the Fon (the leader) of the dangers he faces as a result of his continued association with the catholic priest, Father Leo. Another sign of future unrest is the sudden resurgence of the Fibuen, the women's secret society, which is heard making its way to the Fon's palace after a long period of inactivity. The women of the Fibuen arrive at the palace carrying the bound body of Dewa, a Mbororo cattle rearer.[42] They accuse Dewa of poor management of his cattle, resulting in cattle straying into Ngangba, their farming area, and destroying their crops. The Fon listens sympathetically to the women's complaints but refuses to acquiesce to their request that the cattle rearers be sent out of the village. Instead, he offers them 20 000CFA francs as compensation for

[42] The Mbororos are a nomadic group of people found in various parts of Cameroon, from the northern provinces to the southern regions. They tend to settle wherever they find suitable grazing land for their cattle. There is a huge Mbororo population in the North West Province, perhaps because of the cold climate in this part of the country, which makes it favourable for cattle habitation. Henri Bocquené's *Memoirs of a Mbororo: The Life of Ndudi Umaru, Fulani Nomad of Cameroon* (2002) is an insightful anthropological record of the life of an ordinary Mbororo man in Cameroon.

their loss. The women, however, refuse his offer and leave the palace in dissatisfaction. Back in the enclaves of their secret cult, they decide to starve their husbands, physically and sexually, so as to incite them to compel the Fon to send away the cattle rearers and to perform the traditional rites of worship due to the god of the lake on whom they rely for a bountiful harvest.

The plan works and after a few days the Kwifon, the men's secret society which had been banned for its activities, is re-established as a group of men decide to seek Shey Bo-Nyo's advice on what should be done to appease the lake god and to reverse the impending catastrophe on their land. Shey Bo-Nyo, the priest of the lake god, apprises the men of the intensity of the lake god's anger, evident in the boiling of the lake, and advises that prompt action is needed. Under the leadership of Shey Tanto, the Kwifon enters the palace and demands that the Fon set a date for performing the required sacrifices to the lake god. The Fon rejects this request on the basis of his new religious beliefs which forbid him from participating in what he perceives as heathen sacrifice. Provoked by the Fon's obstinacy and moved by the persistent boiling of the lake, the Kwifon returns to the palace the following day and takes the Fon away. Angela, the Fon's Christian wife, seeks help from Father Leo, but before the priest can summon the police to their aid there is a loud bang and both he and Angela are seen coughing wildly and collapsing on the floor. It is on this note of mystery and speculation on what the bang means that the play ends. The epilogue (referred to in the play as the passage) dispels some of the speculations when it reveals a ruined landscape peopled by five survivors of a disaster.

Lake God is built around a historical event, what has come to be known in Cameroon history books as the Lake Nyos disaster of 1986. In 1986, there was an explosion in Lake Nyos (in the NW Province) which killed many residents in the villages surrounding the lake. In the absence of satisfactory scientific explanations of the cause of the explosion, many people at the time insinuated that the lake had been used as a testing ground for a new atomic bomb by certain Western powers (see Eyoh, 1993b: 103; Tangwa, 1993:

169).[43] Butake subtly captures this public opinion in *Lake God* when at the beginning of the play Father Leo informs the Fon of the arrival on the previous night of two Europeans who had headed straight for the lake that morning and were to return to the capital city immediately after lunch. The said Europeans are never seen and what we know of their mission is only what Father Leo speculates about it, namely, that they are hungry for knowledge. In this way, Butake acknowledges the general sentiments of people at the time of the Lake Nyos disaster but neither endorses their speculations nor demystifies the situation. For adding mystery to a tragedy whose causes even scientists cannot agree on (see Lyonga, 1993: 179), Butake has been faulted as a writer who takes refuge in 'anachronism and cosmogonic myths' (Tangwa: 1993: 169), escaping into the safe zone of mythology instead of confronting the issues surrounding the explosion with the directness that the time and situation demanded.

Eyoh (1993b: 103) describes *Lake God* as Butake's dramatic re-invention of the Lake Nyos disaster from a metaphysical point of view in which, by tracing the demise to the abnegation of a people's mores, he questions what has become of Cameroonians' collective essence. Beyond the metaphysical, though, the play seems to be Butake's proposition of an effective system of accountability in political leadership in Africa. Africans often tend to blame the West for the many problems plaguing their continent. While not exonerating the West, Butake shows in this play that African leaders need to accept some responsibility for the conflicts dividing their peoples, for it is only then that they can begin to find ways of healing the fractured edges of their societies. The village in which the events of *Lake God* take place is not given any specific name; it is simply

[43] Since 1986, there has still not been a conclusive and satisfactory scientific explanation for the cause of the deaths of the 1 700 people and numerous cattle that were the casualties of the Lake Nyos disaster. According to a documentary by *National Geographic*, scientific research revealed that although the lake sits on the crater of a dormant volcano, the gas that killed the Nyos inhabitants could not have been hydrogen sulphate (volcanic gas) since there was no sign of this gas on the trees surrounding the lake, no sound of an eruption, and no trace of temperature change around the lake. Scientists were therefore compelled to speculate that the killer gas could have been carbondioxide that had accumulated at the bottom of the lake over the years. This conclusion was based on inference to similar tragic events in other lakes in other parts of the world and not on any concrete evidence emanating from the site of the Lake Nyos disaster itself.

referred to as "the land". This opens up the possibility of seeing the said land as a microcosm of Africa itself.[44]

3.2.2 *The Survivors*

As the title suggests, *The Survivors* is a play about a group of people who escape death after a tragic incident in their village. The five survivors are confronted with the task of retracing their steps to a stable life, a task which proves Herculean in the face of destitution, waste and the constant presence of a domineering military officer. In order to soften Officer's heart and placate him into giving the survivors food provisions, one of the survivors – the only adult female survivor – goes to him and offers him her body. The plan succeeds and she returns to her fellow travellers dressed in new clothes and carrying packets of biscuits and bottles of water. Officer, however, would not allow the survivors to continue on their journey to Ewawa, because their leaving the area would put a stop to the flow of aid he has been receiving from internal and external donors. Although the survivors are resentful of Officer's greedy exploitation of their unfortunate circumstances, they are nonetheless compelled to accept his benevolence. Old One's attempts to deny his dependence on Officer's benevolence by refusing to eat the biscuits brought by Mboysi is self-defeating, because in the end he accepts the water offered to him, which water ensures his survival.

While Old One and Ngujoh continue to lament over the state of affairs in which they find themselves and to watch over Tata and Bolame, Mboysi frequents Officer's cottage in an attempt to coax him into letting them go. On one such visit, she manages, through pretense, to manipulate Officer into giving her his gun. It is this gun that she uses to kill him. However, before she concludes her dance of jubilation on her victory over Officer, she is shot by another soldier offstage. The soldier walks in with two others, admires her beauty and commands his two companions to carry her lifeless body away. Thus, the play, like *Lake God*, ends in gloominess and waste.

[44] In the discussion on *Lake God*, the term land would be used to refer both to the village as a political entity and to arable land as a natural resource.

Like its predecessor, *The Survivors* is informed by a historical experience, for there was documented evidence that following the Lake Nyos disaster of 1986 Cameroon received international aid, which aid fell prey to systematic looting by top government officials (see Eyoh, 1993b: 103). Thus, *The Survivors* is a continuation of *Lake God* in terms of the sequence of events. There is evidence in both plays to support this claim. First, the number of characters with which *Lake God* ends is the same number with which *The Survivors* opens. In the epilogue of *Lake God*, the reader is presented with five characters – Man, Woman, Boy, Girl and Shey Bo-Nyo – who have escaped death after the lake god unleashes its anger on the village. These survivors meet one another by chance and, through conversation, learn from one another the toll of human destruction resulting from the tragedy. Without much deliberation, they decide to seek refuge in Ewawa where they hope to find food and shelter (*Lake God*, p. 58). With the Boy supporting Shey Bo-Nyo by carrying the staff of Kwifon, all five survivors proceed towards Ewawa, bringing the play to its end. Significantly, *The Survivors*, published three years after *Lake God* in 1989, opens with five survivors of a catastrophe – Old One, Tata, Bolame, Mboysi and Ngujoh. The choice of words and tone of voice of these characters are reminiscent of those of the five survivors at the end of *Lake God*. The following table illustrates that Ngujoh, Mboysi, Tata, Bolame and Old One are re-incarnations of the five survivors in *Lake God*:

Lake God		*The Survivors*
Man	→	Ngujoh
Woman	→	Mboysi
Boy	→	Tata
Girl	→	Bolame
Shey Bo-Nyo	→	Old One

The Man, Woman, Boy and Girl in *Lake God* have moved from being simply random survivors of a disaster to individualized characters with specific names. Shey Bo-Nyo, however, is now simply the Old One, perhaps because his role as the high priest of the lake god is no longer relevant. At this stage, he simply represents the wisdom of the older generation. The irony here is that these survivors have now reverted to the nomadic

lifestyle associated with the Mbororos in *Lake God*, whom the women wanted out of their village. In elucidating the survivors' need for re-settlement among and acceptance by the people of Ewawa, the play points to the uncertainty of life and the value of peaceful human relations in times of need.

The second aspect that functions as a link between the two plays is the music of the Ngem that accompanies both the exit from stage of the five survivors in *Lake God* and the appearance on stage of the five survivors in *The Survivors*. The Ngem is a mournful tune and it is only fitting that it is used to end and open both plays, respectively. The rhythm of the Ngem represents the element of continuity, not only in terms of plot but also in terms of the atmosphere of despondency that dominates both plays. In spite of the link between the two plays, each play is totally independent of the other and each has aesthetic merits without reference to the other. Whereas *Lake God* can be read as a dramatization of the human tendency to waste life, *The Survivors* can be seen as a dramatization of the human instinct to protect life. The latter play comes as redemption to the former, for although the element of wastefulness is still evident in *The Survivors*, on a broader scale the play encapsulates a more positive outlook on life than *Lake God* does.

3.2.3 *And Palm Wine Will Flow*

In this play, Butake again takes his readers into that spiritual realm that is the orbit of humans' relationship with the supernatural. The first scene of the play is set in the sacred grove of Nyombom where Shey Ngong, the high priest of the gods, performs libations invoking the gods to respond to the plight of the people of Ewawa. This particular scene is reminiscent of Scene Two of Maimo's *Sov-Mbang the Soothsayer* in which Sov-Mbang enters the sacred grove and invokes the gods of his land for guidance and protection. For Shey Ngong, Ewawa has become a palm wine republic ruled by an alcoholic Fon, because 'the Fon has lost vision' and the elders of the land now 'listen only to the inner voice of greed' (89).[45] The mood of the play at this opening scene is one of despair. Shey Ngong is at loggerheads with the Fon, with the result that his wives' farmlands are seized and given to Kibanya's wives. Tensions between the two escalate

[45] All textual references are to *And Palm Wine Will Flow* in *Lake God and Other Plays* (1999).

when the Fon seizes the palm bush, depriving Shey Ngong of the palm wine he needs for his libations.

Kwengong as Earth-goddess and Tapper as Kibaranko intervene in the conflict, each storming and wreaking havoc in the Fon's palace. But the final stroke on the Fon comes from the women's society. After meeting and performing certain rituals, the women assign Kwengong the task of delivering to the palace a pot filled with their urine. Kwengong dutifully presents this to the Fon. In response to the Fon's repulsion at the sight of the pot's contents, she pronounces death on him and breaks the pot on his head. Back in the shrine, Kwengong, Tapper and Shey Ngong agree that there would no longer be Fons in Ewawa. Shey Ngong is elected to lead the people through the council of elders on condition that he never abuses this position of power. The play ends with Tapper informing the people of the changes in the leadership structures of their society.

In this play, Butake draws extensively from oral tradition, as evident in the wide selection of proverbs, incantations and songs that embellish the characters' verbal interaction. Shey Ngong's speech in particular is resonant of that of Obierika and the council of elders in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Butake's own admission of being influenced by Achebe in his use of language (see De la Taille, Werner & Tarkang, 1986: 54) is clearly reflected in the play. The proverbs, incantations and songs used in the text are replete with animal imagery that heightens the conflict between Shey Ngong and the Fon. Metaphors such as 'your Fon is a goat' (92) and 'the leopard does not wrestle with a goat' (93) project Shey Ngong as occupying a position superior to that of the Fon, by virtue of his closer ties with the gods of Ewawa. According to Ambanasom (1993: 120), Butake's wide use of metaphorical language is fitting because the metaphors highlight the allegorical nature of the play. To elaborate, the play is an allegorical representation of a Cameroonian society infested by propagandist discourses 'employed by ruling classes to validate their monopoly over state power' and their 'cynical manipulation of traditional, cultural and symbolic codes to authenticate their social status' (Eyoh, 1998: 118). It is clearly Butake's indictment of authoritarian rule and non-democratic government practices. The title of the play is significant in that it exposes to ridicule the tragic devaluation of honour titles in a society that once conferred nobility on a man on the basis of his outstanding

achievements. From a higher plain of symbolism, the play is a lament over the phenomenon of arbitrary appointments that has come to mark the New Deal leadership of President Paul Biya.

3.2.4 Utopia vs Dystopia

Both *Lake God* and *And Palm Wine* are not so much about the empowerment of the women within a simultaneously empowered community but the empowerment of the community at the expense of the women, for in these two plays women are made to step in to restore order in society but once that stability is attained they hand over the reigns of power to the men again. This is quite vivid in *And Palm Wine* in which women's intervention in state politics results in the re-institution of a new order of democratic governance which is, however, still headed by a male-dominated council of elders. The play is utopian in vision because it promotes revolutionary modes of thinking which envisage, to use Ihom's words, the 'establishment of a new socio-political order that will ensure a people's liberty, justice and happiness' (2000: 115). Kubayanda (1991: 8) asserts that utopia is the African writer's most promising alternative to tyrannical post-colonial leadership in Africa:

> Literary production and criticism actually is an integral part of the process of state formation, for at the heart of the polemic is the search for new political orders for a continent that is viewed by intellectuals as desperately in need of social change. The writer articulates the ideas, words and images that relate to or undercut real power to construct a powerful alternative utopia or a new sense of nationality.

Just how intense the 'new sense of nationality' is that Butake's utopian fiction creates in Cameroonians, both within and out of the country, can best be determined by audiences' reaction to the staged plays and critics' intellectual response to the vision presented in the texts. It would seem that while *Lake God* and *The Survivors* were favourably received by audiences in Yaounde, the response to *And Palm Wine* went beyond favourable to an ecstatic endorsement of the play's radical proposals for change.

Perhaps this celebrated acceptance of the play was induced by the very fact that it was first staged at a time when cries for democratic politics were at their peak. The play made its debut appearance on 27 March 1990 at the Hilton Hotel in Yaounde, and according to Lyonga (1993: 177), it came at the height of pro-democracy demonstrations which

resulted in student arrests during the 1991/1992 academic year. Lyonga observed that during the performance of the play, both Anglophone and Francophone students in the audience endorsed Kwengong's pronouncements by chorusing her lines, and thereafter Kwengong became the students' alibi for expressing their politically dissenting views. The play has also received tremendous acclaim in the world of critical writing, not only because, as Nyamndi claims, it endows women with 'a nobler sense of mission' as they 'start and sustain the ultimate battle for survival' (1996: 231), but also because 'it dared to encourage popular change in society at a time Cameroon was suffering the pangs of totalitarian government' (Takem, 2002: 8). In fact, it has been argued that the play foreshadowed the birth of the SDF, the first opposition political party launched in Cameroon on 26 May 1990, and this argument is premised on the fact that the SDF slogan "Power to the people" resonates with the play's final announcement of a new democratic dispensation for the people of Ewawa (see Takem, 2002: 8; Lyonga, 1993: 178; Butake, 1999: 3). Thus, Kubayanda's view that utopian writing accelerates the process of nation building resonates with Cameroonians' response to the stage production of *And Palm Wine*.

3.3 Women, Sex and Discourses of Dis/empowerment

Before delving into the discourses on sex and female power as elucidated in Butake's drama, it is important to show first of all that the ritualistic display of the female body in public performance, which is a central empowerment strategy in the "women empowerment" plays, has historical parallels in which women's bodies created avenues for the institution of female power. However, a counter argument is made here that although Butake's fictionalization of actual historical events could be read as evidence of verisimilitude, the manner in which his plays capture historical accounts of female militancy is problematic not only because it sexualizes women's political activity but also because it projects body politics as the mainframe of women's agency.

3.3.1 The Anlu of Kom and the Ta'kembeng of Bamenda

In the Cameroonian historical experience, the Anlu of Kom and the Ta'kembeng of Bamenda are two traditional women's societies that have been acknowledged for their spearheading of protest movements. The Anlu is a traditional women's group among the

Kom in the Grassfields region of Cameroon. The general consensus among the sources consulted is that traditional *anlu* referred to disciplinary action taken against men (and sometimes women) who committed offenses of a sexual nature against women (Ritzenthaler, 1960: 151; Ardener, 1975: 37; Nkwi, 1985: 37; Chilver, 1992: 114). Such offenses include the beating of a pregnant woman, the impregnating of a nursing mother within two years after the birth of her child, the insulting of a woman's genitals, the verbal and physical abuse of old women, and the sexual violation of a female family member.

In the event that one of these abominable acts was committed, women came together and performed a ritual, the aim of which was to ostracize the offender until he repented. The women came out early in the morning dressed in men's clothing and decked in vines and stormed the compound of the offender, singing obscene songs and dancing to their rhythms. They defiled the compound of the offender by defecating and urinating on every valuable item, thereby turning the compound into a public latrine (Ritzenthaler, 1960: 151; Ardener, 1975: 37). Essentially, 'revenge is taken on an offender by corporate action, and typically he is disgraced by a display of vulgarity on the part of the women' (Ardener, 1975: 37). Once the women were convinced that the offender had repented, which repentance was indicated by persistent pleas for forgiveness and offers of indemnity goods, they then took him to a stream where they immersed his naked body into the water. This was a ritualistic act symbolic of the washing away of the person's guilt. The women also washed in the stream all cooking utensils which may have been contaminated in the course of punishing the offender through *anlu*. This completes the act of cleansing and the incident is forgotten as the person is reinstated into society.

The Anlu became famous when it got itself mixed up in the political debacles preceding British Southern Cameroons' attainment of independence in 1961. According to several sources (Ritzenthaler, 1960; Nkwi, 1985; Ngoh, 1987; Konde, 1990; Konde, 2005), the Anlu had grievances against the colonial government, which the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) led by Augustine Ngom Jua and John Ngu Foncha exploited to its advantage. The KNDP was an off-shoot of the Kamerun National Congress (KNC), the ruling party at the time led by Dr EML Endeley. Ngoh (1987: 210) reports that the

Jua/Foncha faction had broken away from the KNC because of differences in ideology, for while the KNC wanted autonomy for Southern Cameroons within Nigeria, the KNDP advocated secession from Nigeria and reunification with French Cameroon.

The Anlu got involved in the struggles for dominance in Kom between the KNDP and the KNC when the government introduced a new agricultural law that prohibited Kom women from continuing with traditional farming techniques that were seen to cause soil erosion. The women were used to farming the hill slopes vertically. Thus, the government's injunction that ridges should be made horizontally did not sit well with Kom women. Their lack of understanding of these new agricultural policies, coupled with the fact that the government had failed to mete out sanctions on the Mbororo whose cattle had been destroying their crops, made them suspicious that the KNC government had designs to take over their land.[46] The women's suspicions were further fuelled by rumours that the Fon was conniving with the KNC to seize their lands and sell them to the Igbos, and the fact that the new laws on cross-contour farming were being enforced by a non-Kom agricultural officer was enough to make the women convinced that the rumours were true (Nkwi, 1985: 187; Konde, 1990: 13). A state of hostility developed in which the women mobilized and chased KNC members out of their village. They harassed and terrorized villagers who were known to sympathize with the KNC; they invaded their homes, wreaked havoc on their property and insulted them through songs and peculiar dance steps (Ritzenthaler, 1960: 154; Nkwi, 1985: 188; Konde, 1990: 11). They even interrupted activities at the local primary school where some of the teachers were known to be KNC supporters and requested the teachers to leave their jobs (Konde, 1990: 13). When Endeley visited Njinikom on 11 July 1958, he encountered several roadblocks and was later greeted by a cold reception from the few supporters of his party who were left in the village.

[46] The introduction of new agricultural policies, which sparked the tensions between the Anlu and the Kom/KNC government in 1958, has a fictional parallel in Kenjo Jumbam's *The White Man of Cattle* (1978), a novel, which like *The White Man of God*, is set in Nso, a 'natural setting that permits us to discern the attitudes, aspirations and weaknesses' of the characters, as well as the 'limitations of their worldview' (Ebot, 1998: 45). The same could be said for Butake's plays where we find the villagers pitted against Father Leo in *Lake God* and Shey Bo-Nyo against the Fon in *And Palm Wine Will Flow*. In each case, differing worldviews account for the strained relationship between the two parties, and even without authorial intervention we are able to see the foibles of humans in their ridiculous attempts to secure power.

The Anlu campaign against the KNC intensified in November 1958 when four of its leaders were summoned to Bamenda for interrogation on offenses committed through Anlu activities. In a spirit of solidarity, a large group of women from the village, some with babies tied to their backs, accompanied the leaders on the 55km trip from Kom to Bamenda, trekking all the way in semi-nakedness (Nkwi, 1985: 190; Konde, 1990: 14). During the elections in 1959, the KNC lost in Kom and the political landscape changed in favour of the KNDP.

Another women's society which scholars such as Jua (1993) and Lyonga (1993) have claimed Butake captures in his writing is the Ta'kembeng of Bamenda. Unlike the Anlu of Kom, this group has not been the subject of many anthropological and historical studies.[47] According to Jua (1993: 182), membership of this group is open only to women who have attained the age of sixty. Like the Anlu of Kom, this is a group whose activities traditionally revolved around the regulation of social practices that threaten public order. Joseph Takougang and Milton Krieger (quoted in Ngwang, 2004: 2) assert that *ta'kembeng* is a 'practice which brings post-menopausal women to disputed terrain with sacred grasses and other materials from nature, invoking maternal authority to restore peace, threatening and using bodily exposure against violators, whom it is meant to shame and stop'.

The Ta'kembeng, however, became a political movement during the "villes mortes" or "ghost town" period in Bamenda in 1991. The "ghost town" period was a time of severe restriction, during which people were not allowed to be out of their homes after six o'clock in the evening. There were police and gendarmes patrolling the city and those who were found contravening the laws of the curfew risked facing jail time. To scare off the gendarmes that were sent off to contain the protesting masses, the Ta'kembeng women wore their *kabbas* (long flowing gowns) without underwear and simply lifted these up in front of the officers, forcing them to turn away in repulsion at their naked emaciated bodies. Again in 1992 when a state of emergency was declared in the NW Province following protests against the alleged rigging of elections that denied the

[47] Despite persistent research efforts, no historical or anthropological material on this group was obtained. The history of the group in this section is therefore reconstructed from literary sources arguing for Butake's plays as reflections of women's political activism in Cameroon.

opposition party (the SDF) its rightful victory, the Ta'kembeng women were seen attempting to redress political malpractices through resistance. Ngwang (2004: 2) reports that they challenged the authority of security officers who attempted to stop a protest march in campaign for the release of members and sympathizers of the SDF who had been arrested and imprisoned. The women's resistance to authority took the form of obscenity as they challenged security officers by exposing their bodies to them (see Ngwang, 2004: 2). The unexpectedness and boldness of this act forced the officers to turn away in discomfort.[48]

As noted earlier, many scholars of Butake's works have argued that the Fibuen in *Lake God* and the women's society in *And Palm Wine* are fictional renditions of the historical Anlu and Ta'kembeng. The Kil'u in *Shoes and Four Men in Arms*, though not visibly present, also surfaces as Butake's re-invention of the Ta'kembeng. However, what many of the Butake scholars, particularly Lyonga, Jua and Ngwang, have not questioned are the specifics of the Anlu and Ta'kembeng revolts. Given the dearth of anthropological evidence, it is questionable whether they have really looked to historical documents for evidence of women's political domination during the crises periods. They seem rather to have simply relied on popular opinions to frame their arguments. A more in-depth look at the sparce historical and social anthropological sources reveals multiple reasons for this study's adoption of a stance that rejects the almost religious celebration of female sexual power in Butake's plays.

First, Jua (1993: 181) claims that 'the Anlu became a political tool in 1958, influenced the outcome of the 1959 elections in Kom in favour of the KNDP and also changed the whole course of history as far as Southern Cameroons was concerned'. However, while its activities may have influenced the results of the elections that ousted the KNC from Kom, it is critical to question the extent to which the Anlu has been valorized in

[48] It appears that marches by women in which the body is exposed to the public eye as a sign of defiance are not only discernible in the history of Cameroon. Ify Amadiume (1987: 121-122) describes a situation in Nigerian colonial history in which the women of Nnobi village demonstrated their anger at the killing of a royal python by a Christian zealot by marching half naked to the city of Onitsha where they besieged the resident's office and thereafter returned to the village and burned down the house of the man who had killed the python. This seems to be an indication of women's non-passive response to the colonialist's incursion into areas of religion, culture and political administration.

Cameroon literature as a "political" body. By its very nature, the Anlu was never a political body. As shown above, it was a social structure set up to deal with serious matters pertaining to men's abuse of women either publicly or privately (see also Ngoh, 1987: 211; Konde, 1990: 5). The Anlu that came into being in 1958 was different from the traditional one both in its composition and executionary technique: 'unlike traditional *anlu* that was a technique to uphold the dignity of womanhood, the new *anlu* was a profanity of the old. Traditional *anlu* was initiated and carried out by women; the new *anlu* was initiated by men and the women activists merely followed the script written for them by male politicians' (Konde, 1990: 15).

It has to be noted that *anlu* was not a practice peculiar to Kom. There were similar movements of social protest in many societies in Southern Cameroons, including among the Bakweri and Balong (see Ardener, 1975; Konde: 1990). Perhaps a personal experience is essential to show the validity of this point. Among the Oroko of Mundemba, a small town in the SW Province of Cameroon, there was always what was called the Palaver House and the Woman House. The Palaver House, on the one hand, was a male-dominated body that dealt with cases of conflict among individuals and families in the community. The only female member of this constituted body was an old woman who presided over the Woman House. The Woman House, on the other hand, was an exclusively female body which handled cases pertaining to women only. If a man insulted his wife or mother, especially in public, by making derogatory references to her genitals, it was considered a serious offense that warranted his appearance before the Woman House.

The responsibility to report cases of women's mistreatment by their spouses rested not only with the offended party but also with any person (male or female) who witnessed the incident. The offender would be summoned to the Woman House and depending on the weight of his crime and state of remorse he could either be let off with a fine of goats and whisky or be sentenced to perform community service in addition to paying a fine. In any case of prosecution, the chief would normally endorse the women's decision and his councillors would ensure that the sentence on the offender was executed. The point that is being emphasized by this detailed narrative is that the Woman House was essentially a

disciplinary body whose influence on the daily public administration of Mundemba was limited to those times when a member of its constituency was a victim of some form of sexual, physical or verbal assault. Although it wielded power over a segment of society, one certainly cannot pretend to call it a political body with executive powers over the entire community.

As was the case with the Woman House of the Oroko, the Anlu of Kom certainly had a measure of authority over a certain group of people in society, but the exercise of this authority was limited to the times when punishment had to be meted out on men who insulted or disrespected women. There is evidence that the widespread activities of the Anlu during the 1958-1959 period were influenced from behind the scenes by male politicians who had more to gain from the KNC fall than the women did. As a point of departure, the incident that has been referred to as the 1958 "women's uprising" was not strictly provoked by grievances against the political order of the day. The women were mainly protesting against the introduction of new agricultural laws which, in their understanding, were deemed inappropriate, and perhaps more significantly were perceived as being influenced by politicians who wanted a stake in Kom land. The issue of cattle which reportedly destroyed the women's crops was simply an additional reason that intensified the women's anger against the ruling authorities in Kom, and especially against those presumably enlightened individuals who supported the new farming laws.

As Konde asserts, this situation was exploited by men to achieve other political aims that worked out mainly for their benefit. Ardener (1975: 39) notes that the women took advice from those men who were opposed to the KNC government of Dr Endeley, and the result was that *anlu* became highly organized. Writing over a decade earlier, Ritzenthaler (1960: 152) asserts that the conversion of *anlu* into a political organization was the work of two politically ambitious men who held out to the women the hope of a solution to their real and imaginary problems. Both Nkwi (1985: 188) and Chilver (1992: 114) confirm that the KNDP was the brain behind the women's demonstrations in 1958. The women were mainly concerned about their land, as their livelihood depended on it, but the KNDP politicians led by Augustine Ngom Jua exploited their grievances and instigated their revolt against the government to extents that were unprecedented.

Roselyn Jua (1993), incidentally a daughter of the KNDP leader Augustine Ngom Jua, alleges that the Anlu's revolt against dubious party politics in Kom in 1958 enabled it not only to influence government action but also to re-structure power sharing in the area. In her view, the victory of the KNDP in Kom was a victory of the Anlu. 'Political issues of the day,' she writes, 'were clearly being decided by women' (Jua, 1993: 182). If this were the case, one wonders why the women lacked any significant role in the new governmental structures that were put in place after the KNDP victory in the 1959 elections. There is historical evidence that while Augustine Ngom Jua re-gained his seat in parliament and thereafter held various cabinet-level positions until he was made Prime Minister of the United Republic of Cameroon in 1965, the rest of the Anlu militants, besides the chief leader, returned to their normal domestic activities and soon discovered later that the KNDP had reinstated the same farming laws they had been fighting the KNC government about (see Nkwi, 1985: 189; Konde, 1990: 15). It is, therefore, clear that the women had simply been manipulated by the KNDP leaders to foster their own political agenda and rise to power. As Konde (1990: 2) puts it, the 1958 Anlu uprising was 'nothing but the relic of an old practice by which men used women to empower themselves and maintain political control over the women'.

The demonstrations of the Anlu of Kom and the Ta'kembeng of Bamenda are two historical events that have been continuously referred to in defence of women's political activism in Cameroon. It strikes one that by constantly evoking these events scholars seem to be asserting that there is really no need for a women's movement in Cameroon, because women have *always* been recognized as indispensable to the political survival and/or functioning of their society. Of course, their indispensability is one factor that can hardly be denied since they have often spearheaded campaigns that usher men into power, while they themselves sit back and sing songs, feeling triumphant that their "beloved sons" were now in positions to perform the miracles they have never had the courage to perform for themselves. It is argued here that the Anlu has been overly lauded by Anglophone Cameroonians speaking in defence of women's participation in public politics, and that the militant strategy of the Ta'kembeng – the act of disrobing as a sign

of protest – has been exploited to excessive proportions by Butake in his attempt to forge an image of a viable women's activism within Cameroonian politics.

3.3.2 The Patriarchal Order and Female Power in *Lake God*

Patriarchy has multiple faces and the extent of its pervasiveness can be seen in the manner in which hierarchical orders are established and sustained. Beyond the realism of women's oppression, in fictional writing too roles are assigned according to gender and women for the most part emerge as custodians of a people's cherished values, the protectors of what is deemed indispensable to the welfare of the community. In *Lake God*, it is the Fibuen that is entrusted with this task. The same task is assigned to the unnamed women's society in *And Palm Wine*. The Fibuen's quest to reinstate order in society stems from two main factors: the occupation of its farmlands by Mbororo cattle and the refusal of the Fon to perform sacrifices to the god of the lake. When the play opens, members of the Fibuen are seen carrying the bound Dewa to the palace to report a case of cattle encroachment into their farmlands. The women associate the cattle business with capitalist exploitation and imperialist domination, since it benefits only a handful of people – the Fon and his collaborators. In this play, the following exchange between the Fon and Dewa, in the presence of the women, underscores the rising tensions between what can be termed the ruling class and the proletariat:

> **Fon:** Na weti happen?
> *[What happened?]*
> **Dewa:** Cow dong go drinki water fo Ngangba sai wey na kontri fo Bororo.
> *[The cattle went to drink water in Ngangba, the land of the Mbororos.]*
> **Fon:** Fo sika sey me tell you fo go shiddon dere da wan mean sey na wuna kontri?
> *[So because I allowed you to stay there you now think it is your land?]*
> **Dewa:** No be na gomna don talk sey na place fo cow?
> *[Isn't it the government that allocated that region for cattle grazing?]*
> **Fon:** What gomna, you bloody fool? You look the palaver wey you don bringam fo my head?
> *[What government, you bloody fool? Do you see the trouble you have now caused for me?]*
> **Dewa:** Allah! Me no bringam no troubou fo Mbe.
> *[God forbid! I didn't mean to cause any trouble for the Fon.]* (16)[49]

[49] This is my translation. Butake here employs the technique of diaglossia – the simultaneous use of a "high" and "low" language in a work of art – in order to highlight the ethnic and class differences between Dewa and the Fon. Diaglossia also gives the play local colour and roots it deeply within the multicultural society portrayed in the plays, since Pidgin English is a lingua franca in Cameroon.

This conversation highlights the problem of land ownership in that while Dewa attributes ownership of the land to the government, the Fon sees the land as his property, and this is significant because in Cameroon 'land is a factor of power and strength' (Logo & Bikie, 2003: 33). Although the Fon is clearly unhappy with Dewa for allowing cattle to trespass into Ngangba and to destroy the women's crops, he does not share the women's view that Dewa and other cattle rearers should leave. To him, land is not just a heritage but a resource that could be exploited for his economic enrichment through the provision of more grazing land to the Mbororos, for as he states 'progress here is tied with cattle' (18).

By contrast, the women depend on subsistence farming for the sustenance of their families, and the apparent growth of the cattle business now threatens the very foundations of their economic stability. It is not the first time their crops have been ruined by cattle, for when Yensi says 'we have borne the suffering long enough' (17) there is indication that this malpractice has been going on for some time. The women find in the association between the Fon, Father Leo and Dewa a dangerous political force that spells disaster for their community. Therefore, in an attempt to forestall the disaster, they decide to bring back the disbanded Kwifon to the scene of active politics.

The Kwifon had been outlawed by the Fon because on a previous occasion it had responded to a communal need and offered sacrifices to the lake god to ensure a good harvest. But the Fon had said 'human sacrifice was barbaric and heathen' and 'he did not realize that it was an emergency solution because of his own negligence of the annual lake sacrifice' (21-22). It appears that the advent of colonialism and its necessary accomplices, Christianity and modernization, has resulted in the forceful erosion of the powers of the men folk under traditional systems. According to Odhiambo (2009b: 168), 'the very act of outlawing the male institution of authority can figuratively be interpreted as an act of "de-masculinizing" the men in this society, rendering them impotent and irrelevant'. The Kwifon has become impotent, figuratively speaking, in that its members are incapable of functioning as a productive political unit. Their impotence is evident in the fact that all they can do is sit and groan over the "detestable" things going on in the village and listen to Lagham brag about beating his wife for failing to cook his food as

tradition demands. Like Achebe's Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, Lagham is the prototype of the powerless husband who deals with frustrations by resorting to physical violence. The women's response to the problem stands in contrast to the men's in that rather than look on helplessly they embark on a plan that, if successful, could save their land from total devastation by the new religion. They make a decision to withhold their bodies and their food from their men.

The limitation of this plan, however, is that its success depends entirely on the ability of the men to think beyond the obvious. To galvanize action against the Fon, the women have to pass through the Kwifon. The big question is: "Why"? The answer lies in the fact that, historically, although the Fibuen is a body of power in its own right, just like the Kwifon, its power is exercised strictly within the female space, that is, in matters relating primarily to women's interests within the domestic space. For example, it intervenes in the mistreatment of women by their husbands and in extreme cases goes to the compound of the offender to demand justice (Koloss, 2000: 262). Beyond the domestic space, the Fibuen makes an appearance only at funerals and commemorative ceremonies for deceased members, at the admission of new members, and at communal work during which it is ordered by the Fon and Kwifon to coordinate and control the work of the women (Koloss, 2000: 262). Thus, although the Fibuen is a respected women's society, it remains an appendage of the Kwifon to whose authority it must subject itself. Its subordination to the Kwifon in real life is not subverted in the fictional world of *Lake God*; neither is it challenged. The Fibuen in the play operates from backstage, carefully orchestrating its plans without dismantling the status quo. This pattern of representation is consistent with masculinist perceptions of women's role in nationalist struggles, for as Elleke Boehmer (1991: 7) states, whether one looks at literature or law one will find that the national subject is in most cases either implicitly or explicitly designated as male, and therefore women are excluded from 'full national participation on an equal footing with men'. By making the Fibuen engage with the neo-colonial leadership of Fon Joseph by proxy of the Kwifon, Butake preserves, consciously or unconsciously, the hegemonic structures of masculine power in Grassfields societies.

Eunice Ngongkum (2008: 185) argues that *Lake God* is revolutionary in vision because the women 'go beyond demonstrating a heightened awareness of the issues at stake in their community to actually taking steps to addressing them'. While this view seems irrefutable, one has to probe deeper to determine whether the specific steps taken by the women to redress the problems in their society bear evidence of female power. It is necessary here to quote in full what transpires at the meeting of the Fibuen.

> *A moonlit night. There is a crowd of women in the village square. After the abortive encounter with the Fon, and because of the fever of the Fibuen, they display a spirit of defiance that would shock their men folk. Something like mob action in which the women have no inhibitions. When action begins, there is the sound of the now familiar horn of the Fibuen followed by an exhilarating ululation. Then the women perform dance steps to such lyrical songs as "Kwessim kwe bo lang e Banya". When they have worked themselves to fever pitch the horn sounds again and, again, they ululate.*
>
> **Yensi:** *(performing the Kinsheng)* E-chong E-chong E-chong E-chong o o!
> **Chorus:** Ho ya ho ya ho ya!
> **Yensi:** I lack the words with which to express my joy. The happiness that is in my heart cannot be shown on my face. The happenings of today have shown that, in spite of what some people say, the ways of the land are alive. We must be one person to succeed in our present undertaking. We must be one woman. Some here have only recently been given into marriage. Their bellies are hot. There are others who cannot control their emotions of love and sympathy. There are still others who will easily succumb to threats and the fear of being beaten. You all know where we have built the sanctuary of the Fibuen. We have taken it away from that place which I don't want to call by name. The sanctuary is the refuge for those without a heart. Go there if you cannot look your man in the face and tell him to go and eat shit.
> **Chorus:** *(laughter)* He he he! Haaa! Wus!
> **Nkasai:** Listen, Yensi, this thing is not as easy as you want to make it look. There are women here who, as soon as we disperse, will start disclosing everything as if their mouths are leaking.
> **Kimbong:** You speak the truth, Nkasai. Where is Ma Kusham? We must all take the oath of sealed lips.
> **Yensi:** Ma Kusham? Ma Kusham? I beg you to come forward and conduct the rite.
> *An old woman carrying a clay pot in both hands moves forward and places the pot on the floor.*
> **Ma Kusham:** Are such things still performed in the land of Christians? These are pagan things. Things of Satan.
> **Yensi:** Ma, don't Christians have crops that are destroyed by the cattle? When the harvest is poor do the Christians not starve with the rest? When there is drought in the land, does the rain fall on the farms of Christians? Hunger has no friends and no enemies. Go ahead with business.

Ma Kusham: Thank you, my daughter. These are things of the land. Things of our gods and ancestors which the white man has fooled us to abandon. Things of the white man have brought suffering to the land. *(She dips her hand into the pot and takes out broom-sticks of equal length which she proceeds to distribute to all the women).* These broom-sticks have been cooked in the most potent medicines and herbs in the land. However, the most important ingredient as far as our oath is concerned comes from the sacred pot of the lake god which Shey Bo-Nyo guards jealously. The link is simple. There is no Queen in the palace and the Fon has refused to lead the people in sacrifice to the god of fertility. Now, listen. Hold the stick in your right hand between the thumb and forefinger like this. Cross your lips vertically with the stick like this. Break it in the middle and throw both ends behind you while repeating the following: if my mouth discloses what my ears have heard in this gathering, may my tongue swell and fill my mouth with dumbness.

The rite is performed in strict silence after which Ma Kusham sprinkles the women with the liquid from the pot.

Yensi: We are now going to disperse and go back to our homes. And if your man should ask you what is going on, ask him if women ever know what is happening in this land of men. May our enterprise succeed. E-chong e-chong e-chong e-chong o o!
Chorus: Hoo ya ho ya ho ya! (24-25)

There are essentially four steps the women take to solve the problems facing them and the community at large. First, they work themselves into a delirious mood designed to indicate the intensity of their frustration with the existing leadership. Secondly, they remind themselves of the importance of the undertaking they are about to embark on. It is implied that a resolution in relation to this has already been taken. Thirdly, acting on what seems to be logical reasoning on the part of Nkasai and Kimbong, the women decide to take an oath not to disclose to their men the "minutes" of their meeting. In a sense, they prefer to let their actions speak to the men. Finally, they disperse and retreat to their homes where their plan of action is to be enforced. A number of significant points can be deduced from this simple analysis and these need to be discussed in detail.

The oath of sealed lips taken by the women highlights the power relations that operate within traditional Grassfields societies. The oath is administered to provide a guarantee that no woman discloses to her husband the resolution that has been taken. But the oath itself underscores a conscious mutation of voice. It is indicative of the enforced silence to which the women have to subject themselves because of their relatively disadvantaged

status in a society dominated by men. Because a previous attempt to voice their grievances had been heedlessly dismissed by the Fon, the women now resort to silence as a political weapon. Implicit in their choice of an option that excludes verbal expression are two significant factors. On the one hand, their choice could be seen as a demonstration of subtlety wherein they express their dissatisfaction with the existing political order and successfully get their demands met without destabilizing the social order. On the other hand, however, the women's silence in this context materializes as that which is often imposed on women 'either by social taboos and restrictions or by the more genteel tyrannies of custom and practice' (Cameron, 1990: 4). Because in Grassfields cultures speech is monopolized by the hierarchy and women constitute a muted group (see Warnier, 1996: 116), the women in *Lake God* are compelled to resort to this less revolutionary means of evoking change. Their actions are less revolutionary in comparison to those of Woman in Bate Besong's *Requiem for the Last Kaiser* who seeks redress for the unjust practices of the corrupt government in power by not only enlightening Student on the ills of that government but also by persuading the soldiers to see the futility of defending a government that is already doomed for destruction because of its excesses (see Nkealah, 2009a). Constrained by the shackles of tradition, the Fibuen takes a more *silent*, albeit political, approach to change. By tacit agreement, its members adopt what Wills (1995: 158) calls 'noisy silence' – a silence that is pregnant with protest though devoid of voice. This seems to be the only available avenue of political expression open to them.

In addition, the possibility of women betraying one another when under pressure is hinted at in the decision to take the oath of sealed lips. It must be noted that the decision to starve the men physically and sexually is made before the oath of sealed lips is taken. What necessitates the administering of the oath is Nkasai's claim that some among them will be unable to keep their activities a secret and 'will start disclosing everything as if their mouths are leaking' (24). Implicit in this statement is women's own proliferation of gendered notions of femininity that see women as incapable of respecting verbal terms of agreement. Such notions are reproduced through various forms of verbal communication in traditional society and proverbs are especially notorious in this regard. Two examples of such proverbs suffice here. The first is a Cameroonian proverb from the Bakossi of the

SW Province which states that 'when a masquerade appears among women, the person inside is revealed', meaning that women can never be trusted to keep secrets (Jick, 2008: 80). The second proverb is from the Yoruba of Nigeria and it states: 'Only he that is stupid takes an oath with a woman. The day a woman knows the secrets of a cult, that cult is destroyed' (Jick, 2008: 80). This proverb, like the previous one, perceives women as "basket mouths" – talkative and irresponsible. These two proverbs highlight the point that in many African societies women are stereotyped as "blabber mouths" or gossips, and it is this perception that seems to inform Butake's construction of the plot of *Lake God* to include the oath of sealed lips. While the oath may seem necessary as a guarantee that the women will stick to the plan of action, its ritualistic enforcement undermines the women's potential for resilience and ascribes them feminine qualities that are innately sexist. In the end, one is not convinced that the women succeed in their plan because of their conviction of its merits and not because they simply dread the consequences of transgressing the terms of the oath.

Besides highlighting the uneven power relations between men and women and the gendered perceptions of women in patriarchal societies, the meeting of the Fibuen also illustrates a point made earlier, that women in Butake's plays carry the burden of keeping the flames of tradition and custom burning. At the meeting, the women resolve to starve their men sexually and physically, with the hope that this will make the men realize the seriousness of their demands to send the cattle rearers away. This is not a casual undertaking for it takes place with the accompaniment of song, dance and other highly esteemed performances such as the Kinsheng performed by Yensi. The women's chorus response to the Kinsheng indicates their unanimous consent to the resolution that has just been passed. In Yensi's speech to them, she states that 'the happenings of today have shown that, in spite of what some people say, the ways of the land are alive' (24). The Fibuen is, therefore, concerned principally with keeping alive the age-old traditions that define Ewawa as *African*. The people's customs are under threat of erosion owing to the conversion of many villagers to the new religion and the Fon's negligence to fulfil his duties even as a convert, like his father had done (see p. 31). Because of its political impotence, the Kwifon can do nothing to reverse this situation. The Fibuen's single act of

addressing the problem through its resolution thus reads as a re-instatement of the cherished customs of its people.

That the central function of the Fibuen in the play is to protect traditional values from being eroded by foreign values is also evident in its war against Angela, the Fon's Christian wife. Like Elissa in *Betrothal*, Angela is depicted in this play as the unwanted wife, the woman who forces her way into a society that rejects her for what she represents. While Angela is not accused of loose morals in the way Elissa is, she is nonetheless recast as an outsider, an intruder and a misfit within her husband's village. The women reject her as queen because she is not one of them. She comes from a foreign culture and is thus deemed unqualified to assume the prestigious role of a queen. To show their rejection, they refuse to sell her food items in the local market. Ironically, it is the Mbororos, also a rejected group, that supply her with what she needs to feed her household. The Fibuen women tell the Fon that he must 'lead the people in sacrifice to the Lake God and consummate [their] love and kinship by sharing the royal bed with the Queen' (17), but they also state categorically that Angela is not the queen they want. By implication, then, Angela is an obstacle to the stability of their society because, although she usurps the position of the rightful queen, she is not eligible to fulfil the obligations of a queen. In the larger context of the play, Angela embodies not only a destabilized society but also the personal demise of a leader rejected by his people for his non-traditional way of governance.

The play's female empowerment discourse is somewhat contradictory in that woman is at once the cause of the problems in the land and the source of solutions to these problems. On the one hand, there is Angela, partly because of whom the Fon refuses to fulfil his religious duties towards the people. On the other hand, there are the women of the Fibuen whose activities propel the Kwifon to take drastic action against the Fon and Angela. Butake seems to empower the Fibuen by disempowering Angela. The women's rejection of Angela suggests not only their overzealous adherence to tradition but also their lack of sympathy for other women. They do not question any of the customs that hold them bound to a patriarchal order. The play is explicit in its ironic depiction of the ways in which women uphold patriarchy and use its components to marginalize other women.

Tradition, which is one such component, works against women, because it places value only on a certain group or type of woman – the submissive and malleable type. Yet, it is in the name of tradition that the women in this play mistreat one of their kind.

The play appears to suggest that female solidarity is almost impossible among women where ethnicity is given importance over gender, for the Fibuen's stance against Angela reads as a lack of sorority among women. Angela's barrenness is significant in a number of ways. For one thing, her inability to have children and subsequent distress over this situation echoes the traditional African sentiment that a childless woman is not a woman *yet* but a girl. In addition, her barrenness symbolizes the Fon's loss of honour as well as his degradation as a ruler. In fact, the play associates male sexual impotence with male political impotence, for the Fon's inability to produce children is symptomatic of his inability to exert control over his subjects. As Angela mockingly states, 'the divine ruler is powerless before a pack of illiterate native women who insult his wife in public' (34). In this case, sexual potency is posited as the key to power, while impotence becomes an analogy for a hopeless nation. The Fon is plunged into an abyss of masculine stagnation and is in need of regeneration because he has been unmanned by colonial forces through his acquisition of a western education and conversion to Christianity. And Angela holds little promise of providing him with this regeneration because in her barren state she too is in need of redemption. The sexual impotence of both characters thus embodies a nation's loss of optimism and hope of continuity.

By the end of the play, the Fibuen has been completely effaced and the arena of active politics is now under the full control of the Kwifon. When Shey Tanto leads the seven most important members of Kwifon to the sacred grove of the lake god and begins to chant incantations, it is clear from his words that there is some attempt to keep the realms of power a male-dominated space. The following excerpt attests to this assertion:

> **Shey Tanto:** … We are meeting in this sacred grove of the lake god
> Because the land is no longer the land
> You illustrious ancestors handed over to us
> Kwifon is in exile; and the women of this land
> Are waging war against their men-folk
> Because the Fon, our Fon, the Fon you gave us
> The Fon we thought you gave us, has sold the land.

The Fon has banished Kwifon and given the land
To strangers and rearers of cattle.
And now the women starve their men! (39)

The Kwifon acknowledges the activities of the Fibuen but trivializes its mission to be merely a war against the men folk. It refuses to acknowledge that the call for political transformation declared by the women is directed not at the men *per se*, but at the ruling authority of the land (represented by the Fon), at the government which makes decisions at national level, and at the imperialist forces (represented by Father Leo) which continue to exert their influence on government decision-making bodies. Although the Kwifon benefits from the intervention of the Fibuen, it prefers to see itself as the sole custodian of the preserves of power, while the Fibuen remains a shadowy presence that only gets admission into the arena of power when the original actors cannot perform. The play offers no proposals for expanding the role of the Fibuen beyond its obvious status as a mere appendage of the Kwifon or a body for the execution of its orders. It seems to justify the hetero-masculine formations of power prevalent in Grassfields societies.

In addition, reflecting on the power struggle between the Fon and his cohorts, Dewa and Father Leo, on the one hand, and the Kwifon, on the other hand, it would seem that the Fibuen simply plays an intermediary role to bring the two antagonistic forces to a head-on collision, thereby fitting into the social construct of women as instigators of chaos. The problem inherent in using a male narrator to recount an event is that the visibility of women actors is almost always shadowed by the dominant male voice. Hence, it is important that women be allowed to tell their own stories, to construct their own history – a history from which, according to Djebar (1992: 147), the archetypal image of the feminine body will be expelled. Anglophone woman writer Tanyi-Tang has made a significant effort to re-appropriate the feminine body in men's writing and to reconstruct it in ways that illuminate women's transformative powers beyond the sexual. As a female playwright, Tanyi-Tang addresses women's realities with greater insight and proffers multiple expressions of female empowerment (see Nkealah, 2009b).

3.3.3 The Sexual Politics of *Lake God*

Butake's vision of women's empowerment draws much from Foucault's view of sex as a 'focal point of the exercise of power through the discursive constitution of the body' (Weedon, 1987: 119). The power relations governing the landscape of sexual interaction are such that where there is desire the power relation is almost already present (see Foucault, 1979). Empowerment is defined as a process or mechanism by which people, organizations and communities gain autonomy or mastery over their own affairs (Hancock, 2005: 247). The attainment of political empowerment, for instance, usually depends on the availability of financial, educational and technological resources and inevitably requires skills, training and leadership formation (Hancock, 2005: 247). Butake in *Lake God* projects a women's society that is deficient in all these resources but is nonetheless seemingly powerful in its sex-oriented approach to pressing political problems facing its community. The problems are highlighted in the following conversation among the men folk:

> **Fisiy:** There is something definitely wrong in the land.
> **Lagham:** You know me. I am used to punishing any of my wives when they disobey me. But what I saw today …
> **Forgwei:** I said before that the women are determined to starve their husbands.
> **Fisiy:** Ever since the day the Fibuen was heard again in this land after so long a time, I knew there was trouble coming.
> **Maimo:** You mean the day they tied up Dewa with ropes and carried him to the palace?
> **Lagham:** Yes. The day the Fon asked them to accept two thousand francs for all the crops in Ngangba.
> **Forgwei:** Was it two thousand or twenty? I heard that the Fon asked Dewa to pay twenty thousand and the women turned their back.
> **Fisiy:** Does it really matter how much money it was? The women did not want the money at all.
> **Maimo:** Then why did they tie Dewa with ropes? Why did they carry him to the Fon?
> **Lagham:** They want all the cattle out of the land. They also seem to know that part of Dewa's herd belongs to the Fon.
> **Fisiy:** And the Fon does not want the cattle to leave because that is the source of his wealth.
> **Lagham:** Exactly. The Fon says the cattle cannot leave.
> **Forgwei:** Where do we come in? What is our own crime that we starve?
> **Maimo:** Can't you see? The women want to get justice by starving us. Unable to withstand hunger, we will put pressure on the Fon. (27-28)

This conversation reveals the women's perception that the welfare of the community depends not only on the existence of life (as opposed to the absence of it when the lake god eventually unleashes its wrath on the people), but also on the sustenance of that life through the cultivation of food crops. The women reject the 20 000CFA francs offered to them by the Fon because they believe that the transgression cannot be compensated for in monetary terms. They are more concerned with justice and the survival of the community and their refusal of the bribe indexes their fervent attachment to communalism and active resistance to exploitation. Thus, what redeems them from capitalist domination is their determination not to trade the welfare of their community for short-term benefits. The conversation also reveals that from the women's perspective Dewa represents capitalist exploitation, whereas from the Fon's point of view he stands for economic empowerment. How then do the women negotiate power in this situation? The conversation by the men folk continues and through it we gain insight into the kind of weapon the women employ to accomplish their mission:

> **Lagham:** If it were only hunger of the stomach, a man can browse here and there like cattle. For almost a week now, I have lived on palm-wine and roasted cocoyams or plantains. That is not food, but it is something. But it looks like they are also making use of the other weapon, hunger of the loins.
> **Forgwei:** No! That is not possible. Just not possible! I will kill someone.
> **Fisiy:** Lagham, sometimes you can really imagine abominations.
> **Lagham:** Fisiy, why don't you consider what I have said? Has any of you called his wife to your bed in the last week? Ever since the Fibuen was heard?
> **Forgwei:** My first wife is nursing a baby. The other has the periodic sickness.
> **Lagham:** For one week?
> **Forgwei:** I called her about three nights ago and she complained of periodic sickness. Since then I have returned home too drunk to bother about sleeping with a woman on the same bed. What can a man even do with a woman when there is hunger in the stomach?
> **Maimo:** Lagham might have a point. This last night, I was gripped by desire. My friend kept nodding and nodding like a lizard. So I called my son, Chinfon, and asked him to call his mother. You know what message she sent back? She said if I had anything to tell her I should come over to her house because she was too tired from chasing cattle out of the farm.
> **Fisiy:** Did you go?
> **Maimo:** Could I even walk without betraying myself?
> **Forgwei:** So, what did you do?
> **Maimo:** I went to bed with all my troubles. When she sends that kind of message, there is nothing to do.
> **Forgwei:** She may just have been tired.

> **Lagham:** No, my friend. Haven't you noticed that the idea of cattle destroying crops is always mentioned? When your wife complained of periodic sickness the other night, did she not say something else?
> **Forgwei:** Let me see. I think she mumbled something about Ngangba. Since she had already mentioned her periodic sickness, I did not pay any attention.
> **Lagham:** You see? It is a well-orchestrated plot. When you ask them what they have been discussing in the Fibuen, do they say anything? There are even rumours that Ma Kusham administered the oath of sealed lips. (28-29)

The women's weapon of resistance is therefore the withholding of their food and their bodies from their husbands. Their plan does succeed, because the men eventually become aware of the need to take action against the Fon. This awareness is evident when Maimo relates an incident in which he beats his wife for failing to prepare him *foo-foo* (traditional meal made with corn flour) with which to eat his hare soup and she responds by telling him to 'go to Nganga and make the cattle leave the land instead of beating up a defenseless woman who has been fighting all her life to feed her husband and the children' (30). It is upon their discerning of the determination in the women's refusal of access to nutritional and sexual provisions that the men decide to confront the Fon. Although the Fibuen's central objective is not attained since the cattle owners do not really leave the land and the Fon does not perform the needed sacrifices to the lake god, it can be said that it succeeds in gaining recognition for its efforts towards the transformation of society. This assertion draws support from the understanding that 'power struggle is to be seen not so much in terms of victory/defeat, since it is the kind of struggle that yields a no-win situation, but it is to be looked at from the perspective of the impact of the experience on the individual and the latter's ability to examine, articulate and utilize the transformative capabilities of such an experience of struggle' (Cham, 1987: 90-91). Female empowerment is said to be achieved in this case because the women of the Fibuen succeed in enforcing, to borrow Machera's words, a 'bargaining power over sex' and effectively establishing 'control over their own bodies and the terms on which sex is negotiated' (2004: 166-167).

The women's deployment of sexual deprivation in an attempt to restore order in their society resonates with events in Aristophanes's Greek play *Lysistrata* (in Hadas, 1962), a play which depicts a crisis situation in which women resort to the withholding of sex in order to bring their men to reason (see Njeng, 2007: 24). Led by Lysistrata, the women of

Athens and Sparta take an oath to resist their husbands' sexual demands in order to force them to end the twenty-one year war that had been going on between the two states. The oath is accompanied by a ritual in which all the women drink from a bowl of wine to cement their commitment to the cause for which they have come together. As in *Lake God*, personal pleasures have to be sacrificed for the communal good, for the play emphasizes that the women's strategy can only succeed if they stick to the plan and remain resolute, brave and strong-willed. *Lake God* echoes many of the sentiments expressed in *Lysistrata*. Following Aristophanes's model, Butake implies in *Lake God* that sex cannot be completely dissociated from politics. In her sociological study of gender roles in an Igbo society, Ify Amadiume (1987: 91) shows that among the women of Nnobi food and sex are weapons of war in that men showed their displeasure with their wives by refusing to eat their food while women did the same by denying their husbands sexual compliance. For these women then, sex was a political asset because a withholding of it implied not only a defiance of but also a challenge to a husband's authority over his wife (Amadiume, 1987: 91). When used collectively by women, the weapon of sexual denial is most effective because it establishes female power and forces men to comply with the wishes of women.

However, although such display of female power has been duplicated in fictional writing across cultures, it is important to look at the ways in which it reproduces hetero-normative structures of power. By making the women resort to the withholding of sex in order to achieve their goals, Butake's play hints on woman's sexuality as the limit of her political expression. Her body is 'the emblem of male desire' (Stratton, 1994: 52) and her sexuality defines all that she represents as the objectified body. When Lagham states that 'it is clear that until the cattle leave the land no adult male is going to eat or sleep with a woman' (30), we note in the women's ploy of using food and sex to instigate a revolution an explicit proposition that the only instruments of power at their disposal are the sexual and the domestic. The writer thus confines their political expression to these two spaces, a strategy which this study maintains is more disempowering than empowering. The view that sex is the sole determinant of female power is typically masculinist as it withholds from women access to other significant determinants such as education, economic independence and self-actualisation.

3.3.4 Body Politics in *And Palm Wine Will Flow*

In the play *And Palm Wine Will Flow*, Butake attempts to construct a more revolutionary image of women, moving from presenting them merely as "backstage actors" to showing the far-reaching effects of their activism. Although women's agency is central to the writer's new vision of the Cameroonian society, the feminine body is still inscribed as 'a locus of tension, contestation and assertion' (Etoke, 2004: 41). The central conflict in the play is between Shey Ngong and the Fon, but a significant point in the rising action is when the messenger challenges Shey Ngong with the question: 'Now that your wives have lost their farmlands what are the gods and your ancestors doing?' (93). Before Shey Ngong responds, one of the masks, Earth-goddess, suddenly becomes agitated and pronounces a drought on the land. Her reaction seems to be a direct response to the messenger that she will come to the aid of the women, although the possibility of a drought helping the women to regain their lands seems implausible. Implicit in her agitation, therefore, is a sign of the socio-political tensions that characterize relations between the people and the leadership of Ewawa. Her agitation and subsequent pronouncement is Butake's way of introducing an alternative voice to the debate, a female, albeit spirit, voice. Before now, all the actors on stage have been males. It has been the Fon and his loyal supporters pitted against Shey Ngong and his. Even the gods Shey Ngong relies on for solutions to the problems of Ewawa, that is, Nyombom the 'creator and guardian of the land' and the 'illustrious forebears' (89), seem to be all male figures (see Alembong, 1993: 138). These gods, however, are slow in responding to the crisis. It is Earth-goddess, one of the masks in the sacred grove, which responds by proclaiming a drought. Her pronouncement is what motivates the women's involvement in the search for a resolution to the crisis.

Butake entrusts Kwengong and the women's society with the weighty responsibility of saving Ewawa from impending demise, but he arms them only with their sexual organs. Woman's agency in the democratic process is realized through her naked body, an ageing sacred body that is at once repellent and alluring. While the women 'must do something to avert the drought pronounced by Earth-goddess' (105) and must take 'drastic action against the desecrator of the gods and ancestors' (109), their ability to do so resides in the

use of their bodies as political weapons. Nudity, urination and myth become classical ingredients in the production of power and crude references to the genital organs heighten the play's celebration of the grotesque, turning bizarre acts of obscenity into grand theatre (see Mbembe, 1992: 8-9).

As in *Lake God*, woman's weapon in *And Palm Wine* is her body, a body that is invested with a magnanimous potential for upsetting overpowering structures. This time, the body is not just a participant in ritual ceremony but its very potential to succeed in its mission is dependent on ritual power. This is evident in Kwengong's report of her "sacred" mission to the palace:

> **Kwengong:** When I got to the twin-streams, there was a large gathering of women, mostly the elderly ones. They were all naked, stark naked. It seemed that they had been performing some rites. Upon my arrival, they raised a great shout and one of them placed a pot full of some potion on my head. Go to the Fon! Go to the palace! they shouted. And make him drink! Then I knew what I was carrying. (109)

Kwengong is entrusted with a pot filled with the 'savoury juice from the vaginas' (110) of the women who constitute part of the oppressed in this kingdom of despotic rulership. The expression 'savoury juice' is pregnant with dangerous connotations. It is first of all ironic because the 'juice', which can be symbolic of women's fertility, repels rather than attracts in this instance. The same fertility that has been exploited to elevate motherhood throughout Butake's plays is now being reduced to an icon of the undesirable. But the sarcasm with which the women refer to the 'savoury juice' suggests that the vagina is the seat of their power. The sexual innuendo is deliberate. The female genitalia are here associated with pungency, repulsion and ultimately distaste for a nauseating political system. It is a symbol of the filthiness and putrefaction that have come to mark the Fon's leadership. As in *The Rape of Michelle*, woman's body is used to denote the moral degeneration of a people and a society's relapse into depressingly squalid conditions of governance.

The rite that is performed by the women before entrusting Kwengong with the pot for delivery to the Fon is significant in terms of its association of the naked female body with ritual power within traditional women's groups. The naked female body is a major motif

in Anglophone writing. It can also be seen in the story 'The Forest Will Claim You Too' in Makuchi's short story collection *Your Madness, Not Mine* (1999) in which an old woman's exposed naked body symbolizes a people's denunciation of their government's collaboration with foreign companies in the exploitation of timber from their land. But as shown earlier, this motif is implicitly disempowering in its rigid construction of women's agency within the parameters of the grotesque and the bizarre.

In *And Palm Wine*, the potency of woman's naked body in eliciting male compliance is heightened by the 'syncretic fusion of terse realistic images and African ritual' (Takem, 2002: 7). While the activities of Kwengong and the women's society are reminiscent of the solidarity march of the Anlu and the group disrobing of the Ta'kembeng, Kwengong is imbued with strong ritualistic powers that enable her to perform her role of liberating Ewawa from tyrannical leadership. Although she alternates between the material and spiritual realms, she excels more in her capacity as Earth-goddess than as first wife to Shey Ngong. She becomes the mythological medium through which Ewawa is ridden of tyranny, for as Alembong (1993: 136) states, 'the chief priest resorts to spirit possession and mediumship as detergents to cleanse Ewawa, to purge it, so to speak, of the canker that undermines its very existence'. As Earth-goddess, Kwengong visits the Fon as an emissary of the women, carrying with her the 'wares the women commanded deliverance to their Fon' (110), and this visit marks the Fon's demise because it is his rejection of the "gift" from the women that precipitates his death:

> **Fon:** (*Looks curiously into the pot and then turns away suddenly, holding his nose*) Urine! Urine! What is the meaning of this abomination?
> **Kwengong:** Not urine, Chila Kintasi,
> But the savoury juice from
> The vaginas of those upon whom
> You wield power, Fon.
> Drink! Oh Fon!
> Drink the liquor from the vaginas
> And feel the power of power!
> **Fon:** I will die first.
> **Kwengong:** Then you will die indeed, Chila Kintasi.
> Your own mouth pronounced judgment.
> Die and deliver the land from the
> Abominations of drunkenness and gluttony! (110)

The Fon's death is a 'ritual death' (Alembong, 1993: 135) orchestrated by the pronouncements of Earth-goddess, followed by her breaking of the pot on his head. In a tone of mock encouragement, she urges the Fon to 'drink the liquor from the vaginas and feel the power of power'. Power in this context is situated within the female genitalia. What Mbembe calls 'elements of crudeness and the bizarre' (1992: 8) are placed on centre stage as theatrical ornaments.

Spirit possession is essentially a male tradition by which male writers confine women's power to the mythological. In her discussion on women's spaces within Indian nationalist movements, Ketu Katrak (1992) points out that Hindu tradition mythologizes women by deifying them and glorifying them as representatives of known goddesses. Yet, even these goddesses had to be tamed as their powers were restrained when they were married to strong male gods (Katrak, 1992: 398). Through spirit possession Butake essentially situates female power within a spiritual realm in which active female sexuality is curtailed not only by the spirituality that dominates this space but also by the very presence of a male mask that exerts greater control over both the spiritual and the concrete world.

Siga Asanga (quoted in Lyonga, 1993: 178-179) has criticized Butake for "drugging" the women in *And Palm Wine* before they undertake their revolutionary action. His criticism is not without validity, for in circumscribing to ritual power as the defining limit of women's power Butake posits the notion that women's agency is at best mechanical, subject to control by superhuman forces. In his masculinist project to empower women, Butake adopts a mimetic technique by looking to historical accounts of women's militancy and presenting parallels of these in his work. This approach, however, is defeatist because it allows the writer little room to explore alternative worlds of women's political activism, to extend his imaginative horizons beyond the traditional space where the politics of woman is not necessarily the politics of sex and of the body.

3.3.5 Practices of Exclusion in *And Palm Wine Will Flow*

As shown above, women's power in *And Palm Wine* derives from ritual ceremony and traditional practices which tend to define women mainly as sexual/reproductive beings.

Butake, however, denies that this pattern of representation endorses patriarchy and its construction of women. As he claims,

> those metaphors, those images, they help me to enforce my conception of the woman as someone who can lead better than the man, at least within the context of Cameroon, because we have been overwhelmed by this Western notion of patriarchy in Africa, patriarchy there, everywhere you go you hear about patriarchy and in the long run you find that in effect it is in the West that women are more exploited against. (Nkealah & Odhiambo, 2008)

Butake claims that patriarchy is a Western notion, and by this he implies that his society is not patriarchal. However, in his plays readers and audiences are transported into societies in which women acquire power using mainly sexual resources. Women are thrust into liberation struggles where they become vehicles for the elimination of undesired leadership. But once order is restored, they relinquish power to men, because that seems the acceptable thing to do. If this is not a demonstration of the workings of patriarchy, what then is it? Can Butake claim that gender activists and feminist scholars are giving undue attention to the question of patriarchal domination when his own work vividly illustrates the extent to which women suffer under the patriarchal yoke even in post-colonial times? Would not this line of argument be defeating his intention to garner recognition for women as capable leaders?

In *And Palm Wine*, as in *Lake God*, the vision presented is that of a dissident womanhood that nonetheless chooses to maintain its subordinate position within a patriarchal society. The play clearly endorses practices of exclusion. Evidence of women's exclusion from political leadership is found in the final stages of the play when one realizes that it is Kwengong who defines the structures of the new government but her own position in it is not clearly defined. When Tapper burns down the Fon's palace and returns to the sacred grove with the Fon's bugle in his hands, a conversation ensues that gives us insight into the space allocated to woman in the political affairs of Ewawa:

> **Kwengong:** What is the Fon's bugle doing in your hand?
> **Shey Ngong:** He brought it from the palace, after setting the place on fire. And to think that this same bugle has sounded here twice today!
> **Tapper:** Keep it and become Fon, if you wish. The Fon's notables have all escaped. I mean those who were not consumed by fire.
> **Kwengong:** He cannot be Fon. The women have decided. No more Fons in the land!

> **Tapper:** So what will happen?
> **Kwengong:** The people will rule through the council of elders led by Shey here. The day he takes the wrong decision, that same day the people shall meet in the marketplace and put another at the head of the council of elders.
> **Shey Ngong:** And the affairs of the land shall be debated in the marketplace.
> **Tapper:** Wonderful idea! So that all the people shall see clearly that the fowl has an anus. Wonderful idea! No more secrets in the land! (113)

If, as Ngwang claims, Kwengong gains empowerment because she declares the overthrow of the dictatorship and the institution of a genuine democracy (2004: 1), where then is her position within this new democracy? It is clear that although Kwengong had earlier said 'the only men left in the land are the women' (112), the hegemonic structure of the council of elders does not change to accommodate these women, because within the membership of this new council Shey Ngong and Tapper are already two candidates, and they both hold the most prominent positions in it. If the council of elders represents the national assembly where matters are deliberated and decisions taken for the common good of the people, then Shey Ngong is its appointed Chair and Tapper could well represent its Secretary-General who coordinates the decisions of the members and transmits this to the general public. Kwengong has no pos ition within this "national assembly". She is simply the voice of the people, the instrument through which their collective will is transmitted to the elite group. In effect, she remains part of the ruled, occupying a position less significant than that of her male counterparts. Like Mboysi in *The Survivors* and the Fibuen in *Lake God*, she remains at the receiving end of power dispensation, never to be on the executing end.

Butake's construction of women in *And Palm Wine* aptly illustrates Boehmer's argument about the hierarchical order characteristic of nationalist politics. In Boehmer's view,

> the male role in the nationalist scenario may be characterized as metonymic. Male figures are brothers and equals, or fathers and sons and thus rivals; but in both cases their roles are specific and contiguous with one another. The 'female', in contrast, puts in appearance chiefly in a metaphoric or symbolic role. She is the strength or virtue of the nation incarnate, its fecund first matriarch, but it is a role which excludes her from the sphere of public national life. Figures of mothers of the nation are everywhere emblazoned but the presence of women in the nation is officially marginalised and generally ignored. (Boehmer, 1991: 6)

In *And Palm Wine*, Kwengong's role is essentially symbolic: she represents "people power" or the collective will of the people. Her marginalized position within the new government of Ewawa echoes women's marginal representation within leadership bodies in Cameroon. Butake himself claims that there are less than 25 women in a parliament of 180 members in Cameroon and with this example he expresses a seemingly genuine distress at the gross inequality that characterizes male and female representation within government bodies (see interview under Appendix III). If this concern for women's empowerment and desire for more female participation in the political administration of Cameroon were part of the vision for *And Palm Wine,* then one has to say Butake killed that vision by excluding Kwengong from the new dispensation in Ewawa. Without woman's participation in the new leadership, who can say that tyranny will not again reign supreme in Ewawa? The practices of exclusion visible in this play not only reflect but also endorse a general marginalization of women in Cameroon through patriarchal ideologies which undermine women's participation in national politics.

3.3.6 Heroism in Whoredom: *The Survivors*

The Survivors is a play about neo-colonial exploitation of the masses by greedy politicians and it dramatizes humans' insidious slide towards animalistic tendencies as a means of survival. There are six main characters in the play, among which are the five survivors comprising two children (a girl and a boy) and three adults (one woman and two men) and the military officer. This already indicates that the world of the play is a male world and that power imbalance in gender relations is one of its hallmarks. Although the play is not set in any specific location, it captures the politics of survival in any given woe-besotted context, be it in the context of civil war or natural disaster. Female representation in the play revolves around the single female character, Mboysi, through whom the writer's enforcement of the sexual exploitation of women's bodies in the ultimate quest for survival is perceived.

In his selfish exploitation of the five survivors, Officer represents corrupt African leaders who conspire against their own people in order to solicit the benevolence of their former colonial masters, thereby enriching themselves and their few supporters while the majority of their people suffer acute deprivation. The five survivors in the play find

themselves at the mercy of this cruel military commander who, though invisible to most of them, not only interrupts their journey but effectively takes them hostage in order to ensure a continuous flow of aid from foreign governments, as already noted. Besides having to deal with homelessness, the survivors need food and water to sustain them. They need to get to Ewawa where they can get assistance from the villagers. Ngujoh is determined to get his freedom back but he lacks the means of negotiating with Officer. Both him and Old One feel they are incapable of confronting the mighty Officer and making any requests for food provisions. In a verbal conspiracy against the only woman among them, they agree that Mboysi should approach Officer:

> **Ngujoh:** (*Looking at Mboysi*) We can get him to negotiate. With her co-operation.
> **Mboysi:** What do you mean? With my co-operation?
> **Ngujoh:** You can speak to him in the language he understands, having been a teacher at our school. Moreover, you're a woman with great charms.
> **Old One:** Oh hoo! A woman will soften the hardest heart.
> **Ngujoh:** Especially the heart of Officer. (63-64)

Ngujoh's statement that Mboysi can speak to Officer in 'the language he understands' suggests more than the use of a language acquired through formal education. His next words claiming that she is a woman with 'great charms' are indicative of his belief that Mboysi can tame Officer's cruelty by using her body to seduce him. The underlying perception revealed in his words and also in Old One's response is that woman's body is a means to an end – an instrument for female survival. Mboysi attempts to denounce the intended abuse of her body but is made to believe that it is no abuse if she does it for the sake of the children, for 'the children must survive to tell the story' (64). As if acting on the cue, Tata and Bolame begin to scream: 'We are hungry! We are hungry!' (64). Their continued pleas for food and water are what move Mboysi to accept to surrender her body to Officer. Thus, the play elucidates the figure of woman as a heroic whore, for in order to save the children Mboysi must prostitute herself to Officer. As Ngugi does with Wanja in *Petals of Blood* (see Stratton, 1994: 49), Butake conflates in one body the figures of woman as a mother and woman as a whore and by this he suggests that there can be no possibility of woman performing her motherly role without sacrificing something of herself. Mboysi's act of self-abnegation indicates that to sacrifice personal interest for that of the community is a fate woman cannot escape.

The enshrining of woman's body as an object for male lustful desires is only a sub-text of the play because in the main text Mboysi's self-sacrifice is celebrated as a heroic act, an act that saves her fellow travellers from starvation. It is greeted with cries of praise:

> **Ngujoh:** You are our saviour, woman. The Old One here was right. Go and speak to him in the white man's language, he said. Show him that we are people too. You see, you have saved us from thirst and hunger. Officer catch man… Woman break Officer… Woman free man! Old One, see how she shines in those new clothes….
> **Old One:** Woman bring survival to children….
> **Ngujoh:** Woman break Officer. Woman save man. (66-67)

Mboysi is projected as a saviour to all the survivors, but especially to the children for whom she becomes the heroic mother. Tata proclaims in her praise: 'Mother is great!' (67). The play glorifies this mother-like status she assumes.

In the last scene of the play, Mboysi manages to manipulate Officer into giving her his revolver which she uses to kill him. She then chants a victory song in celebration of her accomplishment:

> The elephant has fallen!
> The elephant has fallen!
> The lion is no more!
> Woman is great! (84)

But before her dance of victory is completed there is a sudden noise off stage and two gun shots are heard. Mboysi falls to the ground dead. An officer walks on to stage carrying a revolver. He takes a few minutes to admire her beauty and then castigates her bravery in sexist terms:

> **Officer:** Walahi! She was really a beautiful woman. I now understand. But where did she get those crazy ideas from? And a woman of such beauty! Very strange, indeed. (*Raising his voice*) Corporal? Bring your men and clear out the casualty. (85)

Thus ends Mboysi's premature victory over Officer. Her death symbolizes a re-establishment of state power and its propensity for excesses. She is whisked off the stage as 'casualty' and all traces of her revolutionary fervour are wiped off with her elimination.

There is a disturbing ambivalence in Butake's construction of Mboysi in that she seems to be a heroic figure and yet she suffers a profound defeat. The question is whether this postulation of heroism in defeat does not perhaps undermine female agency. Natalie Etoke (2006: 42) cautions against "heroic" modes of writing women's bodies when she states that 'it is not enough to sing the praise of woman warriorship. We must question the literary use of her sexuality and we must guard against a simple celebration of female militancy or political participation, because the key question is for what purpose it is used'. In *The Survivors*, the celebration of female militancy only serves to valorize the gender ideology governing relations between women and men, because implicit in Mboysi's sacrificial act is a compulsory compliance to male wish.

Mboysi in this play is a woman alone who is disempowered in the sense that her womanhood is defined as her sexuality and her sexuality is perceived as being designed for male consumption. Moreover, besides the reference to her education, the accolades she receives are all centred on her physical beauty. First, she is described as a woman of 'great charms' and then later she 'shines' in new clothes given to her by her exploiter. Everything about her reverts to her looks and what they have to offer. Her body is reified, objectified and sexualized. In this guise, she becomes the symbol of a wealthy nation brought to nothingness by the greed of its corrupt politicians and their neo-colonial allies. She is the writer's projected vision of Africa in distress, a vision that emblematizes woman as being in need of redemption from her state of debasement.

Another noteworthy point is that Mboysi is a pawn on the patriarchal neo-colonial chessboard. She is trapped between two groups of male individuals that both see her as a means to their own survival. Her allegiance to either one of them necessarily jeopardizes her relationship with the other. Whether she chooses to stay with Officer or to rebel against him to be with the survivors, she loses herself in some way. With Officer, she gives of her sexual self for his pleasure; she becomes a commodity for his self-indulgence while she herself remains the robotic player. With the survivors, she loses her will to act for herself, because they make her believe that their communal survival is more important than hers as an individual. If Mboysi's lack of self-will is seen as a necessity for the preservation of the community, one must then ask, as Etoke does, 'if a woman's

involvement in the collective fate at the expense of her personal fate is not a negation of her own individuality' (Etoke, 2006: 42).

Intrinsic in Mboysi's selfless act on behalf of the survivors is an endorsement of her own sexploitation. Her body is projected as 'a sexual weapon, a catalyst for political change', but 'by the same token, it is also prisoner of a wide range of stereotypes that define women by their sexuality' (Etoke, 2006: 42). Mboysi allows herself to be traded to Officer for his benevolence, perhaps because she hopes to appropriate some of that male power in the process. Thus, when in her conversation with Ngujoh and Old One she notices what feels like a measure of that power being conferred on to her, she revels in it. For example, when the two men attempt to find out from her the kind of house in which Officer lives, she gives them a retort and her words indicate that her relationship with them has crossed what Kenneth Harrow (1994) calls the 'thresholds of change'.

> **Mboysi:** You people stop worrying my ears with your questions. (*To Tata and Bolame*) Let us move. (*To Old One and Ngujoh*) Are you coming?
> **Ngujoh:** When did women start talking like that in the presence of men?
> **Old One:** You sent her to Officer, didn't you?
> **Ngujoh:** And that gives her the right to talk to men like that?
> **Mboysi:** Why did you not face Officer? Was it not because of me, a woman, that Officer gave you food and water? If both of you don't come now…
> **Ngujoh:** Old One, this woman now has power over us.
> **Old One:** This woman has power over Officer. With her help Officer might allow us to go to Ewawa.
> **Ngujoh:** You are right, Old One. We must not anger her.
> **Old One:** I am glad to hear that. Let's follow her. (70)

The question of power in this context rotates on Mboysi's newly attained status as a saviour and hence her capacity to assume leadership of the group. From now on, she decides where the group goes and the rest have to follow because their survival depends on it. While Ngujoh acknowledges the power she now commands over them, Old One chooses to see it more as power over Officer and he hopes to exploit this situation to their advantage when he intimates that Officer may let them proceed to Ewawa because of Mboysi. Old One and Ngujoh both resent Officer's control over their mobility, but they prefer to use Mboysi to fight their battles. Her body thus becomes the playground on which masculine power is battled out.

Mboysi's power is mainly the product of her sexual dalliance with Officer, but that power is inherently contradictory because it exists only at the superficial level, couched within the words she utters to the people around her. At the profound level, she is powerless not only before the militaristic structures superimposed on her society but also before a masculine order which subjects her to its caprices and tosses her about like a soccer ball. Mboysi's exercise of power over her travelling companions camouflages her real subjugation to a neo-colonial patriarchal order that exploits women sexually and materially. Officer keeps her alive first because she is a means to his 'material survival' and secondly because she provides the distraction he needs from time to time since, as he says, 'the flesh is weak' (73). Mboysi's value resides only in her physical attraction and sexual appeal, as evident in Officer's soliloquy: 'Hm… that woman does things to me. I don't know what a woman like that was doing in the bush. Just wasting away in the hut of some native who didn't even know the value of a woman' (72). She is a 'good woman' (72) because she acquiesces to Officer's sexual demands. Yet, he treats her with condescension, because he sprays her with a disinfectant every time she approaches his tent. Although it upsets her that he treats her like a 'sub-human' or an 'unclean' animal and even uses her 'like a horse' (80), signifying her commodified status as his property, she continues to indulge him. Moreover, she keeps going to his tent for biscuits, bread, sardines, sugar, milk and other food items which she and her companions need for sustenance. There seems to be very little she can do to escape from Officer since not only does she depend on him for food but is also scared of the gun he carries with him all the time. Besides the pressure from Ngujoh, Old One, Tata and Bolame, Mboysi must still succumb to Officer's wishes because she lacks any other means of defending herself. Since her sexuality is the only valuable possession the writer entrusts her with and which Officer now has control of, she becomes completely powerless. From a Strattonian feminist point of view, we see here a strong contradiction between Butake's 'desire to privilege women and his tendency toward male titillation' (Stratton, 1994: 163).

It is not until Mboysi realizes that Officer 'does not want [them] to leave because the cargo will stop coming' (78) that she feels inclined to separate herself from the object of her oppression. As she heads off towards Officer's direction, her actions take on masculine aspects; the fire in her eyes, the determination in her steps, and the strength of

her words are all factors that move Old One to say to Ngujoh: 'Between you and that woman, I do not know who the man is' (79). Implicit in this statement is a link between the exercise of power and the masculinization of the female body. As Mboysi walks away she is made to be seen as a woman usurping male qualities since the spirit of fierceness she now displays is not typically associated with her gender. The qualities of femininity naturally ascribed to her gender have been momentarily circumvented in favour of a pseudo-masculinity that purports to be in control but is nonetheless being controlled by greater forces. Her "male-like heroism" is thus short-lived because it is in opposition to an established order that legitimizes male control of public politics.

That this order triumphs in the end is evident in the final scene of the play when Mboysi is killed. Why Butake allows Mboysi to be killed is the big question that begs for an answer. Nol Alembong sees her death as 'a wasted effort for both the character and her creator when Cameroon stands in need of revolutionary models' (quoted in Lyonga, 1993: 177). Lyonga, however, thinks that this was Butake's way of discouraging individualistic action in favour of group action (1993: 177). Eyoh on his part provides an explanation that seems to encompass both Alembong and Lyonga's views in that he sees in the creation of Mboysi the writer's desire to imbue his society with a regenerative capacity, although such regeneration fails because the forces that annihilate all positive values are overwhelming, and not even the revolutionary hero can survive. To Eyoh, 'her survival could not achieve much since in the process of trying to save her people, she had to use means which make her abhorrent and rid her of that moral force needed to redeem her society' (Eyoh, 1993b: 104). Eyoh's argument illuminates the point that the writer intended Mboysi as the carrier of his sense of moral integrity, for despite Mboysi's claim that she was a respectable schoolteacher in her clan before it was decimated, she trades her respectability for survival, an action which then relegates her to that patriarchal space that stipulates that 'lady and whore are both bred to please' (Minh-ha, 1989: 97). Her deficiency in moral integrity therefore necessitates her eviction from the writer's projected world of nationalist struggle.

As Eyoh shows, the play also highlights Butake's advocacy of a collective revolution as opposed to an individualistic one. In this case then, he orchestrates Mboysi's death

because of two weaknesses on her part. First, she fails to accept that her enemy is not just Officer in the role of a ruthless military commander but an entire political system headed by greedy and corrupt politicians who care nothing about the common people. Secondly, she allows her anger against Officer to overshadow her bigger objective to ensure the communal survival of her fellow comrades. Once her relationship with Officer becomes defined in terms of personal revenge, then the mission to protect the lives of the survivors is jeopardized. Thus, while her death represents a tragic end to a seemingly progressive power negotiation between the rulers and the ruled, it also marks Butake's non-endorsement of individualistic power pursuits as well as his strong leanings towards the "People Power" ideology.

In a way then, Mboysi embodies Butake's vision of the post-colonial state in its dire need for redemption from greedy, individualistic power struggles. As Karen Keim noted many years ago, Anglophone writers of post-colonial literature use a didactic approach to point out the need for social responsibility and ideals like equality, justice and communalism (1986: 209). Mboysi's tragedy is the result of her acting alone rather than involving her comrades in the struggle against militaristic domination. In this brief moment, she epitomizes a spirit of individual survival, but the play's quick curtailment of that spirit through the enactment of her sudden death affirms Etoke's view that the involvement of woman's body in 'discourses on nationalism, violence, identity and desire displays an inherent dualism opposing collectivity and individuality' (2006: 44). There is also a profound contradiction in Mboysi's actions, because she sets out to be the archetypal mother of the nation who ensures the survival of the children, but in the end she precipitates their death, for by compromising her own survival she compromises the survival of the other survivors. Essentially, then, Mboysi fails her people, just as Africa's leaders have failed her in many respects.

The manner in which Mboysi's body becomes a vehicle for the writer's inscription of ideologies of power is a feminist concern since her death defeats any vision of female empowerment that the play may have set out to impress. A romanticized ending to the play is not necessarily what is being advocated here, but a more challenging discourse on the politics of survival – a discourse beyond the sexual – would have been a refreshing

token. Such is not the case because the medium of Mboysi's supposed empowerment is her subjection to what Mbembe satirically calls an 'active penis' (1992: 9). In the light of Strattonian feminism, Butake's attempt to replace the traditional female figures of mothers, prostitutes and secretaries with heroic women characters does little to promote a discourse of women's agency, because in the end, the gun – conventionally symbolic of phallic power (see Stratton, 1994: 162) – triumphs and Mboysi is vanquished. Mboysi is undoubtedly a casualty of authoritarian rule and male lasciviousness. In this play, as in *Lake God*, sex is inextricably linked to power and domination. The two competing genders vie for spaces of domination, and as can be expected the masculine gender gains an upper hand over the feminine one. In essence, *The Survivors*, *Lake God* and *And Palm Wine* all end in ways that awaken rather than suppress feelings of despair, disappointment and dissatisfaction with the writer's approach to the women empowerment discourse.

3.4 Butake's Female Characters under a Strattonian Lens

Reading *Lake God*, *The Survivors* and *And Palm Wine* from a comparative point of view suggests that the common denominator unifying the three plays is *active* women in an environment of *passive* or *powerless* men. In each text, there are conflicts between groups of people, most notably between rulers and their subjects. The male subjects are portrayed as powerless in the face of domineering rulers and it is the female subjects who are seen taking decisive actions to rectify difficult situations or to evict unwanted presences. The female subjects take the side of their male counterparts but draw on their own resources to effect change. Their resources, though, are mainly sexual and body-centred. The following table outlines the various instruments of female empowerment that the plays reveal:

Play	**Instrument of female empowerment**
Lake God	The "de-sexualized body": the body bereft of sexual desire or forced to suppress its desire for the purpose of attaining a specific goal.
The Survivors	The "re-sexualized body": the body endowed with sexual appeal and the capacity to negotiate in what Sasha Gear (2007: 219) calls the 'commodification of sex' – where the body is 'exchanged for

	any number of necessities or luxuries'.
And Palm Wine Will Flow	The "ageing naked body": the body that is forbidden to the male gaze by virtue of its advanced age and hence closer affinity to the ancestral realm.

Superficially, then, the women in these plays are seen as powerful actors initiating positive processes of reconstruction and rehabilitation for their peoples, but beneath their empowerment lie connotations of subjectivism and female compliance to male authority and maintenance of the symbolic order. In other words, the three plays seem to promote a discourse of power by women, but if one peers deeply into them using what has been termed the Strattonian feminist lens in this study one finds that in many ways the plays reproduce in symbolic form the gender relations that have come to define traditional African societies. In all three plays, there is a traditional division of labour in which men are in charge of state matters and women are entrusted with socio-economic responsibilities such as providing food for the community and looking after children. A reversal of these roles only comes in when male greed and complacency interfere with the smooth functioning of the state. Significantly, even when women have to take over men's responsibilities they do not do so as women but as masculinized women, emphasizing the point that the masculinization of women is perceived as the only cultural matrix for successful female leadership.

Butake's plays abound with examples of female roles that have been duplicated over the years in African men's writing. The replication of roles such as women as custodians of traditional values, women as protectors of land, and women as objects of men's sexual gratification suggest a vision that is masculinist in both conception and execution. In addition, the unrepentant representation of women as guardians of customs and traditions is inherently disempowering because it is those same customs and traditions that hold women bound to patriarchy.

3.5 Whose Empowerment is it?

The central question in this chapter had to do with empowerment: whose empowerment do the plays achieve in the end? It has been illustrated throughout this chaper that beneath the superficial empowerment of the female characters run undercurrents of a masculinist

ideology that institutionalizes rather than dismantles male dominance. A valid argument then is that the three plays underscore the writer's own quest for social and/or creative empowerment, since the trope of placing women at the centre of nationalist movements tends to accord male writers a hero-like status with the general readership. It has to be emphasized that in spite of the supposed empowerment of women by the writer, the world of the plays remains a male world with women being given brief entrance into the male order of communal power and as quick an exit as the symbolic order dictates. Even the world of gods and ancestral spirits is almost exclusively a male world. There seems to be no hope of changing the status quo be cause, as El-Saadawi points out, powerless women cannot change patriarchal values since 'God is always with men against women' (2005: 25).

In all three plays, it is the males who triumph or succeed in retaining political power in the end. In *Lake God*, the women work from behind the scenes and manage to breathe new life into the Kwifon which then proceeds to re-instate its power over the affairs of the village. In *The Survivors*, Mboysi attempts to overthrow a corrupt leadership but is shot in the end by a soldier, and her death effectively restores power to a military regime headed by r uthless soldiers. In *And Palm Wine*, Kwengong succeeds in ousting the tyrannical Fon but relinquishes control of the land to a new council of elders headed by Shey Ngong. Thus, another male leadership takes over and women's involvement in it is conveniently shadowed. With this paternalistic norm of female withdrawal and/or eviction from the exercise of state power, Butake's plays offer little hope to modern Cameroonian women battling with the inequalities that continue to characterize their participation within executive, legislative and judicial bodies of power.

CHAPTER FOUR

WOMEN AS ABSENTED PRESENCES IN *SHOES AND FOUR MEN IN ARMS* AND *DANCE OF THE VAMPIRES*

> Despite professed ideals, nationalisms do not address all individuals equally: significant distinctions and discriminations are made along gendered (and also class and racial) lines. Such distinctions are not mere decoration; on the contrary, nationalism relies heavily on ge ndered languages to imagine itself. Gender informs nationalism and nationalism in its turn consolidates and legitimates itself through a variety of gendered structures and shapes which, either as ideologies or as political movements, are clearly tagged: the idea of nationhood bears a masculine identity though national ideals may wear a feminine face. (Boehmer, 1991: 6)

4.1 Introduction

In his article 'Absented Presences in Recent Anglophone-Cameroon Poetry', George Nyamndi (2009: 4) posits the view that the commanding force in recent poetry by Anglophone Cameroonians is not the immediate, observable structure of society, or what he calls the historical present, but the absented or concealed circumstances of the coming into being of that historical present. Nyamndi sees in the poetry of Bate Besong and Mathew Takwi, the two poets he discusses in his article, a sp irit of nationalism that derives its strength from the nationalist endeavours of the Francophone freedom fighter Um Nyobe, although the poems themselves make no explicit reference to Um Nyobe. In his view, then, Um Nyobe is an absented presence – that historical figure that is physically absent but spiritually present in the sense that his ideals inform, guide and motivate the poetry of Anglophone Cameroonians in this age of general dissension against dictatorial regimes in Africa.

The term 'absented presence' is oxymoronic in that it is a combination of two words whose meanings are inherently contradictory. The purpose of using an oxymoron is usually to heighten or intensify the reader's visualization of an image – usually an image that is central to the narrative (novel, play or poem). The term 'absented presence' has been borrowed from Nyamndi to frame the analytical focus of this chapter, but the

manner of its usage is distinct from Nyamndi's. The use of the term in this chapter is related to Elleke Boehmer's insightful deconstruction of the relationship between gender and nationalism. As the opening quotation indicates, nationalist discourses are essentially masculine discourses made attractive to the public eye by the adoption of a feminine face. This feminine identity notwithstanding, nationalist discourses tend to construct women as gendered beings, thus consigning them to the periphery of the dominant discourse. This chapter interrogates Butake's depiction of women in two plays, *Shoes and Four Men in Arms* (1992) and *Dance of the Vampires* (1996). It looks not just at woman's place in Butake's narration of the nation in a general sense but specifically at the space Butake allots to women within the practice of national politics. To guide the analysis of texts, the chapter asks the following questions: Are women participants in the policy-making processes that define the nation or are they simply observers? Do they construct power of their own and is this power recognized by their male counterparts? Do we see agency in their actions or mere survival instincts? And to what degree do they succeed in changing the status quo of the fictional world in which they find themselves?

In the analysis, the term 'absented presence' is used to refer to four types of female characters: (1) those that are mentioned by other characters but never get to appear in the plays or are never seen performing any roles; (2) those that are assigned roles in the plays but perform them off-stage; (3) those that do get to appear in the plays but are for the most part silent, that is, they are seen but not heard; and finally (4) those that, although seen and heard, remain stereotypes created to propagate a particular gender ideology. These categories of women characters constitute the absented presences in Butake's plays, the invisible/visible faces that populate the pages of the texts. In *Shoes and Four Men in Arms* (henceforth referred to as *Shoes*), women's presence is limited to shrill voices that bemoan their woes from a far-off destination. The women are simply absent from the fictional reality of the text. Where they are present, as in *Dance of the Vampires* (henceforth referred to as *Dance*), their role is far from being inspirational, for they feature as cohorts in a political game in which the quest for supreme power obliterates all other human concerns.

It must be recalled that the political arena in Cameroon was for a long time dominated by men and women's participation was hardly visible. Konde (2005: 42) acknowledges that 'women in pre-colonial Cameroon did participate in public life but only a few of them were as v isible as their male counterparts'. The situation of women's invisibility in politics became worse under colonial structures of power where women were totally excluded from the public administration of their societies (see Konde, 2005: 68). This time, even the indirect avenues of power open to them under traditional systems, such as serving as advisers to the husbands, were now closed, because the imposition of a foreign administrative system (even in the case of British Indirect Rule) on the people necessarily meant that men too lost their privileged positions in politics.

With the advent of independence came women's rise to political power as many women, including Mrs Dorcas Idowu, Mrs Josepha Mua and Mrs Julienne Keutcha, became notable figures in politics. It is interesting to note from Konde's study that Mrs Dorcas Idowu and Mrs Josepha Mua got into parliament by a ppointment in 1957 a nd 1959, respectively, while Mrs Julienne Keutcha was the first Cameroonian woman to contest and win a seat in parliament in 1960 (see Konde, 2005: 117). Konde claims that the fact that women were for the most part appointed rather than elected, unlike men, meant that they were 'treated like political minors and patronized by the male politicians who decided on their appointments' (2005: 122). While this claim ignores the willingness of these women to accept these positions or their prior exhibition of leadership skills so as to necessitate such appointments, one has to acknowledge that within Cameroonian politics some degree of strategic thinking usually informs appointments of women to public office. Even in recent times, women's appointment to political positions is sometimes done not so much to establish equity in gender representation as to ensure access to votes during elections, since women tend to be highly successful in rallying support for political leaders.[50] Thus, over the years, women have been subjected to manipulation and

[50] This claim derives from personal observation of the Cameroonian political scene. Butake shares this sentiment when he states that women constitute the active population that comes out the most during political rallies to canvass support for political leaders and yet their representation in parliament remains insignificant (see interview under Appendix III). Women who are appointed as heads of educational institutions, ministries and public service departments tend to be "favoured" or rewarded for the support they show for the ruling political party. Others are vested with political office to neutralize their allegiance to opposition parties. Many appointments of women come with a price tag. Such is the game of politics in Cameroon.

exploitation by politicians who appear desperate to remain in power. It seems that this is the reality that Butake attempts to present in his two plays, *Shoes* and *Dance*. However, if his intention is to satirize the leadership in Cameroon for its failure to meet the expectations of the people, then little attention is given to the leadership's disregard for women's right to inclusion in political affairs. Butake's literary inscription of women's absence, or minimal presence, in Cameroonian politics works against modern-day efforts to revolutionize women's activities and/or empower women in all spheres of public life.

4.2 Highlights of the Plays: Of Vampires and Vandals

The two plays *Shoes* and *Dance* were written at a time when public outcries against government malpractices were at their highest. The period of the early 1990s saw the rise of opposition parties determined to penetrate the enclaves of power which for many years had been hoarded by the dominant CPDM party. *Shoes* certainly speaks to this theme of unrelenting leadership and this explains why it won the hearts of audiences on many occasions when it was performed in the major cities of Cameroon. According to Butake (1999: 3), a performance of the play at the Bamenda Congress Hall in 1996 had so impressed the then director of Helvetas Cameroon, Thomas Bûrge, that he made available a grant that enabled Butake to publish this and other plays in the collection we now know as *Lake God and Other Plays*. The play also apparently made such an impression on other members of the German community in Cameroon that it was translated into German by Eckhard Breitinger under the title *Vier Mann in Uniform und ein Berg Schuhe* and broadcast over Westdeutscher Rundfunk (West German Broadcasting), a radio station based in the city of Cologne in Germany. Under Butake's direction, The Flame Players took the play to Germany in June 1996 where they performed at the Shau Forum Festival in Leverkusen and also put up performances in places like Gelsenkirschen and Bayreuth (Butake, 1993: 3). Butake, however, does not report on audiences' response to the play on these occasions.

Unlike his other plays, Butake does not mention the production highlights of *Dance* in his foreword to *Lake God and Other Plays*. It is, however, worth mentioning that the play's title is the exact English translation of a German musical known as *Tanz der Vampire* which premiered in Vienna, Austria in October 1997. It is tempting to assume that Butake

borrowed his title from this German production, especially considering his links with Germany,[51] but then one has to remember that Butake's play was actually written and performed in 1996, a year before the Germans produced *Tanz der Vampire*. However, there is still a possibility that the title was borrowed, because the German musical was essentially the remake of a film by Roman Polanski called *The Fearless Vampire Killers* which was launched in the United States of America in 1967. While there is no real evidence that this film had an impact on Butake as to influence his choice of title for his play, there is an interconnectedness between the play and the film in that both are set in a world of the gothic and the magical and definitely a world in which leaders emerge as vampires who maintain their hold on power by turning their close collaborators into vampires themselves. The image of the blood-sucking vampire adequately captures the power-hungry dispensations of Psaul Roi in Butake's play, as shall be illustrated later.

Shoes and *Dance* are two plays in which the exercise of power within the macro space of the state (as opposed to the micro space of traditional society depicted in *And Palm Wine* and *Lake God*) is unreservedly attacked. By presenting political struggles pitting rulers against subjects, superiors against subordinates, soldiers against civilians, and colonialists against indigenes, Butake exposes to public criticism not only the excesses to which African leaders resort in their quest for power but also the blind devotion that some of their subjects bestow on them. In *Shoes*, the exercise of power is seen through a military dictatorship that remote-controls soldiers into performing tasks that go against their better judgment. *Dance* is about a tyrannical ruler who takes extreme measures to secure absolute power for himself. The atmosphere in both plays is saturated with tension, hostility, and conflict-arousing sentiments. It compels the reader/audience to share Frantz Fanon's criticism of the neo-colonial bourgeoisie as sell-outs of their countries and perpetual beggers from the West (1967: 122-123). The two plays seem to be the writer's vehicle for conscientizing the oppressed masses on the decaying political morality of their leaders and propelling them towards revolutionary thoughts and actions.

[51] Butake has spent extended periods of time in Germany conducting research, running workshops, adjudicating doctoral thesis defences, and attending conferences. From October 2002 to March 2003 he was a DAAD research fellow at Bayreuth University, during which time he was also given temporary employment as Professor of African Literature at Bayreuth's Institute for African Studies. Again, in June 2008 he was a visiting professor at the Institute for African Studies at Bayreuth University.

A noteworthy point is that the plays expand on the theme of oppression through violence evident in *The Survivors*. As in *The Survivors*, the gun is a symbol of power in both *Dance* and *Shoes*. It is the instrument with which the oppressor keeps the oppressed under strict regulation, be it in terms of physical movement or political expression. Inordinate ambition is a flaw in major characters in both plays and it is what drives them to take extreme measures in order to acquire power for themselves. Power, as shown in the plays, is expressed in several ways. One such way is through obscenity – the production of vulgarity – which Mbembe describes as an integral part of the stylistics of power in the post-colony, because it allows the ruling class to indulge in the 'pursuit of wrongdoing to the point of shamelessness' (1992: 14). The exercise of power through obscenity is exemplified in Butake's plays when in *Shoes* the soldiers make derogatory references to women's body parts in the song they sing and when in *Dance* Psaul Roi uses vulgar language to describe the sexuality of his women. In both instances, the women being referred to are visibly absent; they are absented presences. Significantly, Butake's vision in these plays shies away from the structural pattern of woman as the saving power in a morally and politically disintegrating society. What we see in these two plays is a vision in which women feature only as bodies on which power (both sexual and political) is contested, exercised and sometimes challenged. Women are absented presences in these plays because they are not only passive and voiceless for the most part but also effectively powerless since their actions are more *reactive* than *proactive*.

In *Shoes* and *Dance*, the absence or near absence of women is not only glaring but also projects itself as the result of a creative process that is intentionally selective: selective because it confines its exploration of human follies to the quest for political power, a quest that is taken to be beyond the scope of female participation. Although one female character features in the contested power space of *Dance*, the play itself does not pretend to create an impression of female power. There is hardly any evidence of women's agency; neither is there any foregrounding of women's role as proponents of democracy. Butake's vision of women as militants, as seen in the plays discussed in the preceding two chapters, has been replaced by one in which women are victims of an oppressive system that deprives them of a space to demonstrate their militancy and to change the

status quo. This suggests that within the political structures of post-colonial Cameroon women's exercise of power remains more of an ideal than a reality.

The most striking aspect of the two plays, one which sets them apart from the "women empowerment" plays discussed in Chapter Three, is that change is effected not by women but by men. It is men who step in to liberate the state from the follies of unscrupulous leaders. The paradox is that in both plays, it is soldiers (who all happen to be male) who now seek to redress the political problems and to restore some semblance of order in society. They become the medium through which Butake "educates" his readers/audiences on t he devastating effects of violence and oppression, the voice through which he denounces the exploitation of the masses, and the characters through which he projects his ideology that a reversal in humans' way of thinking and acting is indeed possible. Women literally take a back seat in the re-ordering of society we see in these plays. They therefore become the "no-bodies" that populate the pages of the texts. The "some-bodies", in contrast, are the violent and the frivolous monarchs and soldiers who engage in various atrocities in order to define their place within the highly contested space of political power.

4.3 The Post-colony and the Absented Presences in *Shoes and Four Men in Arms*

In *Shoes*, Butake makes a caricature out of military leaders and paints the post-colony as a quagmire infested with grabbers and opportunists. Because Cameroon has never been under military rule, as it is the case with Ghana and Nigeria, it can be said that the play demonstrates broadly Butake's disappointment with post-independent African states where power is hoarded by a selected few whose primary instrument of administration is violence. To illustrate his point, Butake chooses to present a military dictatorship in which leadership is fraught with extortion, looting, exploitation, deprivation and power abuse. The four soldiers in the play are sent on pa trol to quell any 'vandals and subversives' threatening to overthrow the regime and they end up guarding a pile of 'old tattered shoes' amassed through the looting and plundering of 'innocent civilians'

(133).[52] Thus, the title of the play is satiric in its mockery of the excesses of military dictatorships and authoritarian rule in general.

By the end of the play, it is one of the soldiers (Fourth Soldier) who becomes the voice through which Butake launches his quest for liberation from oppressive governments. He is the character that strips the regime of its façade, revealing its true identity as a multi-faced statue of power-hungry individuals. Fourth Soldier tells his comrades:

> **Fourth:** … We have been four men in arms being used like play things, like toys even, by a small nyama-nyama group of very corrupt thieves and self-seekers, to humiliate, to torture and to kill our own brothers and sisters, the suffering people, in the name of a law and a land which they manipulate at will and in which they have no faith. (141)

The image of African leaders as a bunch of greedy self-seekers is quite vivid here, because the term 'nyama' in many indigenous African languages means meat. The double usage of the term in 'nyama-nyama group', literally translated as 'meat-meat group', vividly captures the luxuries enjoyed by the ruling minority and the excesses to which they indulge in their reproduction of what Mbembe calls the 'economy of pleasure' (1992: 21), an expression which aptly describes the incessant display of wealth by pleasure-obsessed politicians. The soldier's words above illustrate Butake's disillusionment with post-colonial leadership and its propensity for violence, lawlessness and frivolity.

Having come to the realization that they had all along been manipulated by the General, the soldiers decide to join the liberation struggle now led by First Soldier who has unexpectedly joined the band wagon for freedom after being stripped of his military command. The soldiers' conversion from a military to a civilian, though revolutionary, way of life symbolizes hope for the nation, that the nation can still be rescued from the self-destructive path that its leaders have mapped out for it. It is the converted First Soldier who tells his comrades: 'We must abandon the wanton violence against others that was our way of life in the army. From this moment, we must demonstrate a deep respect for human life and the basic rights of each and every individual' (142). First

[52] All text quotations are from *Lake God and Other Plays* (1999)

Soldier's self-renewal is complete, for his words indicate a complete change in his pattern of thinking. With this new mindset, it seems logical that he should be the one to lead his colleagues in a march to join the rest of the revolutionary forces (whom we do not see but understand are there). The song with which the four soldiers march out of stage is markedly different from the opening song in that the content has changed, moving from obscene remarks about women's body parts to a deep concern about the inequalities that pervade society. To illustrate this point, the opening song is as follows:

> **Solo:** ebeesee, ebeesee!
> **Chorus:** Wonderful!
> **Solo:** ebeesee, ebeesee!
> **Chorus:** Wonderful!
> **Solo:** Small gondele, big, big bobbi!
> **Chorus:** Wonderful!
> **Solo:** Big gondele, small, small bobbi!
> **Chorus:** Wonderful!
> **Solo:** We soja dem di jam noting!
> **Chorus:** Wonderful!
> **Solo:** Woman na so dem boku fo ya!
> **Chorus:** Wonderful!
> **Solo:** Small gondele, big, big bobbi!
> **Chorus:** Wonderful!
> **Solo:** Big gondele, small, small bobbi!
> **Chorus:** Wonderful! (116)

In contrast to this song, the closing song, which has now dispensed with the division between solo and chorus, reveals not the soldiers' lust for women's bodies but their concern about the wanton looting that takes place within government structures, as the words below indicate:

> People di sofa General di chop money!
> Soja di sofa General di chop money!
> People and soja di sofa General di chop money! (142)

Shoes decries malpractices such as the harassment, exploitation and looting of the property of ordinary citizens, the rape of women (both old and young), the siphoning of state funds into private bank accounts, and the violent quelling of any form of dissension and opposition against the government. These are practices and attitudes that have come to characterize power politics in the post-colony (see Fanon, 1967; Mbembe, 1992; Bayart, 2009).

In the play *Shoes*, however, there are no major roles assigned to female characters.[53] The play has four characters – four soldiers who are all male. Women are only heard off-stage bemoaning some form of injustice done to them by the soldiers. The military space is presented as exclusively male. Yet, woman's body is centralized as that which provides sexual relief to the soldiers. In other words, woman does not appear in any concrete form in this play but her body is made a recipient of the daily indiscretions of the soldiers, first by the song they sing and then by the sexual escapades they indulge in.

The song sung by the soldiers in the opening scene quoted above is an adapted version of a common song among soldiers in Cameroon.[54] The words of the song are derogatory references to women who are small in size but have big breasts ('small gondele, big, big bobbi') or big in size but have small breasts ('big gondele, small, small bobbi'), and thus look 'wonderful' to the male gaze (116). The implied perception is that in spite of their disproportionate body structure/shape, they are designed for "male consumption", for whether big or small they possess the paraphernalia that attracts male attention. This explains why the soldiers declare that they lack nothing ('we soja dem di jam noting') as they see many women ('woman na so dem buku fo ya') whom they can procure to indulge their fantasies. In this song, therefore, woman's body is commodified and presented as an object to be possessed by men simply for its sexual appeal. The song is indicative of the soldiers' distorted perception of women as nothing more than "consumable products", and it is prophetic of their sexual assault of young women later in the play.

[53] This is to say that the play does not feature women as active participants in the events that make up the main plot of the narrative. Interestingly, in an interview with Eckhard Breitinger, which could not be included here owing to constraints of space, he told me that during the premier of the play in Yaounde in 1992, the roles of the four soldiers were played by four women dressed in military attire, and this unexpected reversal was to him Butake's way of 'playing with male and female roles and power positions' (Nkealah, 2009c). In my view, this significant reversal of character role in the performance of the play is Butake's attempt to circumvent the gender roles he had assigned to characters within the text, creating the possibility of both genders co-existing within the military space. The gendered casting gives a different dimension to the play altogether, but as stated clearly in Chapter One the analysis here is based on the *text* of the play and not on the *performance*. The text of the play itself gives no indication about the writer's intention to have the play performed by an all-female cast. The reader cannot, therefore, be faulted for analysing the characters' roles as presented in the text.

[54] I have personally heard the original version among soldiers in my hometown. It is common to hear it early in the mornings or later in the evenings when the soldiers go out for their routine exercise. As they jog from their camp to the public stadium where they exercise, they sing along.

Butake states clearly in the beginning that this play is set anywhere in a military dictatorship. As history has shown, sex and violence are ever-present realities in this space. The play establishes a link between 'eating, fighting and fornicating' (129), the equivalent of food, violence and sex. This triune concept can be loosely linked to Mbembe's trinity of the mouth, the belly and the phallus which he describes as primary signifiers of the post-colonial leader's total lack of restraint (1992: 7). In situations of armed conflict, violent sex directed towards women is not uncommon.[55] The link between sex and violence is succinctly captured in *Shoes*. This is evident in Second Soldier's response to Third Soldier's question about what is to be done with the 'bodies', which Second Soldier and First Soldier mishear as 'bobbies' (breasts). Second Soldier's response indicates a dissociation of feelings of tenderness (as symbolized by a woman's breasts) from those of aggression associated with armed conflicts: 'You squeezam small, small. Then you suckam like pickin who has not seen his mammy for one whole day. After that you take your belt and lasham well, well. That is what you do with bobbies' (117). Second Soldier here compares a man's desire for a woman's breasts to a child's hunger for its mother's milk. The irony, however, is the violence that follows the man's action, for Second Soldier intimates that after sucking on the woman's breasts the man uses his belt to whip them. There is an underlying contrast between the child's action and the soldier's, one that suggests that a woman's body simultaneously evokes a tender and violent reaction from man: tender because of its sexual appeal and violent because of its assertion of power. Woman's body is ultimately the object of male violence, be it in a situation of armed conflict or domestic violence.

In its absented form, woman's body also features in *Shoes* as the embodiment of victimhood. It is a site of aggression, a battleground on which political differences are fought out, and a platform on which blatant lies are turned into absolute truths. The following exchange between Second Soldier and First Soldier attests to this point:

[55] Speaking about the xenophobic attacks on immigrants in South Africa in May 2008, social scientist Michael Neocosmos (2008) notes that it is a common tendency for the powerless to take out their frustrations on the weakest around them – women, children, the elderly and outsiders. Often, women are victims of violent sexual assaults by men driven to predatory instincts by existing dissatisfactions with prevailing political and socio-economic conditions (see the newspaper article 'Zimbabwean Raped Four Times' in *The Star*, 13 May 2008).

> **Second:** So there are many wounded?
> **First:** Many had been treated and sent home, the doctors said. But I saw seven who had been operated because of bullet wounds. There is this girl lying there in a comma [*sic*] with a big wound in the back of her head. Somebody must have hit her hard with the butt of a rifle. I don't know if she can survive.
> **Second:** She must be the one I hear they showed on television. They said she had tried to escape by jumping from the military truck, which was transporting those who had been captured. They said she was the only one who had received injuries.
> **First:** Liars! They pushed her off the truck. Some ethnofascist was bent on killing her. (127)

The portrayal of women as victims of war, civil strife or violent political struggles is a recurrent literary pattern that is not unique to African men's writing. Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1994) presents a protagonist who, in a tragic ironic twist, is raped by soldiers fighting for the same government she pledges to serve. Stereotypes of masculinities and femininities are common in African literature, in which men are depicted as vandals and predators and women as victims and prey. While this archetypal mode has a sociological backing in that the writers are seeking to provide, through fiction, an explanation for realities that are sometimes hard to deal with in real life, it canonizes male power and establishes female subjectivity as a given. In Butake's play, women's victimized state is foregrounded, albeit through the comments of the soldiers as opposed to actual enactments on stage. Women are the victims of rape, plunder and gross human rights abuse. In the threat of war, the soldiers display a desire to keep their wives and mothers from harm's way but they feel no qualms about taking the lives of other people's wives and mothers. They see human life as valueless and dead bodies as nothing more than objects that can easily be loaded on to trucks and dumped in 'shallow graves in the forest' (117). What Butake captures in the play is a landscape of human loss resulting from meaningless wars – meaningless because they are the result of differences in political ideology. In this political quagmire, women are ultimately the casualties of egoistic and masculinist struggles for dominance.

The list of dramatis personae tells the reader upfront that the only role women would have in this play would be that of "voices". The first voice heard off-stage is that of a young woman protesting against a soldier's manhandling of her body on the pretext of looking for stolen shoes:

> **Female voice:** Leave me! Leave me, I say. Help! Please, help me. These soldiers will kill me. I don't know anything about shoes. Leave my wrapper. Help! Help! I say, leave my wrapper. I beg Officer, take my shoes and leave me alone. I say I don't know anything about shoes. Leave me! You will tear my pant you this brute. What shoe can be hidden there? Leave me! I say leave me. Help! Help! Help! Help me e e e e e! (137)

There is also a male voice heard off-stage crying for help:

> **Male voice:** Shoes? I know nothing about shoes. Leave me alone. I say I know nothing about shoes. Oh, my coat and my shirt. Yes, take mine. Take my shoes and leave me alone. A a a h! They will kill me! You are knocking my toes off. Help! Help! Help me e e e! (137)

This indicates that the plea of the female voice is not unique in its distress. Both the young woman and the young man are being robbed of their clothes and shoes by the soldiers. Their cries for help indicate the soldiers' use of brute force, an aggressive tendency typical of persons in the army. The play shows how power operates in a system backed by the military. The voices are introduced to show the extent to which law and order have been cast aside in favour of violent acts orchestrated to satisfy mundane pleasures. As Fanon observes, the intelligentsia that took over power at independence has turned out to be nothing but a gang of profiteers and schemers determined to enrich itself through every conceivable means. The following statement by Fanon articulates Butake's sentiments about African leaders in the post-colony:

> The intellectuals who on the eve of independence rallied to the party now make it clear by their attitude that they gave support with no other end in view than to secure their slices of the cake of independence. The party is becoming a means of private advancement. There exists inside the new regime, however, an inequality in the acquisition of wealth and in monopolization. Some have a double source of income and demonstrate that they are specialized in opportunism. Privileges multiply and corruption triumphs, while morality declines. Today the vultures are too numerous and too voracious in proportion to the lean spoils of the national wealth. (Fanon, 1967: 137-138)

The opportunistic attitude displayed by the soldiers in Butake's play demonstrates the gross moral degeneration to which unscrupulous leaders have sunk the nation. Their failure to make the promises of independence a living reality is an act of treachery that necessitates the launch of a political revolution. This explains why in *Shoes* Butake rallies the soldiers into a revolutionary band that sets out to "cleanse" the state of its

"impurities" and to restore a new order based on equality, justice and social commitment. Disappointingly, though, no woman features among the revolutionaries.

In *Shoes* Butake again introduces the myth of the naked female body. The voice of the old woman heard off-stage shortly after that of the young woman and man provides this dimension to the play. It is not a voice in distress but one in defiance of authority:

> *Bootsteps of many people running off. Sarcastic laughter of old woman off.*
>
> **Female voice:** Come take you chop no my bikkin. You di lun weti again? Soja man witi long, long gun di lun woman na lun? Na only nyong girl wuna di fanam? Shoes, shoes! Wus kana shoes soja dem go chakara country so and den beat Chila dem and chakara nyong girl dem lass?
> [Come and take your food, my child. Why are you running away? How can a soldier with a long gun run away from a woman? Is it only young girls you want? Shoes, shoes! What kind of shoes are soldiers looking for that they will turn the country upside-down and beat elderly people and destroy young girls' vaginas?]
> *More old women's voices.*
> **Voices:** Wusai dem dey? Shoes! Shoes! Shoes! Wuna come take shoes. Wuna come take lass. Shoes! Lass! Shoes! Lass! Wuna come take shoes. Wuna come take lass!
> [Where are they? Shoes! Shoes! Shoes! Come and take the shoes. Come and take our vaginas. Shoes! Vaginas! Shoes! Vaginas! Come and take the shoes. Come and take our vaginas]. (138, my translation)

This part of the play evokes mirthless humour and places unnecessary emphasis on female sexual power. The old women challenge the soldiers by exposing their naked bodies to them. Their action seems to be guided by the knowledge that the soldiers cannot face them in their naked state; that within their nakedness lies a power that cannot be defied even by soldiers who have little regard for any law other than theirs. As it is expected, instead of attacking the women, the soldiers run away in fright. Their flight suggests that the possession of power by any individual or body is transient in a context where forces of opposition, whether human or supernatural, exert a strong resistance against the dominant power.

The above excerpt reveals Butake's obsession with what was identified in Chapter Three as the ageing naked body – the body forbidden to the male gaze by virtue of its advanced age and hence closer affinity to the ancestral realm. In Butake's fictional world, this body is endowed with enormous spiritual powers, making it the mythological mother-earth

figure – that which gives, nurtures and protects life. Unlike the bodies of young women which are vulnerable to male conquest (as in *The Rape* and *Family Saga*), this body is held in awe and dreaded for its propensity to ruin the lives of those who disrespect it. This explains why the soldiers take to flight. They recognize the women's act not as a mere defiance of authority but as a display of a different kind of authority – one that is backed by age-old beliefs and customs. The women's identity is explained thus:

> **Third:** The Kil'u women. Very old and very dangerous.
> **Second:** They carry arms?
> **Fourth:** Yes, bamboos. Long bamboos.
> **Second:** What do they do with the bamboos?
> **Third:** Nothing. They just walk with the bamboos. Like walking sticks, you know.
> **Second:** Why were the soldiers running?
> **Third:** Captain, you know what it means for an old woman to expose her nakedness before your eyes?
> **Fourth:** A curse beyond measure.
> **Third:** The end of your manhood. What is the use of being a soldier without your manhood? (138)

Butake gives the old women a god-like status, investing them with the power to destroy when they feel insulted by lesser mortals. Thus, the soldiers' reverence for the Kil'u stems from a profound fear of losing their manhood, their own perceived source of power. Two forces of power are here pitted against each other – the female genitalia and the phallus – and Butake seems to suggest that the phallus is no more dominant than the female genitalia is. There is a subtle leaning towards demystifying phallic power and deconstructing the concept of penis envy. It has been argued that in the complex world of sexuality, 'men fear passivity, women envy the penis' (Heath, 1987: 4). This ideology denotes that passivity is equated with femininity, hence it is to be repudiated. On the other hand, activism is associated with masculinity and masculinity equals the penis. Women thus envy the penis because of the power that lies behind it. However, what women exhibit is not so much penis envy as phallus envy, because what women desire is not the penis itself but the power it wields over them. The construction of the phallus as the envy of women is demystified in Butake's play in which we see women in possession of a 'phallus' of their own, one that dispels male phallic power. However, in this seeming debunking of the myth that the phallus dominates the power space, Butake inadvertently shows that in a society where female power can only be instituted through the parading of

the female genitalia, there is hardly any chance of women reversing power structures to accommodate their specific needs. Thus, the brief "appearance" of the Kil'u women and their immediate withdrawal into a world unknown to the public eye is indicative of Butake's consignment of Cameroonian women to a periphery that hardly changes their status as disempowered citizens.

Butake's projection of the Kil'u in *Shoes* parallels that of the Fibuen in *Lake God* and the women's cult in *And Palm Wine*. What holds these three plays together is the fact in each of them women construct power through the medium of the sexualized/de-sexualized body. An interconnection can also be seen between *The Survivors* and *Lake God*. Mboysi's use of her feminine charms to manipulate Officer into relinquishing some of the food provisions he receives from foreign donors reinforces the Fibuen women's resorting to sex to force their men to take action against the Fon. Women's use of their bodies to expedite processes of change or to ensure survival is the most glaring motif in Butake's drama. It forces one to ask questions about the scope of his conceptualization of female sexuality. For example, what conceited ideas of women's sexual powers does he entertain? What limitations does he impose on women by framing their agency strictly within the sexual space? Women's use of their bodies to attain political goals is a motif that denigrates women and projects them as agents of moral corruption. By harping on women's sexual power, Butake persistently highlights the genital difference between men and women, possibly suggesting that women's sexual organs are less dignifying, for in none of his plays do we see men exposing their genitals for any reason, political or otherwise.

It is important to state that in Butake's fictional world women's sexual power is closely associated with ritual power. In other words, their so-called heroic acts are mostly facilitated by a prior engagement with magic or communion with the spirit realm – the world beyond. In both *Lake God* and *And Palm Wine*, a descent into the world of the supernatural precedes brave acts in the world of the natural. Though this pattern is not exactly replicated in *Shoes* (because the audience does not get to see female characters on stage), the Kil'u's identity is still constructed on the premise of superhuman capabilities. The following excerpt illustrates this point:

> **Second:** Where have they been? I never heard about them before.
> **Third:** They have always been around. Kind of Mountain Elephants. Sleeping volcano if you see what I mean.
> **Fourth:** But why the volcano eruption only now?
> **Third:** You should know, Sergeant. Since the day you people whipped leaders of Mfu and Manjong and Kwifon did not react, the Kil'u erupted. The pronouncements of Kil'u are law in the land. If Kil'u says today is market or nobody's nose should smell the outside air, that is law. (138-139)

As in *Lake God*, the Kil'u is projected as a women's body that has always existed but only becomes active in a time of crisis. It is a body that holds promise of deliverance when the tradition designated saving body – the Kwifon – is powerless. It is given the image of an all-powerful, highly resourceful and authoritative body that wields exceptional power over its subjects. But women are being raped and their homes plundered and the Kil'u is not seen putting any constructive plans into place to ameliorate the situation. Butake speaks about the Kil'u (a fictional rendition of the Ta'kembeng of Bamenda) in grandiose terms, as evident in Third Soldier's claim that 'if Kil'u says today is market or nobody's nose should smell the outside air, that is law' (139). This implies not only that the Kil'u's authority is established and recognized but also that the Kil'u wields power that cannot be ignored even by the military authorities of the land. However, in spite of this "staff of authority" given to the Kil'u, the reader/audience does not get to see this group being proactive in terms of effecting transformational structures. The old women's disrobing is an act resorted to in a desperate attempt to retrieve some sense of dignity and to repudiate an overwhelming powerlessness imposed on them by the prevailing circumstances.

It seems a reasonable supposition then that Butake's inclusion of a few lines designed to project women as heroes while the rest of the play castigates them as victims is a mere mockery of women's ability to destabilize male power or to establish a democratic system. It is certainly not exciting, even less inspiring, to hear the soldiers speak with reverence about the Kil'u, and yet this Kil'u is just as disempowered as the rest of the citizens in this lawless nation. The metaphor of a volcano that appears in the passage quoted above implies that these women have natural capabilities to effect positive change, but the play implies that such capabilities are vested in their genitals and not their brains. Hence, the 'volcano' remains dormant for the most part, considering their

advanced age. Surely, there are more realistic instances of women's agency in history that the play could draw on to make its characters more appealing to a gender-conscious and feminist audience.

4.4 The Grotesque and the Absented in *Dance of the Vampires*

As in *Shoes*, this play gives little space to female presence. In fact, there is only one female character in the entire play. Though she is both seen and heard by the reader/audience, the milieu in which she appears (the vampire cult) resuscitates the earlier argument that female power in Butake's dramaturgy is strictly linked to ritual power. As in *And Palm Wine*, spirit possession is the medium by which women exercise power within the political space. Beyond the spiritual realm of the play in which the lone female voice is heard, the dominant actors in the rest of the settings are all male. Women are neither seen nor heard but are being spoken of. So then they become 'absented presences' – they are absent as characters but their bodies are made present for male subjection.

Dance is set in a nameless post-colonial state and depicts a ruler obsessed with the idea of absolute power. Psaul Roi is a ruthless tyrant whose exercise of power is marked by cruelty and savagery. When the play opens, we find him sitting on his throne in a dream-like state. The forces of good and evil are engaged in a battle for dominance in which he becomes the object of torture. Besides the external combat, he is also being tortured by an inner voice that compels him to defy all rules in order to secure absolute power. Butake uses dreams in this context as an expression of the wishes and desires of the unconscious. Psaul Roi has what can be termed a nightmare and the oppressive feeling he experiences throughout the dream is caused by an internal conflict between his desire for absolute power and the restrictions placed on him by the vampire tradition. His angry outburst in the dream highlights the torments humans suffer when their desires stand in opposition to what society entitles them to. Butake's inclusion of sounds and images of horror in this opening scene enhances the atmosphere of fantasy, myth and mystery that dominates the play.

The image of the fantastic is further heightened with the introduction of the vampire cult. The vampire cult, the play tells us, is the body that maintains a balance of power between the king and the council of elders. It regulates the king's activities and ensures that no single family stays in power for longer than custom allows. As the ruling monarch, however, Psaul Roi is not thrilled about the prospect of leaving office. Worse still, he discovers that his powers are limited because he is not a member of the vampire cult. He is so determined to have absolute power that he defies the vampire cult by gaining access to its ranks. Through bribery and threats, he becomes not only a member of the vampire cult but also its chief priest, a position he is not entitled to. His initiation into the cult endows him with the power he has craved for a long time, and henceforth he is seen passing orders and decrees that allow the army to gun down citizens opposed to his rule. The ruthlessness of his ruling style is evident in his favourite command to the soldiers to 'shoot to kill' (160-161), a command which legitimizes violence.

Throughout *Dance*, Psaul Roi emerges as a hard-hearted, unscrupulous, ruthless and murderous leader whose policies favour neither his subjects nor his close collaborators. Significantly, his display of power is blighted by a sense of impotence. During his public address to his people, he confesses his sexual impotence openly and projects this as the rationale behind his "necessary" quest for power. The following speech establishes a link between (1) sexual impotence and the quest for power and (2) the tyrant's exercise of power and the commodification of women's bodies:

> **Psaul Roi:** … Right from my early childhood nothing had ever tickled me down here. Nothing. I didn't even have any leanings towards the opposite sex. So I turned my energies to more useful opportunities. When you have power the rest of the land lies at your feet. But always it turned out that money was not enough. Aren't women curious beings? I have seen men who have given up their manhood in order to be wealthy. Others like me gave it up for power. But no matter how much wealth you put at the feet of a woman she will never be satisfied until you can make her tick. And they tried to escape with my wealth since they could not get their he-goats into the palace to service them. So I had them snuffed out. (159)

Psaul Roi's words read as the outburst of a man frustrated by his failure to prove his manhood both to himself and to the world at large. They are a projection of the preoccupations of his mind and a reflection of the anguish he suffers as a result of his *de-masculinized* state. If he has such a weak sexuality, as he confesses, why then does he

keep women in his palace, one is forced to ask. Are they not simply "ornaments" on display to redeem his masculinity and give him a sense of power? This seems to be the logical conclusion.

Like Fon Joseph in *Lake God*, Psaul Roi is both sexually and politically impotent as he can neither bear children nor perpetuate his reign through the production of an heir. It is ironic that he gives up his manhood for power and yet by the end of the play he is completely robbed of that power. The play then suggests that power is transient and ephemeral. It also posits the notion that being in a position of authority does not necessarily result in the acquisition of power, for prior to his initiation into the vampire cult Psaul Roi is only a king who signs instruments of pardon and appointment. His exercise of power is restricted to officialdom, as he confesses: 'That is the best part of my job as a monarch – signing and sealing instruments and proclamations. It is the only moment that I have a feeling of fulfilment. It is like having an orgasm which I have never had' (158). For this feared monarch, therefore, the claim to power is as unreal as a fake orgasm, a feeling he has never truly experienced. Sexual impotence thus gains greater significance in the play in that it is the visible manifestation of an endemic deficiency in leadership – its lack of true power over all its constituencies. This is a paradoxical situation that can best be understood in the light of Mbembe's claim that the post-colonial body that dresses up in party uniform, stands on the streets and applauds the passing of the presidential procession is not only demonstrating its subordination through small tokens of fealty but is, more significantly, laughing at the effrontery of the elite, 'and by laughing it drains officialdom of meaning and sometimes obliges it to function empty and powerless' (1992: 25). What is implied here is that leadership's sense of power emerges from a false sense of absolute control, an ignorance of the drain that is placed on its potency by the very subjects it claims to wield power over.

Psaul Roi's sexual impotence fittingly foreshadows the political impotence that descends on him when the army eliminates most of his subjects and he becomes bankrupt after using state funds to buy his way into the vampire cult. He occupies a vulnerable position in the negotiations with Albino because, unlike the latter, he has neither money nor subjects. His bragging about the women he secured with his wealth is perhaps his way of

gaining some sense of potency, both as a man and as a monarch. Reflecting on his excesses, and recalling the vulgarities of the soldiers in *Shoes*, Mbembe's words that 'the everyday life of the postcolonial bureaucrat consists of … alcohol, amusements, lewd propositions and bawdy comments in which the virtue of women comes under scrutiny by allusions to the sexual organs of office secretaries and the prowess of declared favourites and young mistresses' (1992: 24) ring with truthfulness. But in spite of his wealth Psaul Roi's feeling of inadequacy persists, deducing from his obvious resentment of the 'he-goats' whom his women supposedly cannot sneak into the palace to 'service' them. Psaul Roi is a failed man because his wealth has failed to "buy" him what his sexuality could not. Women are the commodities he uses for the decoration of his palace. Violence is the instrument he employs for the elimination of undesirable elements – persons who threaten his domain of control. And deception is the weapon he engages in order to stay in power. He is the image of the depraved modern-day politician who uses women, sex and violence to validate his authority.

Reflecting on the sequence of events in *Dance*, it is clear that Butake is extremely harsh and critical of political leaders in post-colonial Africa (see Odhiambo, 2007: 19). But where do women fit into the picture he paints of post-colonial leadership? It is sad to say that women feature in the political space not as wielders of power but as instruments through which that power is wielded by men. As shown in *Shoes*, in Butake's plays women's bodies are foregrounded while their subjectivity is obliterated. This raises some concern, for as Mary Russo states, 'the reintroduction of the body and categories of the body (in the case of carnival, the "grotesque body") into the realm of what is called the "political" has been a central concern of feminism' (1994: 54). In *Dance*, East is the lone female character, the only female voice within the vampire cult. As is traditional in Butake's dramaturgy, she is the iconic Mother Africa figure – mother of the nation and giver of life. Like Mboysi in *The Survivors*, her role is to ensure the continuity of life through the protection of the living and the unborn. Her actions are motivated by a desire to see posterity prosper rather than diminish. It is thus not unexpected that in her objection to Psaul Roi's wish to be initiated into the vampire cult she launches her argument from the point of view of a mother concerned about the loss of her children. The following conversation among members of the vampire cult illustrates this point:

Centre: His Royal Majesty demands initiation. What do the four pillars say? Speak, North!
North: I am the pillar on which the land is hooked. My feet are wedged by the weight of a thousand solid granite rocks. The monarch's initiation is like a dead dog whose head cannot enter the cooking pot. I am the pillar on which the land is hooked. A dead dog is no good for the cooking pot. The spirit of the cross flows through my heart down my feet, down South, down South.
Centre: (*turning right around*) Speak, South!
South: The blood of ten dogs is like a mere drop of water in a burning throat. Not even the blood of a thousand dogs. I cannot hear the blood of a thousand dogs barking. The monarch's thing requires two thousand. Shall we become greedy suckers of blood for the monarch's mere delight? The spirit of the cross rises from my feet, through my heart and out through my hands. Through my arms left or right.
Centre: We all know you bear the weight of the land on your shoulders, but two thousand dogs is a lot; an awful lot of blood which surely transforms us into suckers of blood. East, speak!
East: (*female voice*) I am the home of the sun that bathes the land with radiance. I am the womb that peoples the land. Two thousand is too much blood; for the spirit of fertility condones not the wanton shedding of blood. The spirit of the circle flows from my heart through my arms embracing North and South, extending West, a human spirit.
Centre: West, your turn!
West: The spirit of the West is the spirit of the wind, the wild west wind blowing down baobabs and howling for blood. The spirit of the West accepts two thousand dogs for the monarch's thing …
Centre: That is violent language, very violent language, unknown to the spirit of the cross and circle.
Unmask. As other figures advance threateningly towards him, West unmasks revealing Psaul Roi.
(154-155)

Loss – in both a literal and figurative sense – seems to be the inevitable consequence of Psaul Roi's outrageous request. East mourns not only the two thousand souls that have to be sacrificed for the monarch's sake but also the community at large that will go into extinction because of his insatiable hunger for power.

It is important to note that the souls to be sacrificed proceed from East's loins. She exclaims: 'Two thousand human beings from my loins! This is madness' (155). This declaration casts East in the role of the traditional mother figure perpetually distressed about prevailing conditions affecting her offspring. East is depicted as the mother of the nation, the symbol of fertility and fecundity. She is 'the sun that bathes the land with

radiance', denoting her centrality in the nation's growth processes, and 'the womb that peoples the land', signifying her unique role as both the giver and nurturer of life. In her is vested the 'spirit of fertility' which 'condones not the wanton shedding of blood' (154). It seems that even as a g othic character she cannot escape the confines of domesticity (see Milbank, 2007: 155). She is the embodiment of motherhood at its most excelling performance, for every time she speaks (and she only speaks five times throughout the play) there is an unhidden trace of wisdom that graces her speech and a visibly impressive sense of foresight (call it sixth sense or motherly instinct, if you like). When she states 'I will not stay here and see the land destroyed' or 'I fear and I tremble for the consequences' (155), the reader/audience begins to associate her with the Anlu of Kom who stand for justice and respect for custom. However, as honourable as her statements might be, one needs to question her being cast in the traditional mother-of-the-nation role. As Nnaemeka (1998: 9) has pointed out, African feminists are not averse to the idea of motherhood, nor to maternal politics. However, if every time the image of the African woman appears in a writer's work it is necessarily linked to motherhood, then there is clearly a problem of limitation with the writer's vision. Such a pattern of gendering indicates that the writer cannot conceive of women beyond their roles as sex ual or reproductive beings. In fact, it suggests that even when women are participants in political activities they still remain absented presences, because in the eyes of their male counterparts their significance comes into being only when they fulfil their "God-defined" and tradition-imposed role as mothers. East is the perfect example of category four of the absented presences outlined in the introduction to this chapter, because through her role as a stereotype – a stereotype of African motherhood – she enforces a gender ideology that equates womanhood with motherhood.

A visible irony in the portrayal of East is that although she claims to foresee disaster for the land should Psaul Roi be initiated into the cult she nonetheless relents in her opposition to his initiation and in the end demands to have her share of 'the booty'. Like the rest of her cult members, she falls prey to greed once the obstacles to morality seem insurmountable. Her change of attitude and quick discard of the values she hitherto held suggest a v alidation of the sexist view that women lose their rationality as so on as material benefits are waved before their eyes. This turn of events reminds one of

Mariama Bâ's *Scarlet Song* in which materialism becomes an obstacle to sisterhood. Gender is implicated here, as one can read East's demand for money as a performance of femininity in terms of its lack of restraint in the pursuit of the material. She sinks to the same low depth of banditry and clandestine accumulation of wealth that her male counterparts, and Chambiay in particular, have sunk to in their greedy quest for status and fame. Effectively, East becomes a sell-out of the people – the same children from her loins she boasted of protecting. The result then is the gross massacre of citizens we see later in the play. The suggestion the play makes is that woman is the moral force of society and once that force has been corrupted anarchy descends on humanity and with it comes death – the ultimate anarchy. By depicting woman in this role and then denying her the potential to fulfil the role to positive extents, Butake effectively robs her of agency in political matters.

In *Dance*, as in many of Butake's plays, women take on symbolic roles. East symbolizes the failure of the ruling minority to curb their desire for personal enrichment. More importantly, she signifies the degenerate condition of African states owing to the inward and outward corruption of their leaders. Woman's appearance in *Dance* is brief but in that short space of time the words she utters and the decisions she makes, most notably that of securing her share of the national booty, concretize her portrayal as an 'index of the state of the nation' (Stratton, 1994: 48). Like Rufina in *The Rape*, she is a metaphor for the depravity that has come to mark African societies in this post-colonial age. Such a representation of women places Butake's *Dance* strictly within the male literary tradition, a tradition that envisions women from a masculinist point of view and subjects them to biased constructions of femaleness. It is also a tradition that reinforces patriarchal constructions of women's contributions within nationalist struggles as perpetually marked by negativity and regression.

4.5 What Happened to Women's Agency?

It has been shown above that the world of politics in *Dance* and *Shoes* is an almost exclusively male world in which women exist only as the substrates upon which male power is exercised. They are absented presences, like bodies enclosed in a glass casket which we can see but cannot touch or feel. The complete objectification of women in

these two plays echoes patriarchal notions of man as the dominant sex and woman as simply the vehicle that keeps that dominant sex in motion. It is important that Cameroonian feminist scholars counter such projections of women in literature. Boehmer (1991: 9) has stated that for many an African writer, to write about nationalist concerns is to be 'much more a worthy writer' and 'much more a loyal nationalist', and by implication to be 'much more male'. This circle of mutually reinforcing identities, she argues, shuts women out as they become merely national symbols that establish masculine identity as normative. For feminist scholars, such hegemony within nationalist discourses needs to be unveiled and questioned.

Considering the absentedness with which women are clothed in these two plays, the big question then is: what happened to women's agency? What happened to the notion of women's agency that seems to seep through the pages of *Lake God* and *And Palm Wine*? Some would argue that the Kil'u in *Shoes* personifies the notion of female power in a time of crisis and is the body through which Butake demonstrates women's agency. The contension in this study is that while the women's act of disrobing is political in that it has a clear objective – the unsettling of male power – it lacks novelty and avant-gardeness. It reads as a repetition of strategies that apply to a different time and place. Moreover, in *Shoes*, the image Butake projects of women is one fraught with stereotypical attributes of femininity, such as helplessness, lack of resourcefulness, and passive resistance. The old women, whom we do not see but hear, attempt to subvert the system through acts of opposition, defiance and rebellion, but such acts paradoxically give them stereotypical identities as poor, ignorant and helpless women trapped in a masculine order dominated by vandals and vampires.

Disrobing is a crisis management technique adopted by the writer to project the women as creative and resourceful, but this apparent show of ingenuity, rather than commanding admiration and respect, casts the women in a debasing light and confirms them as stereotypes. Odhiambo (2007: 17) has argued that the women's use of their bodies as a site of taboo and abomination is what provokes the soldiers to begin searching into their inner selves, thus leading to their transformation. However, the soldiers' transformation results not so much from the women's act as it is from their own realization of the

General's horrendous scheme to profit from their ignorance. Moreover, in decorating the female body with ornaments of myth, mystery and ritualistic power, Butake consigns it to an abstract space in which it lacks the capacity to reform the concrete. This is especially so because in the end it is not the women but the soldiers who take decisive action to establish a new order. Once again, women are portrayed as t aking the backseat of political development while men take the lead.

So again the question arises: what happened to female agency which, although situated strictly within the sexual space, provided some semblance of women's active involvement in the politics of their day? Did Butake's vision of female power begin to grow dim as the '90s progressed and yet the possibility of a change in leadership seemed even more remote? Is the solution to revert to the ritualistic powers of female sexuality not simply a convenient way of side-stepping the more pressing matter of greater participation of women in the socio-political endeavours shaping the country's powerscapes? Because the two plays analysed in this chapter end without any allusion to a productive exercise of power by women, they seem to project a vision that the political space in Cameroon will continue to be dominated by men. Or, to put it differently, that women will continue to be absented presences in the world of politics.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FEMALE NEGOTIATOR IN *ZINTGRAFF AND THE BATTLE OF MANKON* AND *FAMILY SAGA*

> A paradox lies at the heart of most national narratives. Nations are frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space. Yet, at the same time, since the mid nineteenth century in the West, "the family" itself has been figured as the *antithesis* of history.… The family trope is important in at least two ways. First, the family offers a "natural" figure for sanctioning social *hierarchy* within a putative organic *unity* of interests. Second, it offers a "natural" trope for figuring historical *time*. (McClintock, 1993: 63)

5.1 Introduction

Conflict is a dominant motif in Butake's plays and thus the role of a negotiator becomes crucial. Two plays in particular, *Zintgraff and the Battle of Mankon* (2002) and *Family Saga* (2005), embody this concept of a negotiator in their dramatization of conflict between individuals and groups of people, all identifiable with Cameroon's historical past. As with many of Butake's other plays, *Zintgraff and the Battle of Mankon* (henceforth referred to as *Zintgraff*) was only published several years after it premiered as a stage performance at the Goethe Institut in Yaounde in 1994. The play was the result of a collaborative venture between Butake and Gilbert Doho, both of whom were academics at the University of Yaounde in the African Literature and French departments, respectively. According to Butake, this collaboration between an Anglophone (himself) and a Francophone Cameroonian (Doho) served as a statement that the idea of nationhood was not far-fetched, that the Franco-French tactic of divide-and-rule could be overcome through Anglophone-Francophone collaboration: 'At a moment when Francophones and Anglophones were tearing at each other, we proved that we can build a solid Cameroon with all our diverse heritage and cultures' (Butake, 2004: 56). Over the years, Butake and Doho have maintained a collaborative relationship, as they have worked together in directing the production of several video films addressing socio-

political issues in Cameroon, such as electoral malpractices, ethnic conflicts and early marriage for girls.[56]

As co-author of the play, Doho produced a French version titled *Zintgraff et la Bataille de Mankon*. The result then is a bilingual play which was eventually published by Patron Publishing House in 2002, with an English and a French version in one volume. Whether the actual performance of this play was done in both English and French at different times is doubtful, considering that Yaounde where it was staged three times in 1994 (once at the Goethe Institut and twice at the Centre Culturel Français) is predominantly a French-speaking city. However, it is likely that English was the language used when the play was performed for the second time at the Centre Culturel Français for an audience made up of international medical researchers who were attending a conference in Yaounde (see Butake, 2004). In an article in which he recounts the experience of producing the play, Butake (2004: 58) reports that the play received wide acclaim from audiences in Yaounde on all three occasions of its performance, and that its success is further evident in the government's incorporation of some of its dance sequences into a TV advertisement showcasing Cameroon's participation in the 1994 World Cup in the United States of America.

As with *Zintgraff*, the play *Family Saga* premiered in 2003 in Yaounde before its actual publication by Éditions CLÉ in 2005. The cast was relatively small as compared to that of *Zintgraff*, but it included actors such as Emmanuel Tita Tabi, Jean Robert Tchamba and Hilarious Ngwa Ambe who had also featured in the cast of *Zintgraff*. Butake admits in an interview that *Family Saga* was born out of a desire to document the applied theatre methodology that he had employed over the years to sensitize people in remote parts of Cameroon on issues such as women's rights, democracy and good governance, HIV/AIDS, and environmental protection (see interview under Appendix III; see also foreword to *Family Saga*, 2005). He had set out to write an academic book on applied theatre and found it more feasible instead to write a play that captured the process of theatre making and all its accompanying techniques. The play, as he states in the

[56] A detailed list of the many films co-directed by Doho and Butake can be viewed on Doho's curriculum vitae available online at http://www.case.edu/artsci/dmll/faculty/doho/resume.html. Accessed 19 January 2010.

interview, is his ultimate response to the question regarding his position with respect to the Anglophone/Francophone divide in Cameroon. It is not surprising then that the play is dedicated to 'all those with whom I have laboured in pursuit of dialogue in conflict resolution' (*Family Saga*, 2005). This in itself is a statement that he privileges dialogue and reconciliation over separation and partisanship, as a way of resolving the Anglophone/Francophone conflict in Cameroon.

Both *Zintgraff* and *Family Saga* are historical plays in that they re-enact significant and tense moments in Cameroon's historical journey from autonomy to colonialism, from colonialism to independence, and from independence to neo-colonialism. The momentous events re-captured in these plays are the first encounter between the people of Bali Nyonga (in present-day NW Province) and the German explorer, Dr Eugen Zintgraff, in the late 19th century, and the re-unification of British Southern Cameroons (Anglophone Cameroon) with the independent Republic of Cameroon (Francophone Cameroon) in 1961, respectively. Both plays reproduce in fictional form the tensions that have characterized relations between the people of Cameroon and their three colonial masters (Germany, France and Britain), as well as the hostilities that were already a part of inter-ethnic relationships. But they also demonstrate how conflict within the country was exacerbated by the advent of colonialism. While *Zintgraff* focuses on the German colonial incursion into the Grassfields and the toll of human loss for both the Germans and the Grassfields nations, *Family Saga* condenses the entire history of present-day Cameroon into a single narrative dramatizing Cameroon's evolution from its primal beginnings as a sacred part of the "Dark Continent" to its current state as a neo-colonial asset to the West. That Cameroonians can overcome ethnic and linguistic divides to create a national identity and united front against colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism seems to be the key ideology in *Zintgraff* and *Family Saga*. The notion of nationhood identified earlier in *Betrothal* (discussed in Chapter Two) re-surfaces in these two plays from a less utopian perspective, and becomes the key thematic strand that links the two together.

Whereas in *Shoes* and *Dance* Butake narrates the nation through the masculine ideal of the mother-of-the-nation figure, in these two plays he uses the metaphor of the family

within which woman becomes the nation itself and not just the bearer of its sons. Anne McClintock, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, points out that the family trope provides artists with what is perceived as a "natural" medium for legitimizing social hierarchies (man-woman, father-son, adult-child etc.) and for engaging with history. Her postulation of the family as the antithesis of history is a subject for debate that will be left for a different time and space. What is relevant at this point is her lucid reading of the interconnection between gender, nationalism and the family. McClintock asserts that within nationalist discourse, 'not only are the needs of the nation identified with the frustrations and aspirations of men, but the representation of male national power depends on the prior construction of gender difference' (1993: 62). Within the family metaphor, therefore, women's identities are frequently gendered, for male nationalisms tend to construe women mainly as symbols and carriers of the nation's essential signifiers.

A key feature of Butake's *Zintgraff* and *Family Saga* is the construction of women as negotiators or mediators. In the discussions that follow, both plays are interrogated as to the extent to which they enunciate gender difference in their narrating of the nation through the family metaphor. Recalling the fact that in *Shoes* and *Dance* discussed in the previous chapter women's role as leaders is marked by absentedness, this chapter makes the assertion that *Zintgraff* and *Family Saga* strive to reinstate the female subject within the public sphere of politics. Nonetheless, this female subject tends to embody conventional models of femininity and to enforce popular notions of African womanhood. [57]

5.2 The Plays as Historical Drama

As mentioned earlier, both *Zintgraff* and *Family Saga* capture Cameroon's historical evolution. In a work of art that is presumably historical, the plot is not simply laid out to readers or audiences as historical fact but as a re-invention of that which defines their collective essence. Achebe (2007a: 107) reminds us that art is humans' constant effort to

[57] In Chapter Two, it was shown that Butake's portrayal of women in *The Rape* and *Betrothal* follows a male literary tradition in which women emerge in negative roles, most commonly as prostitutes and temptresses, which define their sexuality as being dangerous to the social order. It was also asserted that conventional models of femininity projecting women as good housekeepers, submissive wives and silent partners are a characteristic feature of Butake's writing and of the male literary tradition.

create for themselves a 'different order of reality' from that which is given to them. In line with this, Ngugi (1997: 4) asserts that literature is more than a mechanical reflection of social reality, for as one of humans' artistic activities literature is a part of human self-realization – it shapes our attitude to life, to the daily struggles with nature, the struggles within communities and those within our individual souls and selves.

Butake uses historical material as building blocks to construct new understandings of past and contemporary society. For the dramatist, as Michael Etherton (1982: 144) notes, history provides not only stories and themes which are specific to the dramatist's world view but also specific content, in terms of the playwright's own society, which embodies those broad themes. African historical drama, therefore, adopts prominent figures in history and recreates them as heroes in plays, mostly with a view to re-asserting the greatness of indigenous African kingdoms and the heroic stature of their leaders. However, one has to exercise caution here lest one be tempted to view historical drama as a reflection of "true" historical experiences. In a post-modern world where notions of certainty and veracity have been cast in shades of doubt, 'there is no more history in the traditional realist sense; there are only possible narrative representations in, and of, the past, and none can claim to know the past as it actually was' (Munslow, 1997: 16). Historical drama can, therefore, only lay claim to possible interpretations of the past, but in using history as its major component it emphasizes the importance of memory as a "national archive".

5.2.1 Bali History and Pre/colonial Politics in *Zintgraff and the Battle of Mankon*

In *Zintgraff*, the reader/audience is transported back to the late 19th century when what is now known as the North West Province of Cameroon was still a vast spread of unconsolidated territory made up of autonomous kingdoms ruled by different kings, known then and now as Fons. As noted in Chapter One, the Germans officially established colonial rule over Cameroon in 1884 when the German representative, Dr Gustav Nachtigal, accompanied by his facilitators (representatives from German firms in Duala), Eduard Schmidt, Eduard Woermann and Voss, signed a treaty with Duala Kings Akwa and Bell and their subordinates on 12 July and hoisted the German flag over the territory on 14 July (see Ngoh, 1987: 26-29). German colonial administration of

Cameroon, then known as Kamerun, was however confined to the coastal areas around present-day Douala and Limbe, and later extended to Buea where the colonial headquarters were set up. The exploratory mission of Dr Eugen Zintgraff into the interior parts of the territory was what opened the way for German administrative control to be exerted over the Grassfields and Adamawa regions. Butake's play essentially captures the events surrounding Zintgraff's encounter with the people of Bali and other Grassfields nations.

How the Bali people came to settle in present-day Bali Nyonga following a migratory move from the Adamawa region is not explored in the play. Rather, the play focuses on the diplomacy of the Bali Fon, Galega I, who ruled Bali from the 1860s to 1901, and his political ambition to conquer all neighbouring kingdoms and to bring them under Bali dominion. It highlights the war-like nature of the various Grassfields communities and provides insight into the political tensions that marked relations between these independent kingdoms. As the narrator informs us, Galega had engaged the might of his army in subduing most of the surrounding kingdoms, including Bangwa, Bafochu, Mbatu, Guzang, BatIgbo and Bametta. However, Bafut and Mankon have so far resisted his efforts to bring them under his political control. Having well-trained armies of their own, they present a formidable challenge to Bali. Galega finds an ally in Zintgraff, the European explorer whose appearance on the scene could not have come at a better time. When the two palace messengers, referred to as Gweis, inform the Fon about the arrival of 'a man of white body' in the kingdom of Babessong (3), what they least expect is for the Fon to consider this man a possible ally in the fulfilment of the Bali aspiration to subjugate the resisting Bafut and Mankon kingdoms and hence establish political domination over the entire Grassfields.[58] To the people's consternation, the Fon commands his son, Titambo, to lead a delegation to Babessong and to bring the white man to Bali.

When Zintgraff arrives in Bali, he is given a princely welcome and a house is set up for him and his four companions, Huwe, Nehber, Von Spangenberg and Tiedt. He is provided with everything for his material comfort, as far as comfort can be attained at a

[58] All textual references are to *Zintgraff and the Battle of Mankon*, 2002.

time when war is almost a constant. As a form of gratitude to the Fon for his hospitality and a sealing of the new friendship, Zintgraff presents to the Fon a rifle, a bible, some whisky, a mirror and other European products deemed valuable for a royal personage. The Fon's other son, Titanji, is strongly opposed to the Galega-Zintgraff alliance which he sees as a betrayal of the people to the colonialists. Acting on his conviction that a Bali alliance with Bafut and Mankon is a wiser course to ensure a more formidable resistance of colonial incursion into Bali territory, Titanji enters into a secret alliance with Fon Gwalem of Bafut and Fon Formukong of Mankon. He reveals to the Bafut and Mankon rulers Bali plans to attack Mankon, warns them about the superiority of the Bali army (having been trained by the German soldiers accompanying Zintgraff), and advises them on how best to counter the Bali attack on their peoples. Although Titanji's actions are motivated by what could be considered a patriotic attachment to his motherland, he nonetheless betrays his people to their enemies. For this, he suffers a painful death. Once found out, he is taken to the 'bad bush' and executed and his body is left as food for the wild beasts of the forest.

Meanwhile, Bali has indeed declared war on Mankon, having rejected the two attempts for peace made by Bafut, Mankon's ally. The war rages on and the Mankon soldiers are relentless in their resistance to the Bali war machinery. They keep sending more and more soldiers to the battlefield, with the hope of exhausting the supply of ammunition carried by Zintgraff's soldiers and thus making them vulnerable to physical attack. They follow Titanji's advice to the letter, with the result that the German soldiers indeed run out of ammunition and are thus killed by the Mankon soldiers. The war ends with both Mankon and Bali incurring huge losses, but while Bali mourns the loss of Zintgraff's companions Mankon celebrates its victory over the 'ghosts'. Zintgraff escapes death but becomes a very unhappy man. Unable to withstand the stench of death hovering over Bali, he decides to return to Germany. But two years later he returns and with the help of Bali he succeeds in bringing the rest of the Grassfields under German colonial rule. The narrator concludes the story by pointing out that both Galega and Zintgraff found in their different aims a common goal – that of establishing a sovereign state known as Kamerun.

Butake and Doho describe *Zintgraff* as a semi-historical play, and this is fitting because some of the scenes are hardly enactments of true historical episodes. Of the three historical sources consulted on Zintgraff's dealings with the Bali (Eyongetah & Brain, 1974, Ngoh, 1987 & DeLancey, 1989), none mentions any encounter between Zintgraff and a woman named Kassa. The love relationship between Zintgraff and Galega's daughter, Kassa, in the play is therefore a sub-plot designed to include a female figure in the traditionally male-dominated arena of politics, and perhaps to illuminate the emotional side of the male figures whom history textbooks often project as super-human. But why does Butake maintain the real names of the historical figures rather than inventing new names to tell their story, one may ask. The purpose is perhaps to give the play a feeling of historical verisimilitude. Aspects of the play that are inventions, that is, are not part of the historical account, create a sense of fictional realism and such creations are necessary to give the work its artistic quality, for literary drama, or any genre of art for that matter, cannot engage with content to the exclusion of dramatic structure, irony, metaphors and other aspects of aesthetic beauty.

Essentially, *Zingraff* is history played out in dramatic form, in the course of which it acquires new meanings for contemporary society. The plot of the play is punctuated with the narrator's comments which shed light on aspects of the performance. It is the narrator who carries out the task of extracting from the play what is relevant for today's men and women, political leaders and society as a whole. The contemporaneity of the play is most evident in its critique of leadership in Cameroon, specifically in its subtle critique of the undesirable ruling techniques of the two presidents that have ruled Cameroon since independence, Presidents Ahmadu Ahidjo (1960-1982) and Paul Biya (1982-present). It must be remembered that the play was written and produced in 1994, a time when there was increasing restlessness among Cameroonians following the re-introduction of multi-party politics. As Butake admits, the play was his and Doho's 'resounding response to the nonchalant and amateurish manner in which the so-called politicians were playing around with a nation that had been crafted through sweat, tears and blood' (2004: 56). For them, it was also 'a cultural crusade against those who would like to see our cultures annihilated' (Butake, 2004: 57). This implies that the play was an attack on colonialism and its ever-present twin, imperialism.

5.2.2 Cameroon's History and the Anglophone Problem in *Family Saga*

It was noted earlier in Chapter One that Butake is an advocate of the Southern Cameroons motto to win the struggle for recognition by using the force of argument and not the argument of force. This ideology is explored in greater depth in his play *Family Saga*. The play follows a common structural pattern of moving from a state of disorder to one of order, in the course of which the characters undergo a rite of expiation. The ease with which order is restored in the end is perhaps the reason for the play being criticized as romanticizing the notion of nationhood (see Odhiambo, 2009a). The plot centres on two brothers, Kamalo and Kamala, whose relationship is one of subordination of one by the other, for Kamalo declares himself the one who conceives while Kamala is the one to execute his orders. He and his son, Redone, laze away while Kamala and his children, Ngong and Sawa, expend themselves in the fields daily in order to increase the family's food provisions. The play's anti-neo-colonial sentiments are embedded in its sharp disapproval of Kamalo's lifestyle of extravagance and arrogance.

Tensions between the two brothers begin to mount when Kamalo takes all the provisions for himself and his 'papa', leaving nothing for Kamala and his children. Kamalo's despotic behaviour destroys any attempt by Kamala to resolve their differences amicably. Nevertheless, with the help of Ngong and Sawa, Kamala eventually appeals to Kamalo's sense of humanity through song and dance, and in the end the recounting of the family history moves Kamalo to realize the errors of his ways and to seek forgiveness from his brother and from his niece, Sawa, whom he had raped. The play ends with a song of family reunion in which the audience is invited to join. This celebration of reconciliation by a group made up of actors and spectators symbolizes the playwright's much cherished dream of a harmonious integration of Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians.

The play is essentially a historical allegory in that it lays out in dramatic form Cameroon's historical experience from the perspective of a family conflict. Allegorical writing takes real-life figures and turns them into fictional characters existing in a different time and place, and the resultant story becomes a commentary on history as well as a reconstruction of the meaning of that history. Maurice Vambe (2004: 5) states: 'it is

the cultural and symbolic act of investing allegory with particular meanings in particular historical contexts that animates and elevates allegory to the level of social text that targets a particular audience, who in turn recreate meanings from it, according to their cultural experience and horizon of expectations'. *Family Saga* presents a family feud spanning several generations, but it is easy to draw a parallel between the characters and events in the play and real-life figures and events in Cameroon's historical past and present. The following table illustrates this parallel:

Fictional character/event	**Historical parallel**
The goddess Kamanda	Pre-colonial Cameroon
The suitors - Yaman - Baakingoom - Fiekafhim	The colonizers - Germany - Britain - France
Kamanda summons Baakingoom to her private chambers	The Duala kings send letters requesting Britain to formalize its control over their territory
Instead of Baakingoom, Yaman responds to the summons and eventually rapes Kamanda	The British delay in responding to the Duala kings and Germany rushes in and annexes Cameroon in 1884
Baakingoom allies with Fiekafhim to send Yaman away	Britain and France join forces to oust Germany from Cameroon during WWI
Kamanda gives birth to twins – Kamalo and Kamala	Cameroon is split in two after the defeat of the Germans in WWI
Kamalo is taken by Fiekafhim	France occupies eastern Cameroon
Kamala goes to Baakingoom	Britain occupies western Cameroon
Kamala separates from Baakingoom and signs a deed of brotherhood with Kamalo under the auspices of the Court of Deeds	British Southern Cameroons gains independence by vot ing to join the independent Republic of Cameroon during the plebiscite of 1961 organized by the UN
Kamala's wife abandons him and their two children	British Northern Cameroons rejects the reunification option, choosing instead to remain part of Nigeria
Kamalo turns the deed of brotherhood into a deed of bondagehood	The federal system of government is abandoned and a unitary system effected, giving Anglophones little say in political affairs

The abrogation of the terms of the reunification agreement marks the point at which Anglophone/Francophone relations move from mere distrust to outright conflict, as evident in Kamala's confrontation of Kamalo about his blatant disregard for the deed of

brotherhood they had both signed, a deed the latter had turned into one of bondage. The deed becomes the embodiment of the Anglophone problem – the rift between Anglophone Cameroonians and their Francophone counterparts owing to perceptions by Anglophones that their minority status has been exploited by government to deny them equal representation in the country's political structures. The origins of the Anglophone problem are therefore deeply rooted in history. The story of Kamalo and Kamala however is an artistic prism through which Butake confronts Cameroon's tragic historical experience and seeks to establish some degree of cultural and political stability.

5.3 Women as Negotiators

In an earlier work on Butake, it was shown that in *Family Saga* Butake uses the possibilities inherent in forum and playback theatre forms to 'reconstruct the materiality of memory to catalyse a profoundly meaningful process of expiation, healing and transformation that leads to his vision of reconciliation' (Odhiambo & Nkealah, 2008: 4). Moving the argument from this premise, this section of the chapter looks specifically at Sawa's instrumentality in the reconciliation process that culminates in the healing and expiation of the characters and of the nation presented in the text. The analysis focuses on Sawa's role as a co nflict negotiator, in the course of which some investigation will be made into Butake's portrayal of Sawa as a gendered body – the body endowed with little more than its *feminine* attributes. The section also investigates possibilities of female power in pre-colonial Grassfields societies as projected through the character of Kassa in *Zintgraff*.

5.4.1 Negotiating Peace: Kassa

As noted in previous sections of this chapter, the disorder that is visited upon Bali is not the result of Zintgraff's arrival *per se*, for the Bali have always been a warring people seeking to exert their control over surrounding kingdoms. History confirms that although Zintgraff was a sel f-appointed agent of German colonial administration, his success in bringing Bali under German rule was facilitated by Galega's eager disposition towards an alliance that would ensure the defeat of the Bafut and Mankon kingdoms. The following analysis of the Galega-Zintgraff alliance makes much sense in the light of events in the play *Zingraff*:

> Zintgraff's expedition represented the vanguard of German colonial expansion into Northern Kamerun. Zintgraff and Galega were much taken with each other: Zintgraff decided that Bali Nyonga would make an ideal centre for German administration of the hinterland, and Galega astutely reckoned that the Germans might be useful to his own search for power and wealth. This interlacing of their ambitions marked the beginning of Bali's attempts to exert sub-imperial control on behalf of the Germans. (Fardon, 2006: 5)

Thus, in Butake and Doho's play, Zintgraff's arrival in Bali only serves to give the already existing war between Bali, on the one hand, and Bafut and Mankon, on the other, a new dimension. His presence catalyzes the betrayal of Bali to the enemy camp by the prospective heir, Titanji. The tensions mount when Galega rejects Titanji's advice to ally with Bafut and Mankon and proceeds to welcome Zintgraff into his palace and to form an alliance with him. The character that facilitates this alliance is Kassa. Kassa is Galega's daughter, hence a princess. Conditioned by both her noble birth and her gender to be of service to those who wield political power over her society, Kassa submits to her father's wishes and accompanies Titambo to Babessong. Her role in this mission is that of seducing the white man into buying the idea of extending his visit into Bali. Galega does not mince his words when he gives Titambo instructions about the mission:

> **Galega**
>
> Let the noble princess Kassa keep your company.
> Make sure she is plentifully supplied with food.
> It is said that a beautiful woman will break a man
> No matter how strong-willed he may be. (8)

There is no ambivalence in these words. Kassa is the bait that will draw Zintgraff to Bali and to Galega's side in the war against Bafut and Mankon. Kassa is, therefore, taken along to Babessong to forestall any possible resistance Zintgraff might present to the Bali emissaries. She is the 'jewel that must entice even a man of white body' (10), a metaphor which captures her value as a princess but at the same time objectifies her body as bait. Her being 'plentifully supplied with food' ensures that her body maintains its suppleness and delectability. This body thus becomes the "meat" that will lure Zintgraff into Bali territory, much as a meaty bone lures a hungry dog. It is the body through which colonial power is tamed to some degree. In one metaphor, then, Butake conflates the figure of woman as a hero and woman as a temptress, for Kassa can only save Bali by exhibiting her feminine charms to the white man. This point illustrates woman's entrapment within

patriarchy. Kassa is bound to the will of her father and has little choice in the matter at hand. At this stage, the play even withholds her voice; she is only mentioned by various characters, but the audience does not get to see her or hear her speak.

The mission to Babessong is successful as the royal entourage returns to Bali with Zintgraff and his four companions. The play does not shed light on what happens in Babessong but it can be deduced that Zintgraff was indeed taken by Kassa's charms, for he continues to drink from the well of her affections while in Bali. Without much coercion then from her brothers, Kassa fulfils her duty as an ambassador of the royal house of Bali. Once in Galega's palace, Zintgraff becomes the recipient of a special kind of hospitality. It appears that in addition to a house of his own and food items of various kinds provided for him and his men, he also gets to keep Kassa unofficially as his paramour. It is quite significant that the very first meeting between Zintgraff and Galega takes place in Galega's palace with Kassa as the intermediary between the two men. It is through Kassa's hand that Galega presents to Zintgraff the traditional peace offering – kola nuts – and it is again through Kassa that Zintgraff responds with a peace offering of his own. The following excerpt illustrates this point:

> **Galega**
>
> Kassa, my daughter, come.
> Take kola to Fonmbang,
> And tell him to sit down.
> *(Kassa takes the kola to Zintgraff and signals him to sit on the carved stool. Galega receives wine in his horn, pours a little on the ground, drinks and passes it to Kassa who takes it to Zintgraff and signals him to drink after which she takes the royal horn back to Galega.)*
> Fonmbang, you are welcome.
> Welcome to this land of the valorous.
> The eagle flies and flies and flies
> But must perch on the iroko for rest.
> Fonmbang, you and your people are perching
> On an iroko tree in full bloom.
> *(After brief consultation with Titambo, Zintgraff signals Kassa who takes presents – a rifle, bible, whisky, mirror and other curiosities – to Galega. The queens sing and dance.)* (20)

If the iroko tree represents the strength of Bali as a warrior nation, then Kassa represents in more vivid terms the beauty of this nation – its rich landscape, productive land, and hospitable people, for she is a woman in full bloom.

In contrast to *Lake God* and *And Palm Wine* where we see women attempting to re-shape the political landscape of their society but doing so within their given space (the women's secret society), in this play woman is placed at the centre of the public space, performing a service on the same level as the male actors. The paradox, however, is that her voice is muted, for she simply represents her gender without speaking for it. Konde, quoted earlier, notes that in pre-colonial Cameroon, women's political participation in traditional society was often indirectly expressed, as 'they had to play their roles behind the scenes, to be seen in public but not to be heard' (2005: 48). Interestingly, Butake makes Kassa a part of the public deliberations, but only as a presence and not a contributor to the affairs being deliberated. Her marginalized position in public affairs is a reflection of the male-dominated structures of power that prevailed in pre-colonial Grassfields societies.

After the singing and dancing of the queens, Kassa speaks for the first time, addressing her father with the following words: 'Father of the land here are some gifts Fonmbang bids me to give you' (20). The exchange of gifts is an establishment of peace and collaboration between the Bali Fon and the European, and Kassa becomes the medium through which the alliance is concretized. She is an absented presence that nonetheless expedites the political machinations that will shape the history of her people in the years to come. By facilitating the alliance between Galega and Zintgraff, she inadvertently endorses the Bali ambition to conquer Bafut and Mankon and the German mission to establish administrative control in the interior of the Grassfields. The gifts that she presents to Galega as coming from Zintgraff are quite significant in terms of their historical function as tools of colonialism and imperialism in Africa. However, she is a mere passive participant in the colonial formations that are falling into place at this juncture. Although she is made a part of the power politics, she exists on the margins of it as her role is confined to that of facilitator and not that of a stakeholder. Like the rest of the women who are mere entertainers – singers and dancers – in the royal house, Kassa is the unconsulted participant in a political game of intrigue and disorder. And yet the play

seems to suggest that in spite of her being roped into negotiating the Galega-Zintgraff pact she does have a degree of self-will in deciding where her allegiance would be, whether with the Galega-Zintgraff-Titambo camp or with the Titanji-Gwalem-Formukong alliance.

A different dimension of Kassa's personality comes to the fore when she visits Zintgraff in his house and Titanji finds her there and accuses her of fooling around with the white man. Kassa stands up for herself and uses strong words to defend her honour. For the first time in the play, she speaks for herself and adopts a tone of voice that is almost rebellious. She tells Titanji: 'I have done nothing dishonourable to deserve such harsh words from you' (38). When he insists on calling her a whore, she states with indignation: 'Titanji, do not mistake my respect for you as a weakness. I swear that if you use insulting words on me again …' (39). She continues to address Titanji with boldness, counter-accusing him of eavesdropping on her instead of consulting with the Fon on important matters of state. Her seeming concern about the political mess in which the kingdom had become entangled suggests a strong sense of attachment and commitment towards her society. Titanji, it seems, is concerned only about losing his position as heir to the throne. Thus, when Kassa questions his sense of duty as a prince he interprets the bluntness of her words as an attack on his ego and like a typical oppressive male he reacts with violence. He is about to hit Kassa with his fist when Zintgraff intervenes and hits him instead. Kassa then becomes the archetypal beautiful woman who epitomizes discord and dissonance, for it is because of her relationship with Zintgraff that Titanji intensifies his hatred for the white man and proceeds to execute his plans to betray Bali to Bafut.

The encounter between Kassa and Titanji illuminates some aspects of Kassa's personality which add up to her portrayal as the proverbial sacrificial lamb in the political battles of Bali. She emerges from this as a self-confident and feisty young woman who tolerates no disrespect to her person. Although she has much affection for Titanji as her brother from the same mother, she boldly makes him understand that there is a clear line between being protective and being controlling. The irony situated in the brother-sister relationship, however, is that it is Kassa who sacrifices her virtue in an effort to save Titanji from being exiled by the Fon. When Zintgraff threatens to report Titanji's

atrocious act of assaulting Kassa to Galega, Kassa pleads with him not to, and in a bid to appease the white man she follows him into his house, and presumably straight into his bed. Her self-sacrificing act is however satirically commented upon as ev idence of women's supposed inability to resist male sexual advances, for the narrator's statement 'never take a woman's "no" seriously' (41) effectively eliminates any element of heroism that Kassa's actions were meant to project. As in the case of Mboysi in *The Survivors*, there can be no heroism in whoredom if redemption of one's kin or community inevitably involves the prostituting of one's self to the same group that enforces one's oppression. By making Kassa to succumb to male sexual domination as a means of ensuring not so much her own survival as that of her brother, the play reiterates and re-constructs in vivid terms the myth of self-sacrifice as proof of real womanhood.

The self-confidence Kassa displays when talking to Titanji stands in contrast to her timidity when she speaks to Zintgraff. Her display of ignorance of Zintgraff's sexual innuendos makes her a stereotype of the village girl unschooled in the culture of wooing and the language of courtship. Flattering expressions such as 'my African Queen', 'Tropical Star' and 'Morning Glory' used by Zintgraff to lure her into his bed mean little to her. She is more overwhelmed by fear of Titanji than by the promise of a "good life" implied in Zintgraff's words. Consider the following conversation between the two:

> *(Zintgraff looks up and smiles when he sees Kassa approaching)*
>
> **Zintgraff:** At last there is some sunshine coming into my life. Kassa, my African Queen, so you have come? I have waited and waited and waited. You did not get my message? My friend, Titambo, did not tell you how I longed for you? Oh, how my sad heart warms at the sight of you!
> **Kassa:** I no come. Foolish me come.
> **Zintgraff:** Come on, Kassy, your coming is not foolish; it is the call of the heart.
> **Kassa:** Heart foolish. Titanji see me you, Titanji beat me.
> **Zintgraff:** If Titanji touches just one hair of your lovely head I will blow off his head with my gun. Come, Tropical Star, let's go into the house. Come.
> **Kassa:** Me no come. Brother look me.
> **Zintgraff:** Why are you so frightened of your brother? He is only a brother, after all. Your father is my friend and will only be too pleased to hear …
> **Kassa:** Broder me, one belly.
> **Zintgraff:** What about Titambo? Is he not from the same womb too?
> **Kassa:** Titambo king after. Titanji vex. No like you.
> **Zintgraff:** Am I the cause of his disinheritance? I am only a stranger in your land, you know? If his friendship with Gwalem has resulted in his forfeiting his claim

to the throne, he only has himself to blame. Come, my dear, let us go inside. It is cooler in there.
Kassa: Me fear. No enter.
Zintgraff: I will protect you. Titanji cannot lay his hands on you while I am alive. Come, my Morning Glory, I need you.
Kassa: No come. I go back.
Zintgraff: No my dear, you can't go back so soon. Alright, since you won't go inside, let us stay out here on the garden. I will bring you a chair to sit down.
Kassa: No sit down. I go.
Zintgraff: Come on, Kassy, don't be so difficult. Don't you realize there is a fire eating me?
Kassa: Fire? Where? Bring water!
Zintgraff: Kassy, don't be so foolish. I mean desire; I want you.
Kassa: No fire, no water, no want. I go house.
Zintgraff: Alright, since you insist on going, let me bring you something. I won't be a minute. Just wait here. (35-38)

This conversation, quoted in full for the purpose of giving a complete picture of the encounter between Kassa and Zintgraff, illustrates the point made above about Kassa's portrayal as a stereotype of womanhood in its "blissful" state of innocence. The expressions 'Tropical Star' and 'Morning Glory' can be read as an exoticization of nature and their metaphorical use in reference to Kassa suggests her possession of natural beauty, her adornment in purity and her freedom from defection. These virtues, from a Strattonian point of view, conflate to project her as Mother Africa in the figure of a virgin – pure, undefiled, unadulterated. Kassa thus symbolizes Bali, and by extension Africa, in its primeval beginnings as unchartered territory. She is the virgin territory to be explored and robbed of its naturalness by the colonialist. Such a symbolic representation of woman places her permanently in a subordinate position, one in which she is devoid of power or control over her fate. In addition, the accolades Zintgraff uses on Kassa illuminate the white man's stereotyping of the black woman, a trend also evident in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1973). Zintgraff gives Kassa an essence that fits into his construction of what he perceives as African-ness. The significance of this is that it defines a relationship of power and of domination between the European and the African, thereby consigning the latter to a space of other-ness, of powerlessness. This is what Edward Said writes about in his seminal work, *Orientalism* (1995).

The passage above also highlights another dimension of Kassa's portrayal as a model of femininity – where innocence is the ultimate marker of the "good woman". Zintgraff's metaphorical use of fire as a reflection of the intensity of his desire eludes Kassa, making her the epitome of innocence. Her naïve responses to the sexual implications of his utterances create intense humour, and it is as if Butake and Doho are deliberately making a mockery of the typical village woman. From another perspective, though, the passage highlights clearly Kassa's entrapment. She is caught between the brother she desires to protect and the man to whom she has been offered as a "gift" by her father. It is obvious that Zintgraff has Galega's backing in courting Kassa, but Kassa's hesitation stems from an overwhelming desire to maintain allegiance to her kinsman. The irony, though, is that Titanji's sudden appearance on the scene and his unfounded accusations levelled against Kassa cause the breakdown of Kassa's resistance to Zintgraff. In her state of fear, Kassa can only worry about the fate of her brother. Using sub-standard English, she pleads with Zintgraff not to report the incident of Titanji's aggression to Galega. Her ultimate goal is to keep the peace between father and son. In her modesty and mildness of spirit, she thus represents the cherished cultural values of an African society. On the other hand, her forced compliance to Zintgraff's wishes suggests the corrupting influence of Western civilization. Kassa is ultimately the symbol of pre-colonial Africa sold to Europe for power and fame by its leaders and robbed of its glory by the greed of Western imperialists.

One prominent theme that emerges from this play is the theme of loss – loss of self, loss of kin and loss of control over one's fate. Kassa can best be described as a victim of circumstances as she is not only traded for political aspirations but also entrapped in a war that has little relevance to her as an individual or for the womenfolk as a group. In the course of doing her father's will, she loses her right to self-preservation and plunges into an unscrupulous world of intrigue, conspiracy and counter-plots. Titanji's aggressive attitude forces her to take sides with the opposite camp – the Zintgraff-Galega-Titambo camp – and the result of this choice is that she loses the brother she was willing to sacrifice everything for to keep alive. Having lost her support, Titanji embarks on his dangerous mission to "save" Bali single-handedly, or at least with the help of Bafut and Mankon. The tragic consequences of his decision are manifold and the manner of his

death is perhaps the most tragic. The narrator reports: 'He was taken into the bad bush where he was executed and his body quartered and exposed as food for hynas [*sic*] and vultures' (69). Thus, Titanji loses the battle with his father, Kassa loses a brother and Bali loses a prince. More significantly, Bali loses its sovereignty to the Germans. That is the price Galega pays for seeking German aid in spreading Bali civilization across the entire Grassfields. As Zakes Mda shows in his historical novel *The Heart of Redness* (2000), civilization is not cheap; it comes with a price tag.

The theme of loss is further evident in marriage unions transacted on the basis of strengthening political ties and maintaining cordial relations between kingdoms. In her study of the Nso society in the Grassfields, Miriam Goheen (1996: 33) states that within the Nso social setting, 'daughters of the *fon* act as important court ambassadors when they are married into foreign chiefdoms', and in her view this position carries with it some degree of power. She, however, does not explain to what extent this power is felt back home among the women's kith and kin. In *Zintgraff*, there is an overt suggestion that women in pre-colonial and colonial Grassfields societies possessed less power than anthropological studies tend to project. Galega's blatant rejection of any alliance with Bafut stems from a deeply nursed grievance he holds against Gwalem who apparently murdered his sister, 'a woman [he] freely gave to him as wife' (7). Galega offers no proof to back up his accusation, but the inexplicable death of his sister seems to be the reason behind the intense animosity he displays towards the Bafut. For him, her death is a loss that cannot be compensated for, not without the shedding of Bafut blood. Ironically, although he still resents Gwalem for the loss of his sister, he does not seem to be concerned about losing another female member of his household. Galega's habit of *giving* women away to other men – first his sister and now his daughter – seems to be a strategy by which he not only establishes his power over the women folk in his kingdom but also extorts allegiance from the beneficiaries of these "gifts". It is a performance of masculinity and power play at its most sinister.

The reality of pre-colonial Grassfields societies was that there was a delineation of social roles between men and women and no group was expected to meddle in the business of the other. This division of labour, however, does not necessarily mean that there was

equality between the sexes. In *Women in the Grassfields*, Phyllis Kaberry (1952) highlights some of the executive bodies that enforced law within Grassfields societies, and it is interesting to note that of the women's groups she mentions, only the Queen Mothers had the licence to assist in the governing of society and the hearing of cases. Although the Queen Mothers ranked next to the Fon, they played a less prominent role in secular affairs than the exclusively male body of Councillors known as the Vibai (Kaberry, 1952: 9). The men's societies dominated every aspect of public life. Such is the kind of socio-political order that informs Butake's play. Although a princess, Kassa has no executive position in the secular administration of Bali, unlike her brothers, Titanji and Titambo, who are Galega's personal consultants, advisers and emissaries for special missions. While Titambo is entrusted with the task of bringing the man of white body to Bali, Kassa is only to be taken along as a guarantee of the mission's success. As a cultural stereotype of the obedient and submissive daughter, she is a pawn in her father's political game, a position that automatically sabotages any attempt on her part to resist Zintgraff's sexual advances. The political implications of her relationship with Zintgraff can be read in terms of peace negotiation. She tries to negotiate peace between Titanji and Galega, but sadly her strategy is neither effective nor of sufficient impact to forestall the imminent war that is brewing between the two. The head-on collision is beyond her power to halt.

Kassa is a negotiator who is handicapped, first, by her lack of knowledge of the full spectrum of the crisis facing her and, secondly, by a lack of understanding of the political limitations placed on her gender. She has little experience in the task of negotiation, because for the most part her duty as princess excludes any involvement in active politics or the every-day running of the state. Her environment necessarily conditions her outlook on life and her place in society, and that place does not go beyond addressing domestic matters and facilitating men's projects just by her being physically present. With these limitations thrust upon her by Butake and Doho, how then can she function properly as a negotiator of peace between men? Her inadequate training and lack of the basic skills automatically hinders the realization of her full potential in the resolution of the political disputes within her society.

In the light of Strattonian feminism, which is the theoretical framework that informs this study, Kassa is an index of the state of the nation. She symbolizes Bali's submission of its sovereignty to colonial domination, for just as circumstances compel her to surrender her body to Zintgraff so does the threat of war from a superior army force Galega to accept German friendship, even at the expense of Bali autonomy. Essentially, then, Kassa becomes a metaphor for pre-colonial Cameroon's subjection to colonial rule. Her body is the script on which Butake and Doho re-write the history of Cameroon from their perspective as male playwrights. From the point of view of Strattonian feminism, Kassa also fulfils the Mother Africa trope in that she emerges as the "virgin" woman with virtues that enhance her vulnerability to male conquest. She is the model daughter who speaks less and obeys more. As the play implies, the success of her role as a negotiator does not depend on verbal articulation. Thus, she is depicted as a silent negotiator. For the most part, it is her body that does the talking. This centring of body politics has gender implications for both the character and women readers/audiences of the play in that it is a deliberate mutation of women's voice and the imposition on them of a culture of silence that works out to the advantage of male hegemony. Such a gendered depiction of women leaves them with little room to overcome the challenges posed to their emancipation by patriarchal discourses.

5.3.2 Negotiating Reconciliation: Sawa

Where Kassa fails to negotiate lasting peace among her people, Sawa succeeds to a greater extent, because the instruments of her negotiation are not carnal. Sawa is not the perfect reflection of intellectual brilliance, but her capacity to think logically and to use words effectively in conveying her points is what gives her character a heroic status. Butake makes her the voice of reason in *Family Saga*, the character who sees beyond the obvious, who questions the Manichean ways of men. In contrast to Kassa who is portrayed as a destabilizing force, Sawa is the embodiment of social stability and female survival in the face of general unhappiness. Her role as the voice of reason manifests itself in four principal ways: (1) she persuades Kamalo to see the injustices of his ways, though mere words do not succeed in getting him to change; (2) she initiates the crying act which becomes a ritual for the psychological and emotional purgation of her family and marks the start of her own healing process; (3) she spearheads the movement to

resolve the identity crisis by searching out the family history; (4) and she encourages the audience to participate in the performance of the family saga, thereby facilitating the collective healing of her people.

Sawa's pursuit of logical persuasion to draw out Kamalo's humane side is evident when she is taken to his house and allowed to enjoy the luxuries of his mansion. Sawa is quite taken with her new clothes and new surroundings, but she does not hesitate to point out to Kamalo the injustices evident in his treatment of her father and brother who slave away all day while Kamalo spends his time drinking and smoking. The inequality that exists in the ownership of resources by the two brothers is highlighted in the following conversation:

> **Sawa:** Uncle, why are you only flattering me na? You will make daddy to build a nice house like this your own na? Even just half as nice na? At night we cannot even sleep because of mosquitoes na? In the rainy season the whole roof is just leaking and water just pouring every where na? Yet the harvest is always very heavy na? I don't know what father does with all the crops we harvest all the time na? Uncle, you will make him to build our own house too, na?
> **Kamalo:** Don't worry about that, my dear. From today you will stay here with me. Any thing you want will be yours.
> **Sawa:** But I also want my daddy and brother to enjoy too, na. We have been suffering too much in the fields for all these years na? Daddy does not even drink na? He doesn't smoke na? When I remember what Ngong goes through I can even just be crying na? (26)

It is ironic that Sawa is currently enjoying some of the luxuries bought with the proceeds from the harvest made by her father and yet she does not know that it is Kamalo who takes everything away, leaving her family impoverished. The irony is further heightened in that her father who neither drinks nor smokes but works extremely hard ends up being the one without a proper house and with the least of material comforts. This disparity captures the depressing condition of Anglophone Cameroon which is said to produce the greater percentage of Cameroon's export crops and yet remains the more under-developed of the two regions. Kamalo's leisurely practices of drinking and smoking represent modes of extravagance and attitudes of superiority adopted by the ruling Francophone elite to dominate power and suppress the Anglophone minority. There is no doubt that Butake was targeting the elite class when he wrote this play, for as he himself

admits, his theatre is 'directed at the consciences of the political and bureaucratic leadership' in Cameroon (Butake, 2003: 104).

Sawa resists the temptation to be lured by material things into a lifestyle of thievery and waste. She directly refutes Kamalo's strategy of divide-and-rule, an attempt to destroy the strength of her family by co-opting her into his council of the privileged. For her, economic and social benefits must be equitably distributed and she refuses to compromise in her belief in the equality of all humans and each person's right to just and fair treatment. It is her ideological stance, which contrasts with the me-first and superior attitude of Kamalo, which moves the latter to resort to sexual aggression as the only way to break her willpower. In Kamalo's view, Sawa is too beautiful to be so intelligent; he did not expect these two qualities to be vested in one female human being. Yet, Sawa proves to him that there is no c ontradiction in such a combination. Through the convincing power of Sawa's argument, therefore, Butake deconstructs the sexist notion that beauty and intelligence are mutually exclusive in women.

The rape of Sawa is an emotionally traumatizing experience, not only for her but also for Ngong and Kamala, both of whom feel partly responsible for the incident owing to their absence at the time of its occurrence. The pain evident in Sawa's voice as she reports the incident to Ngong is so touching that he joins her in singing a dirge which highlights the agony to which their supposed uncle has subjected them. The dirge provides an avenue for venting out their emotional turmoil. But singing, though effective in evoking compassion from listeners, does little to heal the wounds of the victimized Sawa. To truly purge herself of the agony that remembrance brings, she has to engage in another ritual – that of weeping. By weeping, Sawa unburdens her soul and empties it of the painful emotions that have come to dominate her very being. Acknowledging that expressions of emotion have a t herapeutic effect, Kamala and Ngong soon join her in wailing and bemoaning their woes. Sawa, therefore, establishes lament as a ritual of psychological healing. The weeping of the trio is not just over Sawa's rape but also over other problems they experience. They weep over their loss of dignity, over Kamalo's betrayal and over the general malaise of being subjected to the cruel authority of Kamalo and his papa. This emptying of the burden of their hearts through weeping results in emotional relief,

manifested through recourse to joyful laughter. We are told that after crying for some time, Kamalo smiles through his sobs and begins to laugh heartily until he rolls on the ground. Ngong and Sawa join in the laughter and together they all laugh until the guards keeping watch over them harshly remind them to get on with their work. Thus, Butake projects expressions of emotions, whether sad or happy, as activities that are therapeutic in nature, and moreso as a course that is not gender-specific but derives from the depths of human feeling.

Butake's vision of democracy attained through proper dialogue between the rulers and the ruled is captured in the Sixth Movement of the play in which the performers come together to discuss the pressing problems affecting the people of Kamanda. Sawa, Ngong and Kamala are each expected to present their three most distressing problems. The structure of the discussion is such that it allows for common problems to be addressed first. Poverty is the one problem common to all three participants in this workshop-like discussion and there is a suggestion here that poverty alleviation is a major goal of intervention theatre. Throughout the play, audience participation is encouraged as spectators are invited to join in the workshop and relaxation exercises. The play-within-a-play provides further opportunity for spectators to contribute to the theatre-making process. They effectively become the 'spec-actors' (see Boal, 1979), as they take control of their fate. Sawa is empowered by the playwright to canvass audience participation in the process of healing that is central to the play's ideological construct. The following quotation supports this claim:

> **Kamala:** Wisdom is beginning to come. Sawa, what do we do about the small circle now that our companions have refused to join?
> **Sawa:** *(Nodding in the direction of the spectators)* Let's ask for volunteers among them na? They are only sitting there smiling at us and doing nothing na? Let's go and get some of them to join us na? *(Sawa, Ngong and Kamala go into spectators and return with as many volunteers as they can find … Actors and spectators form a circle and perform a popular dance such as the Njang, Bensikin, Ndong, Bagalum, etc. Then they engage in simple relaxation exercises for controlled breathing and the body.)*
> **Kamala:** (*Addressing spectators*) Good people, this is only the beginning. But a very promising one. We will be practising here every day until Kamalo comes to see what we have prepared for his entertainment and the amusement of his papa. Will you, please, kindly join us every day for the practice session? As you can see, dancing and play are very good for the heart and the soul; for the body and the mind. Just go back and take your seats while we work out how to proceed

> with the rest of the elements that will be included in the folk dances because dancing is talking with the body, the heart and the soul. And the spectators must listen with their bodies, their hearts and their souls. Take your seats, good people, and we will continue to work together. *(Kamala, Ngong and Sawa position themselves on stage in such a way that there is hardly any divide between actors and spectators)* (46-47)

As argued elsewhere, the bringing together of spectators and actors is Butake's artistic tactic of reminding his audience that just as the dichotomies between actors and audiences are superficial, so too are the conflicts between Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians (see Odhiambo & Nkealah, 2008: 6). Butake's incorporation of applied theatre techniques – workshop, song, dance, discussion and play-acting – in this play ensures that empowerment is achieved through the collective efforts of both actors and spectators and that no gender is empowered at the expense of the other.

Through discussion, Kamala and his children are able to put their problems into proper perspective and this marks a crucial point in the problem-solving process. The discussion, which is the equivalent of the workshop in applied theatre, highlights their state of identity loss, as they all grapple with individual worries about their parentage. While Kamala is distressed by the news of his mother being held prisoner by K amalo and Fiekafhim, Ngong and Sawa are anxious to learn about their own mother's whereabouts and why she left them in the first place. Both parties have an identity crisis that needs to be resolved before they can tackle the problem they have with Kamalo. The following conversation supports this claim:

> **Kamala:** … Kamalo is our problem because he wastes away our resources, making us poor. His papa is our problem because he has enslaved Kamalo who in turn has enslaved us. Can a slave ever know any thing but poverty? We are our problem because we are doing nothing, absolutely nothing, to regain our liberty and dignity that Kamalo and his papa have taken away from us. That is the problem as I see it. I do not know how you see it. But that is the way I see it…
> **Sawa:** But you a lso say that we are our problem na, daddy? Because we don't even know who we are na? You have told us about our mummy na? But what about our grand-mummy and grand-daddy na? That is the only way to know our identity na? Who we are and how we are family with uncle Kamalo na? Who are we na? Where did we come from before all these problems fell on us na, daddy? It is important for us to know our family story na?
> **Ngong:** Father, Sawa is right. Your father says he is not really your father. He also says Kamalo's papa is not really his papa. Kamalo himself says you are not really his brother. How do we get the wind to show us the fowl's anus? Father,

> how do we know where and when the rain started beating us? Where and when the harmattan came on us suddenly? (55-57)

Echoes of Achebe's famous statement of going back into history to find out when and where the problems of Africa began (2007b: 104) are evident in Ngong's response to Sawa's request. By pointing out that the family history has to be retrieved in order for them to define their roots, Sawa becomes Butake's ambassador for empowerment through knowledge, a role that none of his female characters has hitherto played. In the plays discussed in Chapter Three, women's empowerment is achieved through the use of the body, but in this play it is attained through education and the acquisition of knowledge. The play is not necessarily advocating women's acquisition of knowledge through formal education. Rather, it suggests that knowledge can be acquired through traditional social systems in which the older generation passes on to the younger one the history, values, customs and beliefs of the community. Knowledge of the past becomes an empowering tool with which problems of the present can be corrected. Sawa and Ngong are the principal collectors of this knowledge, as Kamala is prohibited from leaving the farm. They go into the community and ask the elders of the clan about their family history. The history turns out to be an exciting one, one that re-ignites their zest for life and instills pride in them about their origin.

> **Sawa:** It is not good to be in the dark na? Now like this I am very happy na? All the people like Kamalo who pretend that they have power, it is just because they know certain things na? Which other people don't know na?
> **Ngong:** Knowledge is power! Father, of all the things that you have ever done for us, this one is the best. Going out to look for the story of our family has been the best school that we have gone to. *(to spectators)* Good people, the best inheritance that you can give your children is giving them education, information. A person who is informed, who is aware of his surroundings, who is educated, can never become the slave of another man or woman. I am now ready, we are ready to dance for Kamalo and his papa not because we are their slaves but because knowledge of who we are has liberated us and given us dignity, pride and a sense of purpose in life. Father, we will dance for Kamalo with all our hearts, souls and minds. I have never been so proud of these rags that have been the symbol of our enslavement after what I have learnt about our family. (60-61)

From their quest, Sawa and Ngong come to understand that their grandfather is not really Bakingoom and Kamalo's papa is not Fiekafhim but that both Kamalo and Kamala are real brothers whose real father is Wakadu, a mad musician who often entertained

Kamanda with his music and dancing. It is through the enactment of this family story that Sawa succeeds in negotiating reconciliation between herself and Kamalo and between Kamalo and Kamala.

As the writer's designated negotiator, Sawa facilitates the reconciliation process. In the play-within-a-play, she plays the role of Kamanda and invites Kamalo to play the role of Yaman. It is in his role as Yaman that Kamalo comes face-to-face with the cruelty of his act of raping Sawa. At the exact point he is about to rape Kamanda, Sawa reminds him that this would be the second time he would be violating her body and Kamalo freezes with Sawa in his arms. This marks the moment at which memory converges with dramatic reality, for it is the memory of past experience which propels Sawa to speak out in protest to Kamalo's aggression and it is her verbal juggling of Kamalo's memory that forces him to see the light, as it were. Acknowledging his error, he kneels down in front of Sawa and pleads for forgiveness. Sawa assures him of her forgiveness and he moves on to Ngong and then Kamala who both also assure him of their forgiveness. The four of them come to a unanimous decision: 'Henceforth, all our decisions and actions shall be participatory. We shall all conceive and execute, each according to his ability' (84). To celebrate the attainment of reconciliation, they sing the song entitled 'In one family', after which the spectators join the actors in strategizing on how to rescue Kamalo from Fiekafhim's hold. This act enshrines the possibility of a collective emancipation of the Cameroonian peoples, an uplifting of the nation from its current state of neo-colonial oppression to a new state of true independence and democracy.

In this play, Butake's vision of change differs drastically from that expressed in other plays such as *Lake God*, *The Survivors* and *And Palm Wine*. In contrast to these three plays in which change (positive or negative) is envisioned as the result of radical communal actions effected with the aid of women's sexuality, often in combination with ritual power, in *Family Saga* change is envisioned as the direct outcome of a process of self-education and/or the education of one's community and an application of the knowledge acquired in the defining or re-defining of one's self. Butake hereby suggests that the process of effecting change begins with understanding the problem at hand, and then moving on to finding possible ways of dealing with it. Sawa is instrumental in the

solution-finding process and it is significant that she uses not her body but her intellectual capacity to re-direct her society towards pathways of justice and moral uprightness. In *Family Saga*, there is a new vision of womanhood, one that hinges not on self-sacrifice, as in *Zintgraff*, but on taking control of one's fate and rising above one's oppressed state, with or without the help of others. Such is the vision that Sawa embodies.

Through Sawa's conciliatory approach to conflict, the play suggests that violence is not always the way to go when resisting foreign domination, that sometimes subtlety is needed. This is a shift from the vision presented in *Lake God* and *And Palm Wine* in which, as some scholars have argued, Butake stresses 'the relevance of violence as a veritable weapon in the fight against institutionalized injustice, dictatorship and cultural imperialism' (Jick & Ngeh, 2002: 32). In *Family Saga*, dialogue is privileged over armed conflict. The vision moves from that in which radicalism and revolutionary action prevail to that in which peaceful negotiation and strategic planning triumph. It is through Sawa's words that we gain access into Butake's gradual accommodation of the idea of the individual, as opposed to the communal. Although the language Sawa uses is a transliteration from Pidgin English to English, as indicated by her perpetual use of the Pidgin expression 'na' at the end of every utterance, the play amplifies her innocence without making her a caricature of the model African woman. Sawa is to some extent an inspirational character for Cameroonian women, because unlike Kassa who takes refuge in complacency and servitude, she is a resourceful thinker, a fearless speaker and an impressive orator. She epitomizes new values of women's survival even on harsh terrain. Kamanda, on the other hand, recalls images of women in Negritudian writing and her portrayal denotes a re-packaging of the Mother Africa figure predominant in the male literary tradition.

5.4 Echoes of Negritude: Mother Africa Re-packaged

In Chapter Two, it was argued that Butake projects women's moral degeneration as an index of the corrupt, disruptive practices that have culminated in the total collapse of Cameroon's judicial and political systems. In both *Zintgraff* and *Family Saga*, woman's body becomes the metaphor for an African nation, society, ethnic group or village that is trampled upon by its ruling elite and their imperialist cohorts. In these two plays, the

image of woman that is projected is the positive, idealized image evident also in Negritudian writing. As shown earlier, Kassa embodies Butake's notion of acceptable models of female behaviour. She is the epitome of beauty, and beauty associated with the female body is the stronghold of Negritudian writing. In *Family Saga*, the image of the beautiful woman persists, this time enhanced with elements of myth. The mythic element is deployed to valorize Africa's cultural heritage and to contest colonial representations of Cameroon. Kamanda is the goddess from whom the twins, Kamalo and Kamala, spring. She is given superhuman status and an extraordinary beginning. The following narrative by Sawa and Ngong highlights her mythical origins:

> **Sawa:** Grand-mummy is a goddess na? The people say that one day she emerged from the smoking volcano of Mount Kamanda. That's why they call her Kamanda na? She can never die because of her extreme beauty and wealth na?
> **Ngong:** And the people offer sacrifices every now and then to Kamanda, the Mountain Goddess. Because of her great beauty and wealth many foreign traders passing through the estate always sought to seduce her in order to capture her love and more especially her wealth. (63-64)

As a goddess, Kamanda is the cosmic centre of the play's universe. The supernatural dimension given to her portrayal suggests some influence of Butake by Achebe, in whose two novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, we find females endowed with special powers of foresight. The supernatural element, according to Amina Bashir (2004: 71), 'serves as an easy way of resolving an otherwise knotty problem emanating from the need to preserve the patriarchal definition of women'. One cannot help but agree with this observation, considering the portrayal of Kamanda in *Family Saga*. There is much emphasis on her beauty as well as her possession of abundant wealth. The portrait that adorns the stage throughout the performance provides the spectators with a visual representation of Kamanda in her primal beginnings. It is the portrait of a richly dressed old woman whose beauty and wealth commands the respect of her observers. Note the following description given of her:

> **Sawa:** … Even in her old age she looks beautiful na?
> **Ngong:** And rich. Beautiful and rich, Sawa. That portrait tells me that we have to find our family story. Our past must have been truly glorious and happy.
> **Kamala:** You're right, son. Even today our estate is fertile and rich. There is really no reason for our wretched condition other than mismanagement, misplaced priorities and the looting done by Kamalo's papa. (58)

The emphasis laid on Kamanda's beauty and wealth suggests a Cameroonian past that was almost perfect, as it seemed to be untainted by the greed and corrupt practices that are rife in the country today. This resurrection of a glorified past is the identifying mark of Negritudian writing which sought to instill a sense of pride in African-ness by elevating Blackness to the heights of irrefutable glory. The black woman in her role as goddess, mother, seductress, wife and sister became the natural symbol of the movement's ideal:

> Her femininity, sensitivity, grace and strength; her spiritual and physical beauty; her psychology and character all made her a fitting symbol of the best in her race. Her mystique was an endless source of wonder and enchantment; her movements, her glance, her voice were a source of inspiration for a poetry whose professed aim was to give the lie to the detractors of the Negro-African. (Finn, 1988: 172)

Through the character of Kamanda, womanhood is conceived in terms of the myth of origin, and according to Isidore Diala (2004: 186), the artistic consequence of such mythologizing is the 'idealization of woman' and the ideological implication is her 'projection onto a plane where her essential role is limited to the symbolic'. McClintock quoted at the beginning of this chapter affirms that in male nationalisms 'women are typically construed as the symbolic bearers of the nation, but are denied any direct relation to national agency' (1993: 62). In *Family Saga*, the retrieval of the family history and the enactment of the play-within-a-play exemplifies Butake's attempt to negotiate myth in the light of contemporary challenges and to foster an aesthetic of hope. Yet, Kamanda is only a relic of the past, for in this national family drama it is the male figures – her sons Kamala and Kamalo – who are the statesmen, the leaders of the nation.

Although the story of Kamanda is retrieved and retold as a means of transmitting the notion of a common origin of the Cameroonian peoples, its mythological dimension inevitably situates woman's political dynamism strictly within the realms of the abstract. Moreover, in reproducing images of beauty and blackness, the play simply re-presents the Mother Africa trope – Africa in the image of a beautiful black woman – in a more attractive packaging than what we have in *The Rape* in the character of Akwen and in *Zintgraff* in the person of Kassa. As Stratton notes, 'the trope has acquired an identity and history *specific* to the African male literary tradition, as men writers have revised and reiterated each other's versions of it' (1994: 40). As an illustration of this point, Butake's

Kamanda myth in *Family Saga* is a re-invention of Achebe's Idemili myth in *Anthills of the Savannah*, and Sawa's role in the play corresponds to that of Beatrice in *Anthills* in that she functions as a negotiator of reconciliation between men.

Although the previous section has shown that in contrast to Kassa in *Zintgraff*, Sawa is a more successful negotiator because she resorts not to the conventional model of female negotiation – the use of the body and its sexual potential – but to dialogue, it must be said that from a Strattonian point of view Sawa does not completely escape criticism in terms of the politics of gender within the text. Perhaps the most significant point about *Family Saga*, in terms of a feminist appreciation of the text, is that the expiation of national guilt is performed on the female body. It is at the point of body contact between Kamalo and Sawa during the performance of the play-within-a-play that Kamalo receives insight about his own role in the plundering of his family's estate by his papa. It is at the point at which he is about to rape Sawa for the second time that it becomes registered on his consciousness that by violating his niece he is endorsing his own mother's violation by Yaman. Awareness dawns on him like a flash of lightening in a thunderstorm. The following quotation highlights the suddenness of this awareness:

> **Yaman:** *(Now played by Kamalo with no make-up)* My Lady Queen, I am privileged to respond to your summons.
> **Kamanda:** *[played by Sawa]* Who summoned you? What do you want here at this time of night?
> **Yaman:** I am honoured to respond to my Lady Queen's summons.
> **Kamanda:** Get out of my sight. It is not you I summoned. Get out of my sight. *(Aside)* I am choking with his stench. Please, get out of my sight.
> **Yaman:** What makes him better than I am? I will protect you from him. I promise.
> **Kamanda:** *(Choking)* Please, get out of my sight.
> **Yaman:** Do you know how long I have waited for this moment? This is my moment of truth. I will not let it slip from my fingers. I will not let you slip from me ever. I will ravish you. Might is right. I am strong. You are weak. I take the upper hand. I will have you now! *(He lifts her, protesting vehemently)*
> **Sawa:** Not again na, uncle Kamalo! You will not do that again to your own brother's daughter na, uncle Kamalo. *(Kamalo freezes with Sawa in his arms)*
> (79-80)

Playing the role of Yaman in the enactment of the family history is instrumental in Kamalo's expiation of guilt, mainly because he gets a chance to confront Sawa whom he had previously wronged. Sawa's role as Kamanda therefore opens up the possibility, first,

for colonial guilt to be acknowledged, and then for the colonialist to make amends for the wrongs perpetuated against the colonized people of Cameroon. Sawa's body becomes the template on which colonial guilt is stamped and then erased. It is the body that is weak, vulnerable and powerless, but paradoxically imbued with a healing potential. Because the inscription of guilt is performed upon the gendered flesh of the female, one can say that the play reproduces, albeit in a less obvious way, the kind of body-centred power politics evident in *Lake God*, *The Survivors* and *And Palm Wine*. It, in fact, re-inscribes femaleness as a limiting condition from which there is no escape for women.

5.6 Gendering the Allegorical Mode

As mentioned in previous sections of this work, Butake employs the allegorical mode to engage with topical issues in contemporary Cameroon, issues such as the Anglophone/Francophone divide, ethno-regional conflicts and neo-colonialism. He uses the allegorical mode effectively in *Family Saga* to capture the tensions between the dominating Francophone majority and the marginalized Anglophone minority in Cameroon. As an allegorical play, *Family Saga* addresses the genesis of the Anglophone problem, and more importantly it brings to fictional realization dreams of nationhood and national identity for the people of Cameroon. The point of interest here, however, is the manner in which Butake uses female characters to construct the allegory in the text. Female representation within the fictional world of *Family Saga* and the abstract world of the allegory is fraught with gendered notions of femininity, or what it means to be a woman from a male perspective. A few significant points are worth highlighting.

Generally, female presence in both *Zintgraff* and *Family Saga* is minute, as compared to that in *Lake God* and *And Palm Wine*. Sawa is the lone female character in *Family Saga* who is visibly present. Kamanda is a mythical figure that is only made alive through the enactment of the family story by Kamala, Sawa and Ngong. Kamala's wife is spoken about lengthily but she remains a hazy figure that existed in some past era. Yet, even in her haziness her portrayal is not without a trace of negativity, as she surfaces as a self-centered woman who abandons her children simply because of differences in opinion with her husband. She is ridiculed for abandoning her home only to become the fourth wife of a polygamist. And yet, we are told that she enjoys a greater sense of happiness in

her new home than she did when she was with Kamala, because now 'she has her own farm and does whatever she likes with her harvest' (55). Can this be taken as a suggestion that where women's pursuit of happiness and economic independence conflicts with family obligations women may choose not to put family first? This is hardly the case as Kamala's wife quickly settles into family life again after her separation from Kamala and soon bears ten children for her new husband. In addition, there is a suggestion in the play that Kamala's dejection is partly the result of his lack of a wife to share his problems with. It is apparent, then, that in the Butake fictional world, the traditional family structure of husband-wife-children is the acceptable model for a stable and progressive society and there is no room for a woman who prefers to exist outside these conventions. Such a woman is inevitably castigated as the *other* "other"; hers is a double portion of other-ness, as is the case with Rufina in *The Rape* who is condemned by society not only for being an unmarried woman but also for being a mother in her unmarried state.

Like the rest of the characters in *Family Saga*, Kamala's wife is a symbolic character. She is the symbolic representation of British Northern Cameroons which during the plebiscite of 1961 had chosen to join the independent Federal Republic of Nigeria. The polygamous marriage into which Kamala's wife enters is a fitting analogy for British Northern Cameroons' integration with Nigeria, a country which had three dominant ethnic groups – Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa. Kamala's sense of abandonment captures the feeling of loss experienced by the Southern Cameroons politicians who were taken aback by Northern Cameroons' overwhelming vote in favour of integration with Nigeria rather than re-unification with French Cameroon.[59] The new wealth Kamala's wife (Northern Cameroons) is said to enjoy after her marriage is significant in that it implies that Southern Cameroons lost out on a better future when its leaders opted for re-unification instead of continued association with Nigeria.

[59] There is general consensus among historians that the results of the 1961 plebiscite in Northern Cameroons came as a shock to politicians in both Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroon who had misinterpreted Northern Cameroons' vote for continued British Trusteeship during a plebiscite held in the territory in 1959 as a vote against integration with Nigeria. The unexpected turn of events explains why the results of the 1961 plebiscite in Northern Cameroons were challenged and the British government was accused of rigging the elections to achieve its aim of creating one big empire out of Nigeria (see Eyongetah & Brain, 1974: 157; Ngoh, 1987: 231).

Of important note here is the fact that Butake uses female characters to represent the two territories of British Cameroons, with Northern Cameroons represented by Kamala's wife and a part of the Southern Cameroons – the South West Province – represented by Sawa. From a historical perspective, these two territories were placed in a politically weak position because of their being governed as part of Nigeria. This administrative attachment to Nigeria was not welcome by the people of the Cameroons because it robbed them of autonomy as a Trust Territory, and this explains why Britain has been criticized not only for its colonial policies which made the Cameroons an appendage of Nigeria, thereby creating room for Igbo domination of the Cameroonian peoples, but also for its failure to develop the territory and to lead it towards self-government without alliance to either Nigeria or French Cameroon (see Awasom, 2000: 97; DeLancey, 1989: 33-34; Eyongetah & Brain, 1974: 141; Fanso, 1999: 285; Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003: 10). By using Kamala's wife to represent British Northern Cameroons before and after independence and Sawa to represent the South West Province of the present-day Republic of Cameroon, while male characters are used to represent stronger entities such as Britain (Baakingoom), France (Fiekafhim), Francophone Cameroon (Kamalo) and Anglophone Cameroon (Kamala), Butake effectively places women in an inferior position characterized by weakness, subordination, powerlessness, dependency, and loss of a distinct identity. The pattern of representation that emerges from the play points towards a propagation of ideologies of women's intrinsic susceptibility to conditions such as vulnerability (Kamanda and Sawa), victimization (Sawa) and dissatisfaction with their lot (Kamala's wife). Such ideologies are not only disempowering for women but also reveal a vision of women that is gender-biased, condescending and chauvinistic.

5.6 In Celebration of Women?

The range of female characterization in *Zintgraff* is extremely limited, because all we really get to see is the seductive woman and the mothering sister, in the person of Kassa. Only Kassa features as a voiced character in this play. The rest of the women in Galega's palace – the queen, queen mother and royal wives – are silent characters being spoken to but never seen or heard speaking in response. Although part of a politically vibrant space, their actions are confined to that of looking after the domestic affairs of the royal house. For example, before Zintgraff's arrival, Galega tells the queen: 'Make sure that there are

first grade kolas in the royal bag' (15), to which command the queen gives no response. It is assumed that her silence means acquiescence, for she cannot be expected to challenge the Fon's authority. The queen is therefore an absented presence – a character that is physically present on stage but whose enforced silence signifies the playwright's conscious control of the space she occupies within her society and within the play. Like the queen, the queen mother is given the "noble" responsibility of ensuring that there is 'enough food for the great visitors and their companions' (14), and yet her nobility in stature as a *queen mother* is not projected onto stage. Hers is the traditional role of feeding the nation, a role also fulfiled with ardent devotion by the women in *Lake God*, *The Survivors* and *And Palm Wine*. Essentially, then, the women live a life of monotony, as their daily preoccupation is that of performing the routine tasks of providing food and entertainment to the male population – the wielders of power.

In contrast to *Lake God* and *And Palm Wine*, however, the two plays *Zintgraff* and *Family Saga* feature women who are not part of any community of women as such; they function in isolation and have to draw on their individual resources for survival. Both Kassa and Sawa are portrayed as beautiful women, their beauty being further enhanced by their youthfulness. This combination of beauty and youth echoes the portrayal of Akwen in *The Rape*, but this time youthfulness represents not just irresistible charm but also gullibility and vulnerability. The emphasis Butake lays on the physical looks of these women is not without import: it highlights their vulnerability to male sexual exploitation as well as their lack of a natural defence mechanism against sexual predators. Both women do not only fall prey to the licentious desires of older men but also submit to a position of powerlessness in the face of male sexual aggression and persistence. Nevertheless, while Kassa disappears from the scene of action, signifying her loss of status as the designated negotiator in the play, Sawa sustains her role right to the end and attains victory by negotiating the healing process that culminates in the expiation of Kamalo and the reconciliation between him and her family.

One of the ideological weaknesses of *Zintgraff* is that it is deficient in the novelty of its vision of women and, if anything, exploits historical material without giving attention to re-creating or re-inventing the conventional woman of the 1890s. Granted, the play is

historical in context, but it is also a fictional work. And if Butake and Doho decided to include a female dimension to the conflict through the sub-plot outlining Zintgraff's brawl with Titanji over Kassa, then it is not too much to expect that such a sub-plot should extend the cultural frontiers of women's place in Grassfields societies. As much as the play is impressive in its deployment of traditional art forms, it fails to broaden its ideological base by embracing alternative forms of African womanhood – forms that go beyond the Mother Africa trope or the virgin/whore dichotomy. In addition, the play re-visits the Cameroonian past in a reflective and critical manner but shies away from critiquing women's position within that supposedly glorious past. *Family Saga*, on the other hand, attempts to launch its social revolution from a new, liberating front through the character of Sawa, but then it reverts to conventional models of femininity by incorporating the mythic element through the character of Kamanda. One can therefore conclude that Butake looks at his world from an artistic prism 'infested by sexual politics that promotes devaluation of the female in all spheres of life, private and public' (Acholonu, 2004: 59).

Nonetheless, it must be said that Butake's vision of women seems to have moved away from an overwhelming emphasis on female sexual power to a more liberating terrain of female empowerment through self-education and self-definition. The privileged position given to knowledge acquisition in *Family Saga* indicates a degree of visionary complementarity between Butake and feminist dramatist Anne Tanyi-Tang whose two plays, *Ewa* (2000) and *Eneta vs Elimo* (2007), not only project self-actualized urban women who pursue education and entrepreneurship simultaneously but also celebrate women's triumph over patriarchy and its multiple avenues of enslavement (see Nkealah, 2009b). Although Butake still emphasizes the empowerment of the community, as opposed to that of the individual which Tanyi-Tang privileges in her writing, it can be argued that of all his plays *Family Saga* is the only one that presents a vision of women less fraught with gendered ideas of femininity and what constitutes femaleness. It demonstrates that Butake's vision of women has attained a degree of maturity, a shade of progressive imagination, and a phase of pragmatic engagement with women's realities.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

WOMEN, POWER AND BUTAKE'S VISION

6.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter looks at how Butake's vision of women has evolved over the years. The task here is to ascertain whether the vision is progressive or retrogressive. In other words, the chapter explores Butake's standpoint to determine whether it moves from sexist notions about women to more positive, inspiring and realistic portrayals of women's identities. It also asks whether his vision engages with the dynamics of female power or if it persists in locating women's power within a particular space. The enquiry examines female characters to see if women are always the initiators and sustainers of change or if there are cases where change is effected by other groups. But before going into the discussion, it is important to provide an overview of the various themes and styles that emanate from Butake's writing, as this provides a holistic picture of the plays that have been analysed in this thesis.

6.2 A Review of Butake's Themes and Dramatic Style

A key feature of Butake's drama is the sense of historicity that permeates the world of his plays. As has been shown, most of his plays are informed by historical events, and as Eyoh rightly reminds us, historicity in fictional writing is not about recounting past events in a factual manner but about commenting on events which may be past or contemporary and 'doing so in a style that is at once velvety, piquant and objective' (1993b: 102). Objectivity here would evoke a sense of past and contemporary events being critiqued through literature in an attempt to conscientize, for example, both the rulers and the ruled on policies of good governance. Through what can be termed his historical plays, Butake navigates through time and space to bring his readers and audiences to new imaginary worlds that are for the most part utopian in vision.

Beyond historicity, one notes the oral and participatory dimensions of Butake's plays. Although this study has focused mainly on the written texts of the plays, it is hard to ignore aspects of the plays that enhance their theatrical quality. Two main elements of theatrical performance that are visible in the texts are storytelling and audience participation. In *Lake God*, there is a narrator who plays the role of the traditional storyteller (see Matateyou, 1997). This narrator, however, functions differently from the one in *Zintgraff*. The narrator in *Lake God* simply introduces the play and then disappears as a narrator to re-emerge later as one of the characters in the play. The narrator in *Zintgraff*, by contrast, sustains his narratorial role right to the end. He not only utters the first and last words of the play but also comments on the events at regular intervals. Although at some point in the drama he becomes a character in the play, he nonetheless retreats into his narrator-commentator role as soon as the performance requires it. As the designated storyteller of the play, he remains essentially the voice that informs, reminds, prods, challenges and excites the audience about events in the play. Moreover, his commentaries on modern society, addressed directly to the audience, give the play a participatory dimension that is not evident in the "women empowerment" plays. This actor-audience interaction is further developed in *Family Saga* where the eventual reconciliation between two disputing brothers is achieved through the medium of the play-within-a-play strategy in which the audience is called upon to participate.

The marketplace is a powerful motif in Butake's plays in that it features in all the plays focusing on the subject of leadership. In *Lake God*, the Fibuen meets in the marketplace to decide on its course of action against the Fon. In *And Palm Wine*, the initiators of democracy (Kwengong, Shey Ngong and Tapper) decide that the affairs of Ewawa will be debated in the marketplace and that the day Shey Ngong as the new head of the council of elders takes a decision opposed to the welfare of the people, that same day the people will meet at the marketplace to elect a new head. The soldiers in *Shoes*, though hardhearted by training, recognize that when the people assemble in the marketplace in protest to the unwarranted arrest of the Mfu and Manjong Leaders (representative of the opposition), it means war and destruction for the land. In *Dance*, we see Psaul Roi being taken to the marketplace to face the judgment of the people he has wronged. The marketplace, therefore, emerges in Butake's plays as the symbol of people power, the

embodiment of a spirit of communion and cooperation that should exist between rulers and their subjects. It is a sp ace in which hierarchies are dissolved to make way for equality and the communal resolution of problems.

Another motif that features strongly in Butake's plays is that of intoxication, by which we see rulers being intoxicated with liquor and/or power. The Fon in *And Palm Wine* and Psaul Roi in *Dance* share a lot in common in terms of the manner in which they are both obsessed with alcohol consumption and power display. As shown in Chapter Three, the Fon in *And Palm Wine* turns Ewawa into a palm wine republic in which palm wine flows freely and titles of honour are conferred at will upon subjects who bow to the Fon's will. Psaul Roi is 'an alcoholic who happens also to be drunk with power even if he doesn't know what to do with it' (*Dance*, 167). Butake seems to be playing with the notion of intoxication as a f luid concept that transcends the excessive intake of alcohol to gain greater significance within the public sphere of power politics. In *Dance*, he shows that rulers who are intoxicated with power have the propensity to cause damage not only to their subjects but also to themselves, for 'a kingdom is none unless there are people' and 'what is the use of being a ruler without the ruled?' (*Dance*, 163). Psaul Roi's reckless instructions to the army to 'shoot to kill' results in his own elimination by the same army. The irony highlights the degree to which power intoxicates and how that intoxication in turn moves the intoxicated individual to turn on himself or herself. Alcohol is a vivid symbol for power in Butake's plays, because it captures the potency of the notion and paints a picture that different audiences can identify with.

The theme of seduction is one that comes to the fore in both *The Rape* and *Betrothal* and it is depicted as a negative act instigated mainly by women, with men being their victims. While *The Rape* shows that Michelle tries to seduce Mikindong into sexual immorality, *Betrothal* suggests that Elissa seduces Fointam into adopting her family and her culture, while abandoning his. What is implied here is the disruptive character of women's emotions, disruptive because they are perceived to destabilize established social structures, be they cultural, moral or religious. A critical look at other plays, however, reveals that seduction is as much a male practice as it is a female one. There is a striking parallel between Kamalo and Zintgraff in that both men are opportunists and seducers.

They capitalize on prevailing circumstances and use these to their advantage, at the expense of their victims. While Zintgraff capitalizes on Kassa's dejection over the possible harm that may come to Titanji and manages to sway her into his bed, Kamalo exploits the situation of Sawa's presence in his house to rob her of her self-pride. As can be expected of opportunists, they both use sugar-coated words to launch their seduction campaigns. Their respective actions project them as symbols of insatiable European greed for territorial space in Africa and French Cameroon's shameless exploitation of natural resources in Anglophone Cameroon. Zintgraff and Kamalo are therefore characters through which Butake articulates his anti-colonial and anti-neo-colonial ideologies.

Butake's writing, and Anglophone Cameroon drama in general, is characterized by a number of factors, including the exploration of history, an experimentation with oral art forms, a concern with social justice, a tendency for protest and propaganda, a dynamic use of language, and a propagation of an Anglophone culture. Theatre of the Absurd is theatre that creates meaning out of seemingly meaningless actions. Butake exploits absurdism in some of his plays, such as in *Dance*, but not for comic reasons. His intent is to critique the existing structures of power that plunge society into a near irredeemable state. It seems that for Butake the conservatism of traditionalism offers a positive alternative to the exploitations and destabilizations of neo-colonialism. Most of his plays explore power as a weapon with which the state institutionalizes terror and imposes its legitimacy on its citizens' sub-conscious. However, in the final analysis, power is reverted to the masses whom Butake sees as the rightful custodians of that power.

It is impossible to provide an exhaustive list of Butake's thematic and stylistic approaches here, as this would require an in-depth exploration of the texts that could well constitute the project of a new doctoral thesis or a post-doctoral study. This section is therefore only a selective look at some of the most apparent themes and aspects of style. It is hoped that other scholars who have chosen to focus on Butake's writing would be able to pursue, at some stage, independent studies on Butake's style in particular.

6.3 The Evolution of Butake's Vision

Throughout this work, the focus has been on the ways in which power operates in society and particularly how women negotiate this power. The nine plays that have been analysed offer critical insights into power structures in both traditional and modern constituencies. As the characters seek to find their space within these frameworks, the reader/audience comes to understand, acknowledge, or even question the hierarchies of power that frequently propel humans – individuals, groups and communities – towards courses intended to bring about transformation. But change, as has been illustrated, is a complex process that sometimes encounters resistance, even if subtly, from the very persons who purport to initiate it. Butake's plays demonstrate in vivid terms the ironies inherent in the exercise of power, for when the feminist reader or audience member begins to think that the structures of women's power are the ultimate bulwark against patriarchy and neo-colonialism, then it becomes apparent that these in themselves are limited in their capacity to reform and transform society. Butake's view is that change is the result of the collective effort of individuals and groups, men and women, leaders and subjects, the powerful and the powerless. His vision is that of a stable, just and efficient political system that remains hierarchized but is more people-oriented, with special attention being given to the equal distribution of wealth. The preceding chapters have explored Butake's depiction of women in various plays and how his vision of women aligns with his greater vision of the nation. This section is therefore an attempt to consolidate the arguments put forward throughout this work, by showing how Butake's vision has evolved over the years.

Beginning from his earliest plays written and performed in the 1980s to the most recent one published in 2005, we come to realize that in Butake's fictional world women are never given power; they take it. That is to say they draw on their resources as a group and break through patriarchal barriers to establish their authority. The forces that regulate their exercise of power are often overwhelming, to the extent that sometimes they capitulate and relinquish control, giving it back to the patriarchal order. Between 1980 and 2005, Butake's vision of women has undergone what seems to be a tremendous change but is more appropriately a slight one. The plays move from a preoccupation with women's traditional roles to an exploration of their capabilities within state politics and

then revert, albeit indirectly, to an obsession with their roles as social facilitators and conflict negotiators. As the writer's preoccupation shifts, power is also shifted from men to women and then from women back to men.

In *The Rape* and *Betrothal* discussed in Chapter One, men are placed at the centre of the "power stage", for the power to reform society or reinstate its values lies in their hands. By contrast, women are consigned to the periphery where they experience sexism, patriarchal oppression and powerlessness based on their gender. In the three plays analysed in Chapter Three (*Lake God*, *The Survivors* and *And Palm Wine*), women are brought on centre stage where they become the principal actors engaged in the struggle against monocracy and neo-colonialism. The pessimism evident in *Lake God* and *The Survivors* gives way to optimism in *And Palm Wine* where we find democratic leadership being established with relative ease by women; that is, without the angry interference of the gods (as in *Lake God*) or the vicious display of supreme power by the military (as in *The Survivors*). Women seem to dominate the public space in these plays, asserting and re-asserting their power as individuals and as a group. This portrayal of women's agency, however, fades away in *Shoes* and *Dance*, the two plays discussed in Chapter Four, as the playwright becomes preoccupied with the vicissitudes of state power, and women's victimization and exploitation under militaristic and totalitarian forms of leadership emerges as a *fait accompli*. The self-confident, active and versatile women we see in *Lake God* and *And Palm Wine* have receded into a world unknown, leaving the world that we know inhabited by women who are absented presences – insignificant figures who hover in the background and facilitate men's domination of political landscapes and powerscapes. The shadow of absented-ness continues to infringe on the lives of women in *Zintgraff* and it is only in *Family Saga* that Butake succeeds in casting it away, placing women once more at the heart of public politics. *Family Saga*, discussed in Chapter Five, is a play that envisions women as facilitators of a national healing process that is a prerequisite to real political independence and true economic development. It is the only play in which Butake attempts to paint a holistic image of women by moving away from the preoccupation with their sexual propensities. However, his re-introduction of the Mother Africa figure in the character of Kamanda creates challenges to an interpretation of the work as a visible indication of the maturity of his vision.

Looking at Butake's dramatic oeuvre in its entirety, this study argues that women fail to shake off, completely, the shadow of disempowerment that beclouds their lives. Some may argue that in Butake's plays women are seen resisting the shackles of invisibility and marginalization; that they are determined to reclaim space in the centre – the domain of politics, public and private. In this reading, Butake neither uplifts them from their marginalized state nor cures them completely of their invisibility. Though he centralizes their actions in the narratives, they remain marginal to political power. In many cases, he gives them visibility but denies them leadership positions. In addition, in Butake's literary imaginary, women perform power exclusively through the body. Even in *Family Saga* it is at the point of body contact between Sawa and Kamalo that power diffusion takes place when the latter realizes the error of his ways and makes amends.

In the fictional world of Butake's drama, women wield power mainly in the domestic space, and even within that space their power is confined to the bedroom. In both *Lake God* and *The Survivors*, women's negotiation of power is effected mainly through what has been termed 'bedroom power' – the power to establish control over one's own body and the terms on which sex is negotiated (Machera, 2004: 167). In *And Palm Wine*, the female genitalia surface as a site of resistance, and woman's body becomes the figure through which a political revolution is enacted. In the three plays discussed in Chapter Three, female characters do not achieve empowerment outside the sexuality of their bodies. They are also constrained to act mainly to protect domestic interests and the economic sustenance of their families and communities. The Fibuen's entrance into the politics of the public space is necessitated mainly by the destruction of the women's crops by Dewa's cattle. Earth-goddess pronounces judgment on Ewawa in reaction to the injustice directed towards Shey Ngong's wives, whose farmlands are declared the new possession of Kibanya's wives. And Mboysi comes to the rescue of the survivors in order to ensure the preservation of the clan through the children. These roles assigned to the major female characters gestures towards the writer's celebration of a women's community under whose auspices a large part of society, the domestic sphere, is placed. This "privileged" community is entrusted with the tasks of preserving the traditions of its people, protecting its lands from foreign domination, and restoring stability during those

times when male selfishness plunges humanity into disorder. It is a community of "super-heroes" made up of wives, mothers and sisters whose essential worth lies in their giving of themselves for the emancipation of others, and never for their own selves.

It is evident that there is a system of power sharing operating within the societies presented in *Lake God* and *And Palm Wine*, but it is also evident that within these societies women's power is only relative to that of men; the political dominance of men is established as a normative order. The process of change in Butake's writing is one in which women and men participate, but they do so from separate domains. On the one hand, men are more visibly present and active in their efforts to transform the leadership of their societies, as evident in the radical actions of the military in *Shoes* and *Dance*. Women, on the other hand, make their presence felt through what can be termed backstage politics, as illustrated by the actions of the Fibuen in *Lake God* and the women's secret society in *And Palm Wine*. In addition to this point, it seems that in Butake's writing the proof of real African womanhood lies in women disowning themselves, thereby placing more importance on communal well-being than on their own personal well-being.

In Butake's imaginary world, women are either victims or heroes as they vacillate between being the objects of oppression and the means of deliverance from that oppression. Whether they are shown resisting the oppressive system or succumbing to its victimizing strategies, they inevitably end up disempowered, because their status within the system does not change. It seems that in an effort to mirror the apparently powerful position of women in his society, Butake tends to ignore the dynamics of being woman, old or young, in a poor, rural or patriarchal society. As shown in many of the plays, he provides distressed female characters with easy solutions – the use of a sexual weapon to counter injustice. In the three plays discussed in Chapter Three, woman power is celebrated in sexual terms. Heroism and survival are projected as the ultimate indicators of women's empowerment. Empowerment in itself is the acquisition of only a certain group of women – old or middle-aged women who have lived the experience of wifehood and motherhood.

In many ways, Butake's women remain shallow characters whose identities are defined and conditioned by society's dominant images and expectations of women: women as submissive housewives, vocal when provoked, excessive when desperate, silent when overwhelmed and more concerned about others than themselves. In the plays, the choices women have in negotiating power are extremely limited; the skills they acquire for self-emancipation are none other than sexual. The plays fail to show how women draw on their resourcefulness to combat different types of oppression in different ways. Sex and its accompanying paraphernalia of the body emerge as the standard means of subversion. Female sexual abstinence is equated with nobility and service to the nation. Yet, it is woman's sexual organs that are placed on the pedestal to signal female power. In fact, female sexuality is synonymous with female power and female power exists mainly within the mythological realm. The gender connotations of this narrative construct for women are manifold, for 'when sexuality and spirituality merge, women are socialized into subsuming sexuality within a spiritual realm, leaving behind the realms of the physical, of desire, of pleasure' (Katrak, 1992: 399). With the exception of Sawa in *Family Saga* who embarks on a journey of self-discovery, the rest of Butake's female characters adhere to traditional constructions of femininity wherein rebellion against the system is orchestrated through body power. It cannot be said with certainty that at the end of the day these women gain greater recognition for their political accomplishments; neither can it be claimed that their social status changes owing to men's new understanding of their intellectual capabilities.

In almost all the plays, women's struggle against totalitarianism is directed through men: men are mostly there to facilitate the process. This may seem like the ideal approach to women's empowerment, but one also has to question whether by this conventional mode Butake is not subjecting women to a vicious cycle of oppression rather than providing them with escape from it. In addition, the women in Butake's plays are for the most symbolic representations of what Butake perceives as socio-political realities in Cameroon. In *The Rape*, for example, Rufina is a symbol of the Cameroonian nation, a country ridden with internal conflicts of its own making. The ongoing tensions between Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians are well embodied in the relationship between Rufina and Michelle, in which case Mi kindong becomes the fictional

representative of the country's head of state with whom both parties strive to establish a relationship premised on the extraction of rewards and privileges. The woman-as-a-nation trope in Butake's writing, most blatantly flashed in *Zintgraff* and *Family Saga*, epitomizes the reduction of women to symbols and the perpetual shadowing of their visibility and subjectivity.

One significant point that comes through in Butake's drama is that women in rural areas have a greater degree of power and autonomy over their activities than their counterparts in urban areas. The so-called modern woman in the city is constantly under the surveillance of the patriarchal lens. She relies exclusively on male benefaction for her survival and appears to have no female networks from which she can draw support. Both Rufina in *The Rape* and Elissa in *Betrothal* are constricted by society's expectations of them and it is their denial, conscious or unconscious, to submit to prescribed codes of female behaviour that results in their being castigated as anti-models. By contrast, the Fibuen and the women's society in *Lake God* and *And Palm Wine*, respectively, emerge as autonomous bodies through which women assume a certain degree of authority over not just their own constituency but the entire polity. There is an underlying assumption that women's power base in traditional societies has not been completely eroded by colonial and neo-colonial incursions and systems, that the rural woman is still better off than her urban sister and therefore is less in need of the "feminist rubbish" with which urban women are being fed.

On the whole, this study has shown that while Butake has made commendable efforts to give the woman question a prominent place in his writing, his vision of women is tinged with certain prejudices, assumptions and limitations that in the final analysis do not aid in the transmission of a message centred on women's advancement. It has been argued that placing women at the centre of textual representation refuses their relegation to a 'matrix of marginality' that oppresses according to race, class, gender and culture, and restores women's centrality in cultural self-definition (Aegerter, 1996: 231). However, what is important is not so much the placing of women at the centre of textual representation as it is the positioning of them at the centre of public politics where they negotiate and retain power, thereby detaching themselves from that 'matrix of marginality'. While Butake's

plays seek to promote an active, as opposed to a passive, brand of womanhood, the marginal position of women within their societies remains one of the hallmarks of the plays. For the most part, woman's body surfaces as a d isempowered entity, and her heroism becomes no more than a gold trophy with a rusted interior. Having undertaken an in-depth study of Butake's works, it is safe to conclude that although his art is impressive, his ideology is undeniably anti-feminist, in the Strattonian sense of the word.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

Butake's Plays on Stage: Some Observations

Because this study's focus has been dramatic literature and not theatre *per se*, this work has given minimal attention to some of the theatrical aspects of Butake's plays, aspects such as costume, lighting and stage design. But perhaps it is important to state a few things about the plays on stage, if only to highlight the degree to which the (written) texts can easily be transformed into theatre. The observations offered here are based on video recordings of two plays secured from Professor Eckhard Breitinger at Bayreuth University in Germany. These are recordings of *Lake God* and *And Palm Wine Will Flow*. The *Lake God* on record was performed in 1988. Details of where it was performed and for what occasion could unfortunately not be ascertained. The video on *And Palm Wine* is a recording of the play's premier on 27 March 1990 and it is a performance by the Yaounde University Theatre. The quality of both videos is poor, partly because the recording was not done by a professional and partly because spectators' frequent movements interfered with the recording process, causing the camera operator to capture blank and/or dangling images. But the images are clear enough for a basic enjoyment of the performances.

Stage Set-up

In the opening scene of *Lake God* when the narrator makes his appearance, the stage is bare – with no set. However, in the scenes that follow, we find a well decorated stage with beautiful portraits of a leopard, an elephant and a lion adorning both sides of the Fon's throne. The portraits are intended as a visual representation of the different totems with which the Fon is associated. The Fon's throne is set on a slightly elevated platform, and it is decorated with animal skin. It is a simple throne made of wood and bamboo and it has an accompanying side stool on which the Fon places his hat occasionally, such as when he is about to pray with Father Leo. The stage set-up of Shey Bo-Nyo's grove is significantly different from that of the palace, as can be expected. Following the stage

direction given by Butake, there is a medium-sized clay pot (the 'sacrificial pot', *Lake God*, p. 19) standing in a conspicuous corner in the grove. The pot is decorated with leaves, leaves of a special kind used for rituals and sacrifices. In the play, it is referred to as 'the shrub of the gods' (*Lake God*, p. 19).



Fig. 1: The Fon and Father Leo reciting the Lord's Prayer in front of the Fon's throne (*LG*).

In the rest of the scenes, the furniture on stage comprises mainly of the Fon's throne, low stools made of bamboo, and a roughly made lectern on which Father Leo places his bible when he addresses the women in church. The low stools are what Lagham and his friends sit on in the scene in which they discuss the affairs of the land. The furniture on stage at any one time reflects the action to follow and is in keeping with the stage directions provided by Butake in the text. The play's director (who could have been Butake himself) made a great effort to ensure that the stage directions in the text were strictly followed.



Fig. 2: Lagham, Fisiy, Forgwei and Maimo discussing the state of affairs in the land while drinking palm wine in Maimo's palm bush. They use cow horns which serve as special wine gourds in traditional Grassfields societies (*LG*).

In the performance of *And Palm Wine*, Shey Ngong's grove (the sacred grove of Nyombom) is decorated with shrubs and carvings of notable animals like the lion and the leopard, images which also featured on stage during the *Lake God* performance. There are two statues (masks) stationed prominently on each side of the stage. Because of their unusual size, they capture attention immediately. The statues are both huge, covered in black robes and have non-human faces, with open mouths showcasing protruding teeth. They are quite grotesque images. No doubt, their presence indicates the dominance of the supernatural within the grove as one immediately associates them with Kibarankoh and Earth-goddess. Later in the performance, the audience gets to see Tapper and Kwengong sneaking behind the statues to take on their respective roles as Kibarankoh and Earth-goddess. Shey Ngong's grove also has a sacred pot decorated with shrubs as the one featured in *Lake God*. There is also a palm wine gourd from which he gets palm wine for his libation. The only piece of furniture on stage during the performance is a bamboo stool on which Shey Ngong sits on those rare occasions when he is not pacing the stage.



Fig. 3: Shey Bo-Nyo reading the cowries and Shey Tanto looking on in anticipation (*LG*).

Costume

In *Lake God* the performers are dressed in typical Grassfields attire. The narrator, who also plays the role of Shey Bo-Nyo, has a loin cloth made from local material wound around his waist, beaded necklaces around his neck and a hand-woven traditional cap on his head. His upper body is naked and his feet are bare. Traces of age – grey hair – are evident on his eyebrows and the front part of his head where the cap does not completely cover. He carries the Ngem or double-ngong bell (a traditional sound instrument) which he beats from time to time to break the monotony of his monologue. Shey Tanto's outfit is made of the same material as Shey Bonyo's, except that Tanto's upper body is covered whereas Shey Bo-Nyo's is bare. Tanto's head is also adorned with a hand-woven cap similar to Shey Bonyo's. When Tanto visits Shey Bo-Nyo the first time, he carries a raffia bag and a walking stick, a symbol of his age and reverence. KIgbow, Mbwin, Munjei, Bolung and Wong are wearing exactly the same outfits as Tanto and carrying

similar bags and walking sticks, so that when they all appear on stage as the seven pillars of Kwifon the audience is left in no doubt as to the sacredness and unity of their mission.



Fig. 4: The seven pillars of Kwifon in consultation (*LG*).

The women of the Fibuen are wearing mostly wrapper outfits, indicating their affiliation to traditionalism and conversely differentiation from Western culture. Their heads are covered with headgear made from the same material as their wrappers. Like Shey Bo-Nyo, the women are barefoot, possibly suggesting their close ties with the earth, seeing that they are the primary cultivators of land.

True to his role in the play, Fon Joseph is dressed in Western clothes. He wears a black suit and a pair of black shoes. He even has a cowboy hat on his head like a Texas Ranger. A significant aspect of his costume is that instead of wearing a white shirt to match his black suit he wears a white jumper sewn in the traditional style. This captures in vivid terms the transitory nature of his personality. In other words, the mixed attire reveals the Fon's status as a traditional ruler engaged in the process of becoming a Christian king. In

contrast to the Fon, Angela his wife appears in a beautiful two-piece dress made out of local wrapper material. Her outfit symbolizes her stronger affiliation to African culture, even though this is a culture that alienates her on the basis of her religious stand.



Fig 5: The Fibuen before the Fon, with Dewa lying on the floor bound hand and foot (*LG*).

The palace guards in their khaki shirts and shorts are typical of employees of the colonial administration. They remind one of the world of the colonialists in Ferdinand Oyono's *The Old man and the Medal* (1967). Father Leo, of course, is in priestly attire. He is clad in the conventional black robe held around the waist with a sash. A silver chain with a big cross hangs around his neck and dangles as he moves around the stage. He carries a deluxe bible, with a maroon cover. Perhaps a disappointing fact is that Father Leo's role is performed by an African and not a European as the audience would have liked to see. In keeping with his Fulani origins, Dewa appears in an orange-coloured *agbada* and a hand-woven cap on his head. His *agbada* is nothing like the sophisticated, expensive *agbadas* worn by actors in Nollywood movies. His is old, faded and worn-out, and this is in line with his social status as a cattle rearer, a man who spends (or should spend) half his day in the fields tending cows.



Fig. 6: The Fibuen meeting in the village square, with Ma Kusham in the centre ready to administer the oath of sealed lips (*LG*).

The costume of the performers in *And Palm Wine* is not very different from that of the performers in *Lake God*, particularly the costume of the male performers. Shey Ngong, Nsangong, Gwei and the palace messenger are all wearing outfits made from local material, what is commonly known in the South West part of Cameroon as "Hausa clothes". These are two-piece jumper-like outfits with the jumpers open beneath the arms such that movement of the arms is quite easy. Nsangong and Gwei carry raffia bags hung across their chests in the traditional fashion. They also have hand-woven caps on their heads and walk about barefoot. Kwengong, the only female we see on stage, wears a wrapper and covers her head with a head-tie, much like the women in *Lake God*.

Audience response/participation

Laughter from the audience is a prominent response. Members of the audience laugh not only at the words of the performers but also at their gestures, some of which are truly

hilarious, as in when the Fon in *Lake God* makes the Catholic sign of the cross or when Dewa speaks in his typical Mbororo accent. The scene that provokes the most laughter is that in which Father Leo presents his sermon to the "recalcitrant" women in the church, admonishing them to return to their husbands and be good wives again. It was all the more hilarious because he addressed women in the audience directly, at which many burst out laughing more in embarrassment than shock. In *And Palm Wine*, Gwei is the character whose performance provokes the most laughter. The performer clearly improvised to make his role more exciting on stage than it is in the text. He speaks in an unusual accent, one that seems to be a blend of the typical "Graffi" accent and the Mbororo accent. He colours his speech with vernacular words and expressions, something which the audience found extremely hilarious. His body movements add to the humour as he circles the stage in obvious fright of Shey Ngong whom he knows he has wronged by associating with the Fon. Gwei's appearance on stage is the one scene that gives the play its most entertaining quality.



Fig. 7: Gwei cowering in fear of Shey Ngong (*APW*).

Explosive applause at regular intervals is the most apparent indication of audience involvement in the performances. However, applause during the *Lake God* performance takes place mainly at the end of each scene or on a few occasions during a scene in which a performer plays a role in an exceptionally moving way e.g. during the mime scenes in which the women reject their husbands sexual advances. In *And Palm Wine*, applause comes, in addition to the standard times, as endorsement of the play's message, especially when Shey Ngong criticizes the council for accepting every decision by the Fon, or when he states that nobles have now become slaves and slaves nobles. The audience's reaction in support of Shey Ngong's words is more than just the applause. There are times when spectators actually chorus or complete his words, such as when he repeats Earth-goddess' third pronouncement that 'the sun that rises must always set' (*And Palm Wine*, p. 100). Specific gestures, such as the nodding of heads and stamping of feet, can be seen and heard, respectively. Murmurs of an emphatic "Yes" can also be heard. At those times when Shey poses rhetorical questions to Kwengong about the validity of Kibanya's title, one can hear members of the audience making loud sounds of "Eh-eh ee" which means "I wonder" or in another sense "You can say that again". In the final scene when Tapper moves among the spectators making his announcement about the new dispensation, we hear loud applause after almost every statement that he makes. It is clear that the audience has not only understood the playwright's message but also agrees with it.

Song and Dance

The songs that are used throughout the performances are familiar tunes from the Grassfields and the singing is sometimes accompanied by dance steps of familiar dances such as the *njang*. In *Lake God*, music is played mostly backstage, except during the mime scene when the audience is given a slight view of the orchestra on one side of the stage partly covered by the curtains. Traditional musical instruments such as the drum and the horn are used to produce the familiar tunes. The musicians, like the rest of the performers, are clad in traditional attire. In *And Palm Wine*, Shey Ngong's victory chant after the first pronouncement of Earth-goddess is a solo performance. He sings while beating a bigger size of the same double-ngong bell Shey Bo-Nyo carries in *Lake God*. His bare feet move dexterously on the stage floor and these movements, like the words of

the song he sings, incite much laughter in the audience. Song and dance grace the performances at various stages and with this both the audience and the performers gain a moment of refreshing entertainment.



Fig. 8: The palace messenger (left) informing Shey Ngong (centre) of the Fon's displeasure with him, while Nsangong (right) is advising Shey Ngong to mellow down his criticism of the Fon, lest the messenger takes his words back to the palace (*APW*).

The Performers

The mime scenes in *Lake God* are exceptionally well performed, as the performers are free to move their bodies stylishly to the rhythm of the *njang* music in the background and to improvise. The age range of the performers can be placed between twenty and thirty five. The majority of the actors are young men in their early or mid twenties, including the Fon, while a few of the actresses, especially the ones acting as members of the Fibuen, are a bit older. Of course, depending on the role each person is playing, some degree of make-up is necessary to make the actor or actress look realistic e.g both Shey Bo-Nyo and Shey Tanto have their hair powdered grey to indicate their advanced age. The total cast of *Lake God* amounts to over forty persons. This is something one could not have imagined just by reading the text. Even when one watches the video, it is only at

the end of the performance when the performers come on stage to salute the audience that one realizes just how huge the cast is. It takes a great deal of expertise to successfully direct a play with that many performers.



Fig. 9: Shey Ngong holding the Fon's bugle which Kibarankoh has brought back after burning down the palace (*APW*).

The performance features, otherwise known as ex tra-textual features, include the gestures, body movements and facial expressions of the performers. Sometimes the performers exhibit gestures of sadness, agitation, provocation, or disagreement. The audience response is varied. Sometimes they clap to indicate that they are impressed with the scene; sometimes they laugh. Others throw their heads backwards while others stamp their feet in excitement. The tone of the performers is for the most part comic, even when the matter at hand is serious, as in the scene in which Lagham, Fisiy, Forgwei and Maimo discuss the news about the Fibuen's encounter with the Fon at the palace. The comedy in their actions – body movements and facial expressions – tends to lessen the seriousness

of their discussion. But then, what seriousness can one expect from a group of men drowning their sorrows in palm wine?

Earth-goddess in *And Palm Wine* is arguably the least satisfactory of all the performers in the play. The performer speaks in a shrill voice. Her tone is weak tone and lacks the authority of the words she utters. The Earth-goddess we read about in the text speaks with conviction. The image of her that comes to the reader's mind is that of a strong, self-willed and no-nonsense woman, not of a soft spoken individual like the actress we see on stage. Although the audience is thrilled when the performer pronounces the curse on the Fon and he falls down and dies, her actions in themselves are hardly exciting. The applause that comes at the end of the flashback scene is more in celebration of the Fon's death than in praise of the actress' impressive performance.

APPENDIX II

A Synopsis of Butake's Life and Work[60]

Bole Butake was born in 1947 in Nkor in the Noni Sub-division of the North West Province of Cameroon. He attended the local primary school and then went on to pursue secondary school education at Sacred Heart College, Mankon. Thereafter, he moved to CCAST Bambili where he completed his GCE Advanced Levels before moving on to the University of Yaounde I where he obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1972. Overseas studies beckoned and Butake responded by pursuing a Master of Arts degree in English Literature at the University of Leeds in England. He completed his degree in 1974 and returned to Cameroon where he took up the position of Lecturer at the University of Yaounde I. In 1980 he was made Senior Lecturer and in 1983 he obtained his doctorate. In 1992 he became an Associate Professor of Performing Arts and African Literature and by 2000 he had become a full professor.

In 1976, while working as a lecturer at the University of Yaounde I, Butake founded a magazine of creative writing which was called *The Mould*. The magazine aimed at encouraging English-speaking Cameroonians to express their art. He published several of his poems and short stories in this magazine before it ceased publication in 1981. In 1984, he released his first play, *The Rape of Michelle*, followed by *Lake God* in 1986, *The Survivors* in 1989, and *And Palm Wine Will Flow* in 1990. In 1992 and 1996 *Shoes and Four Men in Arms* and *Dance of the Vampires*, respectively, were added to his collection of plays. His latest play *Family Saga* was published in 2005.

Over the years, Butake has attended and presented papers at numerous conferences across Africa and Europe. His keynote address 'Home or Exile: The African Writer's Dilemma', presented at the European Conference for African Studies (28 June to 5 July, 2005) has become a seminal document for many scholars of Anglophone Cameroon literature. Butake has also been a visiting research fellow at many universities across the world,

[60] This biography has been constructed using details from the blurb in *Lake God and Other Plays* and from Butake's curriculum vitae obtained from him by e-mail.

including Bayreuth University in Germany, Ibadan University in Nigeria, and Pennsylvania State University in the United States of America. In addition to doing research, he has also served as guest lecturer in some of these universities. Being a theatre scholar, playwright and director, Butake has directed performances by theatre groups such as The Flame Players and the Yaounde University Theatre, and he has led these groups to theatre festivals across Africa and Europe.

One of the major areas in which Butake has excelled in his career as a theatre practitioner is in the organization of workshops aimed at using theatre for development (TFD) techniques to address problems facing communities in Cameroon. In August 2002, he organized the Nkor workshop on HIV/AIDS, sponsored by the Public Affairs Office of the United States Embassy, Yaounde. The workshop resulted in the film *Nyang*, directed by Kwasen Gwangwa'a. Also in 2002 he ran the Helvetas sponsored workshop on Children's Theatre for Environmental Education in Binka, with participants from Tabenken, Binshua and Binka schools. In September and October 2004, he organized two workshops in the Tubah Rural Council on civic education. The workshops were also sponsored by Helvetas Cameroon and they resulted in the films *Gomen na we* and *Tok di fix palaver*.

Butake's interest in film did not begin with the TFD workshops. In 2001, he had been involved in the making of two films, *L'Instituteur d'Eyala* and *Mantrobo*, which commented on the electoral process in Cameroon. The project was sponsored by the Human Rights and Democracy Fund of the Embassy of the United States of America, Yaounde. Beyond films, he had also been involved in the creation of television dramas such as *Hard Road to School*, *Death for all in the New Millenium*, and *Chop a Chop* which highlighted corruption in various sectors in Cameroonian public life. These dramas were produced under the banner of the Women and Development Programme sponsored by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Yaounde.

In recognition of his signal contribution to the development of theatre in Cameroon, Butake was awarded the *Prix d'Excellence Théâtrale Mention Dramaturge* by Cameroon's Minister of Culture on the occasion of World Theatre Day on 27 March

2008. The Cameroon government has also recognized his expertise in the field of arts and culture by appointing him to serve on several committees created to improve the status of the arts in Cameroon. In 2007 he was among the group of cultural experts appointed by the Minister of Culture to elaborate a road map for Cameroon's Ministry of Culture. In July 2008 he was appointed by the Minister of Higher Education to conduct a theatre workshop at the University of Dschang, Cameroon, for 38 student participants from all the six state universities in Cameroon, in preparation for the University Cultural Festival and the National Festival of Arts and Culture which was to take place in Maroua in November 2008. In May 2009 he was appointed by the Minister of Culture to the preparatory commission of Cameroon for FESMAN (*Festival des Arts Nègres*) which was to be held in Dakar, Senegal, in December 2009.

On the whole, Butake has worked in the field of theatre for over twenty years. He is currently still serving as Professor of Performing Arts and African Literature at the University of Yaounde I, Cameroon. He is married and is a father of six children.

APPENDIX III

Interview with Butake[61]

Nkealah: Professor Butake, welcome to South Africa.

Butake: Thank you ve ry much. I'm happy to be in South Africa, especially in Johannesburg and at Wits.

Nkealah: We are going to be talking about a few things pertaining to your work. The first question I would really like to ask you is: what inspires you to write?

Butake: What inspires me to write? The goings-on in my community, the things that I see around me, especially the political issues and issues of social upliftment or social downgrading, issues of injustice, issues of inequitable distribution of resources and others. Those are the kinds of things that inspire me to write, and of course issues ensuing from my cultural background. I come from an ethnic group that is in the minority. So these are all things that bother me and are some of the things that inspire my writing.

Nkealah: Do you envisage that your writing will create some changes in society?

Butake: I think that anybody who writes is always hoping that somewhere, somehow, their writing is going to make an impact. In my daily intercourse with people, they tell me 'Well, I think you are doing well. Keep up with the work that you're doing'. Recently, I met somebody again, somebody I didn't even know, and he said: 'Keep up with the work. We follow you, we know what you're doing, and we encourage you to go on'. So I think it's making an impact, especially with my theatre workshops. It's difficult for me to go

[61] This interview was conducted at 09:00 on Sunday, 09 November 2008 in Room 3172, School of Literature and Language Studies, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Professor Butake was in South Africa as a participant in the Africa Research Conference on Applied Theatre and Drama which took place in th e Wits Theatre complex from 07 to 09 November 2008. The interview is co-authored with Christopher Odhiambo who was a Mellon Research Fellow in the School of Literature and Language Studies at the time.

out in Cameroon and not be recognized. Sometimes I feel that it's impossible for me to hide. You go to somewhere and you think that nobody knows you there and suddenly from nowhere somebody walks up to you and says: 'Oh, Professor Bole Butake, I know you. You taught me in this place and ….' You know, I've been teaching at the University of Yaounde for so many years, more than thirty years, and people have passed through me: those who have seen me, those whom I've taught, those who see me at a distance. Plus the work that I do, especially in theatre for development, what we're now calling applied theatre. That too has made a lot of people to know me and to get to know the kind of work that I do. And from people's reactions, I want to suppose that I'm making an impact.

Odhiambo: If I may interject, there's a paper that you wrote and you spoke about what you call the dilemma of the African writer and you clearly stated there that you started writing short stories and since then you moved from short stories through drama through theatre for development and now you are more into film. Can you comment on this transformation? What necessitated this kind of transformation?

Butake: Well, the transformation was brought about by the necessity of being heard. When I started writing, in fact, I started by writing poetry. Then I moved over to the short story. At the time it was difficult to publish in Cameroon and I discovered that perhaps theatre was the best thing to do because at least when you write a play and it is performed on stage, people see it. So that is what pushed me into theatre. I didn't have any specific training in theatre but my late friend, Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh, when he returned from Leeds he introduced me to theatre, because he came back from Leeds with a PhD in Theatre Arts. He introduced what at the time was a minor in theatre arts and according to him I was the only person on the staff who could help him with that course, because all the other people were more or less interested either in languages or literature or something like that. So that's how I got involved in theatre. When he organized the Kumba workshop in 1984 I was one of the local resource persons, and that's how I got into theatre for development. Then the experience I had in Kumba now began to dictate the way in which I wrote my plays. By the time we were at the Kumba workshop I had written two plays: *Betrothal without Libation*, which was only published in 2005

although it was written in 1982, and *The Rape of Michelle*. But ever since I've written about eight or nine other plays and for the most part you'll find that they are all aiming at making people to change certain attitudes, their behavioural patterns or the way they look at things, and there is this insistence on the need for justice, that people should have their rights and things like that. So that is where I'm coming from.

Nkealah: I remember Nalova Lyonga saying in 1993 that theatre has gained popularity or that it is more popular in Cameroon than prose or poetry not necessarily because of the quality of the plays but because it is easier for the writers to reach the ordinary people through stage performances. Do you agree with that view?

Butake: Yes, most definitely. That's very, very true. I mean, today even how many people read? If you look at what is happening in the world you'll find that a lot more people watch television than read. It's easier to watch than to read. Reading means that you have to strain yourself; and reading means that you have to remove money from your pocket, go to a bookshop and buy a book, and when you come back you have to sit down and read it. That's why the world is getting more and more illiterate, because of the exigencies of reading. But with theatre, you go and sit there and you're relaxed, you don't want to bother yourself about anything, and within one hour or two hours you've imbibed the whole story, you understand what it is all about. But if you had to take up the play to read and something is disturbing and you then you drop it and go, you might never come back to it. So that's why theatre is good. You don't go and watch a play half-way and say: 'OK, I'm going to come back and finish watching it'. You have to see it from start to finish.

Odhiambo: Just to interject again, I find that quite interesting, having read and written on your latest play, *Family Saga*. Does this account for your use of the applied theatre method within the structure of a written text like *Family Saga*?

Butake: In fact, after doing so much – I think I've done something like forty workshops with people in the villages, school children, women, nomads, pygmies and so on, and at some point I got a DAAD grant to go to Germany – I sat down and I thought I could

write a text that is an academic text of my applied theatre process and I discovered that it was very difficult. It was difficult for me to concentrate. Probably, I wrote about two chapters of it, and then an idea occurred to me: 'Why don't you write a play? Why bother yourself with this academic stuff since you can write a play?' And then of course I started writing a play. When I got to a certain point, I think about two weeks into the play – then I had done something like more than half of the story– then I got stuck. There was no way forward; I couldn't go on. So I said OK, I'd rather put it aside. I started doing some other things. And then one day, about three or four days later, I was sleeping and suddenly it clicked in my mind and I jumped out of bed and I rushed to it and that's how *Family Saga* came out. Because, in fact, I had set out to write an academic text on the process that I had been using all those years but I found it difficult. In fact, part of the script is still somewhere on my computer. Maybe I'll have time to finish it. Otherwise, that's how it happened.

Odhiambo: That's interesting.

Nkealah: Talking about *Family Saga*, Chris and I seem to think that the play is your way of envisioning some kind of reconciliation between the Anglophone and Francophone communities in Cameroon. Was that your intention?

Butake: Yes, I would say it was my intention, because there has been a lot of debate and people have been asking me 'Where do you belong?' You know, the world is moving towards globalization. In fact, it's a single world. So why should we start splitting up? In the context of Cameroon, I'd prefer a federation. In my work in the theatre, I prefer dialogue. I always insist on the need for people to be able to talk to each other; but in the Cameroonian context Paul Biya has refused to engage in dialogue with anybody, not even with his own party. He doesn't dialogue with anybody. He only dictates and says this is what it is. And, in fact, in as far as the Anglophone Cameroon problem is concerned he has not said anything about it. So he's not willing to discuss with anybody and it's not surprising because, like I said, even within his own ruling CPDM party he does not discuss issues with anybody. I'd not take it out on him to say he's a bad person because he has not discussed the Anglophone problem. What I'm saying is that people have asked

me over and over again: 'Where do you stand in this Anglophone problem?' and I thought that I should give an answer once and for all, and that's my answer. I think that breaking up or separation or whatever is not the answer. The problem is not even the Francophone counterpart. My problem is not even the Francophone Cameroonians. My problem is the ruling elite because it is those people who are making it seem as if the Anglophones are being marginalized in terms of the appointments that they give to Anglophones, in terms of the kind of things that they do, in terms of how they look at them, you know. So I do not blame the Francophones. Francophones are very, very nice. I have good friends who are Francophones. I think that it is the ruling party in Cameroon and more especially the President of the Republic who is perpetuating this injustice against Anglophones and I think that that is my answer and I gave that because Cameroon will always be. Paul Biya will not always be. At some point or other he will have to go. Even if he lives for a hundred and fifty years or two hundred years, if it were possible for him to reincarnate and so on and so forth, he will go. Some day. But Cameroon will always be. And I think that after Paul Biya the next President is going to look more or with greater justice on this Anglophone problem.

Odhiambo: Yeah, that's interesting, Professor Butake. Having read all your plays, beginning from *Betrothal without Libation* and then *Lake God* up to now with this particular one [*Family Saga*], I just want you to comment on this development – the way your vision has developed. If you look at *Lake God* before you come to *Family Saga* there was this kind of a vision one would call … that encompasses some kind of revolution, some kind of radical change with that elite group. So this marks the realization in your own development that the more important thing now is reconciliation rather than the earlier thinking?

Butake: Yeah, the earlier thinking was radical. There's no doubt about that. At some point you think that you … I remember yesterday at one of the workshops somebody was saying something about asking people, I think it was Ross Kidd, asking people to come together to organize to sustain a water point. And nobody would come. So the solution is what? The people or the boys in charge went there and stood there and anybody coming along with a bucket they seized it and put it there. So at some point you must use some of

those strategies. You will shout at people and when they don't listen you use another strategy. I don't think that getting people to change their opinion is … or must always be radical, radical, radical all the time. As much as you grow older you become more mature and you look at things from a different perspective. I've lived in Cameroon all this while and my idea is that I don't … I have never intended to leave Cameroon. I will not leave Cameroon. I will not run away from Cameroon because of an individual. I will not. But I will be there and try to see how much I can do to influence change, to bring about change. I might not be able as an individual to really make that change happen but at least as far as I'm there, so long as I can get onto the radio and make a statement, so long as I can get onto the television and make a statement, so long as I can teach students and give them some of my ideas, I think that is the way forward. And like I was saying before, when I go somewhere that I think that people don't know me and they see me and they congratulate me and they tell me 'Prof, keep up with the work', I think that shows that there is some impact being felt, that I'm getting somewhere, and that is what gives me the courage to continue.

Nkealah: Chris has just referred to your earlier works, *Lake God*, *The Survivors* and *And Palm Wine Will Flow* and if I read these three works in particular it's quite obvious that your intention seems to be to empower women and I see women who have really masculine features. What is the rationale behind the creation of such female characters?

Butake: Yeah, again it goes back to my disappointment with how men are carrying on with the issue of governance. In Cameroon … Well, Cameroon has not managed to move away from the top of the most corrupt countries. It's still hovering around there at the bottom or at the top of the most … as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. And I remember a few years ago when people were talking about corruption, corruption, corruption, the president himself got on the radio and said 'Amenez les preuves' – 'Bring me the proofs'. And today he has all the proofs that people are corrupt and yet he is not arresting as many people as … In fact, it is not just enough to arrest people; he has arrested top government officials and ministers and so forth but the impression we have, those of us who are watching him in Cameroon, the impression we have is that those arrests are some kind of … they are being manipulated, in the sense that not everybody is

being arrested. From the information that we have, in fact, most of the ministers or most of the present cabinet, all of them should be in jail. But why are they not in jail? I think that at some point the thing becomes some kind of … I think that he's afraid that it might boomerang. It might have a boomerang effect and catch him in the whole thing. So that's why he's treading very carefully. The dossier of corruption in Cameroon seems to be in his own hands because a few months back, I think it was back in March or something like that, he got parliament to pass a law saying that he would never be prosecuted for crimes committed while he was in power or outside after that. Yeah, he has all that but when you pass a law like that one, don't forget that the day that you leave office another person is coming in and is going to start passing laws. So there's no law that lasts forever. You make a law and some other person will come along and say 'OK, I'm going to make my own law'. And this is the way it works. So what I'm trying to say is that in effect the question of politics in Cameroon, why I give women power, is that I'm disappointed with the men. They have not met up with that expectation of good governance and justice and equal distribution of wealth. You see, a man becomes a minister today, before one year is out he's building a castle somewhere. And I think that having watched our women in the villages and in the towns, every morning when I go out to work at 05:30 in the morning I can tell you that the first people I meet on the way are women going to struggle to sustain their families. So I think that women are better managers. They can manage better and we have the example of our university today, University of Yaounde I, which is now being managed by a woman, Dr Mrs Dorothy Njeuma.[62] Ever since she came here things have changed. So that's why I think that women should be given the chance to govern, to rule, because they make better managers and that's why I give them pride of place in my plays. And apart from that the only problem I'm having with the Cameroonian woman is that she is not bold enough. In fact, if Paul Biya is still there today it is because of the women. They are supporting the wrong cause all the time. And this is my problem with them. Those of them who manage their homes, like I've first given the example of Madam Dorothy Njeuma – she's married to a university professor – but when you look at the majority of the women you see that they are just praise singers. It's very disappointing.

[62] At the time of this interview Dr Dorothy Njeuma was the Vice Chancellor of the University of Yaounde I. She went on retirement in December 2008.

Odhiambo: Thank you Bole Butake for that, because that is one issue that I've been raising – this issue about giving power to women – quite a lot in your plays and now it comes out very clearly that there is this underlying fear that you can't give them all the power because they might also again be manipulated by the men. But if one were to read *Family Saga*, being the last play you've written, is that now the new statement you are making? Because in *Family Saga* it is the girl, after being raped, she's the one that you seem to give the vision, she's the one who becomes the narrator, she becomes the master of ceremony, she's the one who reconciles the two. So are you now re-thinking that position that … about this fear, because I guess in the woman character, Kamanda, there is still that fear, but in Sawa it seems as if that fear is no longer there.

Butake: Yeah, with the character of Sawa I was trying to do a character who has suffered a trauma, a very terrible trauma, that of being raped by someone she considers as her uncle and by someone who is actually her uncle and she is the first to realize that this guy did this thing out of ignorance, because he was being manipulated by someone who said he was his father. And she says if this guy can come back to himself, if he can recall and say 'I am sorry for what I have done', then I am willing to forgive that person. And I think it is a very, very important statement, just to come out and say 'I am sorry'. And there are very few people …, not that they are virtuous, especially among the ruling oligarchy, there are very few people there who are prepared to say we are sorry for what we have done against the country. It is not even against the population but against the country itself, because when you steal so much money which belongs to everybody and you put it into foreign bank accounts, you build castles which you will never inhabit, and so on and so forth, I think you are being …. I've realized the country has no roads, the population has no water supply, hospitals are there falling to pieces, there are no schools. I think the most tragic situation now in Cameroon is that the University of Yaounde I Faculty of Arts has 15 000 students. That is one faculty. How many classrooms? Like I'm sitting here now I'm having a nightmare. When I get back tomorrow, how am I going to schedule those courses that still have to be scheduled? I have five level three courses that still have to be scheduled: Sociology, about 600 students; History, 800 students; Geography, 800 students; French language, 700 students; and Bilingual studies, 400

students. You need big halls in order to put these people inside. But the room that I have in that place is having only 200 places. So what do I do about that? The university where the money is supposed to be because we're training young Cameroonians, they are not putting the money there. So where's the money going to? They are not giving enough electricity, they are not giving enough water supply. Why do they have their priorities all wrong? This is my basic problem.

Odhiambo: OK, just before Naomi comes in, I'd make a very quick comment with regard to what motivated you to write *The Rape of Michelle*, given your vision about women. In *The Rape of Michelle*, the two women seem to be quite manipulative, the daughter and mother. What was the motivation behind that kind of writing?

Butake: Actually, it was a real experience. At the time when I wrote the play we had a lot of chicken parlours in Yaounde. Lots and lots of chicken parlours. I went to one of these … In fact, it was not a chicken parlour. I went to some place, some kind of supermarket. I think you could also drink in the place. So I was sitting there. I was having a beer and this beautiful girl …. First, some gentleman came in, quite a mature man, but in my opinion the girl was too small, and the way this girl was behaving towards this gentleman I could see that there was something wrong, not with the gentleman but with the girl, 'cause she was actually trying to, to to … she was courting the man, right? And that's where I got the idea to write *The Rape of Michelle*. It is not something that happened to me.

Nkealah: I want to go back to something you said earlier on about Cameroonian women not being brave enough. I remember reading an article by Asheri Kilo and she mentioned that, I suppose that was still in the '90s, that Cameroonian women find it difficult to come out bravely because of social ideologies about women's place in society. For instance, in the field of theatre many women would refrain from playing roles that required them to act like Michelle in *The Rape of Michelle*, for instance. So most of them tend to stay, you know, without showing the talent that they've got. Now, if I'm looking at some of your works and I see women who are very active, they want to be at the forefront, and yet … I quite agree with you that women are not brave enough; they haven't got to the stage where we want them to be. But don't you think it has a lot to do with social ideologies

and maybe the political situation in Cameroon in particular where there's so much poverty and people just want to survive?

Butake: Actually, if you're talking about poverty, there's not that much poverty in Cameroon. Cameroon is a very wealthy and rich country. Now let's go back to the issue of women in the public space. I think that maybe the time Asheri Kilo is talking about, there was a little reticence on the part of women not to get on stage because of the ideas in Cameroon that in effect the arts are for rascals and vagabonds. No, it is not just women. It is even men. I remember that when my children were still in primary school I got a musician to come and teach them to play the guitar. And as soon as the musician finished it was a Maths teacher who took over. And one day I overheard this guy telling them 'I will take that your guitar and break it'. So I had to come out and say 'Do you think that it is only Maths that is going to take these children to somewhere? Have you heard of Michael Jackson?' He said 'Yes'. I said: 'Do you know that Michael Jackson is a billionaire in America?' And I cited a number of names. I said, in effect, that in the arts the artists make a lot of money. It's just that we are in a country where art is not promoted and where art is not encouraged. Otherwise, I would rather give training to these children to be musicians and artists and so on because they will make more money in life. And today it is true because when you look around in Cameroon everybody is struggling to make his son play football because they have seen that Cameroonians are achieving … those of the Cameroonians who are abroad are achieving in football. Each time they come back to the country they have opened up schools, set up businesses and so on, just from playing football. So today you find that many children are refusing to go to school, but they are going to football schools. Why? They are getting ready to become football stars tomorrow and earn a lot of money. So what I'm saying is that at that time this was the problem, not only with the women but also with the men. But today I can tell you that even married women who have been married for 30 or 40 years are coming to me to say we want to play, we want to be in a film, we want to do this etc. So the attitude has changed. So it's a matter of information. At that time that is how it was, but today things have changed. I can tell you very clearly that most … I have many women, married women and young women and so on, they have approached me and said: 'I'd like to be in your next film, I want to play, I want to go on stage'. So it's changing

Odhiambo: That is interesting, Bole Butake, when you talk about the women. One thing that I find interesting, and I want you to comment on this if that is what my readings are of … these are just my speculations, that you tend to use a lot of traditional material, rituals and all these, in your text, and yet those are the, as Naomi had said earlier, those are the core structures that seem to define women as inferior. And yet you use that quite a lot in your plays. Is that a conscious process of subversion?

Butake: No, the …. In effect, even in the traditional setting where I come from women play a very important role in the society. Yeah, a man might have two wives or three wives or even ten wives but the day that the women tell him nothing works today, nothing works. The man will not take up his big stick and hit anybody because they will all stand up and say 'No, we are not accepting this'. And in my place again in the traditional set-up, like in the social sphere, the social structural thing, where we have a Fon, the chief, then there is a queen who is not … the queen is not a wife to the Fon. No, the queen is actually a relative to the Fon, a member of the Fon's family who makes sure that she gives the Fon advice on how to carry out things in the village set up. So when I use those concepts like you say, it's not that I'm subjecting them; in fact, I'm simply projecting them the way they happen in my own community. In my community women are very highly respected. If you hear that in my community women are being discriminated against … All those things about … I've heard about widowhood rights in some communities in Cameroon, we don't have those widowhood rights. We don't have them. When somebody dies all the women who come around they sleep on the floor, on mats on the floor. Everybody does the same thing. But the wife, the widow, is not subjected to any particular torments or tortures or anything like that. So in that community things are … At some point Paul Biya used the term advanced democracy. I'd say my own community has known that advanced democracy long before Paul Biya's advanced democracy. So what I'm trying to point out is that these, the metaphors and images of women I use in my plays, they are not inventions. They do exist in that community and I used them intentionally to make sure that the rest of the Cameroonian population and the rest of the world see that in effect this is not something that Bole Butake wants women to do. In effect, he is simply mirroring what is already happening in

his own community with the womenfolk and therefore he would like this to go out. I feel regret that even in my own community women refuse to take up leadership roles. But when they do come out and they stand for a problem they must resolve it. They resolve it. But when you want them to become, let's say, the president of some village water maintenance committee, they say 'No, no, no, that's for men, that's for men'. And they try to play … they try to take the back seat. Well, when I say that, it is in conformity with the family system where the man, the husband, is the leader of the home or something like that. I think that I am not inventing anything. It's just that I …. In fact, those metaphors, those images, they help me to enforce my conception of the woman as someone who can lead better than the man, at least within the context of Cameroon, because we have been overwhelmed by this Western notion of patriarchy in Africa, patriarchy there, everywhere you go you hear about patriarchy and in the long run you find that in effect it is in the West that women are more exploited. Even in America today you can imagine that two people have the same job and a man gets paid better than a woman. I mean, I don't understand that. In our Cameroonian context that can never happen.

Odhiambo: That's interesting because after again going back to *Lake God* it seems like that is what *Lake God* is speaking to, that this very progressive tradition on cultural society that give women a lot of power, when it got into contact with the West that is when the patriarchal system came in.

Butake: Exactly. Then women decided to have back their Fibuen and now you remember some of the men say 'Ah, the day I heard Fibuen again in this country I knew something was wrong'. Not that something was right but something was wrong, because now the women were claiming back the rights which they'd lost.

Nkealah: OK, I want to go back to something you just said a few minutes ago about women in your community not being willing to take up leadership roles. I'm thinking …. What can you as an artist do to educate these women about issues of governance, the necessity of them getting into the public space? Is that why you went into theatre for development?

Butake: Yes. I think the answer is very simple. That's why I went into TFD. And most of the workshops that I've done have either been with women or with schoolchildren and when I'm doing a workshop even with schoolchildren I make sure there's an equal divide between the number of boys and the number of girls. One to one. That way, they start coming up from that young age being conscious that the roles that they are going to play in society are complementary. The boys contribute just as much as girls also contribute. I think that is … you've hit the nail right on the head. Yes, that's why I went into theatre for development.

Nkealah: Now, following up on that I've always been very worried why we have so few Anglophone Cameroonian women writers. Any comment on that?

Butake: Yeah, that again goes back to the kind of education that we have been having. I told you that I went into theatre by sheer chance. I never studied theatre. In fact, I got into writing by sheer chance. In the school curriculum in Cameroon there was no teaching … In fact, right now it's only the University of Yaounde I that has a department of theatre arts. Yes, it's only the University of Yaounde I. In fact, of recent I was called down to the University of Douala to draw up programmes for what they call *Institut des beaux arts*. University of Dschang also called me to come and help them to draw the programme for *Institut des beaux arts*. But otherwise the school curriculum in Cameroon is devoid of art. When I went to primary school we were asked … there was a storytelling session as part of the time table. That was a course on the programme – storytelling. But today you are not going to find any storytelling anywhere. The little things we were taught …. In effect, today if you want to bring up your child properly you must give that child a complete kind of education. I've been clamouring in Cameroon that the ministry of … there are three ministries of education in Cameroon – basic education, secondary education, and higher education. In fact, the ministry of higher education is doing a lot better because they are insisting on introducing professional courses which in the long run might help the students to have a job when they graduate from the university. So basic education has a lot of work to do. It is at that level that you must start introducing the children to the arts. And the arts are very profitable. Then you continue with this at secondary school

level. So if you're asking me about why there are so few women writers it is because they have not been taught to read and write. In fact, most of them who are now into writing, it is because perhaps they've read about me, that I taught myself how to read and write and so on and so forth and they too have done the same thing. So this is a problem. But I think I can tell you that there are lots and lots of women now going into writing. I happen to belong to what they call the CAL (*Commission de Arts et de la Littérature*) in the Ministry of Culture where they examine dossiers of people asking for help to publish their works. And I see that there's a lot coming in and many people are applying to the Ministry of Culture for that grant and quite a good number of them are women and they are writing very well. So in the near future, we are going to find that there'll be quite a good collection of or a good number of women writers in Cameroon.

Nkealah: In the past I used to know that it was very difficult for one to get one's work published in English in Cameroon. Is that situation changing?

Butake: It has changed. I mean, today even the Éditions CLÉ in Yaounde which used to publish only in French is now publishing in English. I think I was the first person to publish in English. When I took my work there for the first time to publish, they referred me to Nairobi in Kenya, because they said that was equivalent to the French version of Éditions CLÉ in Yaounde. Well, ever since they published me they've published many other people. In fact, they have a good collection of works published in English. But there are other publishing houses that are coming up. In fact, there is one that is publishing … I don't know, they are supposed to be in Bamenda but I hear they are publishing from America – Langaa Press. I don't think a single week can pass without them coming out with something. So in Langaa Press alone they have something like 20 titles already that I've heard about, but I've not seen.

Odhiambo: Yeah, Butake, as we're still talking about women – it seems to be so central to our discussion – and you've been one of the main advocates of women empowerment, what is your comment on feminism as a movement?

Butake: I have never really considered feminism as anything important. I think that womanism is a lot more important than feminism. Feminism … it seems to be taking me … when I hear about a feminist the immediate thing that comes to my mind is … yeah, maybe I have a warped mind, but the immediate thing that comes to my mind is lesbianism. Yeah, no, t his is the way I react to it. When I hear feminism I think lesbianism. But womanism, I'm more comfortable with that one. But feminism, really, I … That is not my area.

Nkealah: So then it's just a question of terminology? You prefer womanism – that would be the kind of …

Butake: I don't know whether feminism is the equivalent of womanism. But I'm saying that when I hear feminism I think of this …

Nkealah: OK, but then there's been a lot of talk about gender equality. What has been your response to that?

Butake: Gender equality in Cameroon … You know, when I hear about small countries like, I don't know whether it's Rwanda or Burundi, where there are many more women in parliament than men …

Odhiambo: It's Rwanda.

Butake: It's Rwanda, right. When I hear about that I really get excited. Why can't it happen in Cameroon? In Cameroon the women constitute 52% of the population. They are the people who come out most during political rallies; they are the people who come and stand on the streets to welcome the president; they are the people who dance and sing this and sing that. So why can't they go in for political office? In Cameroon parliament today I think there are less than 20 women. Yeah, out of the 180. I don't think they are up to 25. And I think there is something basically wrong and that's why I'm saying that in effect the men in Cameroon seem to be deceiving their womenfolk, I mean in terms of those who belong to the same political party. They are not giving these women equal

opportunities, because the men are too greedy, because you stand for a post with a woman you want the woman to be your replacement rather than the main candidate. And that is what is happening with all the political parties. So I think that at some point it should be legislated that women should constitute at least so much of parliament – of the elective posts. So what I'm trying to propose is … yeah, in effect we should look at other aspects of governance. Well, in the administration I know that in terms of how many ministries we've got, probably 60 or something like that, each ministry has a Secretary General. So I think that in terms of Secretary Generals there must be about 10 or 15 women Secretary Generals. I know that the Director General of Customs now is a woman. For how long she'll be there I don't know. But these are the kinds of things that we're looking at. In some countries it has been legislated and it has worked. And again I think it simply boils down to the fact that the women themselves are not going out and asking and insisting on their rights, in the Cameroonian context. If they insisted, because they are a big political force – it is they who come out in rallies, it is they who stand on the road and clap, it is they who sing, it is they who even compose songs, political songs and so on – if they were to come out and insist on their own rights I'm sure they'll occupy better status, politically speaking, than what is happening now.

Odhiambo: So there's a need for this to come from the women? They are the ones who should push for this equal status?

Butake: They are the ones who should push for it. They are the ones who should push for it. I think that … I cannot say that I've done enough. One can never do enough of anything, but at least they too should take up the cue. The women too should take up the cue.

Nkealah: So do you think it would help to improve the situation if there were more women writers in Cameroon, Anglophone women writers?

Butake: Definitely. It would help. I mean, there's no doubt about the fact that the more writers you have the better the awareness within the community. Look, I am a man. What

I write about women, a woman would always take it with a pinch of salt. How much do you know about women?

Nkealah: Absolutely.

Butake: Yeah, how much do you know about women?

Odhiambo: This is an aside, but it still falls within what we've been talking about, to do with your work in the communities – theatre for development. You usually work with the women more than men. What happens after you've left these communities? Do you empower them so that they continue with the work on their own or you still go back to the communities?

Butake: I'll give you two examples. I think it was 2002, I don't remember the exact year, but I did a series of workshops with women of pastoral nomads in the North West Province, in Donga-Mantung Division. And I think my assistant, Emelda Ngufor, finally did her PhD thesis on that. When we started that project … In effect, how did I even get the project? We had just gone out to do a workshop on community leadership in a village called Esu. When I returned to Bamenda I met this British man who was working with MBOSCUDA – Mbororo Social, Cultural and Development Association. We got to converse and I showed him pictures of the work we had just done in Wum, and he said 'You are the person I'm looking for'. I said 'Why?' He said 'I need somebody to go out and work with those Mbororo women before I come out with my Reflect Circle', because he wanted to teach them literacy and he needed somebody to go out there and lure people into the mood to be able to do that work. So we selected a number of Mbororo boys and girls and other people, of course from the community. We had one week of workshop with them in Bamenda – there's a Mbororo community leaving outside of Bamenda. I think they call that place Ntah Mbang. These Mbororo young men were very discouraging and they told me 'Doctor, this your theatre, it cannot work'. I said 'Why do you think it cannot work?' They said 'No, we Mbororos we don't like play, we don't do theatre'. I said 'What do you do?' They said 'We ride horses and we read the Koran'. I said 'OK, all right, just wait. When we go out to the community and it does not work

we'll ride horses and read the Koran'. All right, so we rehearsed. I think it was a group of about ten or twelve of us. We rehearsed a small play on a problem that the Mbororo people were facing. So we went to that community and we said we were only going to perform to the women. The men, of course, even if we said we were going to perform to them they will not accept, but they said alright since we want to talk only to the women there's no problem. When the performance started we didn't know that the men were watching from behind closed curtains. They were in their houses but they were watching through the curtains. So at the end of the performance, we said 'OK, can we have post-performance discussion now?' The women would not talk, but at least the Mbororo women in the troupe started some kind of discussion and then they picked up. Then the men started coming out of their houses. So from there I could see that the thing was working, and those Mbororo boys who were with us said 'OK, these people are already contaminated by city life. Wait until we get to the rural areas'. So finally we got to the rural areas. We spent 30 days there going from one settlement to the other. We spent two days at each settlement. We arrive today, we do brainstorming, we try to build up a story and so on and so forth. By the next day we try again to do a little rehearsal. We didn't want it to be a big thing; something like ten to fifteen minutes on some little problems people were facing here and there, people's immediate problems. And then they'd perform to the rest of the community. The men, of course, would stay maybe 100 metres away, watching from far away, not wanting to be contaminated by these fellows. But it caught up, because when Emelda went back to those communities two years later or three years later, those women were now doing their own plays. They had their own theatre troupes. Each time they had problems they'd simply get together, brainstorm, cast themselves into various roles, improvise and perform. And it is still going on today. And how did I even get to know about it? Because there's a German woman who also went down to that part of the country where I had done the thing and she came back to Yaounde and was looking for me. Somebody told me there was a woman looking for me. I said 'What's the problem?' He said 'No, there's no problem'. So finally I met her and said 'What is it?' She said 'No, I just wanted to confirm …' I said 'Confirm what?' And she said 'I went to Mesaje and I met Mbororo women who were doing theatre and when I asked how they knew about theatre they said it was you who came and taught them how to do theatre'. So you see? So that is one example. The second example has to do with

another group of women in Ndop. They used to belong to what we call AWICO.[63] I don't know what the abbreviation stands for but they are groups of women who set up social services to help each other and things like that. And that one is still working up till today. So if you go to Ndop you want to meet the women of AWICO they are there. Each time they have a problem they meet, they brainstorm on the problem, create a play out of it and they go and perform. But whenever we have the time we go back and we visit them from time to time. But otherwise they've picked it up and they're doing it on their own.

Nkealah: I must commend you on the great work you are doing in Cameroon.

Butake: That's why I cannot hide in Cameroon.

Odhiambo: And that is why you've refused to leave Cameroon.

Butake: Yes, that's why I cannot hide in Cameroon. Because when you're hiding and you want to take a little beer somebody comes and says, 'Oh, Doctor, how are you?' It can be very embarrassing sometimes. You just want to relax and you don't think that anybody knows you. You want to be anonymous but suddenly there is an eruption and then they start calling everybody 'Do you know this man?'

Nkealah: So then you've become a man of the people?

Butake: Yeah. I don't know, I think it's a good thing anyway.

Nkealah: It is. Absolutely. It's because you're doing great work.

Butake: Yeah, somebody told me that if I was not doing great work people would not be so excited to see me. They would even throw stones at you when they see you. But since you come and they're so happy when they see you it means that you're doing good work. And I think that is very encouraging

[63] Association of Women's Information and Co-ordination Office

Nkealah: Just a final question from my side. Considering the progress you've made so far what future for women empowerment do you foresee in Cameroon?

Butake: Well, I can't answer that question right now. But I think I've already given the answer a moment ago, that I'd like to see women going out and asking for what is their due. They constitute 52% of the population; they constitute the highest numbers in terms of membership even in the main ruling political party and the rival SDF opposition party. They constitute the greatest number. So why don't they insist they want to have their own rights? I think it is time for the women to ask and get what they deserve. I cannot say that I've done enough but I think that what I have done so far should be able to make the women to move forward. I think I should look for some new area to engage in rather than the same thing. In fact, there's none of the plays that I've written which does not lay some emphasis on women. So I think that maybe I should try to digress and maybe go into some other area.

Odhiambo: Yeah, I think this has been very illuminating, Professor Bole Butake. Hopefully we'll get another time to talk about film.

Nkealah: Thank you for giving us your time. We know you came here for a conference and we really do appreciate this time spent with us.

Butake: I think this has been more relaxing than the conference.

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