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THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMAN IN THE WORKS OF FRANCOPHONE WOMEN WRITERS FROM WEST AFRICA AND THE FRENCH CARIBBEAN

By

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ABSTRACT

THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMAN IN THE WORKS OF FRANCOPHONE WOMEN WRITERS FROM WEST AFRICA AND THE FRENCH CARIBBEAN

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This study looks at the works of women writers from countries in West Africa where French is the official language and from the French Caribbean islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, départements of France since 1946. It focuses in particular on the way in which these writers portray female characters and the feminine condition in their societies. The image of the woman is examined in the following contexts: the African woman at home; the West Indian woman in the French Caribbean; the black woman, African and Antillaise, in Europe, and the West Indian in Africa.

In both literatures the socio-historical context significantly influences the way women define themselves. As recently as the early seventies the portrait of the woman in African literature was exclusively the creation of male writers. However, in the past ten years several West African women writers, notably from Senegal, have been published. In most cases their writing takes the form of autobiographical narratives. The image of woman presented in these works is generally a positive one. The African woman is shown as rooted in a rich cultural heritage of which she is justly proud and as grappling successfully with the stresses and problems of adapting to a changing society. She seeks fulfillment in particular in terms of her relationships, including the conjugal relationship--at times a source of friction and distress.

The West Indian works, too, are mainly autobiographical in structure. The question of assimilation plays a crucial role. The Antillaise is depicted as a déracinée, exiled from herself and from her society. Her solution is flight. She attempts to deal with her alienation by making abortive journeys to France and to Africa. Although the settings are different her conflict remains unresolved. Finally, except in rare cases, she resigns herself to exile or seeks escape in dream, madness, or suicide.

Secure at home in France the African woman, like her Antillaise sister, finds she is a victim of prejudice, reification and rejection. She too becomes exiled, but fortunately she can seek comfort in a return to her ancestral homeland, an option denied her West Indian sister.

For Don, Karin, Tim, Steve, and Mark

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Introduction

This study looks at the works of women writers from countries in West Africa where French is the official language or the language of instruction and from the French Caribbean islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, départements of France since 1946. It focuses in particular on the way in which these writers portray female characters and the feminine condition in their societies.

The first two sections deal with African novels, all published since 1970, most of which are relatively unknown and therefore not readily accessible. It is hoped that this study will provide an introduction both to the writers and to their work. To this end the novels have been discussed in some detail though not losing sight of the central interest: that of the woman and feminine consciousness.

The third section discusses the works of women writers from the Caribbean as they relate to the situation of woman in Caribbean society over the last fifty years. Women's writing in the French Caribbean is a rich and largely neglected area of West Indian fiction. Many of these novels have been in print for over twenty years, some considerably longer; yet few have been widely read, discussed or written about, and only recently have English translations begun to appear. For purposes of comparison the novels discussed are restricted to works dealing with the French Antilles, which, like the West African francophone countries, were until relatively recently under French colonial rule, although many

parallels and similarities in themes are to be found in Haitian women's novels.

The final section is concerned with works by both Caribbean and African women authors which deal with the black woman in Europe and novels by West Indian women whose central character is the Antillaise living in an African society. Both these groups of novels depict the woman as being in a situation of exile.

In a study concerned with women's writing, particularly Third World women's writing several questions arise concerning both content and form. Because the works are at once women's fiction as well as African or Caribbean novels, some of the assumptions underlying this study have to do with feminist as well as sociological criticisms, with the nature of the African and Caribbean novel as well as women's writing itself.

It is an established fact that literature by women has been neglected. The fact that women's writing is important and worth studying seriously, not only for women but for the male as well, is by no means generally acknowledged in literary circles, long and still the domain of male critics. Female critics suggest that this is perhaps largely due to the fact that the spheres traditionally of interest to women, the "private and personal" rather than the "wider domain of political history," have so far been considered marginal by men; hence women's texts have never been looked upon as worthy of serious consideration.[1] In an important article, "Dancing through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of Feminist Literary Criticism," Annette Kolodny suggests "three crucial propositions" which could usefully be considered in the area of women's writing and lead to a re-vitalization of certain aspects of literary criticism:

> (1) literary history (and with that, the historicity of literature) is a fiction; (2) insofar as we are taught how to read, what we engage are not texts but paradigms; and finally, (3) since the grounds upon which we assign aesthetic value to texts are never infallible, unchangeable or universal, we must reexamine not only our aesthetics but, as well, the inherent biases and assumptions informing the critical methods which (in part) shape our aesthetic responses.[2]

She further argues that the reader (and male critic) who has never become acquainted with either the "unique literary traditions" or "sex-related" contexts--"historically, the lying-in-room, the parlor, the nursery, the kitchen, the laundry, and so-on - ..."--out of which female authors write,

> will necessarily lack the capacity to fully interpret the dialogue or action embedded therein; for, as every good novelist knows, the meaning of any character's action or statement is inescapably a function of the specific situation in which it is embedded.[3]

Kolodny examines the relationship of male critic and female text and shows the problems which arise when we forget (i) that established literary canons are "of our own making," (ii) that they can and need to be constantly re-evaluated, and (iii) that they cannot necessarily be applied universally and indiscriminately in all contexts and traditions. These are exactly the points made by Chinweizu and his co-authors about the problems which arise when a European or non-African critic (or an African critic with a "eurocentric" view of literature) attempts to discuss African literature.[4] Interesting parallels exist for example in the "so-called 'problem' of space and time in the African novel" as treated by Charles Larson and other "universalist" critics, discussed and criticized by Chinweizu,[5] and similar criticisms of female autobiographical narratives seen by some critics as being "formless" or lacking in coherence.[6] Both "problems" are shown to have arisen from the

critic's misreading/misunderstanding of the author's intent and choice of literary mode.[7] To quote and paraphrase Kolodny, "men (or in the case of African literature, non-Africans) will be better readers or appreciators of women's books (African novels) when they have read more of them."[8]

Kolodny speaks of "a growing emphasis in feminist literary study on the fact of literature as a social institution, embedded not only within its own literary traditions but also within the particular physical and mental artifacts of the society from which it comes,"[9] and makes the point that feminist critics argue that "the power relations inscribed in the form of conventions within our literary inheritance . . . . reify the encodings of those same power relations in the culture at large."[10] The same holds true for much of African literary criticism in its present form. As Chinweizu puts it:

> ...because literary forms are socio-historical cultural products, they, as well as the terms for evaluating performances guided by them, do tend to vary from society to society and even from period to period.[11]

Basically Chinweizu does not question the statements Larson (or other eurocentric critics) make about African literature. He does not dispute that their judgements are "objectively" true <u>from their standpoint</u>, but he claims, justifiably, that their standpoint is not the valid stance from which to judge African literature. Chinweizu suggests that the success or adequacy of a story (its plot, characterization, structure, etc.) depends upon its purpose, its context and upon what its primary audience accepts as "normal or proper." He states explicitly that African writers must be judged by African readers and then "the objections of Westerners, with their alien sensibilities won't

matter."[12] Feminist critics would no doubt share Chinweizu's sentiments (substituting "sexist" for "racist," "chauvinist" for "imperialist" and "female" for "African":

> With time and effort and a sloughing off of their racist superiority complexes and imperialist arrogance, they [non-african-centred] critics might acquire a taste for whatever (.....) African writers and their African audiences establish as the African norm.[13]

Happily, given the difficulties involved, this study is not primarily concerned with, and will not attempt to establish, the literary or aesthetic value of the texts, but rather to examine the view of woman as it emerges in the fiction. Nevertheless it can be said that these works by and large "deal illuminatingly and well with matters of central importance"[14] for women of their time and their society. The novels and prose works included do illuminate and deal (more or less) well with matters of central importance for African and Afro-Caribbean women: their past, their history and heritage, their aspirations, position and roles in the society and, of central importance, their relationships with others and with themselves.

The majority of the works are autobiographies, fictional or real, or genres related to the autobiographical form: letters, diary, etc. Caribbean and African women have played an important part in the building and survival of their societies and cultures. Yet they have not so far had much of a chance, especially African women, to reveal themselves in writing, to "se raconter." Barbara Smith, quoting Alice Walker, points out how the "political, economic and social restrictions of slavery and racism have historically stunted the creative lives of Black women."[15] For historical and cultural reasons African women also have turned to creative writing only very recently. Thus it is fitting,

as well as natural, that this literature, new and young in its public form, should begin with women telling their own stories. Feminist critics have been particularly concerned with the problems of language and the inadequacy of the system as we know it to articulate the female self.[16] This problem is given added dimensions in the case of Third World women writing in the language of the former colonizers. Their texts can indeed be said to tell us about "how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves [and] how our language has trapped as well as liberated us."[17]

The Francophone West African or Caribbean woman writer can be seen in terms of her language as an "assimilée," a term which originated in the French colonial policy and which is still in current usage in historical and sociological writing. The works are often written in French, which for most of the writers is likely to be a second language, acquired very early. French-speaking Africans are bilingual in French and at least one African language--French West Indians in French and Martinican or Guadeloupean Creole. Certain difficulties arise for the writers in terms of translating into standard French their familiar, everyday realities often experienced primarily in their first language, Wolof or Martinican Creole for example. This difficulty is sometimes overcome by using images, proverbs, expressions, references to flora, fauna, articles of clothing, food, etc., from the native culture and translating them into French. Simone Schwarz-Bart, for example, is particularly successful at rendering the Creole voice in standard French. At other times when translation is inadequate or impossible the original Wolof or Creole word is used in the text, with perhaps an equivalent or explanation in French offered within the text or in the notes.

West African societies have traditions, histories and a cultural heritage which are rich, ancient and deeply embedded. Although her French education and a rapidly changing social structure do create conflict and present the educated woman with certain problems, for most of the women in these works their culture, religion and family heritage are a source of pride and they are firmly anchored in their traditions even while recognizing the need and importance of adaptability and change. Several of the novels are set in Senegal, a country deeply marked by the influence of Islam which Madubuike, in his study of the Senegalese novel, describes as "one of the key elements providing resistance to assimilation and change."[18] Madubuike's study shows that from evidence in the Senegalese (male) novel in general "there is far less assimilation in Senegalese society than is generally thought" and that whereas some institutions, for example, within the political structure, education and the economic system, are "more acculturated," in other areas the politics of assimilation continues to meet with great resistance; consequently, in such areas as family structure, marriage, religion, language, dress which are "less acculturated" traditional patterns largely prevail.[19] These last areas being more private and personal and of greater central concern to the individual this finding is especially significant in terms of the actual degree of assimilation. This is particularly important in the case of women whose lives (and works) are dominated by their private and personal worlds. The female West African novel of French expression tends to bear out this finding. In most cases the women are deeply attached to their traditional culture. However, for some, it is a source of friction and even distress. This is particularly the case in the area of male/female

relationships as explored in the novels of Bâ and Fall.

The position of woman in West African societies is extremely complex and easily misunderstood if looked at from a Western viewpoint. In Senegalese society, for example, and in Islamic cultures in general (Senegal is 80% Moslem), women and men have clearly defined and separate roles, codes of behavior, etc., and are judged by and expected to conform to these standards. As Madubuike's work shows, at the private level the degree of acculturation is far less than in public domains. In many ways this is desirable and as it should be. However, some women in the novels find that it is difficult to reconcile Westernized or "educated" (sometimes both terms are synonymous) ideas and consequent aspirations and behavior with traditional norms for women's roles and expectations, especially when tradition is conveniently used as a pretext for selfish, personal ends. This is doubtless a minority view--the creative artist is often the first to question--but nonetheless one presented in the literature and a valid one.[20]

Sonia Lee, in her study on "The Image of the Woman in the Novels of Western Africa of French Expression" (all male writers) states that these authors were very sympathetic to the problems of the African woman in the contemporary world, but she found that "les sentiments des écrivains s'ils sont pour ainsi dire unanimes quant à la femme en tant que mère, se chargent parfois d'ambiguité lorsqu'il s'agit de considérer ou plutôt de reconsidérer le rôle de la femme dans la société contemporaine."[21] She also found that in masculine African writing:

> ...l'image de la femme est toujours un reflet de son rôle, et qu'elle n'existe qu'en fonction de ce dernier. De ce fait, l'image de la femme est en même temps sociologique et stéréotypée. De plus, le personnage féminin, à travers son rôle, sert généralement de véhicule aux idées de l'auteur.[22]

In the case of both Caribbean and African women's writing, the image of the woman we have found is, as is to be expected, much more individualized. Moreover, the authors' central concern and focus is the woman herself. Her traditional rôle is examined and sometimes questioned and the woman is depicted in a variety of rôles and settings.

Whereas the African woman sees herself in terms of a firmly established tradition, evolving and looking to a future, not without problems, but full of possibilities, the West Indian woman is presented as being in a very difficult situation. She is far more pessimistic in many cases than her African sister. The educated woman especially is alienated and full of complexes. West Indian society was born of the slave trade. Maryse Condé points out that West Indians have no "mythes d'origine" as African nations generally do: "Il n'y a pas d'ancêtre fondateur, il n'y a qu'un vaisseau négrier."[23] Because of her particular historical and cultural reality the Antillaise is torn and haunted by a sense of rootlessness and lack of coherent identity as is her male counterpart. Discussing the situation in the Caribbean, Condé points out its complexities:

> Finalement, les Antilles sont des créations totalement artificielles du système capitaliste. Le paradoxe, c'est qu'en fin de compte, né d'une création vraiment artificielle, le peuple antillais existe. Mais si l'on regarde sa genèse on comprend que ses problèmes soient complexes.[24]

The sections dealing with the French Caribbean femme de couleur look at these complex problems and her attempts to come to terms, transcend or escape them.

The novel form or extended prose narrative has been chosen because in both the case of Caribbean and African societies it is grounded in its social context and offers a rewarding vehicle for examining the role

and condition of woman. In all the works chosen the main personae are women. In addition, both the Caribbean and the African novel can be described as "realistic," in the sense that both attempt to represent accurately and faithfully the authors' vision of existing social realities of their societies. Maryse Condé says of West Indian woman writers: "Les romancières rendent compte des situations, du vécu des communautés,"[25] and in An Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel, Ormerod sees the novels as an attempt to represent fictionally

> a particular personal vision of the Caribbean social context. This personal vision may not correspond with that of the reader; but in every case, the novelist has endeavoured through metaphor and analogy to communicate to a disparate public the strength and validity of his or her perception of the West Indies.[26]

Moeroever, in the case of the African (here Senegalese) novel Madubuike concludes that "the Senegalese novel does not necessarily distort reality," and that

> the fictional presentations of social realities complement rather than contradict the observations of sociologists and essayists on the same subject matter. Indeed, the realism of the Senegalese novel lies in the fact that it could be compared to daily reality.[27]

In Towards a Sociology of the Novel, Lucien Goldmann sees the novel form as the literary transposition of everyday life within a specific social context.[28] This study postulates that interpretations of the self are greatly influenced by the social context in which they occur. Literature is among other things a reflection of the ways in which individuals strive for self-knowledge. This is particularly true (i) of the autobiographical form and (ii) in a society preoccupied with the question of identity as Caribbean society is. Roy Pascal points out that autobiography is "a review of a life from a particular viewpoint in

time--a review in which attention is focused on the self as it interacts with the world."[29] In the case of the African novel in general, although there is also a high incidence of autobiography in African fiction, this is perhaps less so.[30] Nevertheless, the educated African woman is faced with many of the same types of dilemma as her West Indian sister, although her background and reactions are quite different. What she is, is also to a very large extent a product of her social and historical context. This study therefore assumes connections between readings of the self and the society out of which the texts come. The perspective is at once literary, feminine and West Indian. In the case of both the Caribbean and African context, but especially as an outsider to West Africa and therefore particularly conscious of limitations in that area, attempts have been made as far as possible to inform interpretations and conclusions drawn from the literature with background reading, but most of all efforts have been directed to remaining sensitive and faithful to the authentic voice of the texts.

The view of the woman in francophone West Africa is generally a positive one. She is presented as being rooted in a rich cultural heritage of which she is justly proud and as grappling successfully with the stresses and strains of a fast-changing society. The Antillaise on the other hand is depicted as alienated and exiled from herself and her society. In her attempts to escape her alienation she makes abortive journeys to France and to Africa, finally (except in rare cases) resigning herself to exile or seeking escape in madness or suicide. The African woman in France, like the Antillaise, is shown to be a victim of prejudice and feelings of rejection. She too is exiled, but fortunately she can seek comfort in a return to her ancestral homeland. The woman in

both Africa and the Caribbean is advocating changes in her society but in particular she is seeking to come to terms with herself.

Notes

[1] Mary Jean Green, "Structures of Liberation: Female Experience and Autobiographical Form in Quebec," Yale French Studies, no. 65 (1983), p. 125. Green makes this point and mentions other female critics who hold this view.

[2] Annette Kolodny, "Dancing Through the Mine Field," in Showalter, ed., The New Feminist Criticism (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p. 151.

[3] See Kolodny, p. 155.

[4] Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike, Toward the Decolonization of African Literature, vol. I (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980). Deborah E. McDowell makes similar points with regard to black women's writing in New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism" in Showalter, ed., The New Feminist Criticism (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985).

[5] Chinweizu, p. 99.

[6] See Green, pp. 125-127.

[7] See Kolodny, pp. 153-157 and Chinweizu, pp. 99-111.

[8] Kolodny, p. 157.

[9] Kolodny, p. 147.

[10] Kolodny, p. 147.

[11] Chinweizu, p. 98.

[12] Chinweizu, p. 123.

[13] Chinweizu, pp. 123-124.

[14] Chinweizu, p. 195, uses this criterion to describe the success of Okot p'Bitek's Songs in terms of his contemporary African audience.

[15] Alice Walker, "In Search of Our mothers' Gardens", quoted by Barbara Smith in "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," in Showalter (ed.), The New Feminist Criticism (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985).

[16] See for example Luce Irigaray's "Parler femme." In "When our lips speak together," Signs 6, no. 1, 1980, p. 66 and also Elaine Showalter (ed.), The New Feminist Criticism (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985).

[17] Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," College English 34 (October 1972), quoted by Kolodny, pp. 150-151.

[18] Ihechukwu Madubuike, The Senegalese Novel. A Sociological Study of the Impact of the Politics of Assimilation (Washington: Three Continents

Press, 1983), p. 165.

[19] See Madubuike, pp. 163-164.

[20] Moreover, at the present time Senegal is only about 10% literate, therefore the number of Senegalese who are "Westernized" is relatively small.

[21] Sonia Lee, "L'Image de la femme dans le roman francophone de l'Afrique occidentale," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 1974, p. 4.

[22] Lee, p. 4.

[23] Jacquey and Hugon, "Entretien avec Maryse Condé," Notre Librairie, no. 74 (April-June 1974), p. 25.

[24] Jacquey and Hugon, p. 24.

[25] Jacquey and Hugon, p. 25.

[26] Ormerod, p. 136.

[27] Madubuike, p. 163.

[28] Lucien Goldmann, Towards a Sociology of the Novel, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications, 1975), p. 7.

[29] Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography, cited by Stephen A. Shapiro in "The Dark Continent of Literature: Autobiograhy." Comparative Literature Studies 5, 1968.

[30] Chinweizu points out that African novels are often concerned with the same reality and preoccupations as their "oral antecedents," cf. Chinweizu pp. 25 ff.

Chapter One

"L'Africaine"

The Woman in African Society--Positive Images

Background

In the conclusion to her work on the image of the black woman in African literature (a work entirely devoted to male writers), Emancipation féminine et roman africain, Arlette Chemain-Degrange re-states the question which has served to guide her study "...quel rôle l'image de la femme noire a-t-elle joué dans la littérature africaine? et dans l'évolution de la société?"[1] She concludes that black African literature is dominated by three types of images or representations of the woman: "celle de la femme à la peau d'ébène et au coeur d'or, orgueil de l'Afrique; celle de la femme marquée par les souffrances morales ou physiques de l'esclavage, de la colonisation, des guerres civiles, et par le surmenage; enfin celle de la travailleuse diligente et active, force pour l'avenir."[2] She notes further that: "Chaque portrait réapparaît périodiquement, selon les besoins de la cause défendue."[3]

This last remark is significant for it points to the fact that even in works by novelists and writers like Beti, Oyono and Sembène who are sympathetic to the cause of women, the portrait of the woman (like that of the masculine characters, we must add) is conceived in terms of the author's thesis, usually a socio-political one. Thus the woman coincides

with a symbol or a function or plays a specific role in the elaboration of the author's ideas. The fact is that so far in francophone African literature: "La femme noire n'est jamais décrite pour elle-même."[4] Moreover Chemain-Degrange makes the point that the image of the African woman in this literature has changed little in the post-independence era. Independence has not modified the depiction of the woman in the works of male writers."En fait, elle demeure identique à ce qu'elle était précédemment. Elle est utilisée selon la même dichotomie, soit pour un éloge de la culture négro-africaine ancienne, soit pour l'évocation de la révolte anti-coloniale."[5]

This limitation in concept has certain practical literary consequences. First of all, the woman tends to be portrayed only in certain fixed sets of circumstances. For example, the woman in town is less often described than her rural counterpart; the education or childhood of the girl is rarely treated; the problems of the wife or co-wife or indeed the women in general are barely mentioned except by very few authors like Beti or Sembène who are notable exceptions.[6] In many cases the image of the mother, as already mentioned, dominates masculine portrayals of women. It is generally an idealized portrait, sometimes coupled with a negative image of a cruel, hated father. Correspondingly, the portrait of the prostitute is usually seen in the context of an attack on colonialism or the ills of an increasingly urbanized less traditional society. Masculine authors tend to describe women and their behavior but generally do not seek to explore motivation and background. Even where they do their viewpoint is necessarily that of an outside, albeit concerned, observer. Comparing the difference in perspective between Sembène and Mariama Bâ with regard to subjects like woman's

liberation, marriage and polygamy, Victor Aire remarks: "Il y a entre les deux auteurs la même distance qu'entre le médecin accoucheur et la parturiente: l'un peut imaginer la douleur de l'autre, mais c'est elle-ci qui la vit dans toutes ces vibres."[7] Often too the male writer betrays the ambivalent attitude towards women common in many African societies, where there is a dichotomy between the traditional archetypal image of female pre-eminence ("Mother is Supreme") and the actual situation of many women, overburdened and subservient to men. [8] Thus the absence of the African woman writer, even more marked in francophone than in anglophone literature, has had serious implications. As Lloyd Brown points out:

> The neglect of the woman as writer in Africa has been an unfortunate omission because she offers self-images, patterns of self-analysis, and general insights into the woman's situation which are ignored by, or are inaccessible to, the male writer. And these self-descriptions provide us with useful contexts within which to assess the frequently uniform generalizations about African womanhood. In other words, the African woman as writer offers special perspectives which need to be considered if we are seriously concerned with the relationship between African literature and images of the African woman.[9]

Fortunately, with the emergence of several black francophone women writers this situation is slowly changing.

The portrayal of the woman in the works of female writers, while still subject to some of these same limitations, offers, as would be expected, a much fuller and more nuanced treatment. Many women writers do not, for example, hold to the shining portraits of themselves frequently found in some male writers. For one thing the image of the mother is much less idealized. She is human, flawed, even occasionally openly criticized for what her daughters see as faults or limitations. Some mothers are presented as greedy, narrow, self-serving.[10] African

women writers, while aware of the problems of colonization and enslavement and conscious of their cultural heritage, are more concerned with the difficulties which confront the modern African woman in her day-to-day existence, especially in her relationships with her husband, but also with her children, friends, sisters and other family members. Women writers are interested in exploring their pasts, their heritage and upbringing, not so much as an attempt to glorify Africa, but rather as a vehicle for understanding the factors which contributed to making the African woman what she is and especially for helping her to come to terms with herself and her society. A Nigerian woman writer describes the imperatives facing the African woman in these terms:

> She must clarify her notions of home and family, of freedom and identity. She must, finally, choose her own life, or at least her own master.[11]

The works of women writers therefore offer us portraits of the African women, not just as wife, mother, or prostitute, but also in a variety of other roles and situations. The woman is portrayed at all stages, from childhood to old age, and we have an opportunity to look closely at the lives of girls and women and to seek explanations of aspects of the woman which hitherto were either neglected or merely described, but not fully investigated.

According to Charles Larson: "... in most Third World novels female characters play lesser roles than their male counterparts--no doubt in large part because Western (romantic) love is missing as a theme. If women are present in any of these books they tend to be of incidental importance, functional aspects in an otherwise masculine-oriented world."[12] Larson's remark as we have seen holds true for francophone African fiction prior to 1970, a literature dominated by male writers,

although the reason he suggests does not seem to be necessarily valid. However, in the works of female African writers, both anglophone and francophone, this is not the case. The works of many black francophone women prose writers are, or seem to be, largely autobiographical. The main character in these works is therefore often a woman. In many cases it is difficult to decide whether a work is a novel or non-fiction, although as Cheikh Hamidou Kane has pointed out, this is perhaps of no significance in the context of an African esthetic.[13] Moreover, although Western (romantic) love is still often largely missing as a theme, as already noted, women are very important characters in these works. It is true that in some works there is more consideration given to the male-female relationship, which in fact dominates in certain cases, for example, in Mariama Bâ's two novels, Une si longue lettre and Un chant écarlate. But in general, women simply write about themselves, often in retrospect.

> Sur quoi écrirait une femme qui ne prétend ni à une imagination débordante ni à un talent d'écrire singulier? Sur elle-même, bien sûr. Voici donc mon enfance et ma jeunesse telles que je me les rappelle. Le Sénégal a changé en une génération. Peut-être valait-il la peine de rappeler aux nouvelles pousses ce que nous fumes.[14]

The African women writers to be discussed here (Bâ, Bugul, Diallo, Fall, Kaya, Mbaye, Ndiaye, Seck), except for Bâ, born 1929, belong to the same generation. All were born around 1940 and grew up in pre-Independence societies of the A.O.F. (Afrique occidentale française) which included Senegal, Guinea, the Sudan and the Ivory Coast. All were educated in French schools. They therefore share certain common experiences and a similar basic formation. They are all professional women, some actively involved in women's organizations, but their work

could not be described as militant or explicitly "feminist," although many of their characters are relatively "liberated" women and they are concerned with questions which in Western societies might be termed "women's issues."

There is enormous variety in the points of view expressed by the women selected here for discussion. Some are optimistic and positive, others paint a picture of complex relationships and problems which seem almost insoluble. The latter share the pessimism of some of their West Indian sisters but still offer glimmers of hope. In general, all the works "de-romanticize the image of motherhood as being invariably supreme and transcendent" without however questioning the inherent value of motherhood.[15] Bâ's novels, for example, contradict the optimistic image of the liberated woman and the revered wife and mother. Yet the author herself affirms her belief in the maternal role as the most fulfilling to her personally if not for all women.[16] This belief in the faithful wife and devoted mother as a feminine ideal is a constant in the works. But at the same time the women, Fall and Bâ especially, plead eloquently for the need to re-examine sexual roles and social customs which hamper and destroy not just women but relationships and ultimately the society. All the works reflect the tensions created for women by the conflict between traditional values and Western influences and especially by the intransigence of powerful elements in the society. For purposes of this study, the works are divided into those which deal with childhood and adolescence and present mainly positive images, and secondly those which treat more directly thorny issues--social problems, marriage, polygamy, changing values--and which tend to be less optimistic.

Woman, a Positive View: Kaya (Ivory Coast), Diallo, Ndiaye (Senegal)

We shall begin our study with the autobiographical works of Simone Kaya from the Ivory Coast and two Senegalese writers, Nafissatou Diallo and Adja Ndiaye, who come from Dakar. Kaya's work Les Danseuses d'Impê-Eya published in 1976 is subtitled "jeunes filles à Abidjan" and Diallo's De Tilène au Plateau (1975) also has a subtitle: "une enfance dakaroise." Both works therefore deal with childhood, girlhood and adolescence in an urban milieu. The works are uneven in literary merit. The three are retrospective examinations by modern professional West African women of their past, their upbringing, their development and the evolution of women in their respective societies. All three works have characteristics which they share in common. Above all, they are all positive and optimistic. They differ, however, in many fundamental ways, first in terms of the reality they present: Diallo's family is Moslem, as is Ndiaye's, Kaya's is Christian. Kaya's work is in many ways less complete as a sociological document than Diallo's or Ndiaye's books, but in the context of this study it is more penetrating and significant in the aspects, incidents, and characters which the author does choose to present. Les Danseuses d'Impê-Eya is significant because it presents and examines the lives of various écolières from diverse backgrounds and regions of the Ivory Coast who share their lives in the cité indigène of Treichville. It details their daily occupations, delights, worries, opinions, attitudes, wonderful dances, and games. But more importantly, Les Danseuses d'Impê-Eya addresses and raises questions which are of great importance in the evolution of women and of African society in general. Kaya's book covers three generations: her own, the older

generation represented by her mother and aunt, the marvelous Mafitini, "fileuse de contes," both illiterate, and the new generation, seen through the portrait of her daughters, educated and much more "aware" as women. Her novel details the evolution of the Ivorian woman and shows clearly what the "femme évoluée," like her society, has sacrificed as well as gained in the evolutionary process. The narrative form is that of a sort of "journal intime," a form common to many of these works. The narrator's autobiographical reflections begin on a positive and almost idealistic note. Her reminiscence is triggered by two incidents, both of direct relevance to the condition of women in her society.

The book opens with a doctoral defense at the University of Abidjan. A young Ivoirienne is about to be presented with the title of "docteur ès sciences avec la mention très honorable." (Danseuses, p. 16). The candidate's calm assurance and self-possession are described with unconcealed admiration. She is at home in two worlds, the domestic foyer and the learned, scientific, technological sphere:

> Semblant ignorer les regards rivés sur elle, la candidate range des plantes sur la table. Elle vérifie aussi l'installation électrique de l'écran de projection et celui du micro dont elle va se servir. Ses gestes ressemblent à ceux d'une ménagère en train de mettre la dernière main au plat qu'elle vient d'achever. . . . Avec sérieux, mais sans jamais se demettre de sa grace féminine, elle nous divulgue une partie des secrets qui avaient fait la puissance d'un petit nombre d'initiés. (Danseuses, p. 16)[17]

The effect on her African sisters is profound. The narrator notes: "En effet, nous sommes toutes, à l'occasion de ce diplôme convaincues d'avoir obtenu le droit à la considération sociale qui semblait être réservée aux seuls hommes. Pour la première fois de leur vie, peut-être, quelques-unes ont éprouvé la fierté d'être nées filles en Afrique noire" (Danseuses, p. 16; emphasis added). This young doctor is a source of

pride but also a model for other African women. By this comment, explicitly inserted, Kaya suggests that their self-concept is damaged and negative. Her remarks once again show that many African women do not coincide with Senghor's positive image of their condition.[18]

A short paragraph on the first page sums up what seems to epitomize for the narrator the ideal of the modern African woman, capable of moving comfortably between two worlds, worlds which for many seem irreconcilable. The narrator remarks with pleasure and pride:

> Madame, notre soeur, qui va solenellement démontrer qu'elle a atteint les hauts degrés du "savoir des Blancs"! Elle est aussi simple que lors de cette soirée passée chez des amis communs, où nous avions parlé de la confection des vêtements de nos enfants et de la mode féminine du moment, les recettes de cuisine étant l'objet des autres propos. (Danseuses, p. 15)

Again, the author insists on the same phenomenon. The woman is a product and synthesis of both traditional African values and Western European knowledge. She embodies both "feminine" and "masculine" qualities. She represents the answer to the question with which the book ends. Recalling her departure for France after spending the holidays in her homeland the young narrator remarks: "...j'ai éprouvé le désagréable sensation d'être transportée d'un monde dans un autre. Mais y avait-il une autre issue?" (Danseuses, p. 127, emphasis added). Kaya seems to hold a positive view: for those who have been exposed to the two worlds the result is not necessarily alienation and loneliness. Mama is torn between her father's ideals and her mother's, between her love for her family and her homeland and her longing to recover "le pensionnat provençal, avec sa discipline, son ordre, sa sécurité austère, et peut-être aussi le joli accent chantant de ses élèves." (Danseuses p. 126). But, unlike many of her compatriots and her Caribbean relatives,

she is not alienated.

This dilemma recurs frequently as a theme in African fiction. For many of Kaya's contemporaries who have been educated in French schools, the result of their education is unhappiness and dislocation.[19] Some women writers share this pessimism with their male counterparts but Kaya's portrayal of the young doctor suggests that her position is more optimistic. Some would hold that the portrait is idealized and unrealistic. What circumstances are necessary to create such a person? The book suggests some answers to which we will return later.

The second incident which serves as a springboard for the narrator's souvenirs is linked to the first and speaks directly to women. The collective joy experienced by the women in the audience makes her think of their other African sisters:

> celles qui n'ont de temps que pour les corvées d'eau et de bois mort, quand les travaux des champs leur laissent un moment de répit. Je revois aussi les femmes des marchés bruyants et enivrant de conteurs et d'odeurs africaines.
>
> Comme il serait bon que toutes ces femmes connaissent la joie collective qui réconforte. Et cette idée me conduit à ma fille, ma Mounia, qui a proclamé dans un moment de colère qu'elle était une femme. Cela à neuf ans! (Danseuses p. 17).

She recognizes the isolation and suffering of rural women, toiling and overburdened. At the same time that she regrets and deplores the lack of solidarity and collective identity which will never exist for certain of her sisters. Mama is aware that for her daughter's generation things will be different, perhaps better. She is surprised to find in her child at the tender age of nine a level of awareness which she never had. The cause of Mounia's anger is a remark made by a male relative, Noibou, to his brother, who had asked his wife's advice: "... faut pas écouté femme, est-ce que femme même gagne tête, femme c'est comme poulet!"

("les femmes n'ont pas plus de tête que des poulets!"). The child indignantly protests to her mother Noibou's comment (Danseuses p. 17). Mounia's anger is further compounded by her male relative's reaction which implies that the remark should not concern her: "Mais c'est pas toi! est-ce que tu es une femme toi?" To which she replies even more indignantly, "Bien sûr que je suis une femme, qu'est-ce que je suis alors?" (Danseuses p. 17).

Mama reflects on the incident which amuses but also astonishes and even worries her:

> Je me suis demandé si ma fille grandissait tout simplement, ou si c'était le signe d'un changement profond des temps? Car, lorsque j'avais son âge j'écoutais avec indifférence ce genre de propos tenu par des hommes. J'ai eu envie d'effacer cette blessure que des esprits retardés infligent encore aux femmes. J'ai entrepris de dire à ma fille qu'autrefois, et souvent encore en Afrique, les choses ne se passaient pas toujours comme chez nous et dans notre entourage immédiat. Danseuses p. 18)

She is eager to communicate this to her daughter, whom she has to pick up after school. However, the sight of her children dancing the traditional Impé-Eya in the schoolyard pulls her up short. She recognizes that although some things have changed, some things should remain, although not necessarily exactly the same. Symbolically, now boys as well as foreigners, little European and Asian girls, are dancing the Impé-Eya. Note that although the adult narrator now refers to Noibou's remark as "cette blessure que des esprits retardés infligent encore aux femmes" and of her desire to efface the injury, she is very conscious that not so long before, she, like others of her generation, was not disturbed: "Lorsque j'avais son âge j'écoutais avec indifférence ce genre de propos tenu par les hommes." Kaya looks back over her childhood and its influences and in the process details the changes in

attitudes that have occurred between her mother's and her daughter's generations. The style proclaims and invites the solidarity and progress of all women, rural and urban, educated and uneducated. Kaya's work is positive, but she does not disguise or romanticize the lot of women in her society or their narrow-mindedness, due largely to their traditional upbringing. Her own mother is depicted objectively. She is very important in her daughter's life, but it is her father who has really served to "raise her daughter's consciousness." Her mother's attitudes are less "progressive."

Kaya's book is dedicated to her father:

> à mon père
> qui a voulu que ses filles sachent
> comme ses fils
> lire et écrire.

In the development of the narrator's character, the relationship with both mother and father is crucial. Kaya describes the couple in detail. This portrayal of the married couple is significant. In Mama's household it is her father who is an influence for, and the agent of, change in matters of his daughters' attitudes, upbringing, education and status. It is he who is mainly responsible for any improvement in "la condition féminine." An incident near the end of the book serves to underline this situation.

Salimata, a young cousin recently married, runs away from her husband, Boula, who beats her at the slightest pretext. The husband is incensed. We must note that in their society husbands have a right and even a duty to beat their wives; for them, women, like children, need to be disciplined. Mama's father tried to calm Boula while her mother lectures Salimata on the duties of a good wife:

> Fanta et moi avons eu l'impression que maman parlait autant

> pour sa cousine que pour nous. "Une femme, a-t-elle dit, quelle que soit sa force, ne devrait jamais lever la main sur l'homme auquel ses père et mère l'ont donnée. Une épouse ne peut lever le bras que pour se protéger, elle devrait savoir apaiser le courroux de son maître en lui demandant pardon à genoux" (Danseuses p. 101).

This advice is in direct contrast to that of her father who is concerned with his daughter's future independence and constantly counsels her in private. "Travaille en classe pour t'élever aux yeux de tous. Je ne veux pas qu'un jour les hommes te fassent souffrir. Une femme sans instruction est victime facile" (Danseuses p. 98). The father realizes that the first change must be in the mentality of the women. In many of the novels portrayals of older women make it obvious how narrow-minded some women are and how necessary this change of attitude it. However, the reactions of Mama and her cousin Fanta, both educated girls, to their cousin's plight are ones of revolt:

> "Je ne me marierai qu'avec un homme gentil."
> "Si l'homme que les parents choisiront pour moi ne me plaît pas, je refuserai de l'épouser."
> "Si mon mari osait me battre, je le quitterais." étaient les phrases que nous lancions aux garçons que notre condition de femme semblait amuser (Danseuses p. 101).

Moreover Salimata has in fact left her husband. Although as illiterate as her older cousin she is by no means passive. She has even dared to strike her husband. She does not share her older cousin's views of her resigned acceptance of her fate. She declares that she was trying her best to be a good wife:

> Elle effectuait de son mieux tout ce que sa mère et ses tantes lui avaient appris. (emphasis added) Mais Boula, ici, loin du village, se montrait quelquefois odieux avec elle. Elle ne voulait pas se laisser battre comme si elle avait été un âne. Si Boula ne voulait pas recevoir n'importe quel objet sur la tête, il n'avait qu'à se tenir tranquille (Danseuses p. 101).

Salimata has in effect moved away from the position of her mother's

generation even without the benefit of a European education. Her shocked older cousin points out that "S'ils avaient été au village du mari ce jour-là, Salimata se serait vue chatiée par ses belles-soeurs (emphasis added) qui l'auraient traitée de sorcière, et l'offense aurait touché son clan entier" (Danseuses p. 101). However, they are no longer in the village but in Abidjan. Although the traditional customs of the village prevail both in Boula and in the older generation of women, who accuse rather than defend their abused relative, Salimata rebels. She recognizes that in the village her husband would probably not dare to treat her that way ("ici, loin du village [emphasis added] il se montrait quelque fois odieux"). Although he has the right to beat her, in the village he could not exercise it indiscriminately. Thus Kaya acknowledges both the positive and the negative aspects of traditional values and customs. The whole work is an attempt to examine the old ways and the new, and finally to arrive at a vision for establishing this equilibrium between the old and the new so admirably exemplified in the young doctor.

Kaya's work contains many divergences from the works of male African writers. Paradoxically, the woman is more objectively portrayed. The portrait of the mother, here again, is not idealized, neither is the portrait of the father typical. He is presented in a very favorable light, he is enlightened and tolerant. The mother is not a negative figure, however. She is portrayed as making a very real contribution to her daughters' education and she is in fact in favor of them being sent to school. She even discourages their aunt from telling them fantastic tales to explain natural phenomena: "Il ne faut pas jeter le doute dans l'esprit de ces enfants sur ce qu'ils apprennent à l'école. Quand elles

deviendront des femmes et des mères, elles penseront comme nous, même si elle vivent avec des Blancs" (Danseuses pp. 27-28). She wants them to become évoluées but does not cease to strive ardently to inculcate traditional womanly skills and values. Their mother is depicted as warm and reassuring, a positive influence in many ways, but limited because of her traditional background and conditioning. The narrator recognizes on the other hand that her own education also imposes limits, that for example the younger generation is incapable of telling stories "à la manière de notre délicieuse tante" (p. 104) or dancing as skillfully as their mothers did. For Kaya what she is she owes in a great part to the generation of her mother:

> Ma maman! J'aimais la regarder s'habilier... Ses gestes lents et mesurés retenaient toute mon attention de future femme noire. Ma mère et ses contemporaines ont essayé d'élever leurs filles et leurs nièces comme elles l'avaient été elles-mêmes. Mais l'école, égayée par les jeux, a façonné elle aussi le monde des filles noires des rives de la lagune aux origines diverses (Danseuses p. 29).

The dichotomy between the school and the mother's culture does not seem however to be a real source of anguish or déchirement for the narrator. They seem rather to combine as two positive sources which fashion "les filles noires," although not without some pain, some of it directly related to their condition de femme. The life of a girl is depicted as being much more difficult than that of her brothers. For Les Danseuses d'Impé-Eya offers insights into this aspect of the world of the African woman and girl not hitherto explored in masculine African literature. Some of the incidents may at first seem trivial--being comforted after a storm for example. But this incident provides the occasion for a description and explanation of how the relationship between the mother and her daughters develops and is nurtured and also of the problems

particular to being a girl in a society where girls grow up early and boys are much more favored.

After being caught in a storm the narrator revels in the joy of being coddled:

> Maman m'avait serrée plusieurs fois contre sa poitrine comme elle le faisait pour Marie, la dernière-née, encore bébé. Elle avait retrouvé pour nous les gestes maternels que notre âge et la naissance des petits frères et soeurs nous avaient ravis.... Maman fut tout entière à nous, les deux écolières; elle nous dispensa des menus travaux, et ce fut pour moi une vraie fête d'être câlinée par ma maman. J'aurais aimé qu'elle fût toujours ainsi (p. 28).

For male writers the mother is almost always presented under this aspect. But for girls as well as a maternal presence the mother is also of necessity a model and an authority figure therefore sometimes reproving, disapproving, and even severe:

> A la maison, les petites et les grandes filles devaient effectuer des travaux domestiques plus ou moins rébutants. Nous exécutions en général ce que les mères nous ordonnaient. Elles aussi savaient nous infliger quelques châtiments corporels; cela allait de la simple gifle à la privation d'un repas, en passant par quelques coups de chicotte ou de bâton. Maman utilisait les cordelettes de cuir chargées de petits sachets de protection qu'elle portait autour du cou (p. 39).

This correction is designed to make the girls into good wives and mothers because "Même devenues grandes dames, si vous êtes de mauvaises cuisinières, on refusera vos plâts, et c'est une insulte pour une femme. Je ne veux pas être accusée de vous avoir mal eduquée" (p. 99). The girls grow up in the traditional way. Although the family lives in Comikro, the quarter of Abidjan set aside for the families of African government office workers, their life is not much different from the rest of African township. "Les fillettes faisaient la vaisselle, la lessive, balayaient la cour et allaient apprendre à marchander au marché" (p. 32).

Mama does not resent her mother's insistence on training her in these tasks. However, she does make clear that it made life much more difficult for girls, especially for écolières. The fact of going to school did not dispense them from their household chores whereas their brothers were generally free to devote time to their studies.[20] Besides, trying to reconcile her father's and her mother's very different ideas of what it meant for a girl to be "bien eduquée" was a source of great strain for the young girl.

> Maman tenait à nous apprendre les diverses tâches menagères; papa voulait nous voir toujours occupées par notre travail scolaire. Cette situation me remplissait souvent d'une sourde colère. Les parents semblaient ignorer que tiraillées de tous côtés, il nous était difficile d'avoir d'aussi bons résultats scolaires que les garçons. Nos frères, même plus âgés, avaient des journées de travail moins chargées que nous (p. 42).

However, she adds that they somehow found the time to have fun regardless (p. 42).

For many male writers the school is the source of alienation not only from their families but from their society in general. For the narrator in Danseuses d'Impé-Eya her education separates her from her mother but draws her closer to her father: "Je crois qu'à cause de l'école, je me suis éloignée chaque jour un peu plus de ma mère" (p. 60). She dreamt of the day when her illiterate mother would be able to help her with her reading or come to school to speak with the headmistress. She rejoices that women's associations now make it possible for grown women to learn to read. Her father, however, "remplissait fort bien son rôle de papa lettré et fonctionnaire, qui se préoccupait de l'instruction des filles" (p. 60). his opinion of his daughter's worth is not based on the criteria of his tribe ("épouses soumises, femmes travailleuses, mères fécondes").[21] "Il disait que ses

filles valaient ses garçons. Il n'y avait qu'à comparer les cahiers des uns des autres" (p. 98). Their intellectual gifts are important to him. His ideas are revolutionary in the context of his culture and startling to women like his wife. Nevertheless he respects his wife's position and even goes as far as conforming to her expectations as to his behavior as a father when at home. "Mon père se faisait volontiers plus distant et plus sévère à la maison. Etait-ce la coutume qui le voulait? Je le crois, ma mère y veillait. Les filles devaient rester près de leur mère. Ce dont j'étais sure, c'était que dans son bureau, je retrouvais un Papa merveilleux" (p. 65). Mama shows clearly the difference between herself and women of her mother's generation. The possibilities for a freer more relaxed relationship as evidenced in her relationship with her father, a father/daughter relationship which her mother could not have tolerated, points to the hope of a radically different relationship between the sexes, which should carry over to the male-female relationship in the younger generation. The fact that her father desires, encourages and enjoys a freer, more intimate relationship with his daughters as well as with his sons indicates that Kaya is illustrating the possibility of an acceptance of this new situation on the part of the male. In fact the narrator mentions that her father treated her as equal to her brothers. This is reinforced by significant details. She notes his frequent assurance that he has confidence in her and that he often told her he was counting on her. He taught her to speak French very early and even introduced her to European ways and customs which her mother would have thought insolent in the circumstances of their own society (p. 65). Already she is learning to move between worlds.

Nevertheless, regardless of their different viewpoints, the couple

is presented as complementary. In spite of the value he places on education the father understands his wife's aims and desires for her daughters and encourages her when her efforts at teaching them seem to bear little fruit. "Papa lui disait alors qu'elle pourrait reprendre ses cours pendant les vacances...." (p. 100). The mother on the other hand despite her fears and anxieties does not long oppose her husband or try to dissuade him when he decides to send his daughters away to school. The decision to send his daughters to France, despite his wife's timid protests, gives rise to much controversy. Many of his friends are against educating women--mainly out of self-interest but also because the girls will be doomed to rejection and celibacy, in their society a frustration of their destiny as women: "Les Africains n'en voudront pas et les Blancs ne les épouseront pas, à cause de la couleur de leur peau." But already there are those who see the advantage of having an educated wife and who admit that times have changed. The narrator stresses how far things have come. However, the portrait of her parents, who are so important to her identity, seems to suggest that the narrator recognizes clearly the contribution both have made. Her educated father and her illiterate mother are a unified couple. The father is perhaps idealized but their relationship indicates that if each respects the other such marriages can work. The bitter conflict detailed in Okot p'Bitek's Song of Lawino, Song of Ocol, where an assimilé and his illiterate traditional wife hurl insults at each other, does not need to occur. But both partners need to make accomodations to recognize that both points of view have validity. Social roles need to be examined and re-defined.

If we extend the portrayal of this married couple to represent as it

were the marriage of Africa and Europe, of the traditional and the modern we see in this coupling of practical and mythical knowledge, with intellectual, analytical scientific knowledge, Kaya's hope for the future of the African woman and African society in general. Kaya does not deny the possibility of alienation or the dangers inherent in trying to reconcile these two opposing worlds.[22] But she questions whether there is any other way out besides flexibility and adaptability. ("Y-a-t-il une autre issue?") The three generations of women depicted show a definite progression in this regard. Adaptability is possible and can be positive. Mafifini, their "tante conteuse" representative of the imaginative and mythical, adapts and evolves: she acquires a taste for the cinema and regales her nieces and nephews with stories from the movies. "Cette tante montrait autant de talent pour nous raconter les films importés d'Europe que pour nous dire les légendes africaines" (Danseuses p. 106). Their aunt, however, is careful to protect them from certain kinds of films. She is selective in her acceptance of what Europe has to offer. Moreover, the girls' sojourn in Europe allows them to realize and to reassure their mothers that "Chez les Blancs il y avait aussi des croyances de bonnes femmes" and that their European sisters, some of whom love to scrub and sew, are not so different from them after all.

Moreover, while the girls are conscious that: "L'école était un lieu où le savoir acquis différait souvent de ce que nous apprenaient nos mamans" this is not presented as a source of anguish. They continue to be delighted and fascinated both by Mafitini's stories and by the new explanations of things acquired from their course books and school lessons (Danseuses, p. 23). It is as if the two different contradictory

worlds complement and fulfill each other: "Nous comparions volontiers le contenu des livres avec les proverbes, les contes et légendes qu'en famille on racontait dans les cours, les soirs de clair de lune, ou à l'intérieur autour d'un feu, d'une lampe à huile, ou d'une lampe tempête quand il pleuvait la nuit" (Danseuses, p. 22). This ability to encompass both worlds and to respect and benefit from them both is partly explained by the narrator's family background and especially by the character of her father who seems to have succeeded in reconciling contradictory tendencies by picking out what for him is positive and beneficial in each. He is Christian, yet devoted to tradition. "Cependant, malgré la religion chrétienne, nos parents avaient conservé le culte que notre tribu vouait aux ancêtres et aux morts" (Danseuses, p. 45). He wants his children to be free of "certaines croyances ou superstitions" (p. 45) in order to be educated, yet Mama says "Mon père avait le plus grand respect pour notre totem" (p. 46), a seeming paradox. Mama's father was not born in his faso or ancestral village. However, his respect for tradition and his attachment to the ways and customs of his people made him take his children on an important "pèlerinage aux sources" as his own father had done before him. This journey allowed the narrator to learn about her origins, a heritage and customs which to her were strange and fascinating: "Pour nous, enfants de Comikro, dits 'nés en brousse', ces histoires de coutumes de notre faso nous paraissaient quelquefois aussi anciennes que la vie des Gaulois, les ancêtres des Français, dont parlait notre livre d'histoire" (p. 71).

The life of the village in the savannah in the north is fascinating in its novelty and crucial to Mama's understanding of her heritage. For

three months the family lives the life of the village. The children are as happy there as they are in the city and are surprised at their village cousins' fierce sense of pride. "...pour eux nous étions de pauvres enfants qui n'avaient pas encore reçu la bonne éducation (emphasis added) de la maison de leurs pères" (p. 78). Life is hard but full. The women cultivate vegetables and peanut fields, spend long hours preparing dishes and weaving cloth. There are restrictions: girls cannot leave their village, they cannot take part in certain games; they can guard the flocks and cattle but may not ride the horses or donkeys. The girls from the city are initiated into the tribe as "futures jeunes mariées qui quitteraient le village et qui par leur conduite d'épouses soumises, de femmes travailleuses et de mères fécondes, montreraient combien les originaires de notre terre étaient des gens d'honneur" (Danseuses p. 83). It is this firm anchor and sense of belonging which Ken, the heroine of Le Baobab Fou seems to lack.

If her portrait of her father seems at times unrealistic and idealized and if her belief in the possibility of marriage between traditional and the rational appears naive, Kaya maintains credibility and her optimism is convincing. Perhaps because she understands that "les interdits les plus risibles aujourd'hui ont leur explication dans un événement qui s'est passé chez les ascendants d'une famille" (Danseuses p. 46). Kaya is able to present the traditional elements as valid without imbuing them with the symbolic or mystical aspects of some of her male counterparts. These traditional elements are preserved and handed down largely by her mother "Ma mère a appris à ses filles à se soigner avec certaines plantes et à connaître la valeur d'un bijou, ou même les propriétés quasi-surnaturelles d'un objet ou d'un geste ou d'un

salut" (Danseuses p. 46). Kaya insists also on the solidarity which existed between families in their ancestral villages and which is carried over to the African township (Danseuses pp. 68-69).

The young scholars going off to France are offered some advice: It is a wonderful opportunity but "il ne fallait pas oublier les parents, le quartier, le pays et la race" (p. 107). It is her knowledge and ability to heed this advice which make of the new docteur-ès-science a different individual from the tragic young African woman portrayed in Ken Bugul's Le Baobab Fou which we will discuss later in this study. Let us now pass on to the other two autobiographical works, Ndiaye's Collier de Cheville first of all.

Collier de Cheville reconstructs with a woman's eye the everyday life of pre-war Dakar. The preparation of food, the wearing of perfume, clothes, jewelry, their meaning and value in the life of a community, are all painstakingly recounted. Written in the third person the narrative style is familiar, colloquial, that of a narrator relating her souvenirs to a friendly, eager, audience. But Adja Ndeye Boury Ndiaye's Collier de Cheville is not only the story of a family and of the everyday life in Dakar described in minute and exact detail. It questions many traditions and offers the portrait of a very strong woman, the remarkable "tante Lika." Lika is the dominant figure in her household and in the work. Married at 15 to Idrissa, a woodworker and cabinetmaker, she is still childless at 30. Tiny and feminine, Lika wears around her ankle a mysterious anklet of red beads (the "collier" of the title) which intrigues her family but which she refuses to explain even to the end. When her sister-in-law dies in childbirth the family decides that "la Lika d'Idrissa," as she is designated, a

significant phrase, is the most suitable person to come to her brother's aid until he can choose a new wife. Her brother in turn dies soon afterwards, and Lika assumes the care and responsibility for his two surviving children, Rokhaya and Mamadou. Her husband is forced to come to live in his in-laws' house, much against his will, because such a situation is threatening to his manhood: "son autorité et ses aises s'en ressentaient" (Collier p. 24).[23] The couple are unusual.

The narrator explains that in Wolof the term for husband, "borom ker," means "propriétaire immobilier" and Idrissa's complex is understandable as he is not under his own roof. The man should always be master in his home. The relationship between the couple is based on traditional bonds but it is different in that it was Idrissa himself and not his family who chose Lika. It is obvious that he loves his wife. The author seems to indicate here that romantic love and personal preference take precedence over traditional customs. At his parents' urging Idrissa had in fact taken over two other wives who gave him children but he repudiated them both in favor of childless Lika. Although his pride suffers both from Lika's being childless and from having to live in his in-laws' house, Idrissa and Lika are happy together. He is quiet and reserved, almost morose, devoted to his woodwork and his Moslem religion. Lika, on the other hand, is practical and outgoing. It is she who runs the household, looks after the children, cooks, weaves, sews, embroiders. She has her own money for she makes "akara," delicious bean fritters, to sell to her neighbors. Like Yama in Fall's Le revenant, although in principle subservient to her husband, Lika asserts and maintains her independence. She is unusually self-willed for a wife of her time and culture. She refuses to give in to her husband when he

demands that she strip her bedroom walls of her family photos. "Lika refusa tout net" (Collier p. 25). She is enterprising. It is she who builds up and maintains good relations with their neighbors so her husband will have enough work (Collier p. 21). When he reproaches her for not having children of her own, his wife to his astonishment answers him back. He reacts with typical male horror at the affront: "Ah ça! quel toupet, quelle audace! Idrissa faillit en tomber à la renverse" (Collier p. 26), yet he puts up with it. Moreover, in defiance she dares to tell him that she has had not children of her own because she has so far wanted none, a position unacceptable and unheard of in her community. She begs God to help her to have a child in order to prove her point and to sustain the challenge she has made to Idrissa. She finally becomes a mother at 37--an age when many of her contemporaries are already grandparents. (Perhaps a concession on the author's part?) She has two more children at 38 and at 40. Her own children imitate their cousins and call her "tante." the fact that she is known only as "tante" is significant perhaps of her independence and special position for as Lika herself says "Une tante ça se respecte" (p. 130). Lika, like Fall's Yama, is a strong, intelligent woman, who controls her own life, although she is married. Both offer comments on the possibilities for women within their communities and family structure.

Ndiaye's book gives many insights into the rearing and socialization of boys and girls in her society and into the nature of the male-female relationship. The work leads to a greater understanding of the complexities facing both men and women in any attempt to redefine their relationships. From the beginning boys are favored in order to ensure that they will be in fact stronger and intellectually superior and therefore

better able to exercise their authority: girl babies are breast-fed for 24 months but boys for no longer than 18 months, as the narrator explains: "au-delà de un an et demi, l'enfant qui continue à têter risque d'être faible et un peu dégourdi" (Collier p. 26), a risk which one can only run when the baby is a girl! The narrator comments further: "Dès le sevrage donc, le petit garçon est privilégié par rapport à la fille, il s'adonnera à temps à une nourriture consistante et diversifiée. Il doit devenir plus fort physiquement, et plus intelligent que sa future compagne sur laquelle il exercera mieux sa suprêmatie" (Collier p. 2). The society demands that the man should be superior.

The desirability of male superiority is embedded in the folklore. Lika tells her children and niece and nephew the story of Sass, "la jeune fille rapide" who although beautiful could not find a husband. "Tellement véloce dans n'importe quoi qu'elle puisse entreprendre, que tous les hommes de son village en étaient complexés. Ils évitaient même de la rencontrer" (Collier p. 60). Her despairing parents organize a contest but Sass remains unbeaten and therefore unmarried. One day quite by chance she meets a hunter who proves to be more rapid than she is. "Depuis lors, tous les hommes de son village ont pu souffler. Elle avait trouvé son maître..." (Collier p. 62). The superior prowess of this young girl threatens to upset the calm of the whole village. The story passes on this lesson. Girls must therefore be kept from being too fast or too intelligent or too educated. Anything which will make them superior is taboo. Idrissa insists that his girls must not go beyond primary school: "'Il ne faut point leur donner des ailes, elles s'en serviraient!'" he says (Collier p. 2). Accordingly, his niece Rokhaya stops going to school as soon as she has passed her "certificat

d'études," at 12. Moreover soon afterwards, in order to indicate that she is of marriageable age, her aunt stops shaving her head.[24]

Ndiaye gives details of the procedures for courtship describing specifically the pleasure the prospective suitors get from being served something to drink, preferably water, for "ce n'était pas qu'on leur servirait à boire qui avait de l'importance, mais plutôt de voir l'objet de leur convoîtise, leur dulcinée s'agenouiller devant eux déjà asservie" (emphasis added; Collier p. 56). The woman always kneels to serve the man. The privileged position of the man is clearly underlined.

Idrissa's opinions and behavior therefore only reflect the prevailing norms in his society. His own parents had objected to Lika and did not expect the marriage to last because "Ce sont des femmes de tête qu'il y a dans cette famille! Des femmes qui décident ne font pas de bonnes épouses" (Collier p. 23). Idrissa tries to ensure that his own daughters and niece will make good wives, that is, subservient ones, for "les femmes, même d'âge avancé, s'agenouillaient toujours devant les hommes, soit pour les saluer ou pour les remercier ou pour les servir" (Collier p. 5).

Moreover women are not free to decide their own future. When Rokhaya will not make up her mind among her suitors her uncle

> ...jugea que la situation n'avait que trop duré. Il "donna" Rokhaya comme troisième épouse à l'un de ses neveux.
>
> Rokhaya fut encore plus expéditive que Pa Driss. Elle divorça l'année suivante, après avoir accouché d'un garçon... (Collier p. 57)

The narrator's language and her quotation marks around "donna" suggest Ndiaye's point of view. Pa Driss's right to "give" his niece is called into question. She implies that his action and dispatch are objectionable. His niece proves to be "plus expéditive" however. She

disposes of her husband and remarries the man of her choice, a former suitor. Rokhaya shows herself to be like her aunt, independent and "une femme de tête." Besides, as noted before, according to the narrator it was Idrissa himself who chose Lika and their marriage, relationship, and household are certainly not typical. However, the relationship is portrayed as happy and successful despite its being out of tune with many of the society's norms.

We recall that Lika is independent, childless for nearly 20 years, they live in her parents' house and yet Idrissa in spite of his amour propre and initial discomfort comes to accept the situation and to live with it happily. In spite of the fact that Lika is portrayed as uneducated, superstitious and in many ways very traditional, her acts of defiance and self-assertion show that this Senēgalaise has a mind of her own. She insists that even the girls learn to read and write French. She goes to a Catholic requiem mass, incurring her husband's displeasure. "Musulman fervent comme il était, cette conduite de Lika le mit hors de lui" (Collier p. 45). Lika however stoutly defends her action "Je ne vois rien d'autre dans une église qu'une maison de Dieu; et puis ... une fois n'est pas coutume!" (Collier p. 45).

Ndiaye's portrait of Lika shows her to be not only sure of herself and independent but questioning, more "aware" than her husband. In the context of her upbringing and her society, she is unusually liberated.

The incidents presented in Collier de Cheville and Lika's behavior and attitudes call into question the prevailing norms in her society, especially with regard to the status of women and sexual roles. However, there is an obvious omission. Although Lika's household is Moslem and she had to bear the pain of two co-épouses the question of polygamy is

not discussed in Collier de Cheville. In fact Lika advises her nephew, Doudou, that Moslem marriage practice allows him to make a bad first choice with impunity, for unlike his Christian companions he is not bound to a monogamous union. Thus she gives tacit approval to the practice. There are instances of women who return home after being divorced, briefly mentioned in passing, but the situation of the repudiated wife or of her children is not touched on. Such occurrences seem to have been fairly common. Rokhaya leaves the child of her first marriage at home with her aunt when she gets married for the second time. This also seems to have been an accepted practice as it is merely mentioned, not debated or commented on.[25]

The situation of the married woman as presented by these works is somewhat ambiguous. Polygamy as an issue does not arise either in Nafissatou Diallo's De Tilène au Plateau, although the household is Moslem and most of the men live with two or more wives. Safi's grandmother is one of two co-épouses and at her father's death we find out that he has three wives. Even when he takes a second wife "une jeune femme" the attitude of the young narrator is one of matter-of-fact acceptance of a normal situation. She finds out about his marriage from her grandmother and remarks that she had noticed his frequent visits to St. Louis:

> Il y passait des week-ends, et quand il y allait, il prenait un soin particulier de sa personne, s'habillant alors à rendre jaloux un jeune homme de 20 ans. ... Il ne rentrait de ses voyages que le lundi, parfois le dimanche dans la nuit. C'est en réponse à mes questions que grand-mère finalement m'apprit le mariage et me montra la photo d'une jeune femme, sa belle-fille (De Tilène p. 5).

This same situation is treated quite differently by other writers. It is difficult to read this passage in the light of Mariama Bâ's Une si

longue lettre, or of the moving scene in Aminata Sow Fall's La Grève des Bâttu where Mour anounces to his wife, Lolli, that he is going to take a second wife, and not to imagine an anguished wife. However, Safi does not condemn, reproach or even criticize her father. If her step-mother suffers as a result of the new co-épouse Safi is not aware of it. She mentions that the young woman never comes to see them but continues to live in St. Louis although she often sends greetings. Safi's final comment on the situation, "Je devais la connaître et l'apprécier plus tard," (p. 75) certainly contains no hint of resentment against this young woman. It is perhaps because Safi's own mother is dead and she is being brought up by her grandmother that the child has this attitude. Her grandmother is herself a co-épouse and seems to be completely at ease with her situation. She lives with her husband and her co-épouse, they each have separate apartments and tasks, and there is no mention of jealousy or rivalry between them. It is perhaps a function of her age and conditioning. Still it is odd that, although so many aspects of the feminine condition are discussed in the work, polygamy as a source of friction or suffering for the woman does not come up. Safi, however, makes it clear later on that her own marriage is a love-match, to a man of her own choosing, and all her attitudes and actions lead one to suspect she would certainly not tolerate a co-épouse. (She breaks with her first fiance because he ignores her and flirts with her friends at a party, a situation which she finds intolerable.) She also reiterates on several occasions that she finds many traditional beliefs and customs restrictive and unreasonable and remarks that times have changed. Perhaps in the context of her society and her respect for her father any more explicit condemnation is not possible. Although the matter of

polygamy is perhaps skirted, the work does address many other issues of direct relevance to women.

De Tilène au Plateau is the story of a family but also and above all of an individual woman, Safi, and of what influences and experiences made her what she is. The title refers to the family's move from the African quarter of Tilène to the Plateau, the enclave of Europeans and of a few select Africans, most of whom, like Safi's father, work for the government. It also symbolizes an evolution, a move away from traditional values and a journey of development on the part of the young narrator, from self-willed child to mature and competent young professional, from dependency through rebellion to a measure of self-fulfillment. In traditional African literature, such as the contes already mentioned above, there are no individuals but rather types, and what is foremost is the good of the group. We have already noted also that in much African fiction this tradition has largely prevailed, and "characterization," in the European sense, especially where female characters are concerned, is often of minor importance. Diallo's work, therefore, although an autobiographical récit du vécu, has more in common with novels in the Western tradition as far as the development of a character is concerned and represents a departure from the trend in most francophone African literature.[26] Diallo in fact states her intention to break with tradition in writing her book.

In De Tilène au Plateau not only do we see things through Safi's eyes, but the consciousness of the main persona, and the effect that events, people, and places have on her are of foremost concern. The focus is on Safi. Diallo's own words are revealing. She makes the point that she is an ordinary woman writing about ordinary people and adds:

"'Ecrire un livre pour dire qu'on a aimé Père et Grand-Mère? La belle nouvelle! J'espère avoir fait un peu plus: avoir été au-delà des tabous de silence qui règnent sur nos émotions (emphasis added; De Tilène p. 132). Diallo has in fact succeeded in her intention. Earlier in the book Safi remarks that in her society displaying one's emotions openly is frowned upon, even if these emotions are positive ones like affection and love. Her spirit rebels: "En général, l'affection restait enfouie dans nos coeurs; on n'osait la dévoiler sous peine de passer pour mal élevé, occidentalisé. Je maudissais dans mon for intérieur notre éducation, sa sévérité, ses componctions, ses tabous" (De Tilène p. 62). This attitude perhaps partly accounts for the absence of introspective writing in much African fiction and Diallo's own reaction points to some of the differences in her book. Safi does examine and articulate in detail very intimate thoughts and feelings about things which affect her deeply even to the extent of breaking traditional taboos. She describes, for example, her reactions to harsh treatment of pregnant schoolmates, to her father's illness and death and her anger at the behavior of the people who come to her father's funeral, behavior which, although harmful and "indecent," she is powerless to prevent: "Je ne pouvais intervenir, étant trop jeune, et même mes aînés ne pouvaient le faire sans passer pour des 'cas particuliers'." (De Tilène p. 130).[27] As in Kaya and in Ndiaye, and like other women writers, Diallo recognizes tradition as being extremely powerful. However, Diallo, through Safi in the narrative, is not afraid to question and even to openly criticize traditional values and practices. Safi is in many ways a revolutionary character. She is in fact the first girl in the family whom her grandfather "allowed" to go to school. All her cousins are jealous of

her. The work abounds in such small but significant details. In the course of Safi's reminiscences we are exposed to many female figures: young girls, sisters, cousins, schoolgirls, écolières, colégiennes, lycéennes, teachers, aunts, belles-soeurs, filles-mères, grandmothers. The relationship and interaction between these different girls and women is described in detail and offers valuable insights into the real lives and experiences of women.[28]

Safi first grows up in a large house in Tilène. The family is well-off and somewhat "occidentalisée." They are allowed to have parties, for example, to listen to records and to dance. This is important--her father is a strict Moslem, but open to outside influences. Her grandmother is the dominant figure in her life. Her older sister Fatou, her "petite mère," is also very important to her development. Thus we have many types of central female characters. As in Ndiaye's and Kaya's works we read about the typically feminine world--of various types of food, dress, perfume, hairstyles, etc., but Diallo gives insights and explanations not found in the other works. We learn, for example, that only certain women wore European clothes. Long dresses or pagnes were de rigueur for the strict Moslem women. The girls at the "Collège," for example, wore short skirts, straightened their hair, wore make-up, indications of their liberation and "progress."[29] Note that "progress" and liberation are perceived wholly in terms of external (Western) characteristics and indicated by adopting Western modes of dress and behavior. One of Safi's friends had once been elected "Miss Gorée." (She was, however, a Catholic, not a Moslem girl. Moslems adhered to stricter conduct.) Only certain professions were open to women--they could become secretaries, nurses, teachers or midwives, like

the author. However, to think of becoming an airline hostess, "ce mêtier éprouvé et scandaleux qui interdisait le mariage" (De Tilène p. 108) for most Senégalaises was out of question. It is a measure of her independent-mindedness that being an airline hostess was the only thing that interested Safi at a certain point! She abandons the idea only because her father is very ill.

Diallo offers insights into questions not dealt with in male African fiction--the preoccupations and lives of adolescent girls; attitudes towards sex and pregnancy, and most significantly, the treatment meted out to those unfortunate girls who become pregnant in a society where modesty and virginity are prime values. Safi describes the life of the girls who form gangs and fight, tease lepers, steal mangoes, have rendezvous and conduct little love affairs unknown to their parents. Although the adults are so reticent to talk about such things that when her married sister becomes pregnant her indisposition is explained away "par pudeur" as being due to "la grippe," there are instances of unmarried mothers. In fact, three of her classmates in "troisième" are pregnant "à quelques jours de l'examen du Brêvet." The girls are talked about and their teacher makes life very hard for them and lectures their classmates "portes et volets clos." But interestingly, they are not forced to leave school and in fact Safi comments that the unfortunate girls react by studying hard and succeed "brilliantly" in their exams. The narrator's own attitude to these girls is extremely sympathetic. She also describes the pathetic plight of her cousin, a "fille-mère" at a wedding, where the older women are celebrating the virginity of the bride which has brought honor to the family while upbraiding the "fille-mère" with bitter remarks:

> La tête baissée, recroquevillée dans son coin, elle supportait l'assaut. J'avais pitié d'elle. Je maudissais ces vieilles femmes s'acharnant sur une personne qui n'était ni leur fille ni leur parente, qui n'avait pas de compte à leur rendre. Il en était ainsi dans les cérémonies de mariage et mieux valait pour les filles-mères s'abstenir de ces cérémonies (De Tilène p. 70).

These older women and "tantes" represent a special group.

Older women are one of the powerful factors for maintaining the traditions and the status quo. They are resistant to change, easily scandalize and are scandalized. The "tantes" and "belles-soeurs" (titles which designate several categories of female blood relatives and in-laws) are forces to be reckoned with, and the traditions recognize and perpetuate this.[30] The money and presents given to a bride, for example, are largely divided between the female relatives. Any young man seeking favor in a family can do so by means of gifts of money to the aunts, who will in turn press his suit. They are presented, as in other works (cf. Aminata Fall), as narrow-minded and somewhat selfish, not just in the jealous protection of family honor, but also when it comes to the good of their own relative, the future bride: "La générosité était pour elles, après la naissance, la qualité primordiale des gendres. Elles ne se souciaient guère de leurs qualités morales ou de leur niveau intellectuel" (De Tilène p. 106). The aunts make it their duty to see that the good of the family is upheld, which often means sacrificing the individual's happiness, most often that of a woman, since men are freer and more in control of their destinies. Safi's grandmother and her sister Fatou are different in this regard as, although conscious of the family's name, they seek most Safi's own good and happiness. Safi is very aware of the situation of women in her society where family honor is crucial, yet so easily betrayed. Family honor is intimately bound up

with age-old traditions of valiant warriors and virtuous maidens. The worst disgrace for a family was a cowardly youth or a girl who brought dishonor by her conduct.

> Et on y croyait, en ce temps-là, à l'honneur: celui du nom de la familie, du clan. Et ce n'était pas une vertu d'importation, quelque chose d'appris dans les livres; cela venait de beaucoup plus loin. Nos contes et nos légendes étaient pleins de filles chastes, de querriers héroiques, de mères nobles jusqu'à la mort (De Tilène p. 88).

A girl's honor resides in her modesty and above all in her virginity. Thus Safi's grandmother is adamant, she warns her that now that she is "une vraie jeune fille" she has to be especially careful:

> Tu n'es plus une enfant depuis que tu as tes règles. Méfie-toi! Fais très attention. Lors de tes menstrues, n'approche sous aucun prétexte les garçons! Eloigne-toi d'eux comme de la peste. Leur "odeur" même pourrait te rendre enceinte. Ce serait la honte et le déshonneur et j'en mourrais (De Tilène p. 77).

Her father too is conscious of family honor and is almost obsessive in his attitude to his daughters and their relations with the opposite sex. Safi notes, for example, that her indulgent father is unreasonable only on one point: when it comes to his daughter's free association with boys, he cannot be persuaded, it is forbidden. He almost kills her, beating her mercilessly, when he sees her kissing her boyfriend in the street. He tells her clearly: "Fille méprisable, tu nous a déshonorés" (p. 89). Explicitly we are told it is not because Safi is endangering her own future but because she has disgraced her family. Even to a loving father a daughter must be sacrificed to family honor: "Qu'elle meure! C'est ce qu'elle mérite." A father seeks to protect the family honor by safeguarding his own daughters, yet many older men exploit innocent young girls. Safi herself is being honorably courted by an older man while still at the lycée and she describes the popularity of

the student-midwives with unscrupulous men out for a good time:

> Les week-ends et jours de fêtes, les voitures défilaient devant le portail, et des querelles mettaient publiquement aux prises des maris et leurs épouses informées de leurs frasques.
>
> Oui, c'était un monde de tentation surtout pour les jeunes filles de la brousse qui brusquement se trouvaient en présence d'hommes "généreux". Beaucoup d'entre elles, sans réfléchir, s'engageaient dans des situations sans issue. Heureusement pour moi que j'étais liée et je craignais beaucoup les "qu'en dira-t-on" (De Tilène p. 115)

In this situation both wife and sweetheart are being exploited.

As has been said so often before, this society is structured to favor the male. The father, uncle, or elder brother who is head of the family is all powerfull and has certain obligations. Being responsible for the girls in the family they are subject to him, he must protect them, but can dispose of them as he wishes. Handed over to her husband the woman then becomes subject to him. The woman's place is properly at home, subordinate to her husband: "L'homme en avant, la femme au foyer" (p. 42). She derives all her value and worth from her husband and in the sight of the male, hence the high premium on virginity. Thus from early the girls vie for the attentions of the young men of promise. It is especially prestigious to have a fiancé who is studying in France. Personal preference and romantic love are not of major importance when it comes to marriage. Even Safi's friends are against her when she wants to break off her engagement to a suitable match "just because" she has fallen in love. They find her impossible and cannot understand her behavior. Even to the younger generation honor and position come before love.

Safi's own development is enhanced by a strong, determined and rebellious nature seconded by positive relationships with her sister and her grandmother, who console and sustain her in a broken love affair,

"une vraie lumière, stable, gentille. Energique et douce, elle me guida à travers ce qui fut un vrai réapprentissage de la vie (De Tilène p. 91). But, as in the case of Kaya's heroine, it is her relationship with her father which is the source of her identity and possibility for liberation. It is only because he permits it that she is allowed to break the mold. (Just as her grandfather permitted her, the first girl, to go to school). Her liberation is largely the result of her own efforts but without her father's approval, or at least lack of opposition, change would be much more difficult. He is the center of their universe "notre lumière" (De Tilène, p. 132) and literally directs their lives.

Safi respects and adores her father but recognizes that many of his attitudes are wrong:

> Lucide, je le condamnais non seulement pour cette violence meurtrière vis-à-vis de moi, mais pour ses attitudes fondamentales elles-mêmes vis-à-vis des problèmes de la vie. Je voulais vivre et trouvais le chemin barré de restrictions. J'avais entrepris d'aimer et il voulait noyer mon amour dans ce qu'il appelait l'honneur (De Tilène, p. 90).

Despite her love of her religion and her regard for her father's wishes she makes her own decisions. She is able to free herself in a way that the older generation, her aunts, belles-soeurs, grandmother and even some of her friends cannot. She thinks for herself but would prefer approval, does not want to offend. At the end of the work as she is leaving for France her grandmother symbolically "frees her" as she bids her farewell: "Nous nous regardâmes longuement, puis elle me fit de la main le geste qui me libérait: 'Va avec la paix!' dit-elle" (De Tilène p. 133). She craves her grandmother's blessing and approval. Similarly, Safi's relationship with her father is ambiguous and extremely complex and reflects the ambivalent relationship of many young African women to

their societies. Safi explains her dilemma:

> Je me rebellai. Mon amour-propre se souvenait de cette correction où j'avais été rouée pire qu'une bête, comme un objet, un tapis, et les battements de mon coeur se précipitaient de révolte.
>
> Pourtant, si je souffrais d'avoir été humiliée, je souffrais aussi pour père. Comprenne qui voudra, ou qui pourra. J'étais malheureuse, malade presque, d'avoir fait perdre à cet homme grave le contrôle de lui-même. Je souffrais de l'avoir fait souffrir, car il faut qu'il eût été profondément blessé (De Tilène p. 90).

The three novels by Diallo, Kaya and Ndiaye treat aspects of women's lives hitherto unmentioned and largely inaccessible to the male writer. Though mainly positive and optimistic, they do not present idealized images of African women or of motherhood. They are characterized by realistic portrayals of the daily lives of women: the struggle and toil of rural women; the problems and temptations of the young, urban, evoluée, with her ambitions and sometimes false notions of liberation which leave her open to unscrupulous men; the harsh censure of unmarried motherhood; the differences in roles and attitudes between generations of women and the friction created in their relationships with each other as women. In the larger context of biography, the works are concerned with "women's issues" and lay the ground for works which are more explicit attempts to "raise consciousness." The African woman is shown rebelling, doing things and making choices which were not open to her before. But at the same time this way of life does violence to her and to some of her relationships. Her rebellion is a source of anguish if others close to her cannot or will not approve of her new concept of herself and her relationships. Animata Sow Fall and Mariama Bâ's novels address these issues more explicitly and directly.

Notes

[1] Chemain-Degrange, Arlette, Emancipation-féminine et roman africain, p. 347.

[2] Chemain-Degrange, p. 347.

[3] Chemain-Degrange, p. 347, emphasis added.

[4] Chemain-Degrange, p. 23.

[5] Chemain-Degrange, p. 18.

[6] Victor Aire calls Sembène "sans doute le premier écrivain féministe africain." Aire, Victor O. rev. of Une si longue lettre, by Mariama Bâ, Canadian Journal of African Studies, vol. 16, no. 2, 1982, p. 636.

[7] Aire, p. 636.

[8] For a fuller discussion of this point in anglophone African literature, see Lloyd W. Brown's article "The African Woman as Writer" in Canadian Journal of African Studies, vol. ix, no. 3, 1975, pp. 493-501.

[9] Brown, p. 495.

[10] See for example Binetou's mother in Bâ's Une si longue lettre.

[11] Buchi Emecheta, The Slave Girl (New York: George Braziller, 1977), p. 179, quoted by Brenda F. Berrian in "African Women as seen in the Works of Flora Nwapa and Ama Ata Aidoo," College Language Association 25, no. 3 (March 1982), p. 339.

[12] Charles R. Larson, The Novel in the Third World, p. 134.

[13] Cheikh Hamidou Kane, Preface to Simone Kaya's Les Danseuses d'Impé-Eya, p. 9, 1976.

[14] Nafissatou Diallo, De Tilène au Plateau, une enfance dakaroise (Dakar-Abidjan: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1975). All further references occur in the text and are indicated as De Tilène.

[15] Brown, p. 496.

[16] Mariama Bâ, Interview with Barbara Harrell-Bond, American Universities Field Staff Reports, 1981, no. 10, Africa, p. 2.

[17] Simone Kaya, Les danseuses d'Impé-Eya: jeunes filles à Abidjan (Inades: Abidjan, 1976), p. 16. All further references appear in the text and are indicated as Danseuses.

[18] "Contrary to what is often thought today the African woman does not need to be liberated. She has been free for many thousands of years," Senghor, Lépold, Sédar, Prose and Poetry, ed. and trans. by John Reed and Clive Wake quoted by Brown, p. 493.

[19] Cf. for example, Ken Bugul's Le baobab fou or Cheikh Hamidou Kane's L'aventure ambigue.

[20] Similarly Gnagna in Collier de Cheville is assigned domestic duties on her only days at home--her days off from her job at the hospital.

[21] This description or variations of it recurs often in black women's fiction, cf. Condé, Une saison à Rihata, description of Zek's ideal woman, p. 37.

[22] Tinga "l'ancien tirailleur" whose true stories about France fascinate the school-girls is mad, not doubt as a result of his voyages to Europe.

[23] Ndiaye, Adja Ndeye Boury, Collier de cheville (Dakar: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1983), p. 24. All further references appear in the text and are indicated as Collier.

[24] Little girls' heads, Ndiaye tells us, are partly shaved until puberty; the pattern of the tonsure being determined by one's family name.

[25] Although Simone Kaya mentions the plight of children in patrilinear communities whose divorced mothers must leave them behind to be cared for by step-mothers.

[26] See Chinweizu's discussion of characterization in African and European novels in Chinweizu, Nowuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuke, Toward the Decolonization of African Literature (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980), pp. 113ff.

[27] Mariama Bâ also treats these situations similarly and in some depth in her two novels.

[28] E.g., one grandmother is simply "Mame" the other "Mame Soda" indicative of the narrator's special closeness with the first.

[29] Mariama Bâ mentions that such a woman in her generation was known somewhat disparagingly as "une courte robe," Une si longue lettre, p. 30.

[30] See Assane Sylla, La philosophie morale des Wolof (Dakar: Sankore, 1978).

Chapter Two

"L'Evoluée"

The Woman in Contemporary African Society--Negative Aspects--

Mariama Bâ, Aminata Sow Fall

The male-female relationship, changing status and attitudes of women, the problem of polygamy: Mariama Bâ

Mariama Bâ's and Aminata Sow Fall's novels are set in modern post-independence Senegal and focus on problems which concern women in a society where traditional attitudes and women's aspirations have yet to be reconciled, even within the women themselves. Both writers have particular appeal to women. In Bâ's novels, Une si longue lettre (1980) and Un chant écarlate (1981), woman's unhappiness is shown to be the direct result of her mate's egotistical and irresponsible behavior, behavior sanctioned by the society's mores, and even in many instances accepted by the women themselves. (Bâ's heroines have been described as "victims.") This is also true of certain characters in Fall's novels (Lolli in La grève des Bâttu 1976 , Sada's wife in Le revenant 1980). But Fall especially sees the question of women's rights and status in more universal terms. It is the society's values which need to be examined. Women, in Fall's novels, must accept responsibility for their lives. They are also guilty because often they do nothing to change these values.Both Bâ and Fall show women, especially older women, who because of their restricted upbringing and limited vision are largely

responsible for their own and other women's unhappiness. Sometimes women even set out deliberately to cause this unhappiness. Through the portrayal of the male and of this older generation of women who stubbornly adhere to retrograde destructive values Bâ and Fall indict their own society and society as a whole. Beyond "women's issues" the works, especially Fall's novels, have a wider context. Fall, on the surface, approaches closest to what might be described as explicitly feminist, militant literature. Yet her works have much larger implications for the society in general. They are modern folk-tales. She addresses questions of fundamental concern in any community: such as poverty and privilege, exploitation and basic human rights. We will examine first Bâ's novels.

Central to Une si longue lettre is the male-female relationship, the potentially pernicious effects of polygamy, and the ability of the rejected woman to come to terms with her situation, pick up the pieces and re-create her identity in a new way. The two central characters, Aissatou and Ramatoulaye, represent two different viewpoints and two different accomodations to the same situation. The book takes the form of a letter, but is really a sort of "journal intime." Ramatoulaye, a recently widowed schoolteacher replies to a letter from her friend Aissatou, an interpreter in the diplomatic service of her country. In her letter Ramatoulaye reminisces about their former marriages. Each had married a kind, responsible, educated husband who subsequently took a second younger wife. Aissatou had rebelled. She left her husband, took her boy-chidren with her, continued her studies and joined the diplomatic corps. Ramatoulaye accepted her situation with resignation and anquish. Despite her children's urging she refused to leave her

husband. Weighed down with the financial and parental responsibilities for twelve children, she accepts her lot philosophically and struggles to cope. Her lucidity and new independence represent however a silent revolt. Modou, Ramatoulaye's husband, seemingly forgetful of all sense of responsibility and of twenty-five years of a good, happy marriage, deserts his wife and children. Ignoring Moslem precepts he carelessly squanders money on his new wife and her family. Ramatoulaye is left alone to support her children emotionally and financially.

Some years later Modou dies suddenly of a heart-attack. Writing to her friend, Ramatoulaye reflects on her life and her society. Unlike her daughters, Ramatoulaye, Bâ's narrator, was firmly attached to certain social and religious precepts. She says "Mon coeur s'accorde aux exigences religieuses. Nourrie, dès l'enfance, à leurs sources rigides, je crois que je ne faillirai pas" (Lettre, p. 18). Nevertheless, in her generation she had been a pioneer, in many ways breaking new ground for African womanhood and suffering because of it: "Car, premières pionnières de la promotion de la femme africaine, nous étions peu nombreuses. Des hommes nous taxaient d'écervelées. D'autres nous désignaient comme des diablesses. Mais beaucoup voulaient nous posséder" (Lettre, p. 26). The women of her generation were the first to be educated in European schools and therefore westernized. They were known as "courte robe" (Lettre, p. 30) and regarded with suspicion. Their husbands were considered "progressive" to have married such women. Theirs was an era of ferment and new beginnings: "Ecartelés entre le passé et le présent, nous déplorions les 'suintements' qui ne manqueraient pas.... Nous dénombrions les pertes possibles. Mais nous sentions que plus rien ne serait comme avant. Nous étions pleins de

nostalgie, mais résolument progressistes" (Lettre, p. 32). The new society, however, had not lived up to their expectations or fulfilled their optimistic hopes: "Combien de rêves avions-nous alimentés désespérément, qui auraient pu se concretiser en bonheur durable et que nous avons déçus pour en embrasser d'autres qui ont piteusement éclaté comme bulles de savon, nous laissant la main vide?" (Lettre, p. 26). Ramatoulaye recalls in terms reminiscent of her European teacher that her schoolmates from all over West Africa saw themselves as having "un destin 'hors du commun' (....) Nous étions de véritables soeurs destinées à la même mission émancipatrice" (Lettre, p. 27). Their husbands seem to have shared their idealistic vision. The society she describes had already changed in some ways, however, in general, men were unwilling or unable to relinquish their privileged position.

Bâ accuses the male and squarely places the blame at his feet. His selfishness is destructive.[1] Modou is weak and vain. His behavior destroys not only his first wife's happiness but also that of Binetou, his second wife. She is a mere child, his daughter's friend, an intelligent girl with a potentially brilliant future ahead of her. Ramatoulaye has nothing but sympathy for her young co-épouse. Binetou is portrayed as a victim first of all of her mother's desires to escape a life of poverty: "Que peut une enfant devant une mère en furie, qui hurle sa faim et sa soif de vivre?" (Lettre, p. 60). The man is seen as the dispenser of favors and happiness. Material gain over and over in these works seems to be a motivating force, especially in the older generation of women. As with Yaye Khady in Un chant écarlate, Binetou's mother has suffered and now sees the means to end her suffering, even if it is at the expense of her daughter's future happiness. The circle of

exploitation perpetuates itself.

Binetou is also a victim of Modou's unscrupulous attentions. She has tried to resist him but Ramatoulaye comments: "Elle ne connaissait pas la puissante volontê de Modou, sa tenacitê devant l'obstacle, son orgueil de vaincre, la rêsistance inspirant de nouveaux assauts à chaque échec" (Lettre, p. 60). Modou relentlessly pursues his own satisfaction, betraying his wife's trust and that of his daughter and her friend, whom he offers to accompany home ("because it is late"), like a solicitous father. It is a situation raised before in African fiction: the older man exploiting the young woman and destroying his family life at the same time.[2]

Once again in this work we see a variety of female characters, some of whom we have encountered before. Aissatou's mother-in-law, Tante Nabou, is a proud princess from the Sine who cannot accept her son's marriage to a woman of a lower caste, a "fille de forgeron." Tante Nabou is representative of the older generation, she is jealous of her status and relishes the privileges it accords her. She carefully plots her revenge and forces her weak son to take his young cousin as a second wife, to the detriment of his first marriage: "Ah, pour certains, l'honneur et le chagrin d'une bijoutière sont moindres, bien moindres que l'honneur et le chagrin d'une Guelewar (noble)" (Lettre, p. 49). If Bâ does not challenge the fundamental hierarchical structures of her society, with her portrait of Tante Nabou she shows the logical tragic consequences when aristocratic pride and egocentric behavior pit one woman against another.[3] Bâ also denounces the abuse of religious customs which Diallo attacked in De Tilène au Plateau. The women who come to Modou's funeral are described as greedy and selfish. Instead of bringing

solace and material comfort as in the old days, they strip the household of all they can find and go away with no thought for the welfare of the bereaved family. These women are hypocritical parasites whose lives are directed by custom and empty ritual. Ramatoulaye however does not discount all traditional values, just the abuse of them.

A positive figure in the older generation is Ramatoulaye's dead grandmother whose traditional wisdom and knowledge of human nature are passed on to her grandchild in the form of sayings and axioms. When she has difficulties dealing with her children her grandmother's advice comes back to her aid in the form of these remembered folk sayings. Thus, like Diallo's Tante Mafitini, Bâ argues for "selective modernisation." African woman is in crisis in all of her traditional roles: as wife, mother, daughter-in-law, "tantes." The religious and social constraints are on the woman, not on the man. Women are bound by what Bâ refers to as "yesterday's chains as well as today's chains."[4] To cope she must redefine herself choosing carefully between old and new, but this presents many problems. Bâ points out that as wife, she conceives her role differently but she now comes up against the fact that the man has not changed. He has inherited a certain image of marriage from his upbringing and his inherited ideas conflict with woman's new vision of what marriage could be like. This is a situation which recurs in the second novel and also in Fall's work. Although the woman is not seeking to destroy everythig from the past, the man must abandon a part of his power and privileges and compromise. Bâ's portraits of Modou and of Mawdo Fall make the point that these men are not villains. They are responsible professionals and for a time, caring husbands. But the existence of polygamy which Bâ describes as

"legalizing a man's escapades,"[5] means that there is always the possibility that the man may take another wife. This is officially sanctioned by the society and the religion. Even responsible "good" men like Modou and Mawdo succumb to the temptation. Therefore, the trust between husband and wife is affected. The nature of the marriage relationship is defined by polygamy because all the woman's efforts are directed at pleasing her husband whereas he is not obliged to reciprocate. Moreover, man has been conditoned by his background to expect that women will be virtual slaves. Before women were educated it was possible for them to accept this and even find a certain measure of happiness. But for an educated woman, like Daba, for example, this is impossible. Hence the conflict. Bâ obviously believes that all women would rather be married and seems to consider this their destiny and fulfillment.[6] She finds her friend's independence and behavior difficult to understand and impossible to emulate, but she recognizes that in many ways women must change.

Ramatoulaye has difficulty with her daughters; as a mother she is forced to examine and try to re-define her role. Bâ makes the point, illustrated by Kaya, that in effect the school and the new society come between the mother and the child.[7] In her traditional role, the mother is the transmitter of the values of the culture and the main source of knowledge and education for her children. But in the new situation she does not perform the same role and the basis of her authority is shaken. The mother's upbringing and education have not equipped her to deal with the changing <u>mores</u> and values. An illiterate mother cannot participate in the process of her child's schooling. But even an educated mother like Ramatoulaye is at a loss in certain situations. She is shocked to

find her daughters smoke and wear trousers. She reluctantly accepts the trousers but forbids them to smoke, however, they secretly defy her. The children, traditionally subject to the mother's authority have also changed. Girls are no longer docile. This situation is compounded by the absence of the father from the home and his irresponsible example. When her daughter becomes pregnant, however, Ramatoulaye struggles with her horror and manages to overcome her initial reaction and to understand and comfort her daughter. She does not reject or condemn her as tradition demands, but reaches out to her in support and compassion. Once again Bâ stresses the need for compromise, flexibility and for selective change on the part of women as well as men. It is necessary to abandon some traditional customs, chief among them polygamy, because in fact if not in the abstract, it destroys conjugal love, and at the same time to reject certain "modern" ideas.

The Daba/Abou couple exemplifies the ideal modern marriage. Daba is "liberated": she is educated, articulate, practical. Her views on marriage are different from her mother's. She believes it is a reciprocal union, for the benefit of both spouses, to be dissolved by either if it no longer satisfies. Her husband, fortunately, shares her views. He even cooks! He affirms: "Daba est ma femme. Elle n'est pas mon esclave, ni ma servante" (Lettre, p. 107). The couple argues for the coexistence of a new, more equitable social order. But such couples in the context of the book are rare. And Ramatoulaye sees the dangers inherent in her daughter's freer attitude. The question remains "Le modernisme ne peut donc être sans s'accompagner de la dégradation des moeurs?" (Lettre, p. 112).

The image of woman in crisis is completed by the portrayal of the

suffering daughter-in-law, Aissatou, and especially by the story of Jacqueline. The case of Jacqueline pre-figures that of Mireille in Un chant écarlate. Jacqueline suffers both at the hands of her husband and at the hands of her mother-in-law. She is not a European but she is seen as an outsider and ostracized, almost destroyed. She is an Ivoirienne married to a Senegalese. As a black West African she should have had no difficulty integrating: "Jacqueline voulait bien se sénégaliser, mais les moqueries arrêtaient en elle toute volonté de coopération. On l'appelait 'gnac' ('broussarde,' country girl) et elle avait fini par percer le contenu de ce sobriquet qui la révoltait" (Lettre, p. 64). The society is hostile to outsiders whether from a different caste, region, or culture.[8] Jacqueline's mother-in-law is especially cruel, while her husband spends his time chasing women and makes no attempt to hide his adventures. Deprived of all support and encouragement, Jacqueline becomes ill. Her illness is not diagnosed for a long time. Luckily, she finally finds a doctor who recognizes her problem as depression and gives her good advice: "Il faut réagir, sortir, vous trouver des raisons de vivre. Prenez courage. Lentement, vous triompherez" (Lettre, p. 68). Ramatoulaye and Jacqueline refuse to be crushed by their situations. They take positive measures and fight back. Although she still believes in marriage as the ideal, Ramatoulaye rejects her older brother-in-law's hand as well as the offer of a man who has always loved her because she cannot return his love, but also because he already has a wife. She prefers to live alone with her children. Although, unlike Aissatou's, hers is not an active revolt, it is still a step toward liberation. We must note that it is not only the man who is criticized, but also women, notably, older women, whose own restricted upbringings result in their

narrow, selfish, and intolerant behavior. Although the woman's suffering is directly tied to man's self-indulgence, it is the whole social system which is at fault. Primarily, however, the woman is not seeking a different official status but her own fulfillment and happiness. In her second novel Bâ addresses this quesiton both in her own society and in the context of Western culture.

Like Ramatoulaye, Mireille, the heroine of Un chant écarlate is a victim of her husband's egoism and selfish sensuality. She also suffers from the prejudices and cruel intolerance both of her own society and that of her husband's. Mireille is French, the daughter of French aristocrats stationed in Dakar. Her father is a diplomat who affects liberal views but, as his daughter discovers to her bitter disillusionment, is really a bigot. She is studying at the university in Dakar and falls in love with an African. Her parents are horrified that she could be acquainted with "ça" as they contemptuously designate the photograph of her beloved. Mireille reasons with them, to no avail. Bitterly, she accuses her father:

> Pourquoi as-tu cédé à mon désir d'étudier ici? Pour moi, certes, mais aussi pour ton image de marque. Cela fait bien, la fille d'un diplomate étudiante à l'Université du pays où résident ses parents. Cela fait "idées généreuses", "options avancées", tant de termes criés avec force, qui ne recouvrent aucune grandeur.[9]

Mireille is immediately sent back to France. She remains faithful to Ousmane however and when they finally marry, years later, disowned by her family, she returns to Africa.

But prejudice is not peculiar to France as Mireille finds to her great unhappiness. Despite her sincere efforts to adapt, like Jacqueline in Une si longue lettre, she is rejected by her in-laws. For them she is

never more than "la Toubab" (the white woman), relegated, as Ousmane was, to being less than a person. Moreover, her mother-in-law, Yaye Khady, cannot accept losing her son to a stranger. Just as Mawdo Fall's mother in Une si longue lettre resents her son's having chosen a daughter-in-law against her will, and plots to get her own back, Yaye Khady refuses to reciprocate Mireille's efforts to subdue her own prejudices and to seek a compromise. Yaye Khady is not content until her son has in effect abandoned Mireille and their métis son and founded a new foyer with a young, sensual, attractive, but uneducated négresse. Mireille is caught between her own disgust for the ways of her adopted society and the rejection of her in-laws. But it is her husband's neglect and infidelity that finally causes her to lose her reason. Bâ perhaps places exaggerated importance on the physical attributes of Ouleymatou, the young wife. It is consistent with her view of the male.

Like Modou Fall in Une si longue lettre, Ousmane is portrayed as being motivated primarily by his sensuality and by his desires for sense-satisfaction. His instincts and drives make him selfish and deprive him of any conscience or reason. He refuses to listen to his sister and rejects his friend's reproving counsel. His own pleasure is all that counts. Ousmane is a slave to his animality, as was Modou Fall. His first meeting with Mireille is described in terms of a physical encounter. His thoughts of her are always recorded in sense images: she is "sa belle," "sa blonde," when he thinks of her: "La forme blanche l'envahissait" (Chant, p. 25). Their love-affair is intensely physical. When he goes back over their relationship at the end of the book his memories of her are all sensual, as are his thoughts of Ouleymatou, his second wife:

> Quelle puissance dans la pensée humaine pour résumer toute une vie dans la hâte de quelques secondes! Son voyage de noces dans cet hôtel de montagne chauffé par les grosses bûches d'une cheminée ancienne! Ses premières nuits avec Mireille, une fête en roses: rose des rondeurs des seins, strié de bleu jailli du désordre des dentelles, rose violacé de la chemise de nuit et toutes les rougeurs nuancées que le jeu de ses doigts peignait sur la nudité laiteuse de la chair! L'éclatement de son coeur! Ses sens gorgés d'un bonheur d'une profonde intensité! La quotidienneté exaspérante avait enveloppé d'oubli couleurs et sensations... Ouleymatou ressurgit, symphonie d'ombres apaisantes sur ses quêtes brûlantes, odeur enivrante de farine de mil, échappée des mortiers de son enfance, canari à l'équilibre parfait dans ses mains de potier? Toute une vie dans la fuite de quelques secondes! (p. 247)

Bâ seems to suggest here that on the part of man, his attachment to his wife is no more than physical attraction. She is a sex object to be used and discarded at will. Faced with the death of their child and his wife's madness, Ousmane belatedly recovers some sense of guilt and shame at what he has done to this woman who loves him. Ousmane at last sees clearly that he has been selfish and unreasonable and he attributes his behavior to madness: "La folie seule expliquait son aveuglement et ses actes" (Chant, p. 246). Ousmane had been content to neglect his wife and son to the point of making her unbalanced. He convinced himself that she would never find out. Bâ, once again, as in the case of the husbands in her first work, accuses the male of callous self-indulgence, gross irresponsibility and self-delusion. In an interview Bâ makes the point that although she does not believe that the male is capable of sexual fidelity, because of his physiology, what matters is "fidelity of affection, fidelity of sentiment that he can have love for the home and respect for his wife."[10] The woman who suffers here is white, symbolically extending the suffering of the woman beyond the limits of Senegalese society. Un chant écarlate is not as successful a work as Bâ's first, but the points it makes are similar. The narrow self-

interest and prejudices of societies and individuals both threaten and destroy.

The work is not entirely pessimistic however. The character of Soukeyna, Ousmane's sister, is an indication of the potential for friendship and solidarity between women. Soukeyna takes her sister-in-law's side and defies her mother whom she openly accuses of egoism and intolerance. Soukeyna visits and sustains Mireille. She consciously rejects the traditional prejudices of her society. Yaye Khady is a figure of traditional, narrow-minded intolerance, as are Mireille's parents, whereas Soukeyna is a plea for toleration and understanding a new order. She tells her mother "Tu la rejettes sans la connaître" (Chant, p. 229) echoing the very words Mireille had used to her parents about Ousmane. When her mother tells her that she is ashamed of her grandson ("à la peau métisée") Soukeyna replies that such a phenomenon is no longer extraordinary. But Soukeyna's voice is an isolated one. Her attempts are frustrated by the intransigence of her society and her brother's irresponsibility. Nevertheless she is different from her mother's generation, even if her brother is not. Bâ is objective in her portrayal of Yaye Khady. Her selfishness and cruel treatment of her daughter-in-law are excused in terms of the old woman's own difficult life. She is a victim, like so many others of her generation, of her upbringing and experiences:

> Yaye Khady pleurait. Et la pensée, laboreusement, cheminait, fortifiée et réconfortée par sa traversée de la "vie". "Mais tout de même: comment Ousmane avait-il pu oublier mon visage en sueur, oublier mes fatigues, oublier notre tendresse? Cette femme me relèguera-t-elle donc à jamais dans les cuisines?"
>
> Quelle différence entre une bru Négresse et Toubab! Une négresse connaît et accepte les droits de la belle-mère (Chant, p. 110).

The lot of women like Yaye Khady is not a happy one and their lives are extremely restricted:

> Yaye Khady ne demandait au destin qu'un repos mérité. Comme toutes les mères, elle avait connu les terribles nuits de veille où l'instinct seul diagnostique les poussées dentaires, les fièvres précédant les maladies infantiles qui se disputent la vie du bébé. Elle avait eu ses entrées chez les guérisseurs, accompagnées de paiement en boubous ou en pagnes, à défaut d'argent. Les longues queues des dispensaires? Elle les avait pratiquées des l'aube pour voir très tôt la doctoresse et ensuite faire son marché et sa cuisine.
>
> Elle méritait une prompte relève. Beaucoup de femmes de son âge, à cause de la présence de leur belle-fille, n'avaient plus que le souci de se laisser vivre agréablement. Elles se mouvaient dans la paresse et l'encens. Leur bru les servait, dans leur chambre, tout leur tombait du ciel: la meilleure part des repas, le linge repassé, les draps de lit journellement renouvelés. L'oisiveté convenait à leur âge. La médisance trompait leur ennui. La direction des cérémonies familiales comblait leur inactivité. Certaines belles-mères se consacraient à Dieu et tuaient le temps en bâtissant leur au-delà: la Mosquée les accueillait à la prière du Vendredi, parfumées, dans des déploiements de vêtements et châles blancs, le chapelet à la main.
>
> "Assurément, affirma t-elle, un des sommets de la vie d'une femme est dans le choix d'une belle-fille" (pp. 111-112).

The image of woman, mother, is far from idealized. Bâ is realistic. There are women like Aissatou, Mireille and Soukeyna but in the face of the selfishness of the male and the intolerance of societies their chances of happiness and fulfillment are greatly reduced. Bâ explains that she chooses to write about a mixed couple in which the wife is white: "Because here in Senegal, it is the woman who is given into marriage and belongs to the husband's family. It is not the same thing with a man.... Thus the problem of a white wife is more interesting from the point of view of the mentality of the man's mother, and from the point of view of society."[11] She makes the point that in a mixed marriage where the man is white: "If he does what the family expects him to do on the material level and on the level of understanding there are

not many problems."[12] In other words, the man is freer, less subject to the demands and restrictions of family and society which hamper and confine women. As it is the woman who is the main transmitter of the traditional values, it is up to the mother to inculcate in her son new values which will help him to relate to his wife in a new way. The individual mentality must change before the society can improve. This is especially crucial in the case of the woman. Fall's works explore these possibilities.

Restructuring society--destroying the stereotypes--Aminata Sow Fall

In her first two novels, Le revenant and La grève des Bàttu, Aminata Sow Fall deals with several problems which beset her society, notably the condition of the poor and disadvantaged. She denounces the materialism of the new post-colonial society, the excessive reliance on superstition, and the lack of communication between generations and between spouses. She solidly confronts the vexing question of polygamy. The chief protagonist in both novels is a man, and the chauvinist values of the society appear in bold relief when filtered through masculine eyes and sensibilities, seen from the point of view of the dominant male, self-centered and arrogant. It becomes clear what the less fortunate in the society--women and the poor (constantly linked together)--are up against. Although the protagonist in each novel is a man, the characters which are most fully developed are mainly women: Tante Ngone, Yama, Mame Aissa, her aunt, Hélène, in Le revenant, Lolli, Sine, Sagar, Salla Niang in La grève des Bàttu.

Bakar, the male protagonist of Le revenant, is for the most part a sympathetic character. He has characteristics more likely to be

considered proper to women in his society. He is an "underdog." He grows up in a very poor quarter of the city. The family lives in a hovel, "baraque où nous sommes tous engouffrés, où un rideau cache le lit, où l'on est obligé de tout fourrer: linge, ustensiles de cuisine, paniers à poissons."[13] We see the situation of the woman objectified through his view. His mother is at once the real breadwinner and his father's slave. Bakar is very conscious of the sacrifices his mother makes for the family. It is largely through her efforts alone that they are able to live. She gets up before daylight to go to the beach to buy fish which she sells to make a living. Bakar's father is a cabinetmaker but days go by without his making any money for lack of work. Bakar loves his mother dearly, he has never forgotten one occasion when after having been misused and ill-treated by her husband she greets him with her usual respect:

> Bakar assistait muet à la scène, et deux larmes jalonnèrent ses joues et il n'oublia jamais ce jour. Il se rappelait que le lendemain et bien d'autres jours, après, il avait vu sa mère, comme tous les matins après la prière, se présenter devant son seigneur et maître, le saluer avec génuflexions. Mais celui-ci n'avait même pas daigné répondre, ce qui n'empêchait pas tante Ngone de répéter toujours les mêmes gestes (Le revenant, p. 76).

Bakar does not comment on the bahavior of his parents, neither does the author. But the scene speaks for itself. Bakar does not blame his father or find his mother's behavior strange. "En observant le dévouement, l'effacement de cette femme, Bakar se sentait un peu coupable de n'avoir pas été en mesure de récompenser en partie tous les sacrifices qu'elle a faits pour l'élever, lui et ses soeurs" (Le revenant, p. 74). Her behavior does not surprise, it only increases his gratitude and his love for her: "Comment payer cette mère infatigable, soumise, discrète? Elle

ne veut rien pour elle, tout pour nous. S'il existe ici-bas une justice, elle sera des plus récompensées!" (Le revenant, pp. 21-22). Bakar also loves his sisters dearly but he chafes under the authority of his strong-willed older sister: "Garçon choyé et conscient de la supériorité que lui conférait son sexe, Bakar n'acceptait pas toujours de gaîété de coeur l'autorité de Yama. Mais après tout, disait-il, elle est l'aînée et il est normal que nous la respections" (Le revenant, p. 23). Bakar is respectful, thoughtful and affectionate but despite his sensitive nature, very much conditioned by the traditions of his society which he does not question. In fact he is very pleased that his wife-to-be is from a traditional household:

> -- Voilà qui est réconfortant, se dit-il. Une maison où il y a de l'ordre. Maintenant les choses ont tellement évolué, les mentalités si reconverties, que l'on est surpris lorsque l'on voit que quelques parents veillent encore à la bonne réputation de leur progeniture.
>
> Les traditions avaient reçu un coup de poignard et ce que Bakar déplorait le plus dans cet état de fait, c'était la dépravation des moeurs et sa conséquence nécessaire: la dégradation de la femme. La honte ne tuait plus. La femme, en déchirant le voile de mystère qui l'avait recouverte depuis l'aube des temps, avait en même temps détruit sa propre valeur. D'or elle était devenue simple métal, bravant les scandales les plus sordides. Ce n'était pas sans nostalgie que Bakar se répétait un refrain qu'il entendait souvent chanter par sa mère et dont il avait retenu ce vers:
>
> Ban gatia nangoo dee (Pas la honte, plutôt la mort) (Le revenant, p. 31).

Thus Bakar mimics the language and value system of his society. In the olden days women had mystery, "pudeur," "réticence." The passage is haevily ironic--Bakar subscribes to the very value system which will destroy him later on and it is only his personal suffering and tragedy which disabuses him of his clichés and stereotyped view of things and bring him to a realization of the emptiness of these traditions. Even so, it is only a partial awareness based on his own need. He suffers

very deeply when his sister, who cannot accept the shame he has brought on the family (he has been to prison for fraud) repudiates him. When Bakar denounces his sister bitterly as "une sale arriviste, une maudite complexée qui a honte de moi et qui me juge indigne de paraître devant la bande de son mari, qui n'est composée que de vauriens! (Le revenant, p. 84), he sees no inconsistency in his position. He deplores the fact that "le monde d'aujourd'hui est bouleversé . . . Non seulement bouleversé, mais pourri" (Le revenant, p. 87).

Yet it is the very traditions that he admires that bring about his unhappiness. It is his wife's upbringing which keeps her from sharing with her husband the unhappiness and pressures she is suffering at home. Fall's depiction of Mame Aissa is revealing. She loves her husband and visits him regularly in prision but cannot share her suffering with him. He notices her reserve but does not ask her what is the matter. He finds her reticence admirable, a quality which he loves and which he finds is becoming, but rare, in modern women. Mame Aissa cannot bring herself to tell him her plight: her relatives want her to leave him. She finally succumbs to family pressure and asks him for a divorce. Bakar's pride prevents him from questioning her motives. They love each other but once again lack of communication destroys their chances of happiness. It is this lack of communication due to male pride and feminine submission and reticence which stand condemned in the old order and in society in general.

Fall contrasts two worlds clearly in her portraits of women, especially the two women with whom Bakar finds happiness, Mame Aissa and Hélène. Mame Aissa is a traditional girl. She is described as being like a princess. Bakar's encounter with her is like a sequence from a folk

tale: "Un jour qu'il allait prendre l'air comme à l'accoutumée au bord de la mer, il rencontra une charmante jeune fille qui coinçait une calebasse entre l'aisselle et l'avant-bras" (Le revenant, p. 29). He comes back to the same spot for a month hoping to see her and finally she reappears: "C'était elle. C'étaient ces mêmes sourcils noirs qui semblaient être dessinés au crayon et que pourtant aucun fard n'avait dû dégrader jusque-là, c'étaient ces mêmes yeux dont la sclérotique était aussi blanche que le lait, le même cou plissé qui rappelle la douceur et la pureté des bébés bien nourris" (Le revenant, pp. 29-30). Mame Aissa's tone is marked by "la timidité et la retenue," when he speaks to her "la jeune fille hésita, par pudeur" (Le revenant, p. 30). For Bakar, Timidité, retenue, pudeur are all desirable qualities in a woman. Ironically, these same qualities are the cause of the breakdown in communication between them and lead to their separation and mutual unhappiness:

> Chaque fois qu'elle quittait la maison de ses parents pour aller voir son mari, elle emportait la ferme décision de s'ouvrir à celui-ci sur tout ce qu'elle endurait. Mais dès qu'elle franchissait le seuil de la prison on eut dit que toute volonté de se confier s'enfuyait. L'éducation a l'étrange pouvoir de modeler l'individu selon des normes inviolables et de le rendre quasi impiussant dans toute tentative de se libérer de ces normes. Il eut fallu une volonté de fer, un courage herculéen. Mais Mame Aissa était femme, il n'était donc pas question pour elle d'assumer librement ses actes. (Emphasis added) Elle était conditionnée par un milieu où toute tentative de libération était considéré comme un scandale, comme une trahison. C'est pourquoi, inconsciemment, elle ne pouvait jamais parler à son mari: 'Ce n'est pas décent que je lui parle des problèmes que j'ai avec ma famille. D'abord cela pourrait le faire souffrir, ensuite cela pourrait me déprécier à ses yeux'" (Le revenant, p. 63).

The courtship is conducted with due decorum and regard for tradition. Indeed Bakar admires his father-in-law because: "A le voir on ne pouvait pas douter qu'il avait de la poigne. Il semblait faire partie de ceux

qui ont toujours le dernier mot chez eux" (p. 32). Bakar marries Mame Aissa and in spite of the cautions and warnings of his friend Sada, he gets caught up in a round of wild spending which he claims is to make his wife happy, but which mainly serves only to impress his in-laws and acquaintances. Bakar, up until then the model employee, is sent to prison for fraud and it is only then that he becomes aware of his true situation: "Il pensa à sa famille, à sa femme, à sa petite Bigue et réalisa qu'il n'avait été qu'un jouet ballotté absurdement au gré des caprices d'un milieu et que maintenant il était seul à assumer les responsabilités" (p. 49).

Bakar's prise de conscience permits him to be able to appreciate Hélène, a young girl from a different milieu. His journey to awareness begun in prison crystallizes when he is rejected by his sister Yama, who represents the new society where material success has made possible excesses of display which underscore the new values. In the new society characterized by show and display, financial success replaces the old traditions of family name and honor. Materialism is the new value. Yama is a product of the poverty of her childhood. "Yama aimait le faste et la renommée, c'était sa seule revanche sur le passé . . ." (p. 40). She sees through the society but ends up being caught up in its values to such an extent that she is transformed into the monster her brother denounces. She becomes selfish, vain and cruel. Scenes of a christening and of Yama's party to celebrate "son tour" (simply, "her turn to give a party") are marked by excess of luxury, spending and a super-abundance of material things which contrast sharply with the world from which she came, the world which Hélène inhabits. We note, however, that Bakar himself was once guilty of similar conduct and that when men behave that

way it is condoned, whereas in a woman, such as Yama, it is considered an aberration.

In an attempt to relive his childhood, which Bakar now considers the happiest days of his life, he goes back to revisit the house where he lived. There he meets Hélène. The description mirrors but contrasts sharply with that of Mame Aissa. Hélène is not idealized, but solid, down-to-earth, and flawed. She is over-painted and somewhat "tarty":

> Elle était très grande, un peu servie en chair et avait le teint assez foncé. Elle portait un pagne en legos multicolore et un corsage transparent qui laissait voir son soutien gorge. Elle aborda Bakar sans autre formalité, en lui tenant la main.
>
> --Baay, tu cherches quelqu'un?
>
> Bakar fut frappé par sa spontanéité, remarqua très rapidement l'outrance de son fard. L'énorme quantité de poudre qu'elle s'était mise au visage, ses yeux exagérément peinturlurés, l'odeur forte du parfum à bon marché qui vous fouettait les narines à la première approche, tout la faisait ressembler à un personnage de cirque (Le revenant, p. 90).

Hélène's spontaneity and easy candor are clearly contrasted with Mame Aisssa's timidity, reticence, pudeur. She is not the sort of woman that the old Bakar could have appreciated except for one purpose. She gives the impression of being a prostitute but when she "seizes him and drags him inside" Bakar notices how clean her room is. The walls are covered with pictures of movie stars and cover-girls cut out of magazines. Hélène (she even has a French name) is one of a new generation of girls, a seasonal worker who has come to the city to work to support her family. She looks cheap but in reality Bakar discovers she is hardworking, honest, and respectable. In a sequence similar to his month-long wait for Mame Aissa he returns to the house where Hélèene lives but he cannot find her. In this workers' quarter the people are wary of strangers and reluctant to give any information which might get a fellow-worker into trouble. Bakar becomes impatient: "Il s'était rendu

compte brusquement qu'il lui fallait coûte que coûte retrouver Hélène . . . L'image d'Hélène la souriante, douce, simple, spontanée, était là, et ne le lâchait plus, et grandissait au fur et à mesure qu'il attendait." He does find her, through the aid of a young man who also represents the new generation of urban youth who break with tradition and have their own aspirations: Bakar "apprit que son guide travaillait dans une usine de confection, prenait des cours du soir au Lycée Delafosse et rêvait d'aller en France pour se perfectionner" (Le revenant, p. 94).

With her portraits of Yama, Hélène and Mame Aissa, Fall destroys feminine and societal sterotypes often found in male fiction. The reticent, modest young girl so prized by Bakar's culture has in her own personality the seeds of her future unhappiness; the prostitute figure is a normal wholesome girl; Yama asserts her independence and behaves like a man in a man's world. The condemnation she incurs serves to call into question the values of a materialistic, bourgeois society as well as to challenge the unquestioning acceptance of male superiority and privilege. It is through Hélène that Bakar is able to discover that poverty and departure from traditional moeurs does not necessarily mean moral degradation and unhappiness. He recovers a certain joie de vivre. His relationship with Hélène is characterized by a freedom and spontaneity which he did not enjoy with Mame Aissa. It is a friendship rather than a romantic liaison. When he offers to marry her, Hélène refuses because she has already been promised to someone in her village and she must obey. She too is bound by tradition, but Hélène's view of marriage is not completely the traditional one of the subjection of the woman: "Ma mère dit que l'amour ce n'est pas seulement le plaisir pour

un homme de rencontrer une femme et vice-versa. L'amour c'est le bonheur de lutter et de vaincre ensemble (emphasis added), de tenir un foyer, de voir vivre une famille. --C'est vrai, ce sont de sages, vos parents" (Le revenant, p. 100), replies Bakar. Fall further develops these themes in La grève des Bàttu

Here, once again, women's problems and women's rights are used as a vehicle for "raising consciousness" about larger issues. "Dire que Le revenant et La grève parlent avant tout aux femmes, c'est selon l'idée que l'on se fait de féminisme, les limiter ou les ouvrir. Les protagonistes de ces deux livres, Bakar et Mour, sont des hommes; pourtant, leurs entrées en scène ne se font jamais sans la présence ou le regard d'un personnage féminin. Chaque question soulevée entraîne avec elle le sujet de la femme."[14]

Indeed, in La grève des Bàttu there is hardly a scene where a female character is not present. Most often the woman serves to play a contrasting role--often ironic--because although on the surface the woman seems to be the one who is weak, impractical, unreasonable, the author lets us experience for ourselves the reality of the situation (often underlining it with a commentary). The true situation thus becomes clear. A striking example of this occurs when Keba, a fonctionnaire who is obsessed with ridding the city of beggars, has been confronted by his secretary who poses fundamental if rhetorical questions which turn out to prove only too relevant later on. Here is how the narrator describes Keba's reaction to his secretary Sagar Diouf:

> Sagar Diouf l'a encore mis hors de lui-même (he knows deep down she is right) mais il se retient volontairement de la traiter de tous les noms. "Sagar n'est pas méchante, bien au contraire. . . . Mais les problèmes sérieux.lui échappent . . . comme à ma femme. . . . Les femmes s'intéressent davantage aux choses superficielles . . . il faut qu'on leur apprenne à être

> responsable. . . . Ce n'est qu'une question d'éducation.... Belles toilettes, cérémonies grandioses, futilité. . . . Non, ça ne doit pas continuer comme ça. . . . Mais il y a aussi que certains hommes n'aiment pas les femmes de tête, comme on dit; elles menacent leur hégémonie. Celles qui ne se posent aucune question et n'en posent pas, voilà ce qu'il faut à ces orgueilleux qui jouent avec leurs femmes comme avec une poupée.. Sagar ressemble bien à une poupée, avec ses joues à fossettes. Elle est belle comme une poupée. . . . Je ne sais pas ce qui a poussé son mari à la laisser tomber. . . .[15]

One could accuse Fall of being too obviously didactic in this heavily ironic passage especially in the light of her comment in the preceding paragraph that "Keba ne répond pas; il n'aime pas chercher des réponses à ces questions: il préfère les éluder, car la véritable affaire pour lui est de dégager les voies de circulation pour exécuter l'ordre de ses chefs et de se guérir de cette nausée que provoque en lui la vue des mendiants" (La grève, p. 23). But the point is well taken nonetheless. It is Keba who is interested in superficial things, without asking himself about the consequences and the deeper values underlying these actions. It is Keba who remarks critically that men want wives who look like dolls so they can be their playthings and then turns around to wonder why Sagar's husband has abandoned her when "elle est belle comme une poupée." He is blissfully unaware of the irony in his remark.

In the novel women are consistently identified with the beggars by the juxtaposition of incidents and scenes which highlight the common elements in their struggles. There is a continual movement between two worlds and two points of view: the weak vs. the strong (the camp of the beggars, Ch. 2, is contrasted with the office of the râfleurs, Ch. 3), the masculine vs. the feminine, the point of view of the woman (Lolli, Sine, Sagar, wife, secretary) with that of the man (Keba, Mour). Moreover, most of the time there is a renversement, a bouleversement of

the normal order of things as in the example above. For as it turns out it is the weak who are strong and the rich who need the poor. La grève des Bàttu: the title itself is a contradiction in terms, for the Bàttu are beggars and how can those who have no jobs, no status, no importance, who are as the subtitle says "le dêchets humains" go on strike? What possible purpose could such an act serve? Besides, who else could it hurt but the Bàttu themselves? "Nous ne sommes pas des chiens" (La grève, p. 31). This refrain comes back over and over again. Each segment of the society, including woman, is crying out to be recognized as human: "un être à part entière, ayant des droits et des devoirs" (La grève, p. 42).

The novel depicts strong, practical women who endure despite obstacles. Notable among these is Salla Niang, former "bonne à tout faire." It is Salla Niang, "femme d'expériences," now "vêritable femme d'affaires" who organizes the Bàttu in spite of the objections of the weaker members of the group (all men) who are ready to despair and to give in. Salla's husband appreciates his wife's qualities, he does not mind that gossips say that he is weak and that it is Salla "qui porte le pantalon." It is noteworthy that the people who hold this opinion are women: "les commères du quartier." In fact it is the women, usually older women, who, sadly, once again work hardest to maintain the status quo which oppresses them.

In this novel Fall addresses directly the question of polygamy. The pages where Mour announces to Lolli, the night before his marriage, that he is about to take a second wife are among the most vivid and moving in the book. Lolli cannot imagine what her husband has to tell her. She takes her position as spouse for granted. Her impatience with the

compliments he is paying her, her naive anxiety for him as he fails to get to the point: "Qu'est-il? Que t'arrive-t-il? Tu as des histoires?" (La grève, p. 39). Her concern for his welfare poignantly underlines her complete shock and devastation when she finally realizes she is to have a co-épouse. Fall's narrator describes Mour's reaction to his wife's outburst and refrains from commenting. Indeed there is no need to. His reactions speak for themselves--he has come to appreciate his wife's qualities and feels some fear and remorse for what he is about to do, but his masculine pride triumphs and he tells her cruelly: "--Après tout, poursuit-il, réfléchis, n'est-ce pas moi qui te nourris et t'entretiens? Et dis-moi quel est le contrat qui me lie et qui m'empeche de prendre une seconde épouse...?" (p. 44). For once Lolli forgets about her traditional upbringing: "Lolli s'en fiche.... Elle s'en moque. Elle a perdue contrôle parce qu'elle pouvait s'attendre à tout, sauf à cela." She speaks passionately for all women, for all rejected spouses when she replies "Le contrat de l'honnêtetê, de la reconnaissance" (Le grève, p. 44). At first she rebels because she knows things are different now: "Mais maintenant 'les temps ont changé, mon gars'" (Le grève, p. 42). Lolli knows about the women's liberation movement. Her daughter Raabi discusses polygamy, which she opposes, with her friends. But for Lolli, her revolt is only short-lived: "après la révolte la résignation." She does not have the courage to break with the traditions which entrap her. Her daughter encourages her to force her father to choose but she cannot. The situation parallels that of Ramatoulaye in Une si longue lettre. She accepts the situation. Mour does not understand "Quelle mouche l'a donc piquée pour qu'elle se mette dans cet état et qu'elle parle à présent à son époux comme elle aurait parlé au plus détestable

des individus?" (La grève, p. 45). The narrator responds "La mouche de l'espoir déçu plus que celle de l'endoctrinement" (La grève, p. 45). Lolli is powerless to change her situation, but the success of the beggars' strike offers some hope. Women, the underdogs, are becoming aware of their power.

Here we see documented the difference between the generations. From the generation of Mame Aissa's aunts in Le revenant to Lolli's there has been a change, an increased awareness. Lolli is secure (she thinks) and she does not consider the possibility of her husband's taking a second wife. She had put up with his "escapades" in the early years. Twice she even had to wake up neighbors to take her to have a baby. But little by little Mour had come to respect her. She now had hope, believing that in maturity she had won out. Faced with the threat of a co-épouse she revolts, the thought is repugnant to her. Her revolt, even though short-lived, is a positive sign:

> Lolli s'était ouvert les yeux en fréquentant le monde. Elle avait vu que les femmes n'acceptent plus d'être considerées comme de simples objets et engageaient une lutte énergique pour leur émancipation; partout, à la radio, dans les meetings, dans les cérémonies familiales, elles clamaient qu'au point de vue juridique, elles avaient les mêmes droits que les hommes; que bien sûr elles ne disputaient pas à l'homme sa situation de chef de famille, mais qu'il était nécessaire que l'homme fût conscient que la femme est un être à part entière, ayant des droits et des devoirs. Elles voulaient le plein épanouissement de la femme dans un cadre familial ou, en responsables, elles auraient aussi leur mot à dire. Elles avaient d'ailleurs réussi en partie, puisqu'une loi avait été votée, qui interdisait désormais à l'homme de se lever un beau matin de mauvaise humeur et pour un rien, de dire à sa femme: "Prends tes bagages, va-t'en chez toi". Meme si la répudiée n'avait pas un chez soi, elle quittait le domicile conjugal, y laissait à contre-coeur ses enfants qui étaient considérés comme le bien de l'homme, et allait à l'aventure chez de lointains parents, des amis ou des connaissances (La grève, p. 43).

In a generation women had won certain legal rights but the conquest of

the mind, the personal revolt, was still to come. Lolli, like Ramatoulaye, accepts her situation but her daughter and her co-épouse, Sine, representatives of the new, more emancipated, womanhood have had a radical change of attitude. Raabi, like Daba in Une si longue lettre, rejects even this reluctant resignation. Sine's comment to her husband at the end of the book represents the fullness of the revolt.

Sine smokes, wears trousers, outward signs of her liberation, and she obliges Mour to marry her or leave her free to "try her chances." She tells him "Je suis ton épouse, traite-moi comme ton épouse! Vraiment, Mour, tu dois déchanter si tu crois que j'accepterai que tu me traites comme un vulgaire objet! Monsieur disparaît des jours et quand il réapparaît, c'est pour me donner des ordres! Ah non, Mour. Va faire cela à ta Lolli, moi je ne suis pas un mouton!" (La grève, p. 126). Sine will not put up with behavior which her co-wife is forced to accept and which the woman of her mother's generation would consider acceptable, even normal. Her words announce a new era for women, as does Salla's call to the beggars: "Maintenant mes amis, l'heure du choix a sonné: mener une vie de chien, être poursuivi, traqué et matraqué, ou vivre en homme (emphasis added) (La grève, p. 53). The double-entendre has particular resonances for the women in her society as well as universal relevance. The down-trodden (women as well as beggars) must recognize that they have a choice--acceptance or revolt. Mour falls for a young girl who is modern, évoluée, precisely because he is not like the traditional woman, but he does not want to give up his old privileges. Unless he is forced to, he will not change. If the beggars/women do not protest, things will never change for them. Women (the beggars) need to recognize their importance, their worth. Salla's words again have a

special appeal to women. The beggars (like Lolli) are sorry for Mour and want to give in and do what he asks, but Salla insists: "Quoi? Il n'en est pas question, il n'en est nullement question! Parce qu'il nous a jeté son argent, on doit céder à sa volonté! Non!" (La grève, p. 128). Now this is exactly the argument Mour used to Lolli ("N'est-ce pas moi qui te nourris qui t'entretiens?" when he tried to tell her she should accept a co-wife (La grève, p. 44).

Lolli is powerless to change her situation because even though she knows Mour is wrong she has been conditioned to accept his irresponsible behavior. But the beggars' success offers hope for women too. Because he gives her money, he believes he has absolute right over her. The revolt of his second wife, Sine, however, has forced him to consider her feelings--a new awakening of awareness on his part. "Après la dispute, au moment où il prenait sa place dans la camionette... il s'était dit qu'il n'aurait pas dû s'absenter le temps de son 'tour.' 'Pour une femme c'est quand même vexant ... il s'était reproché aussi de ne lui avoir donné aucune explication" (La grève, p. 129). It is not a question of advocating the abolition of polygamy but a plea for fairness and justice: giving each wife the consideration she deserves and is accorded by law. Mour still does not fully understand Sine's position or recognize his own vulnerability. He concludes that the misunderstandings between them are due to the age difference and decides it is up to him as the elder partner to be more flexible. But it is a beginning. With Sine, because of her insistence ("Je suis une personne et non un bout de bois," (La grève, p. 126). he is ready to make some concessions "dans la mesure où celles-ci ne nuisent pas à son autorité et ne portent pas atteinte à sa respectabilité" (La grève, p. 129). But if Mour is a

symbol of his bourgeois, male-dominated society, his encounter with the Bâttu has grave portents: he will discover that it is possible for the weak, if they come together, to defeat the strong. The male is vulnerable. The solidarity of the weak can make them strong. Social change is possible but it is difficult and slow. That is the message of the book.

Mariama Bâ, tragically, died in 1982. Aminata Sow Fall continues to write. A third novel, L'Appel des Arènes, was published in 1982. Both novelists address social injustices and present women in the context of the complexities of their societies and the African woman's own ambiguous, sometimes confused, aspirations and attitudes. Like Kaya, Diallo and Ndiaye, they portray women more realistically than their male counterparts--they are sympathetic but more objective. Their women are not symbols for transcendent ideals. If Fall does often use her characters to illustrate a theme with fixed, universal applications they are still neither stereotyped nor romanticized. Compared to the novels discussed in the earlier section their works are more complex, perhaps more pessimistic. Some of the aspirations and hopes of Bâ's pre-independence generation have faded in the post-colonial, some would say neo-colonial, Senegal. Although woman still does not occupy "the first place" in Africa as Senghor affirms, her position is much less restricted, more ambiguous, but also more open-ended.

Notes

[1] Femi Ojo-Ade accuses Bâ of characterizing the male as "a monster" "a sexual beast" (Femi Ojo-Ade, "Still a Victim? Mariama Bâ's Une si longue lettre," African Literature Today, 12, 1982). Bâ's portrayal is in fact much more nuanced and more damning. She shows man as weak and vain, therefore vulnerable.

[2] See for example Sembène Ousmane's tragic Veñi Ciosane.

[3] Ojo-Ade is justified in pointing out that while Ramatoulaye openly condemns Mawdo Fall, her attitude to his mother is less judgmental. However, the tone and asides are clearly disapproving of Nabou's attitudes (Ojo-Ade, p. 75).

[4] Barbara Harrell-Bond, Interview with Mariama Bâ, American Universities Field Reports, 1981, no. 10, Africa, p. 2.

[5] Barbara Harrell-Bond, p. 10.

[6] Mariama Bâ, Une si longue lettre, p. 61. "Je comptais les femmes connues, abandonnées ou divorcées de ma génération. J'en connaissais dont le reste de jeunesse florissante avait pu conquérir un homme valable qui alliait situation et prestance et qu l'on jugeait 'mieux, cent fois mieux que le partant'. La misère qui était le lot de ces femmes regressait à l'envahissement de leur bonheur neuf qui changeait leur vie, arrondissait leurs joues, rendait brillants leurs yeux. J'en connaissais qui avaient perdu tout espoir de renouvellement et que la solitude avait mises très tôt sous terre."

[7] See Simone Kaya, Les Danseuses d'Impé-Eya, p. 60. "Je crois qu'à cause de l'école je me suis éloignée chaque jour un peu plus de ma mère."

[8] A similar situation is treated by Condé and Vieyra where the Antillaise in Africa is ostracized and ridiculed. See Ch. IV of this study.

[9] Bâ, Mariama, Un chant ecarlate, pp. 44-45. all further references to this work are contained within the text and indicated as Chant.

[10] Harrell-Bond, p. 10.

[11] Harrell-Bond, p. 12.

[12] Harrell-Bond, p. 12.

[13] Aminata Sow Fall, Le revenant, p. 24. All further references are

contained within the text.

[14] Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Aminata Sow Fall et l'espace du don," The French Review, vol. LV, no. 6, May 1982, p. 785.

[15] Aminata Sow Fall, La grève des Bâttu, pp. 23-24. All further references are contained within the text and indicated as La grève.

Chapter Three

"L'Antillaise"

The Garden and the Journey: Women in French Caribbean Literature.

> "Mon avenir s'arrête à notre village et aux alentours, la grande ville me fait peur". (Myriam Warner-Vieyra le Quimboiseur l'avait dit..., p. 21.)

Woman as Writer

Writing by women in the francophone Caribbean, although also largely neglected by critics and scholars alike until relatively recently, has a much longer history than feminine writing in francophone West Africa. Whereas the novels discussed in the first two sections of this study all appeared in print after 1970, the earlier prose works by women from the francophone Caribbean appeared before the end of the nineteenth century. One of the earliest studies of the life of a woman in the French Antilles, Yvette, histoire d'une jeune créole, was published in Paris in 1880. Since that time women novelists from Haiti, as well as from the French départements of Martinique and Guadeloupe, have continued to tell the stories of women from their societies. One of the most striking characteristics of the works of these novelists is the autobiographical element, a characteristic shared with their West African counterparts.

Although Thérèse de Betzon, author of Yvette, histoire d'une jeune créole, was probably white (créole originally was a term used to designate a white European born in the West Indies), the women to be

discussed in these chapters are all femmes de couleur. All would be officially considered "black" in a North American context but in the context of their own societies they range, like the heroines of their novels, over a wide and complexly designated color spectrum: négresses, mulâtresses, chabines, câpresses, femmes à peau de sapotille, à peau d'acajou, etc.[1] As the variety and the number of terms referring to different skin shades or color types suggest, the question of color is one which was and is of crucial importance in these colonial and post-colonial societies. This preoccupation is evident in the literature. Color is a dominant theme in these works: color linked to class distinction and divisions, blackness as a source of anguish and alienation, skin color seen as the cause of social advancement or oppression, color at the root of the rejection of self or of others.

The novels which form the basis of this study on French Caribbean writing are written in standard French (as already noted). Their authors are Martinican or Guadeloupean, femmes de couleur. They are all educated. French is their language of formal instruction. Their mother tongue, if not in every case their "mother's tongue," is more properly créole.[2] These factors are extremely significant. A Martinican or Guadeloupean woman who is educated (and the fact of writing in French already clearly points to a fairly sophisticated level of education) is of necessity and de facto an assimilée by formation, conditioning, education and up-bringing, if not by continuing and conscious choice of identity.

"Assimilation," as indicated in an earlier section, was an explicit French colonial policy which sought to make of the educated inhabitant of the colonized territory a French citizen in every sense of the word.

Assimilation had serious social and psychological consequences because it demanded that one discard one's identity in so far as it differed from "French" identity, defined in terms of language and culture, and of white, European, metropolitan values. These consequences, dire enough in French West Africa, had added repercussions in the Caribbean where the Haitian, Martinican or Guadeloupean, previously uprooted and deprived of his/her original (African) culture, already suffered from ambivalent (and, for the majority, often negative) emotions with regard to identity and sense of self. Hence, questions of education in the broadest sense of the term, language, color, and of course identity, become of paramount importance in this literature. Mayotte Capécia was made famous by Fanon (perhaps unjustly singled out) as the epitome of alienation, because of her novel La négresse blanche (1950).[3] Michèle Lacrosil, whose two novels Sapotille et le serin d'argile (1960) and Cajou (1961), tell the stories of colored women severely alienated because of their color, has been described as a "novelist with a color complex."[4] And, although it is dangerous to confuse the novelist with the narrator or the persona in the novel, there are obviously strong connections in terms of the value system out of which they come, even if the author is rejecting that system (as is clearly the case with some of the later novelists in particular). If the earlier writers in particular seem overly concerned, even obsessed, with matters of race and color, it is perhaps but a reflection of their society's prevailing preoccupations and values already vividly elaborated by the male writers of the négritude movement such as Césaire and Damas, preoccupations still very dominant in Caribbean literature both anglophone and francophone even now, fifty years post-négritude.

For purposes of convenience the writers will be considered in two groups, groupings which however greatly overlap in terms of publication dates and influences as well as themes (see Appendix A). The "earlier generation of writers" refers to writers born pre-1930 and the "later generation" to women born mainly in the '30s, most of whom are still writing or recently published. Because West Indian literature is intimately linked to and deeply marked by its historical and sociological context, it is important to review the historical and social background of the writers.

All the women grew up in the French-speaking Caribbean, were educated in local "French" schools and in many instances at universities in France. Many of them, from both generations, also lived and travelled widely in France and West Africa. Most spent the greater part of their adult lives outside the West Indies. During the colonial period there was a constant movement of the educated black population between the Caribbean, France and French African territories.[5] This movement largely continued until the independence of the former French African territories in the '60s. Many of the women from the West Indies found themselves in West Africa via the métropole either as teachers, civil servants or wives of French Africans, often fellow students encountered in the "hexagon."[6] Among the contemporary women writers, a greater number are originally from Guadeloupe than from Martinique, which is not true of male writers--a detail perhaps not without significance, as Guadeloupe is generally seen as more militantly nationalistic and as leaning more towards independence (understandably; for example, more property in Guadeloupe is in the hands of overseas owners than is true of Martinique) while Martinican society with a larger European, white,

population is still largely directed towards the métropole. Many of the writers were at one time or another actively involved with women's organizations and groups concerned with reform in the role and status of women.[7]

The literature of francophone Caribbean women is in many ways a direct mirror image of their society and reflects the ways in which many women, especially educated colored women, see or saw themselves in that society. It is a literature of confinement and alienation rather than a literature of revolt. Caribbean women's writing up to the present cannot be said to be militantly "feminist" in that it does not depict, openly advocate, or point to the possibility of a change in the status or situation of women, seen mainly as negative.[8] However, the preoccupations of the writing in many cases point to the necessity for change and are feminist in the wider sense of having to do primarily with women's lives. The works speak of the feminine condition: of women's every-day existence, of how they live, think and see themselves and their place in their societies. These works make a significant contribution especially with regard to the position and image of the educated woman. In general, the picture that emerges is very pessimistic. Although many of the writers in the study work in more than one genre: poetry, theatre, as well as prose, here the discussion will be confined to prose works only: essays, short stories, novels and récits, including both roman and récit du vécu, fiction and "true life story."

A perusal of a bibliography of prose works by women in Caribbean literature immediately reveals several telling details (see Appendix A). It becomes apparent from the titles that many of the works are names

and/or statements of identity: the names of, or for, women: Yvette, Claire-Solange, âme africaine; La négresse blanche; Fille d'Haïti; Sapotille; Cajou (the heroine's nickname); Juletane. At times the titles are first person statements of identity or problem: Je suis martiniquaise; Mon examen de blanc. The first feature to emerge even from a cursory examination of the works themselves is a preoccupation with identity translated into the literary form of the biographical or autobiographical narrative. In the case of almost every single Caribbean woman writer there is at least one work, often more than one, in this form. The first person narrative, with a female narrative voice (usually the narrator is a women telling her own story) predominates. As in the case of African women's writing many of the works are fictional biographies, the majority autobiographies, or autobiographical narratives, in the form of letters, journals or diaries. In many cases the narrator makes explicit as the reason for writing the fact that the act of writing gives consolation, relief, or simply a sense of coming to terms and attempting to cope with a reality which has become, or is becoming, increasingly intolerable.

In a talk on black American woman's fiction, Gloria Hull, a black American woman scholar, made the point that although there are a number of autobiographies by black American women, diaries (real, not fictional) are rare. She also suggested that this is because it takes a certain "sense of self" to keep a diary, whereas the autobiography allows the writer to present to the world the "finished product."[9] These two factors are relevant here. As the titles of the works mentioned above indicate, these novels are stories of the lives of women, women asserting their identities in the terms they choose. "Je suis

martiniquaise," (Je suis) fille d'Haïti," (Je suis) une jeune crêole" are clearly statements of identity. Claire-Solange, âme africaine, the story of a young métisse taken on a journey to France by her white father, implies by the titles a conscious rejection of European identity (and of her West Indian crêole identity as well). Her name may be French but her innermost being is African. The title expresses a dichotomy which is even more strikingly captured in the title of Mayotte Capécia's work: La négresse blanche. The title is a play on and suggestive of the expression "négresse rouge"--a term for a lighter skinned ("red") negress. Unlike Claire-Solange, who identifies with her African heritage, the protagonist of La négresse blanche, the négresse, Mayotte, simply yearns to be either black or white, but preferably white. The title sums up a duality which is indicative of an almost schizophrenic identity crisis-- a yearning for whiteness and for white values--which is unresolved and the title encapsulates the ambiguity of La négresse blanche.

The idea of the "finished product" is significant also because in French Caribbean writing, it seems that the women look at what they have become and feel forced to go back and try to reconstruct and understand the process, the experiences, influences, which have brought them to where they are. In most cases where they are is not always where they set out to go or want to be. Moreover, often they feel hopelessly trapped. Images of futile journeys, entrapment and dreams betrayed characterize their plight in the novels.

"J'avais choisi une route large et fleurie elle s'était transformée en étroit sentier, plein d'embûches; mais je devais poursuivre mon chemin, n'ayant pas d'autre choix possible ...," remarks Zétou the

tragic heroine of Miriam Warner-Vieyra's Le Quimboiseur l'avait dit ....[10] Her statement sums up the experience and the fate of many another Antillean heroine. The women in these works are haunted by a deep sense of failure, of dislocation and alienation. Like Cesaire's épaves, they see themselves as cut off, isolated wrecks cast up and run aground far from their charted course. Or, in Schwarz-Bart's terms, they are little fish who have lost their "nageoires"--the stabilizing element which enables them to stay upright and afloat in the currents of the vast ocean or river of life. In Schwarz-Bart's imagery they are like "baleines echouées."[11]

The form of the novels mirrors the state of mind and predicament of the protagonist/narrator. The narrative structure is similar in what are otherwise sometimes very different novels. Many of the narratives are told in flashback. Thus we are confronted at once with the end product, the predicament, the narration begins at the end of the road and looks back. There is a constant juxtaposition of time where the narrator/protagonist seems to be attempting to reconstruct the past in order to understand, explain, and establish connections between this past and its significance in terms of the situation in which she finds herself. This seemingly fragmented narration has been associated with l'écriture féminine. This is true for example of Lacrosil's Sapotille ou le serin d'argile, 1960, of Schwarz-Bart's Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes, 1967, as well as of Manicom's Mon examen de blanc, Condé's Une Saison à Rihata, 1981, and Heremakhonon, 1976, and Vieyra's two novels, Le Quimboiseur l'avait dit, 1980, and Juletane, 1982. In each case the situation is usually tragic, circumscribed, in some cases more dire than a predicament. For there are ways out of a predicament, but many of the

protagonists in these novels see themselves as having no way out, they are caught in a situation sans issue, they are up against the wall. Their situation translates itself metaphorically into images of enclosed spaces: a room, a house, a cabin, a boat, a hole or well, a cachot, an enclosed garden, or expresses itself by withdrawal into a dream world, a preoccupation with the life of the imagination, a retreat within oneself in order to shut out external reality.

The themes in the novels all have to do with this tragic situation which on the personal level is marked by frustration, ambivalence, ambiguity, self-hatred, feelings of rejection and of the impossibility of reconciling conflicting parts of the self. it is the identity crisis, or "quest," common to male West Indian writing, anglophone and francophone alike , but perhaps even more acute in the case of the French Caribbean woman who is an assimilée. Indeed one critic claims that all writing by francophone West Indian women can be seen as "an identity quest."[12] Unlike male Caribbean fiction, however, this quest usually ends in withdrawal and/or flight/evasion rather than confrontation and breaking out. It is relevant here to briefly discuss time and space in the novels, especially in terms of the journey and the enclosed space.

The development of Caribbean women's fiction can be seen in terms of two elements which occur frequently in the works: the journey and the enclosed space, images which belong to Césaire's poetic universe and which recur frequently in Caribbean literature. The space is both positive and negative, a trap as well as a protective enclosure. The journey is the "triple" journey of Edward Brathwaite's poetry, akin to Césaire's journey in Cahier d'un retour au pays natal.[13] In the infamous "Middle Passage," (the voyage from Africa to the West Indies) in fact,

both images coalesce: the slaveship or nègrier becomes the simultaneous embodiment of incarceration and uprootedness, déracinement. The African is stripped of his or her identity and becomes the nègre or négresse, trapped in the color of their skin, from which henceforth they derive their only identity in the eyes of their new society. It is at once a physical and psychological journey, the journey of a homeless people who have three homelands: the Caribbean, Europe and Africa, of a people deprived of their identity who have a triple heritage, African, European and Antillean. The writings are journals, records of this journey in reverse away from and then back to the Caribbean and into the self. Like the Cahier, the writings of these women novelists are a means of coming to terms with the self and of finding "one's own space." Caribbean women's novels are primarily concerned with what Césaire calls:

> The peculiarity of "our place in the world" which isn't to be confused with anybody else's. The peculiarity of our problems which aren't to be reduced to subordinate forms of any other problem. The peculiarity of our history, laced with terrible misfortunes which belong to no other history.[14]

Césaire was referring to French West Indians in general, but the same also holds true for women's experiences, women's existence, women's place in the world, which can best and most truly be expressed by women. Hence the importance, especially for Caribbean women, of Caribbean women's fiction.

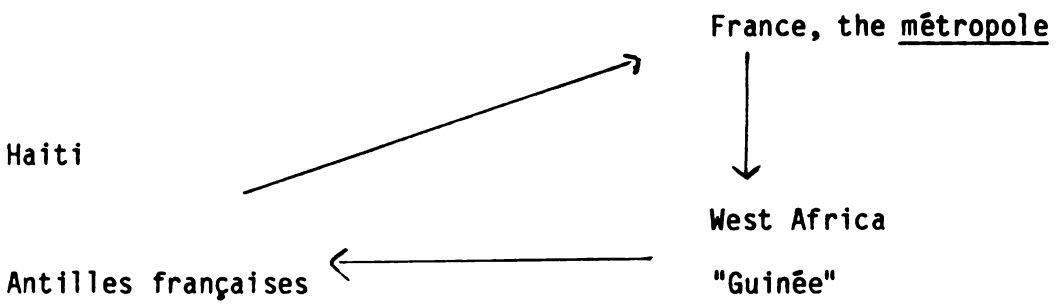

Figure of the journey: physical, sentimental

Historically, as well as spatially and chronologically, the fields of action in the novels begin in the West Indies, move to Europe (France) then to West Africa and finally back to the Caribbean. Lacrosil's three novels for example follow this pattern: Sapotille et le serin d'argile, 1960, is set in Guadeloupe and on a ship bound for France; Cajou, 1961, tells of a young woman's life in Paris and her memories of the West Indies and with Demain Jab-Herma, 1967, we are back in the Caribbean. Chronologically, the earlier novels (or within a given novel the early years) occur in the Caribbean. Some of the earliest novels, for example, La négresse blanche (set in Martinique in the 1940s), Ega's Le temps des madras (published in 1966 but dealing with Ega's childhood), or Capécia's Je suis martiniquaise, are set in the West Indies. Some, mostly the later novels, take place mainly in France, for example: Le quimboiseur l'avait dit, Cajou, Mon examen de blanc or Lettres à une Noire (Ega, 1978), while others, like Heremakhonon, Une saison à Rihata or Juletane, are concerned with the experiences of an antillaise heroine who has come to West Africa by way of France and yearns to go back to her homeland in the Caribbean. Through the fields

of action of the novels therefore, the three geographical and psychological spaces are explored in terms of a personal history. The result in most cases is alienation and rejection. So, whereas in certain types of fiction journey is often journey as initiation, in the case of the female writers journey becomes journey as alienation.[15]

We find recorded in the diaries both the physical journey to France or to Africa, and the corresponding emotional, psychological, inward journey, which in many cases leads to madness or the complete annihilation of self in suicide or death. At the beginning (chronologically the end) of the novels we see a character who is generally isolated both from her immediate surroundings, her homeland or society and from the self. This isolation or withdrawal from reality or from a hostile, unsatisfying world, expresses itself metaphorically in terms of an enclosed space. In some cases the women choose to restrict themselves and limit their world to this familiar, controllable environment. Thus Marie-Hélène (Une Saison à Rihata) rarely leaves her bedroom, furnished with pieces which remind her of her childhood home in Guadeloupe. Lacrosil's Sapotille spends most of her time on board ship confined to her cabin, looking through the porthole, and Cajou is reluctant to leave her dingy room high up in an old building in Paris except to go to the safe familiar universe of the laboratory where she works as a chemist. Even Manicom's relatively liberated Dr. Madévie Ramimoutou is always seen either in her "cube" where she feels safe or in the confined space of the operating theater where she functions efficiently as an anesthetist but has difficulty relating as an individual both to other Antillais from whom she is cut off and to her white co-workers. She too is characteristically depicted looking out the window, most often to the

airport, which links Guadeloupe to Paris and Madévie to her lost unhappy love affair. In other cases the heroines' confinement is forced--a harsh physical representation of their social and psychological alienation. Vieyra's Juletane "la folle," is first locked in her room and eventually ends her life Zêtou in Le Quimboiseur l'avait dit confined in a mental hospital. Trapped, both are victims of a cruel fate, brought about by the betrayal of loved ones and their deluded ambitions. Both choose to retreat into madness and seek escape through willingly embracing death seen as a sort of dark bottomless pit which paradoxically will lead to ultimate deliverance. Mariotte, the vieille négresse of Schwarz-Bart's earlier Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes, ends her days confined, lonely, and destitute in an old people's home in Paris. Only in Schwarz-Bart's later novels does the enclosed space have positive resonances. (Significantly too in these works, négresse becomes a positive term.)

Many of the features which characterize Caribbean women's fiction are linked to the autobiographical form and are expressed in terms of these two metaphors of the journey (flight, escape) and the enclosed space (isolation, alienation, incarceration). A fuller discussion of several novels will illustrate some of these characteristics and highlight the different images of women. First of all, the focus in this literature is naturally on the woman. Secondly, the works are marked by their pessimism. The woman is seen, as already noted, as being in an impossible situation. Hopelessness faces not only woman, but also the male and society in the Caribbean in general. An associated characteristic of the literature therefore, related and giving rise to its pessimism, is alienation. The women are alienated from themselves,

from men, and from their society. Their alienation is bound up with feelings of rejection and expresses itself in negative mother and father figures: a rejection both of their natural parents and a rejection of the past in terms of their history, expressed as disillusionment with Europe, the mother or fatherland ("la mère - patrie"), as well as disappointment with Africa, the mythical motherland. The women's alienation and feelings of rejection lead them to try to find ways of escape but they find there is no real escape, only withdrawal from reality leading to a desire for death, suicide, or madness. The women often see themselves as victims, victims of a hostile environment and victims of their history and heritage. Hence the importance of the past. The past is linked to their identity and their alienation is often a result of historical factors--family history and the history of their society. In this history which began with the Middle Passage the question of race and color is crucial. The social structure inherited from the days of slavery and the hierarchy of the plantation, based mainly on color, left an indelible mark on Caribbean society.

The matter of race and color is explored fully and treated mainly as a source of anguish and conflict. Especially in the earlier novels, the question of color revolves around a rejection of blackness, accompanied as in La negrêsse blanche, by a desire to be "blanchie"--a wishing for what Fanon calls "lactification."[16] It is basically a rejection of self. The repudiation of Europe and the demythification of Africa present in the later novels also express themselves in a rejection of motherhood and an emphasis on sterility or indifference rather than an embracing of the maternal role. Many women in the later novels do not want, or do not have, children. If they do have children, they do not perform the usual

mothering role. Negative mother figures thus reflect both alienation and pessimism. Maternity is often a sign of optimism and hope, whereas sterility is linked to alienation, rejection and hopelessness. This portrayal of motherhood is also a refusal of the stereotyped maternal role, a role assigned and valued mainly by the male. All these features are in fact linked to the question of the women's identity as women, as black women, and as black women in West Indian society. These themes are interwoven threads which interrelate and blur and are in turn expressed in the narrative form, where the narrative voice, the central consciousness or the persona in the novels is nearly always a woman, a femme de couleur.

As we have already stated, the biographical or autobiographical récit predominates. It takes different forms: the journal, diary, letters, retrospective narration. Clarisse Zimra says that Caribbean women's literature is a "literature of catharsis" which seeks to exorcise the black woman's "predicament": being born black and female in a world dominated by white and male values.[17] The connection with the French policy of assimilation is obvious. If one is black creole-speaking, educated, alienation is the inevitable result.[18] The alienation and sense of isolation shared by men is more extreme in women who see themselves as doubly exploited. As Zimra points out, a close reading of La négresse blanche shows a much more complex situation than that suggested by Fanon's analysis of Mayotte Capécia's position. Zimra points out specifically that women see themselves as "sexual pawns passing from the ownership of one race to that of the other. Relations between colored women and men of any color remain those between masters and slaves."[19] In the novels, however, there is a progression chrono-

logically between Capécia and Condé in the degree of feminine consciousness and in the gradual integration of self. In the later novels, although the woman is still for the most part alienated, she is less alienated and much more aware in Manicom than in Capécia. Moreover, her alienation is born of a desire to change the status quo. Condé's heroines are less pessimistic and self-hating than Lacrosil's. Capécia's women are completely alienated. Lacrosil's only slightly less so. In both cases the source of their alienation is the conflict engendered by an education/upbringing which has cut them off from their society and led them to despise one part of themselves and their heredity. Capécia's protagonists as well as Lacrosil's take refuge in flight, withdrawal from a world perceived as hostile and threatening. Ormerod points out that in the nineteenth century French West Indies "Most mulattos passionately desired to dissociate themselves from the black part of their ancestry and be identified only with the white part, and the women among them commonly preferred to be a white man's mistress than to marry another mulatto. The notion of the advantages of a light skin, inherent in the ranking system of plantation life, was thus ineradicably implanted in Caribbean social structure. (...) Alienation, a poor self-image in relation to whites and a disdainful attitude to darker skin shades were thus common features of the free coloured caste...."[20] These attitudes continue to operate in the twentieth century Antillean society of the novels and help the reader to accept as realistic the complexes and pressures Capécia's heroines suffer from and seek to escape.

In the case of Isaure, Capécia's heroine in La négresse blanche, her ambiguity, ambivalence and déchirement are particularly acute. Her

"nature," sympathies and instinct are portrayed (albeit stereotyped) as coming from her black blood, but she has been conditioned to be "white." The predicament is common to all sectors of educated West Indian society. But in the case of French West Indians who strove towards assimilation the dilemma was particularly acute. Their education consciously and deliberately cut them off from their own environment, the creole environment, and from their cultural experiences, especially those experiences with residual African cultural expressions, ways of interpreting phenomena, their language, etc. Thus "le quimbois," "voudou" or "black" magic in the novels is often used as a symbol of this repressed and outlawed African heritage. Although many of the characters have recourse to quimbois, especially in difficult or hopeless situations, they do so in secret and sometimes with reluctance, embarassment and shame. Isaure, "la nègresse blanche" and Zétou in Le Quimboiseur l'avait dit, as well as Lacrosil's and Schwarz-Bart's heroines, all have faith in and dealings with quimbois. Schwarz-Bart's heroines are the only ones who openly embrace and celebrate this part of their life.

The black woman: Mayotte Capécia, Michèle Lacrosil

Mayotte Capécia's heroine, Mayotte, of Je suis martiniquaise, has been discussed at length by Fanon who sees her and her creator as the epitome of alienation. From an analysis of the novel he concludes: "Mayotte Capécia (the author) is barred from herself."[21] Fanon makes no distinction between Mayotte as author and Mayotte the persona in the novel. Be that as it may, Fanon himself shows elsewhere in the same chapter of his book that Mayotte's obsession with whiteness is a

reflection of a preoccupation common in the Martinican society of the time.[22] Mayotte sees her blackness as the source of her hardships in life. She quite unselfconsciously, with extremely naive candor, expresses her desire to "be completely white" (Je suis martiniquaise, p. 59). This desire brings with it an unquestioning acceptance and valuing of whiteness (she can and will only love a white man, simply because he is white), and consequently a rejection of her own blackness, a total negation and hatred of self. But although it is true that, as Fanon says, Capécia is pessimistic about Martinique: "Mayotte Capécia has definitely turned her back on her country. In both her books only one course is left for her heroines: to go away,"[23] Capécia's protagonists are by no means unique. The same can be said of most Antillean heroines at some point in their lives: Lacrosil's, Manicom's, Vieyra's, Condé's protagonists all flee from the West Indies and some of them discover too late, their mistake. Moreover, the protagonist in Capécia's second, later, novel La négresse blanche, is significantly less unquestioning in her acceptance of all things white as superior and desirable and much more consciously analytical about her values. From one work to the other, the character's if not necessarily the author's position has become less cut and dried.

As the title suggests the dominating theme in the novel is that of race and color. Isaure, the négresse blanche, is not free, in fact she is caught in a bind. She is a victim of heredity and history. She has been conditioned by her mother, who, abandoned by her white lover and left with his child, nevertheless inculcates in her daughter "ce respect des blancs," which now imprisons Isaure (La négresse blanche, p. 13). She longs to rid herself of the feeling, but cannot. The novel is set in

Fort-de-France in the 40s. It is wartime Martinique. The town is "occupied" by the French fleet, which, instead of bringing food for the starving Martiniquais, has taken away and exploited their women. The situation at the beginning of the novel is significant. It is symbolic of Isaure's psychological incarceration. She is locked in a room, her own bar, with three white men: two officers and a sailor. Fiercely proud, financially independent, she is nevertheless a prisoner of her fears and prejudices. Outside the door, in the night, are the nègres whom she claims to despise and fear. They have come in pursuit of the sailor who has been with one of their women. Isaure also says she despises the white men and feels the affairs of Martinicans do not concern them, but she is powerless to act. Her despair and frustration are great. She passionately puts the point of view of the wronged and outraged black male while at the same time expressing her scorn and hatred for him. She bars the door so that the officers cannot go into the street to what she fears will be their death. Yet the end of the chapter is telling. Of her own accord, Isaure suddenly does what she has all along been terrified of and has forbidden the white men to do: she snatches open the door--"elle s'était jetée dans la nuit" (La négresse blanche, p. 15). The full impact of this seemingly inexplicable, unexpected action has been well prepared. Isaure is several times described as "nerveuse," even "terrorisée." She does not herself understand her action or motive. "Etait-ce la revanche de ce sang que depuis son enfance elle tentait d'étouffer?" (La Négresse blanche, p. 18). Although Capécia's suggested explanation deprecates Isaure's black ancestry and treats it in terms of negative clichés, her heroine is forced to admit its importance in her identity. Isaure's situation is

one of tragic déchirement. History repeated itself. At 17 she became the lover of a béké (a rich Martinican white) whose family quickly sends him away (to China!). He leaves her with a baby. Isaure however, unlike her mother, is very conscious of her situation and faces it lucidly. She cannot undo her mother's conditioning, further compounded by the results of this first sexual encounter:

> C'était vrai, elle n'avait jamais eu d'amant noir. Peut-être uniquement parce que le premier, qui l'avait prise à dix-sept ans était un blanc. Un premier amant oriente une vie. Cela aurait pu être tout différent. Le mariage avec un noir, cela ne vaudrait-il mieux que le concubinage avec un blanc? Les enfants, du moins, n'auraient pas été des batards. (La négresse blanche, p. 12).

Isaure still despises blacks whom she calls "les sales nègres," yet she is drawn to them "comme une mangouste fascinée par le serpent." Whether or not Capécia herself holds these views, the narrator here mimics stereotyped social attitudes of her society. The male sexual stereotype, the weak white man and the virile black, is reflected in her portrayal of the béké and the typical Martinican. She characterizes the sang-mêlé and the nègre as hot-blooded, instinctual, "earthy," more subject to passions and baser drives--in short, more "animal." Despite her own ancestry Isaure sees the black man as inferior. Her characterization of both the métisse and the black woman are also stereotyped. Yet Isaure's position is not identical to that of Mayotte in Je suis Martiniquaise. Although in some ways more tragic, Isaure's situation is seen in more complex terms. Her position is more ambivalent.

Isaure's relationship with both black and white men is one of scorn, hate and terror. As Zimra has pointed out, she cannot relate positively to either. She despises the white men she is forced to cater to in her bar, yet she cannot help herself. She does not allow herself to mix with

blacks--she will not even serve them in her establishment. Capécia's work is of limited literary and artistic merit. Her psychological explanations and character studies are exaggerated, clichés, reminiscent of retrograde (although still prevalent) attitudes and popular, romantic fiction. But as a record of a woman growing up in the first half of the century in the French Caribbean it provides valuable documentation and insights.

The situation at the beginning of the novel (the whites within, the blacks outside, the métisse of her own choosing locked in with the whites, yet uncomfortable and longing to burst out of her own self-imposed prison) metaphorically expresses not only the position of the femme de couleur but also the conflict in the Caribbean society which is physically and psychologically embodied in the person of Isaure. As the narrator remarks, "Enfin, tout, chez elle, même son accent et ses gestes était métissé" (La négresse blanche, p. 9).[24] Isaure is torn. In addition, as foreshadowed by her role in the opening chapter, the woman is both a source of hostility and the go-between between two groups of hostile males. Having temporarily abandoned their black husbands and lovers the women in Capécia's wartime Fort-de-France are totally involved with the visiting French sailors. Woman is shown to be the main point of contact/buffer/source of friction between the two groups which otherwise have very little to do with each other. As a result, the woman is doubly exploited and victimized--by the white man who uses and abandons her, and by her own man who resents having to share her with the French sailor. It is perhaps of course a situation of mutual exploitation. Capécia depicts the women as choosing to accept the situation because of its material advantages. But life is hard and they

must fight to survive.

Isaure's self-hatred is clearly shown to be the result of her life situation and upbringing. She, too, is fighting for survival and independence. She is financially independent and psychologically she does manage to achieve a very limited measure of freedom. In her relationship with Daniel (a cowardly, selfish Frenchman) she is suppressing her natural feelings and desires. She finally manages to liberate herself: she deliberately ends the relationship. Although her next relationship is still with a white man, he is described in more positive terms. He is in fact sympathetic to the cause of the blacks. He defies his family and marries Isaure.

Capécia's view of male-female relations in her society and her portrayal of relationships between blacks and whites, while still open to serious criticism and somewhat simplistic, is much more ambiguous and complex in this second novel. Although Isaure does not manage to rid herself of her prejudices and she hates the poor black workers who have killed her white husband, depicted as innocent, she does at times recognize and put the case for her fellow blacks. She condemns the békés for their cruel exploitation of blacks and for their snobbery. In the context of the time and her conditioning it is perhaps realistically as far as a woman like Isaure could go.

Capécia attracted Fanon's condemnation for unashamedly voicing sentiments through her characters which are to be found in other works as well, although given less credence. Isaure herself reflects on her awakening consciousness: "Elle était mécontente, angoissée. (...) Elle ne pouvait plus se borner à servir les békés."[25] Although at the end of the novel Isaure's "solution" is flight--a voyage to France which she

does not really want to undertake--Isaure recognizes that it is her own lie or falsehood ("mensonge") which is the cause of her predicament. (To avenge herself at the expense of her mother-in-law who disapproves of her, Isaure has said she is carrying her husband's child.) But "mensonge" must be understood here in a much wider sense than that individual, particular lie. It is a metaphor for Isaure's condition, the condition of the black or mulatto assimilé.

Michèle Lacrosil

Capécia depicts the woman in the West Indies as alienated from her society because of her color and background, but also because of her sex. Especially in the earlier works, as already mentioned, women are seen very much as sexual objects. This is the case with Lacrosil's heroine Sapotille, in Sapotille et le serin d'argile. In this novel too color is a dominant factor in the woman's life and way of seeing and defining herself.

Sapotille (her name, her identity, derives from her color, her "jolie peau de sapotille") despises herself: a consequence of her alienating education.[26] She is black but she has been sent to a boarding-school for the daughters of rich mulattoes and békés because her mother wants her to have "une éducation convenable." The nuns cruelly mock her ambition to be a lawyer and treat her harshly. She is in love with a mulatto who toys with her affections and abandons her, using as an excuse family pressures. She marries a black man, who, himself a victim of his society's prejudices, beats and ill-treats her. She loses her child. Sapotille's story begins and ends with the young woman setting off for France where she hopes to escape the complexes and

restrictions of her native Guadeloupe. The novel is set on board a ship where the woman is confined to her cabin. The space in the novel is compartmentalized and stratified. The divisions on board mirror the divisions in Caribbean society. Sapotille has chosen to take with her significant objects from her past, a tin cup, the clay canary--objects identified with her past humiliation. She refused to leave behind that which she is seeking to flee and forget. It quickly becomes clear to the reader that Sapotille is also largely responsible for her own situation. She drags around with her symbolically and psychologically the seeds of her own self-destruction. The boat is not a means of escape, but her prison. France one realizes will solve nothing. Sapotille's naively ironic remarks at the end of the narrative ("Les Français ignorent le compartimentage de la société antillaise, les interdits d'une classe à l'autre. J'ai toujours aimé leur pays; je ne le connais pas encore, mais je sais que c'est ma patrie"[27]) already point clearly to future disillusionment and unhappiness.

Whereas for Césaire in the final analysis the situation in the Antilles is rotten to the core and has to be destroyed, the reaction of the women is to try, as Césaire did initially, to leave it behind. But there is no escape. In France, the predicament remains--as it does in Africa for Vieyra and Condé's West Indian heroines. They have carried their insecurities, complexes and unrealized hopes with them. These women do not seek as Césaire's poet did to change their society. For them, with the exception of Manicom's heroine and Schwarz-Bart's Lougandor women, the situation is impossible. Schwarz-Bart's heroines alone are able to transcend their environment, accept hardships and even blossom in their ascribed place in the world. Significantly, Télumée and

her grandmother never leave their island and rarely venture far from their homes. They stay in their circumscribed protected and protective space. They too make a journey but it is a journey inward, a journey of initiation, to an integration of self, never a physical journey. Whereas Césaire's protagonist journeys from crushed submissiveness to open revolt the protagonists in female Caribbean writing remain largely passive whatever their geographical or social milieu.

Lacrosil's second novel, Cajou, confirms that only the setting has changed. Cajou and Sapotille are basically aspects of the same self. Cajou has changed her name from Monica. Her new name in her own words symbolizes "ma propre ambiguité." The word "cajou" from "acajou" means "cashew," both fruit and nut, but also means "mahogany"--a precious wood used for carvings and like "Sapotille" a way of designating skin color. The dual nature of the fruit/nut seems to Cajou particularly appropriate to her nature and identity. Her white lover wants to marry her, her director has named her "chef de travaux" in the laboratory where she works. But Cajou cannot accept either love or recognition because she is estranged from herself. Her "solution" is suicide. Cajou in Europe, educated and accepted, copes no better than Sapotille did in Martinique.

The mulatto woman: Maryse Condé

In her two novels, Heremakhonon,and Une saison à Rihata, Maryse Condé offers a portrait of the typical middle class Antillaise.[28] Both Veronica Mercier and Marie-Hélène are attractive, well-educated and above all portrayed as intellectually gifted and independent-minded women. Their aspirations and views contrast sharply with those put forward by society as the ideal Antillaise bourgeoise who is expected to

be basically passive and portrayed by Condé as a sort of stereotyped heroine of imported romantic fiction. The narrator in Heremakhonon remarks that women in her circle believe that "real women" must have hay-fever, allergies, in short, must be weak, or as romantic novels would say "delicate." Their concept of themselves is in keeping with the roles and status imposed upon women by Antillean middle-class values and against which Veronica revolts. Veronica's rebellion however is doomed to fail as the means she chooses to liberate herself are ironically the source of a further enslavement. Veronica longs to free herself from the limitations imposed on a woman by her society. In her desire to be free she mistakenly imagines she can achieve this freedom through a liaison with Jean Marie de Roseval, son of a wealthy creole family. Veronica swears that she was attracted to Jean Marie not because of his name or his color but because he is "free." However, we recognize a scenario and a phenomenon not unlike that of many earlier novels. It can be argued that Capécia's Martiniquaises, Isaure and Mayotte, and Lacrosil's heroines are guilty of the same misconceptions. They all make the same basic error. They believe that by association or identification with one who is perceived as having the qualities they desire (beauty, freedom, independence, security, whiteness, lack of constraint or whatever else they see their lovers as possessing) they can somehow acquire these attributes and change their situation.[29] In each case, the object of their desire is a male in a class which is perceived as being socially superior. Veronica, like Lacrosil's and Capécia's heroines, flees, first to Paris and eventually to Africa, as did many other West Indian women, not just in the novels but in real life also.[30] Tragically, in Veronica's case, as in most other cases, her conflicts and her dilemma

remain unresolved. Their fault lies in failing to see that they need to change themselves, their orientation, values, aims, not their external circumstances.

Veronica's response to the demands of her society is open rebellion and flight. In her later novel Condé shows that despite attempts to rebel, the values of Antillean creole society are hard to shake. In Une saison à Rihata, Marie-Hélène, too, had spent a rebellious, idealistic youth in Paris. In her student days she was filled with the exuberant enthusiasm of a militant left-wing intellectual. She rejected the path laid down for women and exemplified by her mother--a cultivated, potentially independent and strong, sensitive woman: yet victimized by social convention and by her husband, described significantly in these disdainfully pejorative terms by his daughter: "un nègre mal équarri... un nègre, nègre quoi! (...) un homme vulgaire et bien dans sa peau" (Rihata, p. 26). However, having abandoned her studies and a potentially brilliant career to marry an African on the rebound, after a tragic love affair which caused the suicide of her sister, Marie-Hélène in Africa seems to be more and more drawn to those middle-class values of her childhood that she had once rejected. She nostalgically, and it seems proudly, recalls her mother, Alix des Ruisseaux, "cette femme fière et délaissée," who maintained her independence after being abandoned by her husband by selling her embroidery. Her daughter who "avait toujours haï les travaux d'aiguille," now pregnant with her sixth child, "s'efforçait maladroitement de tracer au point de tige le mot 'bébé'. Qu' aurait dit sa mère devant ces points inégaux, marqués de toute son impatience et de sa frustration?" (p. 77). Marie-Hélène, middle-aged, identifies more and more with her mother whom she sees as a victim of a cruel, insensitive,

husband. Marie-Hélène blames her father, unjustifiably it seems, for her mother's premature death. Alix des Ruisseaux is compared to Marie-Hélène's African mother-in-law whom she despises. Alix is the personification of "refined" bourgeois values. Her sin is to have loved "un nègre." She is from a very old creole family, landowners: one of her ancestors, a much anthologized poet, wrote sonnets: "Alix avait été élevée dans le respect de toutes les valeurs qui font de la mulatraille ce qu'elle est" (Rihata, p. 26).

Marie-Hélène grew up partly in this rarefied genteel bourgeois world where "Les dames en robe de soie, comme Alix, tenant par la main des fillettes en robe d'organza comme elle-même, s'extasiaient sur la finesse et l'originalité des broderies et payaient de petites fortunes pour une paire de napperons" (Rihata, p. 77). Now far from the Antilles it is this side of her heritage which she embraces nostalgically. She completely rejects the legacy of her father who "aimait le rhum sec dans les verres, les rires et plaisanteries gras, les négresses à peau veloutée au sexe sans mystère" (Rihata, p. 76) and whom she cannot forgive (or understand) for having married her mother.

Although she does not fully recognize or acknowledge it, Marie-Hélène is conditioned by her outmoded upbringing which is responsible for her inability to relate to her children or to assert herself and face the difficulties and demands of everyday living in an ordinary world. Her role model and her idol is her mother, whom she remembers as "silencieuse, solitaire": "Alix appartenaient à une génération de femmes qui ne se confiaient pas. Surtout à leurs enfants. Et Marie-Hélène n'avait jamais pu que diviner" (Rihata, p. 76). She admires her mother's stoicism and silent martyrdom but it is a silence

which has dire repercussions in her own maternal role. Marie-Hélène and her sister are brought up as family possessions, treasured and regarded with pride like "bijoux" or "propriétés familiales" (Rihata, p. 80). Marie-Hélène the older one is especially coddled because she is not only intelligent but has long, straight, hair. Her sister, a "chabine" is less fussed over: "...on déplorait vivement ses cheveux tellement courts et crépus. Leur grand-mère soupirait: - Heureusement, tu as une belle peau et de beaux yeux... Entendez par là une peau presque blanche et des yeux gris!" (Rihata, p. 80). Not content with her long, straight hair, Marie-Hélène even confesses she wished for eyes like her sister's. Unconsciously it is these deeply-ingrained artificial values which Marie-Hélène reflects when she cannot come to terms with the realities of her everyday hum-drum existence, just as she could not face a world of compromise or accept responsibility for her selfish actions which caused her sister's death.

The Antillean middle class is portrayed as living in a false, fairy-tale world of borrowed values and imported manners where there are strict rules for behavior and rigid taboos. But the influence of this world is very tenacious. Zimra points out that the mulatto heroine is a fitting metaphor for the "surviving colonial condition" in the French Antilles.[31] André Schwarz-Bart's figure of the mad mulatto with one blue and one brown eye in La mulâtresse Solitude is another haunting portrait of this tragic situation.[32] To break these taboos is to court disaster, moreso for a woman. Alix des Ruisseaux suffers as much from having loved a black man who marries and then discards her as does Lacrosil's Sapotille for aspiring to a mulatto. In both cases their real problem is due to false values which inhibit and destroy them. The society is

harsh. Women especially must know their place, channel their affections correctly, and limit their ambition no matter how gifted they may be. Consciously or subtly they are taught and internalize these values, and they find they cannot simply discard them. The nuns ridiculed Sapotille for wanting to be a lawyer. Much later the protagonist of Vieyra's Le quimboiseur l'avait dit declares that if, like her sister, just as intelligent, but less ambitious, she had been content to stay in her tiny native village, her story would have had a happy, rather than a tragic, ending. Indeed the novel carries a warning in the form of a cautionary epigraph: "Là où la confiance te mène, ta force ne te fait pas sortir (proverbe antillais)." It is also a theme of Vieyra's second novel Juletane, set in Africa.

Social roles: mother, wife, grandmother

Condé's novels are pessimistic in their portrayal of Antillean bourgeois society. Her father figures are particularly negative. Veronica's father, en bon bourgeois, denounces his daughter in the harshest terms and Marie-Hélène's although not a status-conscious mulatto, is described as irresponsible, pleasure-seeking and mainly characterized by his absence. The black father in Capécia's Je suis martiniquaise had similar traits but is a more sympathetic character. However, it is the mother who is largely responsible for the transmission of values, and as such she is particularly censured. In male fiction the maternal fgure is most often, almost always in fact, positive. Not so in the case of Caribbean women's fiction. The most damaging depiction of a negative mother figure can be found in Vieyra's Le quimboiseur l'avait dit. Zétou's mother, a figure of the light-

skinned petit bourgeois class, has abandoned her husband and children and run off with a white man. In her mind she left the stifling atmosphere of her native village to seek a better, more rewarding, life in France. Her daughter, the narrator, does not entirely condemn her actions. However, the mother's false values, degradation and tragedy have completely dehumanized her to the point where she becomes a Caricature of an "unnatural mother." Ironically, it is Zetou's desire to widen her horizons which paves the way for her own exploitation. In France she is betrayed and exploited by her mother. Both are victims of their desire to escape their island village which they consider limited and limiting. The mother/daughter relationship as well as that of the father and daughter is depicted as being unsatisfactory. The life of the couple is also portrayed in negative terms.

In many of the novels the portrait which we get of the wife is most often that of the middle-class woman taken for granted and neglected by her husband as he devotes himself to his work and/or to his own enjoyment and amorous adventures. Most of the time the reader first sees the wife in the person of the heroine's mother. This is the case of Mayotte's family in Je suis martiniquaise and it is also the position Condé's heroine Marie-Hélène describes with regard to her own mother. (The relationship between Marie-Hélène and her own husband will be discussed in a later section.) In general, the image of the black West Indian male as husband and father is very negative and perhaps understandably the role of wife is not put forward as a desired or valued one. In Sapotille et le serin d'argile where the narrative is concerned directly with the life of the married couple the situtation is most unpleasant. Benôit, Sapotille's black husband, beats her and

Sapotille, who does not really love her husband anyway, almost proves to be a willing victim. Sapotille says of their marriage: "C'était raté. Benôit s'acharnait en vain à me coincer dans le moule de son idéal; il voulait d'une épouse soumise, aimante et terrifiée, et je n'arrivais pas à réunir les trois conditions en même temps. Le pire grief de Benoît, c'était que je 'ne le craignais pas assez'."[34] Lacrosil suggests that both individuals are warped by their experiences. Benoît, having been humiliated by others, can only feel like a man by victimizing his wife. "Il attendait mes larmes comme une réhabilitation."[35] One hopes that such extreme cases are an exaggeration, but the main point Lacrosil seems to be making is that both men and women are victims of an unjust society and an oppressive past.

In contrast to the Benoît/Sapotille couple we have Schwarz-Bart's portrayal of Toussine and Jérémie's life together in Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle. As a wife Toussine is cherished and within the tiny circumscribed space of their cottage and garden in the country hamlet Toussine "s'épanouissait." For a brief interlude Telumée also enjoys the contentment of a wife until her luck turns and her man is taken from her. These couples, however, are rural, peasant families and even within their own community they are the objects of jealousy among their neighbors who are envious of their prosperity and good fortune.

Positive Images: Simone Schwarz-Bart

> "...car qu'est-ce qu'une femme? ... un néant, disaient-ils, tandis que Toussine était tout au contraire un morceau de monde, un pays tout entier, un panache de négresse, la barque la voile et le vent car elle ne s'était pas habituée au malheur" (Pluie, p. 27)

While Schwarz-Bart's novels have some elements in common with the work of other Caribbean women writers (Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle focuses on women, and is an autobiographical, non-linear narrative for example) her work is more marked by its unique qualities. In Ti-Jean l'Horizon Schwarz-Bart's narrator makes it explicit that her concept of her island is at variance with those who consider it "sans importance" or "insignifiante." Although Fond-Zombi is a tiny hamlet on a tiny island, a speck on the map, it is not a land with no past and no history. Moreover, it is not necessary to look overseas to Europe or to Africa to find a sense of worth. Unfortunately, as the narrator recognizes, most of the people there see themselves as "créatures de sable et de vent" as if "surgis de nulle part, pour n'être rien."[36] It is this image which Schwarz-Bart's heroines resolutely struggle to reject as they assert their power to "dominate their horse" and to remain upright and afloat in the waters of life.

Often in Caribbean literature landscape is a key to character. The plaine/morne distinction can be found in the works of writers such as Césaire, Glissant. In Schwarz-Bart this distinction is clear. In Ti-Jean L'Horizon the "gens d'En haut," who live like Telumée's grandmother on the other side of the Bridge of Beyond, are distinguished from their fellow men. They are and see themselves as superior. Their sense of

superiority comes from a sure sense of self founded on a knowledge of their history as descendants of slaves who revolted. What Schwarz-Bart attempts to do is to give back to the peasant his lost worth. The narrators says of these men: "Ils ne se tourmentaient comme ceux du village, ni s'interrogeaient pas sur la couleur de leurs boyaux; savaient, savaient qu'un sang noble courait dans leurs veines, celui des braves qui avaient construit ces mêmes cases rondes et blanchies à la chaux."[37] The "gens d'En-haut" are a breed set apart. They are strong because they have kept intact their link with the past. They have so far been able to resist "la magie de la plaine" which attracts and destroys. Until the fatal day of the arrival of the "route goudronnée."

In Pluie et vent sur Têlumée Miracle the Lougandor women are also a race set apart. They too belong to the morne, the hill-country, source of myth, mystery and secret sustenance. They are uncorrupted by the destructive attitudes of the plain. The men and women around them see life in negative terms and have lost all hope. The vision the black man has of himself is clearly negative. As Beverley Ormerod points out "The tragic consciousness of past misery and degradation is linked in the novel with a widespread tendency to self-doubt and self-deprecation."[38] Yet the Lounandor women have a strong sense of self, a belief in their ability to endure. They "do not make a habit of sorrow." Although life is hard it must not get the better of them. The view of woman is very positive. Woman is seen not only as having the power to survive and to resist adversity but in so doing, she can save not only herself, but also those around here. When Toussine, overcome by sorrow, almost loses her mind her household slowly disintegrates. When she recovers "elle les ressuscitait" (Pluie, p. 27). The novel, as Ormerod says, "promises

salvation through individual courage and celebrates the role of women in the Caribbean struggle for survival."[39]

Télumée is an old woman looking back over her life. The novel takes the form of her reminiscences. It is rambling, fluid, lyrical, in keeping with the musings and memories of an old lady. In the text we are presented with the history of the Lougandor women and in particular with the life of Télumée herself and that of her grandmother, Toussine, renamed "Reine-sans-nom" for her wonderful ability to triumph over life, just as Télumée is given the name "Miracle." Télumée's life mirrors that of her grandmother by whom she is nurtured and valued. Toussine is the "significant other" in her grand-daughter's life. As in many Caribbean families Télumée is raised by her grandmother who treasures her and initiates her into the alternative world of magic, myth, and legend. The texts offers portraits of the women at different stages--the child, the woman, the grandmother, and more importantly, contrasts the lives of the Lougandors with those of the average women around them. "Ces femmes n'avaient rien dans la vie, quelques planches sur quatre-roches et le défilé des hommes sur leur ventre" (Pluie, p. 27). Télumée, by contrast, is taught to be a proud, "petite négresse," and her education, unlike the formal schooling of village children, is in the truths and values of folk wisdom. In the text there is a revalorizing of terms ("négresse" for example), of many metaphors used negatively in other Caribbean women writers as images of evasion or entrapment: the room, the garden, the closed space, the dream. The closed space (hamlet, boat, house, room, garden) in Schwarz-Bart's text, becomes not a negative limiting image but a positive, protected, and protective space. Télumée is told she must be like a drum with two sides. The world can beat upon

one but she must keep the other face intact. Toussine, we are told, "could withdraw at will into the recesses of her soul, but she was reserved, not disillusioned (Pluie, p. 22)."

Schwarz-Bart's novel is positive, moving and beautiful, but there are limitations to her vision. First of all, she has been accused of romanticizing, of wanting to reinstate "la vieille nègritude." Her characters are seen as "exemplary victims." This criticism is in part justified. Although the women are not victims--they do not have a victim mentality, do not see themselves as victims and are in no way subservient--they do live a life apart. They are rural négresses. (Her novel treats only the world of the peasant). The outside world, especially the white world, is ignored, consciously made irrelevant. Télumée's one foray outside her known, familiar world, as a maid in a white household, almost ends in disaster. It can be argued that the life of the Lougandor women, built around "le mythe paysan" is mythical, unreal, with no relevance to ordinary women, especially to women faced with the problems of everyday, increasingly urbanized life. The narrator herself acknowledges this: the story is set in a time "before paved roads" and electricity. At the end Télumée regrets the passing of her era, and at the thought of increasing modernization she describes her reaction: "Alors une nostalgie m'étreint, ma personne m'échappe et je ne reconnais plus mon temps" (Pluie, p. 248). But even in their time the Lougandor women are depicted as having lived by different codes and their lessons have validity. The peasant is not idealized. Neither is his life. In fact, in the folk wisdom, seen through proverbs, as Ormerod points out, life is described as being harsh and cruel.[40] The novel is about survival, not escape or flight.

The dominant image of the book is that of a river, the waters and currents of life, now smooth now tumultuous. Télumée's grandmother teaches her to flow with the current, not to lose her "nageoire," the propelling and stabilizing element which enables her to stay afloat, if not to chart her own course. She must be like a little fish, not a "grosse baleine échouée." She must hold her head high amidst the storms of life. The source of Télumée's strength and courage is her belief in herself, drawn from her grandmother's nurturing and affirming love. Interestingly the Lougandor women do not have happy or lasting relationships with men, but they are not embittered. They face life squarely. The men they come in contact with, themselves victims of the cruelties of fate and life, often disappoint them. In contrast to the Lougandors these men allow themselves to be destroyed by life as do the women in most of the novels discussed so far. Telumée and Toussine are images of self-reliance and survival outside of the system of white exploitation. Schwarz-Bart's vision stands in opposition to the more common portrayal of woman (and man) as victim. Télumée, unlike Sapotille, Mayotte, Cajou or Zétou, manages to remain whole. But she is outside the system and because of this does not internalize negative, destructive values. She sees herself as a nègresse in her grandmother's eyes and according to her own positive definition. Cajou and the others try to survive within the dominant culture where values are dictated by the békés and where they always see themselves as falling short. So they attempt to cope by fleeing from their island which they imagine is the source of their problems and cause of their constraint. Whereas many of these women withdraw from reality and embrace madness, Schwarz-Bart's heroines refuse madness and assert their ability to cope. But they cope on their

own terms, in their own world, by maintaining their separateness.

The woman in these novels, Lacrosil's Cajou or Sapotille are perhaps the most extreme examples, is a prisoner of the image of herself created to a large extent by her response to her society. This is especially true of the middle-class woman who has been more exposed to the values of the city, of the mêtropole. In many cases their mothers, like Mayotte's mother in Je suis martiniquaise, still want their daughters to behave as if they have been "êlevêe(s) en chapeau, dans la même pension que les enfants des blancs."[41] The woman sees herself as inferior first because she is a woman and especially because she is a femme de couleur. Life she knows by experience is particularly cruel to black women. The source of their misfortune is thus chiefly attributed to their color. This idea is emphasized and exaggerated by their upbringing. The result of this is that even tough, ambitious, independent or well-educated women find it almost impossible to overcome the handicaps of their negative self-image and to break out of society's or their own self-imposed restrictions. Lacrosil's heroines are an extreme case and her novels give a distorted picture, fortunately. But it cannot be denied that in these novels many women do not see themselves or their situation in a positive light. Schwarz-Bart's characters are an exception.

Maryse Condê points out that in Caribbean folklore the image of the woman was largely positive. She is endowed with the capacity to endure, to overcome: "une femme tombée se relèvera toujours."[42] Condê suggests that this legendary image of woman and her status has been degraded by urbanization and the rise of bourgeois values which are modeled after metropolitan, European, ideals.[43] It is this legendary, mythical image

of woman which we recover in Schwarz-Bart's Longandor women but which is largely absent in other female characters. The pity is that more and more "la route goudronnée, les voitures automobiles qui traversent le pont de l'Autre Bord, les poteaux électriques qui se rapprochent, se dressent déjà à mi-chemin de la Roncière, en lieu et places des tamariniers sauvages et des balatas."[44] Télumée's spiritual granddaughters will need to find other strategies, other sources of strength but first of all as women they must reconstruct their shattered self-image. This is what the heroines hoped to do in Europe. But as Ronnie Scharfman indicates, this is a vain hope. Writing about Télumée's terrifying dream of France Scharfman says:

> The heroine is used to seeing herself reflected whole and loved in her grandmother's eyes. But the white eyes in the dream reflect fragmentation and absence. How could she possibly look for herself, recognize herself in such a mirror? That this world is not even a possible source of reflection seems to be what keeps Télumée from the temptation of aspiring to it, all the while reconfirming the restorative component of her mirroring bond with La Reine.[45]

Deprived of a nurturing, reinforcing mirror at home, many of the other protagonists to their detriment succumb to the temptation and seek reassurance and justification elsewhere.

Notes

[1] Some of these terms referred interchangeably to the percentage of white or black blood and (more often) to the appearance, e.g., "chabine" means a light-skinned woman with curly hair whereas "câpresse" is a dark-skinned woman with straight or curly hair.

[2] The term crêole has many meanings. As well as designating the person (originally "a native of non-native descent" especially of the West Indies, Central and South America, and later "a person of Negro descent born in the Americas" as well as "loosely, a person of mixed Creole and Negro stock," (Webster's Dictionary); the term crêole refers also to the language, defined by the Dictionnaire Larousse as "langue parlée par les Noirs de l'Amérique et des îles de l'océan Indien, et qui est formée de français ou d'espagnol et de mots indigènes." Thus, according to "Le Petit Robert" crêole refers to "Personne de race blanche, née dans les colonies intertropicales (Antilles)," as well as to "langues mixtes provenant du contact du français, de l'espagnol, du portugais avec des langues indigènes ou importées (Antilles)"; and also to "Nm Le crêole d'Haïti."

[3] See Frantz Fanon, Peau noire, masques blancs (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1952), Ch. II.

[4] Robert P. Smith, Jr. "Michèle Lacrosil: Novelist with a Color Complex," French Review 47, March 1974, pp. 783-90.

[5] Batouala, considered by some the first "black" novel in French was written by René Maran, a West Indian who was a French functionary in Africa.

[6] This is the case for example of Maryse Condé from Guadeloupe who married an African and taught for many years in West Africa. Miriam Vieyra is married to a Senegalese filmmaker. Françoise Ega lived for many years in Africa, where her husband was in the French army.

[7] Jacqueline Manicom for example was co-founder of The French feminist group "Choisir."

[8] Manicom's work is the most militant and overtly "feminist," and is perhaps the exception.

[9] Gloria Hull, [ed., Give Us Each Day: The Diary of Alice Dunbar-Nelson (Norton, 1985),] unpublished talk at the University of the West Indies, March, 1985.

[10] Miriam Warner-Vieyra, Le Quimboiseur l'avait dit (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1980), p. 31.

[11] Simone Schwarz-Bart, Pluie et vent sur Telumée Miracle, Paris, Seuil, 1972. All further references occur in the text and are indicated as Pluie.

[12] See Clarisse Zimra, "Patterns of Liberation in Contemporary

Women's Fiction," L'Esprit Crêateur, XVII, No. 2, Summer 1977.

[13] Edward Brathwaite is an anglophone Caribbean poet from Barbados.

[14] Aimé Césaire, quoted in Introduction to Return to my Native Land, trans. John Berger and Anna Bostick, intro. Mazisi Kunene (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969).

[15] See, for example, Mongo Beti's Mission Terminée or many of Birago Diop's Contes see also Denise Paulme, Morphology of the African Folk-tale or Propp's Morphology of the Folktale.

[16] Fanon, p. 35.

[17] Zimra, p. 107.

[18] By "black" one must understand also "mulâtre," mêtis" or any other term indicating non-white becasue as Ormerod points out: "The problem of racial identity is, however, much more complex than the simple black/white division of the earliest days of slavery. In Haiti, for example, due to the slave-owners' habit of taking black mistresses, by the eighteenth century there was an elaborate system of colour stratification based on the individual's genetic composition of 128 theoretical parts. The following account gives some idea of the fanatical zeal of the classifiers:

> The true Mulatto was the child of the pure black and the pure white. The child of the white and the Mulatto woman was a quarteron with 96 parts white and 32 parts black. But the quarteron could be produced by the white and the marabou in the proportion of 88 to 40, or by the white and the sacatra, in the proportion of 72 to 56 and so on all through the 128 varieties. But the sang-mêlé with 127 white parts and 1 black part was still a man of colour" (C.L.R. James, The Black Jacobins; rev. ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1963), p. 38.

Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel (London: Heinemann, 1985), p. 13.

[19] Zimra, p. 105

[20] See Beverly Ormerod, An Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel (London: Heinemann, 1985), p. 63.

[21] Frantz Fanon, Black skin, white masks (Paladin 1970), Chapter 2: "The Woman of Colour and the White Man," p. 39.

[22] As Fanon himself puts it: "Every woman in the Antilles, whether in a casual flirtation or in a serious affair is determined to select the least black of men." Black skin, white masks, p. 35.

[23] Fanon, Black skin, white masks, p. 39.

[24] For a discussion of the position of the colored woman, see Zimra: "In a colonial society predicated on racism, the colored woman's role has traditionally been that of a go-between, between two antagonistic

male groups," p. 103.

[25] Mayotte Capécia, La négresse blanche, (Paris: Corrêa, 1950), p. 68.

[26] Michèle Lacrosil, Sapotille et le serin d'argile (Paris: Gallimard, 1960); "Sapotille" is a Caribbean fruit with a reddish-brown skin.

[27] There is some indication that Sapotille's view was that of her creator. Lacrosil is quoted in an article as having said "Vous n'imaginez pas comment les Français sont devenus racistes depuis qu'ils out perdu leurs colonies. On se fait souvent insulter dans la rue ou dans le métro. Il y a dix ans, cela n'arrivait pas." (Le Figaro, 11 Dec 1967, p. 12) quoted by Robert P. Smith, Jr. in article already cited. Cajou Lacrosil's second novel also shows the heroine's complexes as originating mainly from her own damaged self-image.

[28] Maryse Condé, Heremakhonon (Paris: "10/18," 1976); Une saison à Rihata (Paris: Laffont, 1981).

[29] See Jocelyne Loncke's discussion of Veronica's situation in "The Image of the Woman in Caribbean Literature." BIM, No. 63. Veronica's liaison with the aristocratic Ibrahima Sory in Africa is inspired by similar motives.

[30] Condé corroborates this in an unpublished talk on Women Writers, University of the West Indies, Kingston, Dec. 1982.

[31] Zimra, p. 107.

[32] André Schwarz-Bart, La mulâtresse solitude (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972).

[33] These values were vividly parodied and condemned by such négritude poets as Damas in the '30s and in their publication Légitime Défense, Paris, 1932.

[34] Michèle Lacrosil, Sapotille et le serin d'argile (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 235.

[35] Lacrosil, p. 235.

[36] Simone Schwarz-Bart, Ti-Jean, l'Horizon (Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 1979), p. 11.

[37] Ti-Jean l'Horizon, p. 14.

[38] Beverley Ormerod, An Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel (London: Heinemann, 1985).

[39] Beverley Ormerod, Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel, p. 130.

[40] Ormerod, p. 16.

[41] Mayotte Capécia, Je suis martiniquaise (Paris: Correa, 1948), p. 58.

[42] Maryse Conde, La parole des femmes (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1979), p. 4.

[43] Condé, La parole des femmes, p. 5.

[44] Schwarz-Bart, Pluie, p. 248.

[45] Ronnie Scharfman, "Mirroring and Mothering in Simone Schwarz-Bart's Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle and Jean Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea," Yale French Studies 62: 88-106.

Chapter Four

"L'Europe rêvée, l'Europe réelle

L'Afrique rêvée, l'Afrique réelle."

The Black Woman in Europe; the Antillaise and Africa

Works of fiction dealing with the black woman in Europe are mainly by Caribbean women writers. Maryse Condé, Françoise Ega, Michèle Lacrosil, Jacqueline Manicom, Simone Schwarz-Bart, Miriam Warner-Vieyra have all chosen as protagonists, femmes de couleur, who live or have lived in Europe. Francophone African women, who began writing more recently, have so far concerned themselves mainly with the stories of women in their own continent. However, two Sénégalaises have been concerned with the problems of African women in France and their work will be discussed briefly: Mame Seck Mbacké has written both fiction (short stories) and non-fiction and Ken Bugul has published a controversial novel/récit which Bugul describes as autobiographical. The work appears in the collection "Vies africaines" (Les Nouvelles éditions africaines) which contains this note: "La collection Vies d'Afrique est ouverte seulement au récit du vécu des êtres et ne peut comporter d'imaginaire que celui qu'aura élaboré l'auteur comme substance de son bagage culturel.[1]

The profiles and histories of the West Indian femme de couleur in France and that of the African woman are not identical in terms of their

backgrounds, reasons for wanting to go to the métropole and social and cultural conditioning (although their educations in French schools were fairly similar). The "bagage culturel" that they brought with them was different, but the stories of the women in France touch and their experiences coincide on many points. From the literature it appears that the African woman's foremost desire was to go to France rather than to leave home, whereas the main motivation of the Antillaise was to escape from her own society. This is clear when one compares for example the attitude of the young Sénégalaise Youmané ("L'Africaine Exilée") towards France with that of the Antillean heroine Cajou:

> Elle [Youmané] aimait la mer. Elle y découvrait un charme secret. Elle voyait au-delà de la ligne d'horizon un autre pays, le pays des Blancs d'où viennent ces bateaux étranges, chargés et lançant des appels surprenants: la voix des sirènes. Youmané aimait suivre des yeux leur blanc sillage sur le corps de la mer. Elle sentait un besoin confus, une sorte d'attrait, un appel muet. (...) Plus le temps passait, plus se faisait jour ce désir d'en voir plus, d'en connaître plus.[2]

Youmané's desire to expand her horizons in no way implies a rejection of her homeland whereas Cajou's reaction upon learning she has succeeded in her baccalauréat (Cajou) clearly does:

> Mon avenir était là, avec la possibilité de quitter ce village et de les oublier, le boulanger et le facteur, la pitié détestable des commères. (...) Je rêvais de partir. Ce diplôme m'en offrait l'occasion.[3]

The African woman in France who falls upon hard times retains and is sustained by the vision of her homeland. She longs to be repatriated, whereas the feelings of the West Indian protagonists are much more ambivalent. This is especially true of educated West Indian women. The African woman once in France, however, finds herself faced with the same kinds of problems as West Indian femmes de couleur. She has difficulty being accepted, getting a job, finding accomodation, being taken

seriously. She is regarded as an exotic curiosity, a sex object, or a source of cheap labor to be exploited. For perhaps the first time in Francophone African women's writing color becomes an important theme.[4] The women in Françoise Ega's novel Lettre à une Noire, mainly set in Marseilles in the early sixties, are confronted with much the same harsh situation as that of the "travailleurs et travailleuses immigrés" in Mbacké's Paris of Le froid et le piment. Both Bugul's and Mbacké's narrators write of France, as Caribbean women do, with disappointed, critical, and disillusioned eyes. Youmané's first sight of France is recorded thus:

> La terre des Blancs: une terre, c'est trop dire. Plutôt du ciment, du goudron, des ensembles gigantesques dans une atmosphère glaciale où les bruits du monde semblaient étouffés par un ciel bas. Youmané (...) regardait curieusement cette ville dont elle a tant rêvé. Elle était étrangère à cette ville assez différente de celle de son imagination: elle l'avait toujours perçue comme une ville faite de lampions et de néons. Elle était surprise par cette grisaille et cette mélancolie.[5]

But their view of their homeland and their childhoods, like that of other African woman writers, is closer to the autobiographical writing of Camara Laye and of Françoise Ega who alone among West Indian women writers "recaptures through a rigid process of romantic selection the warm and secure parts of the past."[6]

Many of the African women's novels treated in the first section of this study end at the point in the protagonist's life where she is about to set off for France. In Pre-Independence West Africa the pattern of the educated African woman's academic formation followed closely that of her male counterparts. It often led from the village school, to the French school, "l'école française," to further studies in a large town: Abidjan, Conakry, Rufisque, Saint-Louis, Dakar, etc., and very often

especially for the most brilliant students, eventually to Europe.[7] The West Indian student of promise who wanted to pursue further studies in a university also had of necessity to travel to the métropole. The départements d'outre-mer of Guadeloupe, Martinique and Guyane until recently had no university.[8] In any event, many students considered it an honor and a privilege, and both African and Antillais students desired and actively sought to go to France as the final crowning step in their academic development. The image of France which both Africans and West Indians had formed as educated French citizens (Guadeloupe and Martinique became départements in 1946) or inhabitants of French-ruled territories, led them to have great regard for French learning, civilization, and culture, and to have great expectations. They considered themselves French and looked to Paris as their Mecca. They went to France full of hopes and illusions. Jacqueline Manicom's heroine Dr. Madévie Ramimoutou in Mon examen de blanc looks back bitterly on her naive student days, when, as a young, brilliant, middle-class West Indian, she first confronted prejudice. Confident in her own superiority she could not understand why her white boyfriend saw their relationship as problematic:

> Cet été-là, elle croyait encore aux choses qu'on lui avait apprises dans les écoles antillaises: des ancêtres gaulois, voyons! Elle était doublement française: d'abord pour être née dans une colonie française, ensuite parce qu'on lui en avait donné la ferme assurance lors de la départmentalisation en 1945, alors qu'elle était déjà une petite fille qui comprenait beaucoup de choses. Les nègres d'Afrique sont des sauvages lui avait-on dit, tandis que les Antillais sont presque des Blancs. Pourrait-il avoir des choses insurmontable entre Xavier et elle?[9]

She typifies the bourgeois Antillaise's point of view. Madévie's illusions were quickly shattered by the realities of French society, but

these illusions are portrayed as being shared by many of her countrymen/women for whom France was a magical wonderland: "... dans le rêve de chaque Antillais, la France, Paris, c'est: 'Lumière! Lumière! caco doux! pomme France!' C'est le pays de cocagne."[10] Madévie remarks to her French colleague with frustrated irony: "Cher Cyril, que la France est douce pour les Antillais!"[11] These feelings of warmth and expectant hope are also documented in the African novels and biographies. African students too had been taught about "Nos ancêtres les Gaulois..." and came to France expecting to be welcomed and accepted.[12] The students found life difficult--they were homesick, unused to what was in fact an alien way of life and to the extremes of weather, especially in an urban environment. But by and large many of them survived, even excelled, and went back home qualified and successful. Especially in the early days the students (mostly male) had a life relatively free of restriction and prejudice. Thus Zek in Maryse Condé's Une saison à Rihata nostalgically remembers Paris and especially his success with women:

> Zek gardait un souvenir fabuleux des années qu'il avait passées à Paris (...) C'était à cause des femmes (...) Paris l'avait sacré roi, prince du sang. Ce n'était pas le triste Paris qu'il avait revu au cours d'une mission, des années plus tard, grouillant d'un sous prolétariat sénégalais ou malien. Non, c'était le merveilleux Paris de la veille des indépendances, quand chaque étudiant pouvait se fabriquer un arbre généalogique à sa convenance.[13]

The life of a student was relatively easy compared to that of the other groups of Africans and Antillais who also went to France full of optimism, seeking a better life--the immigrants. Manicom's Madévie, for example, recognizes her good fortune, as despite her hardships in France, she is one of "ces mulâtresses privilégiées qui peuvent aller en

France non pour laver le sol des hôpitaux de Paris mais pour faire des études de médecine et écouter ainsi de distingués chirurgiens parler de la grandeur d'âme de la mère patrie."[14]

The novels dealt with here are concerned with both groups--women who come to France as students and become professionals and those far less fortunate, who come as immigrant workers or as ordinary citizens hoping for a "better life."

It was relatively easy for West Indians to go to France. In Mon examen de blanc the narrator remarks that the Immigration Office actively solicited and encouraged emigration from the Caribbean to the métropole with promises of jobs and material advancement. At the same time there were many white collar workers and professionals working on contract in the colonies and French territories. As Madévie observes dryly: "La mère patrie se sert de nos bras et nous, nous avons besoin de ses cerveaux."[15] Some of the African women who went to France to work went as maids: many went back with the French families of these government officials or professionals on contract for whom they had worked in their home country. This was also true of the Antillaises. But many skilled and qualified women also found that because of prejudice they were forced to accept menial and unskilled jobs. Françoise Ega in Lettres à une Noire tells the story of Cécile:

> Elle était comptable diplômée à Fort de France, elle avait même une bonne. Elle a fait le tour des bureaux de placement de la ville, on l'a envoyée d'un emploi à l'autre: on regardait sa peau bien noire et on lui répondait poliment: "je vais vous écrire". La première semaine de décembre, elle a bien attendu, elle ne savait pas ce que cela voulait dire en France, "je vous écrirai", et puis elle a dû se faire une raison, il fallait bien qu'elle paie sa petite chambre au Panier.
>
> Elle a accepté d'être repasseuse dans une blanchisserie sordide de son quartier.

Solange's story is similar:

> J'étais coiffeuse aux pays (...); malgré mes références, cela n'a pas marché et il fallait que je mange. Je n'ai jamais pu sortir de cet engrenage: une fois qu'on est déclaré à la Sécurité Sociale comme gens de maison, allez essayer de vous en sortir."[16]

Sembène Ousmane in his collection of short stories Voltaïque in the conte entitled "La Noire de..." tells the tragic tale of a young African woman who, exploited by the family she works for and kept almost as a prisoner in an unfriendly and unfamiliar environment, is finally driven to suicide. She becomes a mere statistic, a curiosity mentioned in a brief, obscure item in a provincial newspaper.[17] In "Lettres de France," another story in the same collection, he also poignantly portrays the plight of a young African girl sent off to France as a bride for an aging African immigrant worker.

Mame Seck Mbacké, a young Senegalese writer who was for several years an employee of the Senegalese consulate in Paris and in charge of "'cas sociaux'" de l'immigration sénégalaise en France" has written in great detail of the plight of West African immigrants in France and substantiates and documents what Ousmane described many years before.[18] Her work, Le froid et le piment, subtitled "Nous travailleurs immigrés," is divided into three parts. In the first section, "Cas sociaux," Mbacké documents actual cases: "des faits tragiquement vécus de l'immigration sénégalaise en France."[19] The second and third parts are Mbacké's fictional accounts of two people's sad stories: "Un homme de couleur raconte" and "Youmané l'Africaine exilée."

The cases recorded in the first section paint an ugly picture of prejudice, exploitation, déracinement, despair and depravity; of brutalized and emasculated men who in turn brutalize their women, of

women who abandon husbands and children, of exiled women who turn, or are tempted to turn, to prostitution, of battered wives, broken families, poverty, illness, desertion, alcoholism, suicide, death. Most of all it is a gallery of shattered hopes and dreams. Almost all the cases documented express their desire to "rentrer au pays." Tragically, most do not have the means and never make it. Occasionally, as in the case of Fatou, a homesick young wife, things work out well and she adapts to her new country and situation.[20] Much more often, as in the case of Caroline Mbengue, "disparue dans sa douzième année ...loin de sa douce mère...," to whom the book is dedicated, their stories end tragically.[21] The reader must bear in mind that these cases represent those immigrants who, because of their desperate situation, have come to the notice of the Senegalese consulate. It is not the whole picture. There were no doubt many success stories. Yet the extent and depth of the suffering described is devastating. In Mbacké's short story, Youmané, "l'Africaine exilée," is a victim of prejudice and bigotry. Married to a Frenchman, she is proud of her pretty métisse daughter. Youmané is not a sophisticated or educated woman. She has had a hard life partly because she has always been so independent. She has never wanted to be like other girls and learn "womanly" tasks or play their games. On her own from the age of twelve, when she leaves home and school to seek her fortune, she is raped and thrown out by her white employer. Eventually persuaded by a young French co-operant to become his wife, she travels to France with her husband who adores "sa négresse." Youmané is illiterate but she has managed to adapt to her new life quite well. Her husband and child love her, but her in-laws cannot tolerate a black daughter-in-law. She is accepted as a plaything but not

as a wife. They finally succeed in destroying the marriage and alienating her daughter's affection. Left with two young children, Youmanê is forced into prostitution, loses her children and dies in solitude, pining for her homeland and begging that her children be sent back to their African grandmother. Mbacké's story is straightforward and realistic. The woman is shown to be the victim first of all of her disregard for traditional wisdom--Youmanê insists on having her own way even when her parents oppose her. When her mother ritually offers Youmanê her breast just before her departure to ensure her safe return to Africa, she is too ashamed in front of her husband to accept it. She is also a victim of the European's vision of the femme de couleur. Youmanê's husband treats her like a doll and abandons her when his parents turn his mind against her. Although his change of heart is rather violent, the narration suggests that his love was based on a superficial attraction for her as an exotic, beautiful object. Mbacké's story also depicts the solidarity between women. Unable to tell her father when she gives birth to a métis, it is her mother and an influential woman friend, who look after her and support her. Mbacké makes use of the linear, episodic narration typical of the folktale and the didactic intent is clear, as it is in Ken Bugul's story.

Ken Bugul's autiobiography Le baobab fou begins at the point where most of her Sénégalaises sisters leave off: with the journey to France (in this case eventually to Belgium): "Le Nord des rêves, le Nord des illusions, le Nord des allusions, le Nord référentiel, le Nord Terre Promise."[22] As her plane leaves Sénégal Ken hears in the distance the bleating of a lost sheep--"le bêlement désespére du mouton - égaré peut-être"--a prophetic image, and feels as if she is being "arrachée à

moi-même" (Le baobab fou, pp. 34-35). Ken's life in Belgium is marked by many of the same phenomena (exploitation, alienation, solitude) as that of Michèle Lacrosil's extremely disturbed Antillaise heroine, Cajou, although Ken's reactions are quite different. Instead of depression and withdrawal, Ken attempts to flee herself by embarking on an equally self-destructive if spectacularly dissipated and decadent life. She becomes involved, mainly unwittingly as the narrator tells it, in the artistic demimonde of intellectuals, artists, and "marginaux" where nothing is taboo: "free love," prostitution, homosexuality, drugs. Within a year of her arrival in Europe Ken has had several love affairs, an abortion, liaisons with all sorts of characters of several nationalities including a painter, an American G-I, a young Belgian, but, as she says, she always manages. Most of her wild adventures the narrator explains result from her desperate desire to be like those around her and to find and prove herself. Thus her love affair with Louis, the Belgian student who makes her pregnant, is described as "ma première idylle en Occident. Idylle qui me servait à m'expliquer, à m'intégrer, à montrer que j'étais comme eux: qu'il n'y avait aucune différence entre nous, que eux et moi, nous avons les mêmes ancêtres" (Le baobab fou, p. 54). Ken is haunted by the same emptiness and alienation which the Antillaises protagonists of the novels, suffer, but which is not typical of most of the Sénégalaises and other African women in the literature. The causes she adduces to explain her condition are also similar. She blames her education, "l'école française," and the fact that she has no sure identity, no family ties, no sense of belonging. She has come to Europe in search of herself and of "mes ancêtres les Gaulois" because "J'avais une famille sans structures

réelles (...) Mais aussi et surtout, le colonialisme, qui avait créé la distorsion des esprits pour engendrer la race des sans repères. Le colonialisme avait fait de la plupart de nous des illogiques. Je ne voulais pas l'accepter" (Le baobab fou, p. 85). Like Samba Diallo, the tragic hero of Cheikh Hamidou Kane's Aventure Ambiguë (he too blames "l'école française"), Ken is "installée dans l'hybride," she describes herself as "déchirée," a term reminiscent of many Antillais protagonists. She ascribes the blame for her sad plight to her particular biography because, unlike her sisters and her cousins, she is the only woman in her family to have attended "l'école française" and the only one not to have a mother of her own. For her, her mother is not "ma mère" but simply "la mère." Throughout the récit reference is made to the traumatic incident which, together with "l'école française," the protagonist feels changed and shaped the course of her life forever: "le départ de la mère." At the age of five her mother goes away and leaves her behind in the village because she is attending "l'école française." When she rejoins her mother a year later, her place has been supplanted by a young niece whom her mother is caring for. She never recovers her place and for her, although tender and kind, "ma mère" irrevocably becomes "la mère." Her father is too wrapped up in his religious duties to be really close to her and, a brilliant student, she seeks refuge in her studies and in trying to be as westernized as possible. "Je croyais avoir trouvé un moyen de me rassurer en me faisant 'toubab'" (Le baobab fou, p. 138). She is more and more estranged from her family and her village society. Bugul, like the Caribbean writers, explains the further trauma of the meeting with Europe, "the mother-country," where Ken discovers her skin, realizes that she is an outsider and details her

attendant solitude: "Cette solitude que j'avais retrouvée durement, avec le choc d'avoir perdu ici, mes ancêtres les Gaulois. Le reflet dans le miroir, le visage, le regard, cette couleur qui me distinguait en me niant" (Le baobab fou, p. 110). Ken is anxious to be herself, "s'assumer" but she does not know who she is, which identity to assume. Through a process of rigorous introspection she realizes that cut off from her family, she had consciously set out to be totally "occidentalisée" but when she gets to Europe everything is different from what she has been taught. Where she wants only to be accepted, the insistence in fact is on her "difference." It is the era where Blacks are in fashion:

> "Nous avons une amie noire, une Africaine", était la phrase la plus "in" dans ces milieux. La Négresse après les lionceaux et les singes, avec les masques Dogon et d'Ifé. J'étais cette négresse, cette "chez vous autres", cette "toi en tant que moire, il faudrait que..." cet être supplémentaire, inutile, déplacé, incohérent" (Le baobab fou, pp. 101-102).

The African woman in Europe, like her West Indian counterpart, becomes the victim of the process of reification. She is regarded as a sexual object, exotic, sensual: "Tu plais aux hommes." Paradoxically, her beauty enslaves. She cannot escape from her skin; Ken even goes as far as some of her West Indian predecessors in wanting to escape from her blackness, the source of her reification: "Je m'arrachais la peau jusqu'au sang. Sa noirceur m'étouffait. Oh Dieu, comme la mère était loin! (...) je ne voulais plus avoir la peau noire" (Le baobab fou, p. 113). But if Ken, the protagonist, is largely unaware and unthinking (the reader cannot help feeling that she is responsible for some of her predicaments because of her unquestioning, acquiscent attitude), Bugul, the narrator, is extremely lucid and recognizes her loss and ambiguity.

She sees that she is playing a game and she is aware of the futility of her attempts: "Que cherchais-je en fait avec tout cela? (...) Je voulais prendre à témoin les Occidentaux. Je me ridiculisais dans une tentative de re-naissance (...) J'avais joué pour fuir la solitude, car elle me ramenait toujours au départ de la mère, celle dont on m'avait arrachée sans me laisser le loisir de sécher le sang qui coulait à flots de mes entrailles" (Le baobab fou, p. 109).

Just as the child had been separated from her natural mother, so the process of Westernization has separated Ken, the educated African woman, from her traditions and her identity and caused her to want to deny them:

> Dans tous les manuels scolaires que j'avais eus, le Noir était ridiculisé, avili, écrasé ... ou bien les Noirs étaient mis les uns contre les autres. (...) Je n'arrivais pas à redémarrer comme mes "amis" me le conseillaient et comme je le souhaitais! J'avais signé un pacte avec l'irréel et le mouvement implacable au destin. Le temps passait en introspections, en quêtes des racines imaginaires (Le baobab fou, p. 107).

Ken in Belgium becomes more and more conscious of the virtues of village life and nostalgically recognizes that "Il ne fallait pas arracher l'enfant du ventre de la mère. Il ne fallait pas que la mère parte" (Le baobab fou, p. 179). Reduced to prostitution and on the point of suicide the young Sénégalaise fortunately recovers herself and finds the need and the means to return home "J'avais repris conscience à temps" (Le baobab fou, p. 181).

Le baobab fou, like other African and Caribbean novels, traces the process of assimilation/alienation with its deceptions, contradictions and dangers. The narration is lucid, frank and somewhat sensational. Ken Bugul's story also comes close to that of many Antillaises heroines in elucidating the underlying motivations and factors which lead these

women to want to be accepted in the white world. Unlike the West Indians' stories, however, Ken's story ends relatively happily. There is a possibility of re-integration, of repossessing a valid reality almost lost. As the protagonist describes her journey of separation from her origins and village culture there is a constant, retrospective recognition of the treasures being lost, expressed in a juxtaposition of images and sensations. Even before the voyage to Europe, in her brother's apartment in the capital where she goes to spend her vacation Ken is aware of these differences: "Le frère habitait avec sa petite famille au troisième étage d'un immeuble situé en plein coeur de la capitale. C'était un endroit froid, avec des carreaux froids partout. Ah, le sable chaud, tiède, confortable, le sable, la terre qui seule était en mesure de supporter l'être humain" (Le baobab fou, p. 140).

The structure of Bugul's and Mbacké's récits share several elements with the other novels already discussed. Like the Caribbean novels, Ken's and Youmané's stories involve symbolic and real journeys and are told in flashback. Both protagonists suffer from early separation from their family/mother/initial comforting and stabilizing culture. (Youmané, as already noted, left her village home at 12 to become a maid in town and never returned.) Like the Antillais heroines then, they are deprived of parents, family ties which stabilize and give them a secure sense of who they are. This lack accounts for much of their later suffering. Youmané's reminiscences begin and end in Europe, with the protagonist's death. Ken's story opens with her departure from her native land and closes with her homecoming. But although the paths seem to trace a circle, the narration is much more linear than that of the Caribbean novels--incidents succeeding each other more or less

chronologically with occasional digressions--more in the manner of the African autobiographical novels. Bugul and Mbacké deal through their works with the lives of black women in different social milieux but who suffer similar misfortunes.

The Martinican novelist Françoise Ega in her work Lettre à une Noire takes as her milieu the poor Antillais community in Marseilles. She is concerned with the least privileged group of Blacks in France. The work is a series of letters to Carolina, a fictitious Third World "sister," who is illiterate and lives in a Brazilian slum. The narrator establishes the link between all exploited people as she addresses them through Carolina, who will never read her book. She writes of her own struggles as a woman who wants desperately to care for her family and to write. She wants most of all to write about, and communicate with, her less privileged sisters: the many "Antillaises placées," maids in French families. The hardships of the négresses documented by Mbacké in Paris are exposed in literary form through Ega's Marseilles. The stories are often grim, yet because of Ega's faith and optimism, this work is the least pessimistic of the novels dealing with the condition of the black woman in Europe. Ega claims to be "uneducated" and worries about her ability as an ordinary "mère de famille" and unlearned créole-speaker to manipulate the language of Molière and to be taken seriously as an aspiring "femme de lettres":

> ...j'ai un sentiment de gêne. C'est inexplicable, mais avais-je le droit d'ainsi malmener la langue de Molière? Moi, une pauvre négresse? Avais-je le droit de dire de jolies choses en mauvais français?[23]

Obviously the narrator feels she does and she must. Her book is also a book about writing a book, as a woman and an Antillaise. She tells the

story of her West Indian sisters and her own story with passion, objectivity, economy and moving simplicity.

The narrator, Maméga (Françoise Ega's own diminutive) lives in Marseilles with her husband and five children. (The story has many autobiographical elements.) Her husband, a disbanded militaire who served for many years in Africa, is making a living as best he can while waiting for the ministry responsible to place him somewhere permanently. Their situation is complicated by the fact that they do not want to relocate and leave "sunny" Marseilles. Maméga copes with her household, supplements the family income by doing part-time work and tries to find time to write. Moved by the plight of the young Antillaises who work as femmes de ménage or bonnes à tout faire, Maméga decides to take a job as a maid so she can really understand what they are going through and write about it. Despite her husband's opposition she gets herself employed "chez une dame" which is first of many such positions. There are agencies which specialize in placing domestics and it is easy to get jobs because, as one of her "dames" tell her frankly: "Les négresses sont sérieuses et travailleuses; d'ailleurs, c'est pas pour rien qu'on dit 'travailler comme un noir'! C'est pas pour vous vexer, mais c'est vrai" (Lettre, p. 57). Fortunately for the narrator she is not forced to stay with an unreasonable mistress longer than she can bear (some of the women are virtually enslaved as they must repay their passage before they can change jobs) but she discovers to her astonished horror the extent of how petty, thoughtless, unreasonably demanding, and even cruel, these "dames" can be:

> Ainsi je fais l'expérience qu'il y a vraiment de sots métiers, puisque selon que tu es femme de ménage ou femme de lettres, tu passes de la condition de bête de somme à celle de créature humaine. Pourtant, j'ai encore, ma vieille Carolina, mes doigts

> tout raides et je suis bien la même; alors pleure, pleure mon âme, car il y a beaucoup plus de mes soeurs dans la première catégorie que dans la seconde. Quand donc se rompront définitivement les châines qu'elles n'ont pas forgées! (Lettre, p. 151)

Maméga muses over the fact that despite the hardships that await them, Antillaises

> continuent à affluer par pleins bâteaux, les unes pour avoir des allocations familiales au même titre que les Françaises de France, les autres dans l'espoir d'un gain plus substantiel, et le métro les happe, les usines les engloutissent. Alors elles se rongent, elles ne rient plus (.....) Parfois elles trouvent le repos dans un sana, ou beaucoup près de Clichy, et voilà, c'est pas la case, pas la favella, mais le taudis et l'espoir qui ne laisse jamais les malheureux" (Lettre, p. 60).

Above all, Maméga is moved by their spirit and tenacity. Faced with the grim reality of the daily existence of one of her protégées who has found a job as "fille de salle" in a hospital in Paris she is amazed at the girl's courageous, even optimistic, attitude: "C'est dur, mais c'est bien mieux que chez la dame à Marseille," the latter writes to her of her new situation in Paris (Lettre, p. 60).

The Antillaise's condition is extreme and pitiful. As with the Sénégalais in Mbacké's work, life is permeated by "le froid." But it is a cold which is not only physical. The chill in the air, the cold which they cannot escape is an outward representation of their whole existence. "Elle (Solange, one of the narrator's friends) prétend que, lorsqu'elle ne mélange pas quelques syllabes de patois à sa conversation, elle a beaucoup plus froid" (Lettre, p. 63). Isolated, homesick, forced to work long hours, at backbreaking tasks, cheated, "la Noire" is completely dehumanized. Made to bear all sorts of humiliating indignities, what is especially degrading for "gens de maison," is to be treated not just like children or animals but worse--like inanimate

objects with no feeling or understanding. The black maid is usually referred to only as "la négresse" or "la Noire" even by the children. One family, which does use their maid's name, cannot even bother to call Maméga by her own name when she replaces her sick friend:

> Pour la première fois depuis que je suis lancée dans la profession de femme de ménage j'ai un prénom, la dame me l'a donné. Elle ne veut pas changer ses habitudes, c'est moi qui changerai de prénom, je m'appellerai Renée en attendant que la vraie Renée revienne. C'est clair et net" (Lettre, p. 128).

"La négresse" merits less consideration than a household pet. She does not even have the right to her name. Ega sensitizes the reader to the fact that this happens not only to négresses, however, but to anyone who happens to be relegated to the rank of servant for, in the words of one of her employers, "Les autres ne comptent pas!" The narrator explains that "Les autres, c'étaient: la nurse (young, blond), la repasseuse et moi" (Lettre, p. 99).

What Ega is protesting (and her protest is more effective because, although sometimes obtrusive and direct, it is never strident or hysterical) is the demeaning of the human being, the reification of the person who is seen as a "bête de somme," a machine with no feeling, simply because he/she is black or employed as a domestic servant.

> Quand on a été bonne à tout faire, on est vacciné pour tous les évenements de la vie future, car c'est là qu'on arrive à se dépouiller le plus aisément de toute prétention à la dignité humaine, on est une chose, comme un balai ou un réfrigérateur!" (Lettre, p. 132).

Her friend Solange declares herself immune but she has suffered. As the narrator remarks, "Elle rit, mais elle souffre...je ris avec elle, tout simplement, pour ne pas remuer le fer dans sa plaie" (Lettre, p. 64). The "ladies of the house" especially bear the brunt of the narrator's censure. But although she is concerned mainly with the situation of her

black sisters "placées" as maids, she is as moved at the plight of the old Provençale abandoned by her former employers and confined to the cellar. She is objective in her vision. The Antillais stall proprietor who hires her as a vendor in his stall at the "Foire de Marseille" is almost as unreasonable as her French "dames" for in his case too "le bien-être avait endurci" (Lettre, p. 197). The well-off West Indians who belong to the organizing committee of the "Cercle antillais" come in for especially harsh criticism. "Les superbes," as the narrator dubs them, pretend that all is well in the antillais community and refuse to deal with reality. They blind themselves to the desperate needs of their many hurting fellow countrymen. With gentle irony the narrator describes a typical evening where Antillais couples sit listening to a European discoursing on the Antilles. Such people are concerned only with appearances (social gathering, outward show): with organizing "bals" or "conférences" or publishing "un journal antillais" full of sensational nonsense. They are as capable of prejudice as the "Français de France." They refuse to accept or even tolerate some young Antillaises at one of their gatherings because the latter are "maids." They too are responsible for treating their sisters as objects, for classifying them and seeing them as inferior because of their occupation:

> Les petites bonnes étaient de plus en plus nombreuses (....), j'étais contente de les voir enfin hors du joug quotidien. Peut-être elles redevenaient des êtres comme les autres en ce moment.... C'étaient penser trop tôt: un suberbe s'est approché d'un groupe de jolies filles qui payaient leur écot et a dit:
> "Qui vous a invitées? Ce n'est pas un bal pour vous! Il y a des personnalités" (Lettre, pp. 133-134).

These "nègres suberbes" who have "made it" are shown to be full of prejudice and hypocrisy. Out of pride, or shame, the community pretends that things are fine, consequently their compatriots keep coming in

droves (Lettre, p. 87).

The work ends with the death of Mamëga's best friend, Solange, in Paris and the narrator's own illness. (Françoise Ega in fact died, prematurely, in 1976.) She has not yet managed, despite much effort, to find a publisher for her book. But it is finished, she is working on another, and it is being read, her family and friends like it, people are interested. Her indomitable spirit is confident that in the future life will be better for their children.

Françoise Ega's book is the type of work which probably would once have been summarily and finally dismissed as a "woman's book." The narrator is a woman, writing to a woman, mainly about women. And largely about that most forgotten and ignored of women: "La bonne à tout faire," "la femme de mënage." The spheres which she describes are those scarcely ever penetrated by men, except as clients or spectators: the kitchen, the laundry, the back courtyard where the mops are washed, the sewing-room, a house of prostitution. In fact, the narrator's own husband is a minor character, always there, but in the background, and largely peripheral in these areas--apart from their own home he never enters her space (her workplaces, her friends' homes) except to drop her off or pick her up on his bike. He is not central to this story. Most of the time he grumbles and mildly disapproves of what she is doing, although he never actively opposes or tries to stop her. Her work, her writing, her projects, her book are "her thing." In her efforts to help others, to get her book published, to cope with her family she is encouraged, advised, sustained mainly by her women friends and other women with whom she comes in contact.

It is a strong, optimistic book about themes and subjects which on

the surface might appear more likely to evoke pessimism if indeed they were even to be considered worthy of notice. The language and modes of representation that Ega uses seem apt and very "natural." For example, speaking about her book, she uses a metaphor from child-bearing, a clichē, but her expression fits so naturally in the context of her writing, that it appears fresh and almost new: "Que penserait-elle (a friend) si je lui disais que je faisais un livre et que j'écris les derniers chapitres? Il me faut encore cet anonymat, sans cela, je perdais confiance en moi. Et pourtant, si je veux connaître l'aspect de mon bēbē, il va bien falloir que je l'extirpe de ma maison pour qu'on me dise comment il est" (Lettre, p. 65).

In contrast to Ega's optimism two other Caribbean women writers writing about black women in France present darker views. Michèle Lacrosil and Jacqueline Manicom hold very different views and their styles and protagonists reflect these differences. Whereas Lacrosil's narration is straightforward, Manicom's is often ironic. But both deal with women who find that in France, for the educated woman, despite possibilities of advancement, diplomas and good jobs, the white world sets up barriers which it is impossible to overcome. Both Cajou (Lacrosil's protagonist in Cajou) and Manicom's Madēvie (Un examen de blanc) are professional women in the sciences. Cajou has a doctorate in chemistry and works in a research laboratory, Madēvie is a medical doctor, an anesthetist. Both have studied and lived in France. Both are disillusioned and tempted by suicide (Cajou finally succumbs). Their stories are similar: as West Indian students in France, they have encountered prejudice and success. Both have had love affairs with a white man, have become pregnant and decided not to have the child--for

different reasons, however. Madévie because she finally realizes her lover will not marry her, Cajou because she cannot bring herself to marry and "ruin" a white man. The novels have similar surface structures and the stories of the two women are parallel in many of the external facts. Yet thematically they are very dissimilar and represent almost opposing sets of reactions and views of reality on the part of the protagonists. Together they give a depressing picture of the types of difficulty and the fate facing the educated Antillaise in the métropole.

The source of Madévie's conflicts is from without, whereas Cajou's arise mainly from within. Madévie's come from the weakness of her fiancé, Xavier, and the prejudices of French bourgeois society: "Si j'épousais une fille de couleur, ce sera pour ma famille une véritable catastrophe! Maman en mourrait!" (Examen, p. 66). Cajou's come from her own inadequacies: her attitude to life is deformed by a distorted and stratified Antillean society. She brings with her to France the problems of a repressed West Indian heroine. Madévie, on the other hand, comes to France feeling confident and superior. She is a "mulâtresse qui se veut à tout prix civilisée" (Examen, p. 41)--unconsciously she too is driven by the values of Antillean (and French) society which subscribe to the superiority of "la peau blanche." Both are the victims of "chosification." Both are regarded as objects--Madévie by her fiancé and Cajou in her own eyes. Xavier sees Madévie as his society does, as an agreeable exotic diversion for the white man "goûtant sa part de magie, de vaudou avant le mariage bourgeois" (Examen, p. 40), a fact which the young Madévie ignores: "Alors elle oubliait la 'structure' de la bourgeoisie parisienne parce qu'il lui avait dit 'je t'aime', comme on dit 'je t'aime' à une sapotille bien mûre, comme on 'veut' un mango juteux"

(Examen, p. 68). Cajou is luckier: Germain, who really loves her, does not want to relate to her in that way. Disapproving of her past relationships, he tells her: "Tu acceptais d'être un jouet" (Cajou, p. 62). But she has internalized the image of herself as an object, moreover as an object to be scorned and pitied, and she cannot escape it.

Both novels use a pattern of narration familiar in women's writing: instead of being linear they move back and forth in time and space: between Paris and the French Caribbean, between past and present. Both also make use of the closed space, the archetypal womb, symbolically representing their worlds: the window, the mirror, the laboratory or operating room, the tiny attic apartment or the cramped "cube," a circular or cyclical sructure. Although their histories and attitudes diverge, both protagonists limit themselves to these circumscribed spaces where they feel safe. Thematically however, Cajou is a fatalistic, defeatist, pessimistic novel, whereas Manicom's Mon examen de blanc, while pessimistic in terms of the fate of the individual protagonist, is much more upbeat. It is perhaps the only one of these novels which is explicitly militant and "feminist."[24] Manicom's heroine, Madévie, who does not expect, and is not prepared to encounter, prejudice in France, in fact suffers at the hands of others from all the self-imposed, often imaginary, prejudices and obstacles that Lacrosil's failure-oriented, anti-heroine Cajou foresees and creates for herself.

If one takes Cajou as a sequel to Lacrosil's earlier novel, Sapotille et le sérin d'argile, and sees in Cajou (as this observer does) a logical continuation of Lacrosil's earlier heroine (they share many of the same traits), it gives a useful perspective from which to

examine the character. The earlier novel ends as Sapotille goes to France hoping to leave behind her the memories of her unhappy childhood, plagued by prejudice, and the bitterness of a miscarriage, a broken marriage and an unhappy love affair. She goes expecting (or claiming to expect) to find the social barriers of the Antilles and damaging restrictions gone. Events prove that Cajou largely finds that this seems to be so: awarded her doctorate with honors, she is acclaimed for her scientific research, her papers are published. She gets a prestigious job in a research laboratory and her director wants to make her "chef de travaux." A white man falls in love with her and wants to marry her. He prefers her to her confident white friend with whom she is obsessed. He is no angel, but an enlightened even "liberated" man. The trouble is, Cajou's alienation and self-hatred is such that she can accept none of these things as real. Her lack of self-esteem leads her to distrust appearances/reality. She can no longer distinguish between the two and is suspicious of everyone and everything which appears to be favorably disposed toward her. She is indeed as she describes herself "un cas pathologique," depressed, withdrawn, alienated. Her only yardstick for judging everything is her blackness.

She looks in the mirror (often) and can see only her "laideur." Her self-image (and her corresponding impression of others) is so distorted that she is no longer in touch with reality. Lacrosil's justification for her character's state of mind is somewhat weak. Cajou's mother, who is white, loved and protected her. Her negative image comes initially from the reactions of outsiders, strangers (surely less significant than her own mother) who cannot believe that the little colored girl is "madame's" daughter: "'Elle, votre fille? Ma'ame Kébaire, c'est pas

croyable'" (Cajou, p. 40). But, be that as it may, Cajou as a child discovers her blackness (her dead father was black) and from then on her life changes. Because she does not look like her mother she begins to hate herself and to fear that her mother will change and stop loving her: "Tu es une dame, tu es belle. Je serai jamais comme toi. A cause de ce qui me manque, tu comprends?" (Cajou, p. 40). She sees her color as a fatal deficiency: "ce qui me manque." She becomes obsessed with her "ugliness"/blackness. Like the emaciated victim of anorexia nervosa who is so obsessed with her desire to be thin that she looks at her reflection in the mirror and sees herself as fat, Cajou is so obsessed with her own desire to be "other" (i.e., white) that she sees only her color. Thus when she looks at herself in the mirror she perceives everything about herself as "ugly" or "dirty" (black) and concludes that this is the only image others can have of her. Blackness for her is synonymous with "laideur," lack of worth. She interprets everything that happens to her by that one criterion: her "ugliness"/color. Thus she decides her doctorate and her work are acclaimed not for their merits (she does not think they are outstanding) but because they are unusual and not expected by a white world of a "fille de couleur." She is suspicious of her boss's consideration and attention and interprets her promotion as a trap: the director of the laboratory, she says, knows she is incapable of exercising authority. As a black woman others will refuse to respect her and therefore because "elle ne saurait pas s'imposer," she will fail. This, she believes, is his intention. Because she hates herself ("Je ne m'aime pas," Cajou, p. 14; "Je ne me suis jamais aimée," Cajou, p. 29), Cajou does not believe anyone else can love her or that she even deserves to be loved. What she "lacks,"

whiteness, also denies her the right or the possibility of being either lovable or loved.

She explains her lack of confidence, her lack of "self-hood" and her conviction that she is doomed to failure ("Ma chère, le jugement est rendu; il est sans appel et voici le verdict: REFUSEE. L'échec t'attend" Cajou, p. 12) in terms of her heredity and her past and especially in terms of a significant relationship she had with her white playmate Stéphanie, a relationship repeated in Paris many years later in the person of Marjolaine. Stéphanie and Marjolaine become the significant others with whom she identifies and in whose eyes she sees herself reflected as diminished and unimportant:

> Mon premier échec s'appelle Stéphanie. L'opinion de Stéphanie comptait pour moi plus que tout autre quand j'avais dix ans. (.....) Stéphanie devient pour moi la mesure des choses et le miroir où je lisais, quand le rire éteignait et rallumait des étincelles dans ses prunelles, combien j'étais laide. Je me comparais à elle, je me posais des questions Pourquoi est-on soi? Sans choix, sans recours? Pourquoi étais-je cet être et non cet autre? (Cajou, p. 34).

Fearful that her mother will be replaced by a look-alike stranger who will not love her, afraid to leave the garden where she plays with Stéphanie while her mother is out, afraid to extend her circle of friends because she fears she will lose Stéphanie, their friendship finally ends when she is sixteen: "Mon amitié pour Stéphanie se terminait. C'était un échec. Ce premier échec a orienté ma façon de voir et de réagir" (Cajou, p. 97-8). She becomes incapable of escaping from her image formed through her relationships with the two girls. It is irrelevant that (as her lover Germain points out to her in the case of Marjolaine) they are selfish and manipulative. They also happen to be white, which Cajou desires to be above all else, a desire she can never

fulfill. The result is detrimental. She sees her image as her destiny: "Quand je tourne la tête, j'aperçois mon image dans la glace au-dessus du lavabo. Tu es de la race des esclaves, Cajou. Subis, ma chère!" (Cajou, p. 165). In her games with Stéphanie she longs to become Stéphanie and therefore "other" than she is.

Her relationship with Marjolaine is as intense. (Her fiancé in fact suggests that the two women have been lovers and that she prefers Marjolaine to him.) She is fascinated especially by Marjolaine's hair, quite different from her own. Stéphanie and Marjolaine become extensions of her childhood desire to be beautiful like her mother (to be "other") and to rid herself of her physical attributes ("s'évader de soi") which separate her from this ideal self which she can never attain. As a child she had a black doll ("une moricaude que je jugeais hideuse") which she kept trying to lose, another image of her symbolic self. The doll was always returned to her "déformée mais non déteinte." Cajou, the adult, comes to the realization that she is incapable of resolving her dilemma: like the doll she could not lose, she cannot lose ("fuir") herself:

> Réagit-on contre un miroir? Il faudrait briser les miroirs. J'y songeais sérieusement quand j'étais enfant. C'était une idée folle. Je ne guérirai pas. (She will never be "déteinte.") La seule évasion possible, c'est le suicide" (Cajou, pp. 205-206).

Faced with her proposed promotion and her lover's proposal of marriage, both of which she would really like to believe in, but which she feels unworthy of and incapable of handling, Cajou feels trapped and frustrated, "un prisonnier privé d'avenir" (Cajou, p. 113). She is especially terrified at the thought of having to go to a cocktail party given by her boss and his wife. Germain tells her she cannot refuse. The invitation becomes the catalyst, which forces her to act. (It was an

invitation to go to a party which also ended her friendship with Stéphanie.) Cajou chooses suicide, the final annihilaton and suppression of self; thus Cajou achieves the complete darkness and obscurity she seeks: "Je ne suis plus personne. Douceur de me dissoudre dans le noir" (Cajou, p. 183).

While Freudian critics could have a field day, Cajou has generally been dismissed as an unrealistic novel, about a woman obsessed with color and failure, dealing with, as she describes herself, "un cas pathologique." But although it does present an overstated picture of an extreme case, a sick and disturbed individual, in the light of recent findings about passivity and female conditioning, and especially of the "sexual revolution" it needs to be examined more carefully for what it does expose about the damage done to the female psyche by negative conditioning and about the phenomenon called "fear of flying"[25] here presented in the most extreme form. Cajou chose, or was conditioned, to want to be recognized and reflected only in the eyes of the white world (white, female world in fact). She rejected or was denied the other part of herself. Symbolically, on the advice of a psychiatrist her dead father [black], "her origins" or "racial questions" were never discussed with her. That was the start of her anguish and her tragedy. Cajou sees herself as a fatherless child, a déracinée, a displaced person (a theme common in Caribbean literature): "Jamais je n'ai connu le sentiment de sécurité que peut éprouver une fille, Stéphanie ou Marjolaine, solidement enracinée parmi les siens. Cette impression de n'être nulle part à ma place m'est venue avec l'adolescence" (Cajou, p. 41).

Cajou ends with the protagonist alienated, depressed and choosing to end her life, having found no satisfaction or solutions: neither in the

West Indies, in France, in her studies, in her work or her relationships. Seen in terms of sexual and racial politics it is a pessimistic and defeatist position. Manicom's Madévie is healthier and more integrated.

Madévie is cynical and lucid although also divided (the narrator refers to herself in the third person). She is alienated from herself--her younger self, that self which she has outgrown, discarded and no longer wishes to be, but which still clings to her in many ways despite herself, with its prejudices, attitudes and illusions: "Alors je chasse de mon esprit les chimères de Madévie qui enviait la peau de la Sainte Vierge" (Examen, p. 57). She rejects the values and attitudes of that "Madévie, l'autre, celle que je ne veux plus connaître" (Examen, p. 68) intellectually, but cannot escape entirely. That young Madévie, confident, superior, full of illusions and bourgeois ideals, is now back in Guadeloupe, older, wiser, disillusioned, and much more "aware" in terms of her own identity, her society and its needs and problems.

The novel begins in an operating-room in a clinic in Pointe-à-Pitre, near the airport. Madévie is assisting the surgeon Cyril Démian, a "blanc-France." Also in the room is Marie-Dominique who is described as beautiful, "une fée." She is a French nurse on contract and one (the old) Madévie envies her. The question of color arises at once.

> Comme j'envie Marie-Dominique (....) Je voudrais être belle comme Marie-Dominique. Je voudrais avoir le joli nez de Marie-Dominique. Au lieu de tout cela, je ne suis qu'une mulâtresse, avec une peau en chocolat, comme disent les petits enfants de France qui n'ont pas l'habitude des gens de couleur (Examen, p. 11).

Her words are intentionally ironic. Madévie is pretending to see herself in the eyes of the other. Her sojourn in France has proved to be her

"examen de blanc." Her relationship with Xavier, a white student, has taught her that in the white world, she, "une mulâtresse privilégiée," "cultivée," has no value. She is simply "une négresse": "Et les négresses gréco-latines, on ne les prend pas au sérieux!" (Examen, pp. 41-42). Madévie's disillusioned remark points to the conflict between the aspirations of the Antillaises and the role, purely sexual, exotic and erotic, which they are assigned and limited to by a white, male-dominated society, a rôle endorsed by her own middle-class upbringing. Listening to a sonata by Bach (a mark of her assimilation), Madévie reminisces:

> Sonate du pêché tant attendu par Madévie, du pêché exotique commis par Xavier. Pêchés véniels à vrai dire: dépuceler une mulâtresse. Se faire initier à l'amour charnel par un Blanc. Le curé de Saint-Suplice absoudrait bien vite le jeune homme et quant à Madévie, sa mère qui l'avait bien éduquée dans l'admiration du Blanc lui en voudrait à peine (Examen, p. 40).

From Capécia's négresse blanche to Manicom's Examen de blanc the values of many in the society do not appear to have changed. Madévie herself, however, is aware of the inconsistencies and contradictions in her position. As an educated femme de couleur she is cut off from much of her own society. She is caught between worlds, as her clinic is, out there by the airport, where she watches the planes and reflects on the image, a false one, which her fellow Antillais have of France. "Elle guette les boeings" and hopes for the arrival of her lover. But as time goes on she waits for him less and less, and consciously separates herself from "the other Madévie," with whom she no longer identifies. Because of her background and her education she is also isolated and oriented toward the world of the békés who look down on other Antillais, and finds herself confined to the circles of the "blancs-France."

Symbolic of this isolation is her association with closed spaces, her tiny living quarters, the sterile operating room, frequented only by other white people, her colleagues at the hospital. Madévie, "le docteur Ramimoutou" is painfully aware of the isolation and ambiguity of her situation and her attitude to it is ambivalent and disquieting. Sometimes she feels safe and protected, like the privileged class: "Dans mon espace limité je me sens protégée" (Examen, p. 60); sometimes she longs to escape and is tempted by suicide. She recognizes that her relationship with Cyril (a mirroring of the middle-class Antillais(e) and the béké-France) is one of deference and passivity, conditioned by her position, her past experiences and her education. She is just as knowledgeable as he is about classical music, but pretends not to be, which allows him to patronize her and to think he is forming her taste. She is afraid to disagree with him professionally because she may anger or displease him. She admires his skill as a surgeon yet despises him for what she considers to be his unnecessary mutilation of women's bodies: "Il en veut aux femmes de fabriquer des placentas" (Examen, p. 52)! Yet she finds it impossible to say anything. It is Cyril who, ironically, controls her world: "Arrive Cyril. Il s'introduit dans ce cube. Capricieuse géométrie que cette pièce rétrécie qui s'étire quand Cyril est là. Je peux alors si je veux faire des voyages en hauteur ou en profondeur" (Examen, p. 12). Cyril wants to direct her destiny and she allows him to. The "cube" is a metaphor not only for Madévie's body, identity, self-image, and existence (the woman vis-à-vis the male, here specifically the femme de couleur and the white male) but for the Antillean middle- and upper-classes and for Guadeloupe, for the identity and destiny of the French Antilles and their relationship with the

metropole. Cyril, the "blanc-France" has boxed her in to a certain role and path as she has boxed herself in. He can release her from it, albeit temporarily. When he is with her, she feels differently about her landscape, her space, because he has conferred his presence: "Et la source joyeuse a quittē la roche claire pour couler noire et silencieuse dans le 'cube'." The references to color "claire" "noire" are hardly fortuitous. But lest the reader not understand at first, the narrator makes it even more explicit. Madēvie (woman/Guadeloupe) is dependent on Cyril (blanc-France) for her life and her happiness:

> Evidemment je suis malheureuse et j'ai besoin de Cyril. Il faut que je sois malheureuse pour Cyril. Je suis un tout petit globule rouge et il n'y a pas assez d'oxygène dans ce "cube". Cyril Dēmian m'en apporte. Il ne dit rien! ou si peu de choses....
>
> Gēnēreusement, il m'offre le paysage d'en bas. Il me fait cadeau de mon pays: me voilà, les bras chargē de ma savane brulante, de la mer Caraïbe engloutissant le gigantesque soleil d'or (Examen, p. 12).

The multifaceted metaphor functions effectively on several levels: on one level the narrator is using irony to point out the unsatisfactory and unjust realities of the male/female, France/Antilles situation (Manicom, a militant feminist and political activist is here dealing with "politics" proper as well as the politics of both sex and race). On another level Madēvie is criticizing the West Indian who can only appreciate and experience his/her society or culture when it has first been endorsed by the European.

Manicom uses the relationship between Madēvie and Cyril to make several points and on many different fronts. For example, ironically although she is (or pretends to be) willing to have a love affair with him and to relate to him merely as a sex object, it is Cyril who refuses to cast her in that role:

> Je lui dirai, moi, que je vivrai toute ma vie avec lui, s'il le veut, enfermée dans le "cube", espérant des heures, des jours, des nuits durant, que ses épaules m'accueillent, que sa poitrine tremble, que s'affirme son sexe. (....) Cyril ne veut rien de tout cela. Il attend ma voix, ma plainte, mon récit (Examen, p. 39).

Manicom's book, as previously mentioned, is very "feminist." The narrator effectively uses irony and sexual and medical imagery to make her points. She exploits to the full the possibilities inherent in the labour/operating room situation (a white male gynecologist/surgeon, female patients and assistants). But both Cajou and Mon examen de blanc are novels not only about women and the feminine condition, but also about the position of the assimilé/West Indian middle class and Antillean society in general. In Cajou this society, like the woman, is rendered impotent and self-destructive by its neuroses and particularly by its insistence on clinging to white Eurocentric values. In Mon examen de blanc both woman and Caribbean society have come a long way. The neuroses and false position have been recognized and faced but not removed or cured. There is still a long way to go.

The language and images used in this literature to describe the isolation, alienation and frustration of the black woman who finds herself in France, whether African or Antillaise, are remarkably similar. The situations express themselves in several novels almost identically: Mariotte, the old négresse of Schwarz-Bart's Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes, alone and lonely in the hospice in Paris muses on her fate: "Descendre. Glisser toujours plus bas. J'ai fermé toutes les issues, mais vois....la nuit réveille les monstres,"[26] while Ken, the young Sénégalaise of Le Baobab Fou describes her situation thus:

> De plus en plus le fossé se creusait, désespérément. L'Afrique me rappelait à elle par ses élans, ses instants de poésie et ses rites. Mais je tenais bon le lien avec les valeurs appor-

> tées par la colonialisation. Je ne pouvais plus retourner sur mes pas, ni même jeter un coup d'oeil en arrière (Le Baobab fou, p. 143).

Zêtou in Le Quimboiseur l'avait dit uses almost exactly the same terminology and images:

> J'étais plongée dans un monde étrange, derrière une nuit d'ombre. J'entendais des gens rire et parler de l'autre côté, mais je ne pouvais pas communiquer avec eux. (....) Je glissais lentement dans un abîme sans fin. Tout d'abord, j'étais contente d'être loin des autres, à l'abri d'un mur.
>
> Mais quand je compris qu'au fond de l'abîme c'était la mort, je luttai désespérément pour trouver une sortie (....) Il était trop tard.[27]

The African or West Indian immigrée in Europe is coincée. Having found herself in this desperate situation, she is faced with several alternatives and reacts in different ways: she can go back home, if home is still a desirable possibility, as it is for Ken in Le Baobab fou for whom home has positive associations: "se blottir dans les cuisses chaudes de la mère, rouler dans le sable, écouter les contes et légendes..." (Le baobab fou, p. 144). She can go back home to a society which is imperfect and try to change it by social or political action (only Manicom's Mon examen de blanc suggests this). She can stay in France and try to cope by working mainly with other women, together, as women, to help each other, so that the future will eventually be better for their children everywhere (Ega alone depicts this as a possible course of action). The final alternative is to try to escape (s'évader) or to find a better world. Mariotte (Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes) returns in her old age to childhood, and her childhood world comes back to her. In the asylum in Paris she comes and goes between the two, between France and Guadeloupe. Some destroy themselves as they seek escape once and for all in madness or death (Zêtou in Le Quimboiseur

l'avait dit, Youmanè, "L'Africaine exilée," and Cajou). Others, Antillaises, continue to search, following the pattern of Césaire's journey, France having proved in Lacrosil's words, "un échec," the next stage in the retracing of the voyage is Africa.

In Maryse Condé's novel Une Saison à Rihata set in an imaginary, unspecified West African francophone country, Marie-Hélène, the Antillaise spells out her reasons for having married Zek, the young West African, a fellow-student in Paris:

> A vrai dire, l'Afrique avait pesé lourd dans la balance. Retourner à la Guadeloupe ne signifiait guère pour Marie-Hélène que retourner vers sa mère. L'île et la mère étaient la même chose, utérus clos dans lequel blottir sa souffrance, yeux fermés, poings fermés, apaisée par la pulsation du sang. Mais la mère était morte. Alors la douleur de l'avoir perdue à jamais, de n'avoir même pas assisté à ses derniers moments, se changeait en haine de l'île, à présent stérile, matrice désertée qui n'envelopperait plus de foetus. Restait l'Afrique, mère aussi, proche par l'espoir et l'imaginaire. Elle avait donc épousé Zek à la mairie du XV^e^.[28]

The identification of Marie-Hélène's natural mother, now dead, with the island-mother now lost, rejected, or cast aside, re-evokes a theme found elsewhere in Caribbean women's fiction. Marie-Hélène in Paris had rejected the bourgeois values of Antillean society, embraced new militant, revolutionary (and idealistic) theories especially about Africa--"le devenir du continent africain, le progrès de l'homme noir, sa place dans le monde" (Rihata, p. 21)--and had become actively committed. In the wake of a personal tragedy, Paris becomes for her, like Guadeloupe after the death of her mother, no longer a rewarding or safe and comforting world. So she turns to Africa, "proche par l'espoir et l'imaginaire." But Marie-Hélène in Africa becomes the victim of a further, triple, deception. Already betrayed by her natural mother, Guadeloupe, and a victim of her upbringing, now her revolutionary

student ideals acquired in Europe and the mythical vision she has of Africa--that is, both the hope and the illusion--prove false. She cannot come to terms with the Africa she discovers either personally, politically, or socially. She does not find either "healing or happiness."[29]

Miriam Vieyra, who is in fact married to a Senegalese and lives in West Africa, chooses to dramatize the situation of the Antillaise vis-à-vis her own society and vis-à-vis Africa by using as her vehicle marriage and family customs, an area in which there are obvious external characteristics and circumstances which make the sources of friction and discomfort more easily observable. In a companion piece to her first novel, Le Quimboiseur l'avait dit, Vieyra in Juletane treats the problems of the West Indian woman in Africa. There are many parallels between the two works, Juletane, like Zêtou (Suzette) in Le Quimboiseur l'avait dit finds herself in a hopeless situation, both end their days in an insane asylum (one in France, one in Africa) pining for their Antillean homeland, and both seek escape in suicide. The problem of the West Indian woman in Africa, these parallels suggest, is fundamentally the same as that of the Antillaise in Europe, summed up by Suzette's desperately poignant hindsight: "Je dirigeais ma pensée vers mon village que je n'aurais jamais dû quitter...." Like Ken (Le baobab fou), the details which Suzette focuses on emphasize the warm, comforting, positive side of island life. Her selective memory filters out the hardships and extremes of poverty, and she forgets the reasons which impelled her to want to get away. Juletane's situation in Africa, like Suzette's in Paris, is one of severe restriction and unexpected frustration. The life she has come to is not at all what she had expected. Like Suzette's dreams for her future, Juletane's become a

nightmare.

An Antillaise, married to an African, Mamadou, whom she met in Paris, Juletane's first shock comes when she discovers her husband is already married and she has a co-wife. Juletane is an orphan. Not only are her parents dead but she has lived in Paris since she was 10, with her godmother, now also dead. Thus doubly orphaned, motherless, fatherless, and without her country, she feels her world has come to an end with this disclosure: "Une fois de plus je retrouvais mon angoisse d'orpheline. Perdue, seule au monde. Mon désarroi était immense." Juletane realizes her true situation vis-à-vis Mamadou and her new homeland:

> ...l'avenir rêvé se transformait en un douloureux présent. J'avais porté toute ma confiance, mon amour sur cet homme, lamentablement lâche.... L'arrivée sur cette terre africaine de mes pères, je l'avais de cent manières imaginée, voici qu'elle se transformait en un cauchemar.[30]

On the personal level the Antillaise finds that going back to Africa leaves her yearning unsatisfied and her crisis unresolved. The experience is not as she had imagined it would be. It is not a home-coming. The Antillaise in Africa discovers her "otherness" as she already has in Europe. But this last rejection is even more bitter and hard to accept. Marie-Hélène, in Une Saison à Rihata, discovers she is an outsider. "Semela" or "celle-qui-vient d'ailleurs" is the name given to her by the African villagers. She is a stranger not only because of her physical métissage but because of "ses gestes, ses attitudes, ses réactions, toute une manière d'être qui déconcertait, intimidait, attirait selon le cas, et la singularisait...." (Rihata, p. 12). Marie-Hélène, unexpectedly rejected, in turn rejects this reality which does not fit in with her dreams and expectations. Her mother-in-law sees

her as "cette épouse étrangère, cette Antillaise." Presented to her father-in-law, he coldly reproaches his son: "Pourquoi as-tu fait cela? Pourquoi as-tu épousé une Blanche? (Rihata, p. 23). The Antillaise exiled in her own society is at home nowhere: "une négresse" in Europe, "une Blanche" or "Semela" in Africa. Marie-Hélène is puzzled and deeply hurt by her in-laws' rebuff and by the reaction of her neighbors who do not readily accept her: "Exclue? Pourquoi? Savaient-elles comme elle avait rêvé de l'Afrique quand toute sa génération réclamait l'indépendance comme un merveilleux gâteau d'anniversaire?" Rihata, p. 33). Like her view of the métropole, the West Indian's view of herself vis-à-vis Africa was naively egotistical and unrealistic. Her relationship with her mother-in-law is symbolic of her relationship with Africa. Rejected, because she is different, she begins to compare Sokambi, her African mother-in-law, unfavorably to her own mother whose traits now seem so refined by comparison. The Antillaise, in what now becomes an "alien" society partly by her own inadequacy, resistance and her inflexible attitudes, finds herself isolated and confined in a continuing exile. As a result Marie-Hélène, like Cajou, loses her will to act. She withdraws farther and farther into a dream-world. Her perspective alters and the once-rejected Antilles becomes more and more attractive and desirable.

The relationship of the Zek/Marie-Hélène couple is a reflection of a mutually exploitative relationship. "Elle n'avait que lui. Il était à la fois sa victime et son bourreau. Il la sauvait, la guérissait" (Rihata, p. 34). Zek marries her partly because he sees in her the instrument of his vengeance against his father whom he has never been able to please and partly because she fascinates him and he wants to be important in her eyes, while Marie-Hélène marries Zek because for her he represents a

link with Africa and the possibility of fulfilling her dream, but most of all because of the value he confers on her: "Si elle lui avait cédé .... C'était pour se voir en lui. Jamais elle n'aurait autant de prix aux yeux d'un être" (Rihata, p. 25). In this novel identity and "le regard de l'autre," as in much of the other Caribbean fiction already discussed, are important themes. Characters are constructed almost exclusively through the eyes of others and see themselves as their image reflected in the other's eyes. Thus Marie-Hélène sees herself as her brother-in-law sees her: "enceinte, diminuée, vieillie, lasse, lasse à mourir" (Rihata, p. 33).

The Caribbean heroine is still in search of her lost identity. Arguably, because of the Middle Passage which made of Africans of different families and cultures one undifferentiated mass, reducing them all to nègres, she never had an identity except the unacceptable one defined in terms of color and exploitability. Having failed to find either herself or a haven in Europe, she now seeks to use Africa to fill the void and to reconstruct for herself a history and a satisfactory home. But this journey too ends in failure. The Africa she finds offers no solution to the Antillaise's problem of alienation and identity. As she is not European, so she is not African. Alain Baudot points out the paradox of the Antillais's situation vis-à-vis Africa: "L'histoire de la représentation de l'Afrique dans l'imaginaire antillais, qui coïncide avec les avatars de la quête de soi, est donc celle d'une déchirure." This is so, he says, because for the Antillais, "L'Afrique est en lui, avant lui, et, par la force des choses, à jamais hors de lui."[31] Maryse Condé makes a similar point. Referring to the situation of the West Indian woman Maryse Condé says:

> Etre femme et antillaise, c'est un destin difficile à déchiffrer. Pendant un temps, les Antillais ont cru que leur quête d'identité passait par l'Afrique (....); l'Afrique était pour eux la grande matrice de la race noire et tout enfant issu de cette matrice devant pour se connaître, fatalement, se rattacher à elle. En fin de compte c'est un piège.[32]

Condé points out that not only is it difficult to understand and love a country when one does not know either the language or the religion, which makes it very hard to relate to people in the other culture, but that in addition in the case of her heroines who "cherchent à la fois à s'affirmer, en tant que femmes et en tant que colonisées, par rapport aux problèmes politiques et sociaux du monde," the matter is complicated by the relationship of the woman to her own society.[33] Condé does not consider that her heroines' journey to Africa has been futile, however, or that "they fail." Marie-Hélène because "she stays in Africa" and Veronica in Heremakhonon because:

> ...elle a découvert d'abord que ses problèmes personnels psychiques et psychologiques ne pouvaient être résolus en Afrique; elle a compris que pour les résoudre, elle devait retourner aux Antilles pour participer à la vie des Antilles où les événements sont tout aussi angoissants et inquiétants qu'en Afrique.[34]

The case of Veronica parallels that of Manicom's protagonist Madévie at the end of her sojourn in Europe and also recalls Ken Bugul's situation.

The black woman in Europe and the Antillaise in Africa are both victims of their disappointed expectations. Both expect to come to terms with themselves, "s'assumer" as Bugul says or "s'affirmer" as Condé puts it, through the intermediary of this other reality, Europe or Africa, because they have failed to find what they want in their terre natale. At first they have neither the fortitude to immediately accept their rejection and the loss of their dream nor the patience to go beyond the appearances and penetrate the reality once they have met with these

obstacles. But in the end some protagonists at least (Madévie, Ken, Condé's heroines if not Vieyra's or Lacrosil's), profit from their journey in that they recognize that flight is no solution, that they must go back and face their situations, that is, themselves.

Notes

[1] Ken Bugul, Le Baobab fou (Dakar: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1982), p. 183.

[2] Mame Seck Mbackê, Le Froid et le Piment (Dakar: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1983), p. 132.

[3] Michèle Lacrosil, Cajou (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), pp. 101, 104. All further references appear in the text.

[4] Although the women in West Africa in Aminata Sow Fall's novel Le revenant (Dakar: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1980) for example do bleach their skins in an attempt to be lighter, skin color or blackness is not a significant question in the novel. However, Abdoulaye Sadji's novel Nini deals with a mulatto heroine obsessed with being white.

[5] Mbackê, p. 159.

[6] Wilfred Cartey, Whispers from a Continent (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 5.

[7] See for example Nafissatou Diallo's De Tilène au plateau; Cheikh Hamidou Kane's L'Aventure Ambiguë; Bernard Dadié's Climbié or Camara Laye's L'Enfant Noir.

[8] L'Université des Antilles-Guyane now serves these territories. It became a full-fledged university in the late seventies. Before that time all Antillais students of university level went to further their studies in France.

[9] Jacqueline Manicom, Mon examen de blanc (Paris: Editions Sarrazin), 1972.

[10] Ibid., p. 45.

[11] Ibid., p. 47.

[12] The phrase "Nos ancêtres les Gaulois" has been repeated so often it has become an ironic cliché. The phrase appeared according to several African and Caribbean writers at the beginning of a chapter in their history books. French textbooks were used without being adapted in all French territories.

[13] Maryse Condé, Une Saison à Rihata (Paris: Laffont, 1981), pp. 20-21.

[14] Manicom, p. 54.

[15] Manicom, p. 61. All further references appear in the text and are indicated as Examen.

[16] Françoise Ega, Lettres à une Noire, pp. 61 and 64.

[17] Sembène Ousmane, Voltaïque (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1962).

[18] Mame Seck Mbacké, Le froid et le piment (Nous, travailleurs immigrés) (Dakar: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1983).

[19] Mbacké, Avant-Propos.

[20] See "Fatou," Mbacké, p. 19.

[21] Mbacké, p. 5. The work is dedicated "A tous ceux qui ont souffert" and "A Caroline Mbengue, disparue dans sa douzième année."

[22] Ken Bugul, Le Baobab fou, p. 33. All further references appear in the text.

[23] Françoise Ega, Lettres à une Noire (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1978), p. 84. All further references appear in the text.

[24] Manicom was in fact very active in the woman's movement in France and was a co-founder of "Choisir," the French women's organization, which among other things fought actively in favor of abortion.

[25] Erica Jong, Fear of Flying (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973).

[26] Simone and André Schwarz-Bart, Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1974), p. 39.

[27] Miriam-Warner Vieyra, Le Quimboiseur l'avait dit (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1980), p. 137.

[28] Maryse Condé, Une Saison à Rihata, p. 77. All further references appear in the text and are indicated as Rihata.

[29] See Ormerod, Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel (London: Heinemann, 1985), p. 2.

[30] Miriam Warner-Vieyra, Juletane (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1982), pp. 34,35.

[31] Alain Baudot, "Les écrivains antillais et l'Afrique," Notre Librairie 73 (janvier, mars 1984).

[32] Marie-Clotilde Jacquey and Monique Hugon, "Entretien avec Maryse Condé," Notre Librairie 74 (avril-juin 1984), p. 22.

[33] Jacquey and Hugon, p. 22.

[34] Jacquey and Hugon, p. 24.

Conclusion

The writers in this study all belong to the period of history marked by colonialism and by the French policy of "assimilation." French West African countries have been independent of French rule since the sixties, but in terms of the formal education received by these women of letters French or European norms dominate. Martinique and Guadeloupe are French départements d'outre-mer and as such Antillaises receive essentially the same formation as their metropolitan and African counterparts. Thus both African and Caribbean women writers share a basic (French) educational background. The attitudes of the writers clearly show this influence. However, from the literature, the Caribbean woman is depicted as seeing herself in a situation more problematic than that of her African sister. The West Indian novels are in general much more pessimistic. The result of the woman's upbringing and education is often self-doubt.[1] This is evident in their attitude to their writing as well as in the Caribbean woman's insecure sense of self. Both African and Caribbean women question their ability to write as well as whether their subject matter is worth writing about, but the African woman is much more secure and self-assertive in this regard.[2]

In both Caribbean and African feminine writing the focus is always primarily on the woman, on her everyday life, on the feminine condition and on her relationships with herself and with others. The portrayal of the woman is much fuller than in male fiction. Autobiographical

narratives or female biographical material predominate. The literature is not militantly "feminist," except in the case of Jacqueline Manicom's work, but is concerned with questions and areas of central interest to women. Many of the works however portray women who are in some way vitcims of, or in conflict with, social mores or a social structure which they consider outmoded or damaging in practice if not in intent. The attitudes of the African narrators as well as those of many of the protagonists show their backgrounds and education as being clearly influenced by Western values. They are almost all to a certain extent "occidentalisées." This is not to say, however, that they reject their African heritage.

The novel in black Africa is only about 60 years old. Despite a rich and diverse oral tradition and cultural heritage, because written literature began with the colonial period, a period of upheaval, devastation and radical violent change, most African novels published before 1960 deal with the trauma of the colonial situation. Early novels especially focus on the suffering and disintegration of the community as a whole. In these novels, individuals, including women, are representative of group consciousness. It is only later that the focus shifts from group to individual conflict and even then the individual in conflict with the group or society is often still representative of a new consciousness within the community of a need for change. Individualism in the traditional African context means conflict. Self-realization is only possible within the context of the value system of the community. This emphasis on a group identity where the individual's needs and desires are always subordinated to those of the group is especially stressful for women who are often of low status within the community.

The stress increases when the old patterns, which assured them a certain consideration begin to break down.[3] Traditional mores transplanted unadapted to a Westernized urban setting can bring disastrous results. The modern woman is forced to redefine her destiny as a woman in new terms. However, African women do not want fulfillment at the expense of family unity or outside the community. Their works are first of all biographies concerned with establishing a written record of the African woman's place in her community and telling her personal history.

Especially in the case of the African novel it is important to consider the public for which this literature is intended. The African woman writer is addressing an African audience which is extremely limited at the present time. The number of West Africans who are French-speaking is relatively small and mainly confined to urban areas. The literacy rate is generally low; in Senegal, the oldest French "colony," for example it is about 10% at present. Because the literacy figures for women are much lower than those for men, most of the potential literate Francophone African reading public is male. Chinweizu points out that it is useful to see African novels as descendants or inheritors of the oral tradition, the African epic or folktale; hence as having an implicit (or explicit) didactic purpose.[4] Thus, if we look at the actual, often also the implied, reader as the educated African (assuming that the writers are addressing an African reading public), then one can hope that these works will speak to those in the society, numerically mainly male, but also the educated woman, who can play a part in redefining roles, eliminating injustices or righting wrongs.[5]

The African woman is presented as deeply attached to her traditions and heritage. None of the writers or the characters wants to dispense

with or discard their precious cultural heritage. However, all are conscious of and point out areas of conflict and injustice which limit and destroy women's potential for self-actualization and happiness. Kaya, Diallo, Ndiaye all portray the woman in their society in this way. Bâ's novels and Fall's texts deal explicitly with these issues. Bâ and Fall both argue for the need to eliminate and change harmful elements while pointing out and advocating the value and necessity of retaining their traditions. Fall's novels especially see the condition of the woman as being synonymous with the situation of those in the society, both male and female, who are less privileged or of low status. Her works address flaws in the social structure in general without seeking to destroy it.

In the area of the male/female relationship these stories bear out Sonia Lee's finding from anglophone African women's writing that:

> Les héroines du roman féminin ne cherchent pas la monogamie mais le bonheur et ce bonheur féminin se résume par l'amour conjugal. Dans le roman masculin le bonheur de la femme c'est la maternité: dans le roman féminin c'est l'amour.[6]

As Fall puts it in the words of her character Lolli (La grève des Bàttu) what women want is "le plein épanouissement de la femme dans un cadre familial ou, en responsables, elles auraient aussi leur mot à dire."[7] All the women in the literature want to be loved, considered, respected, by their parents, friends, family or spouse. The source of their unhappiness is shown to be a breakdown in relationships, whether it is the mother or father/daughter relationship or the conjugal one. In addition they protest against customs or taboos which they consider unfair or restrictive. The younger African woman, however, as portrayed by these writers, is confident that she can reconcile differences and

overcome obstacles, whereas her disillusioned West Indian sister is shown to be much more cautious. These differences are at least partly due to radically different social structures.

The novel in the Caribbean dates back at least to the eighteenth century. Writings by women constitute some of the earliest examples of West Indian literature. Most Caribbean novels are concerned with the search for an identity. The Caribbean novel deals with race as well as class oppression, and most often the two are inextricably intertwined. Caribbean and African literatures, both Anglophone and Francophone, were born of a colonial situation but the difference in the West Indies was that both the colonizer and the colonized were strangers in the new land. There was therefore much more place in the society for invention, more leeway as far as social roles were concerned. Although, as in Africa, the colonizer was trying to impose a structure, the "givens" were not the same. In both cases the European structure had to be modified to cope with the new situation. But the colonized people in the diaspora, unlike the African peoples at home, were no longer a part of a well-ordered established, hierarchical society. The infamous Middle Passage had already created fragmentation and chaos. Therefore the situation of the African woman or the Crēole woman of color in the Caribbean differed greatly from that of the African woman at home in the mother country. She did not have roles clearly defined for her--young girl, bride, wife, mother--roles growing out of and laid down by long and ancient tradition. She did not have established patterns of behavior and expectations which were defined by tribal culture.

The Caribbean woman of color did not have the respect and status that her African sister had in her ancestral community, although this

deprivation could also be seen as an advantage. Deprived of a pre-conceived destiny the Antillaise had to struggle to achieve any status within the community but she was also freer, the possibilities for individual personal growth and development were more open. The same situation can be said to obtain when the African woman passes from a traditional rural to an urban milieu. In the colonial situation women had a special, albeit not privileged, position. The sexual role of the woman vis-à-vis the master gave her an advantage not enjoyed by the black male. Her sexual role thus tended to give the femme de couleur a mediating position between two groups but also left her open to being doubly exploited and oppressed. Since slavery intentionally broke down and destroyed family structures and traditional hierarchical patterns, the African male transplanted in the Caribbean was deprived of his position and authority and the responsibility for the family devolved largely on the woman. This emasculation of the black male, deliberately practiced under slavery and the plantation system, resulted in the woman's having to assume added burdens and responsibilities, a situation which has continued after the abolition of slavery and the decline of the plantation system. Consequently, if women in a colonial situation are the ultimate victims, in a Caribbean society the position of woman as victim has added dimensions, both in terms of her enslavement and of possibilities for growth and self-realization.

The Antillais' history also caused a destruction of their traditional black identity and values and a promotion of white, European norms. Because of the ambiguity and flexibility of her position, the black, and especially the mulatto, woman was in a position to take advantage of the possibilities for social advancement. This, however,

resulted in a concomittant denial of her black heritage and an isolation and alienation which proved to be detrimental both to her self-image and her integration into the black community. The heroines in francophone West Indian novels clearly suffer from an identity crisis.

In Capécia and Lacrosil's novels the woman is a victim of the image of herself created in response to her social context. She cannot escape from her alienated and alienating values. In Vieyra's novels she is a victim of her naive or misguided attempts to better her life. She is betrayed by her expectations and by the egotism of those closest to her, be they West Indian, French or African, her own mother, the white man, or her selfish spouse. The dreams of France, "terre promise" or of a mythical Africa which can help the protagonists to find themselves are also discounted. In general the women see themselves as victims, caught in their own desperate attempts to define their identities and to rise above the limitations of their social, political and personal circumstances.

The African woman, while coping well at home, in Europe finds herself in the same predicament as her Antillaise sister. She is haunted by the same sense of alienation and exile. Both are victims of a process of reification. If she forgets who she is and tries to become "other," the results are disastrous. Not only is she not allowed to relate except as an exotic sexual object or a useful curiosity, but she is in danger of losing touch with reality and her authenticity. Her salvation lies in remaining firmly attached to her African roots even as she adopts and adapts what may be valuable from European ideas or practices. As Diop says "We are ready to keep the gifts of the West, provided we use them according to our genius and our situations."[8] Ken Bugul's autobiography

serves as a cautionary tale and Mbacké's work, less sensationally, makes similar points.

The problem for the Antillaise is much more difficult. In the West Indian situation, where there is no secure family structure and their aspirations are directed at European ideals, many women find the situation so problematic and hopeless that they run away, literally or figuratively. Even the strongest, most lucid, like Schwarz-Bart's or Manicom's protagonists, are tempted by madness or suicide. Schwarz-Bart writes of "la folie antillaise" which is never faraway and Maryse Condé speaks of the writer's as well as the individual's predicament:

> Nous sommes prisonniers de structures érigées par la génération précédente qu'on prétend nous voir respecter. Or il faut les briser. La libération de l'écrivain négro-africain homme ou femme, passe par là. Il n'est pas d'identité culturelle immuable. Toute identité culturelle dépend de facteurs socioéconomiques.[9]

It is a daunting task. Condé sees West Indian women's writing at the present time as "disappointing": "On the whole West Indian feminine literature is somewhat disappointing. It resolves nothing and is too exclusively based on the myth of the white man."[10]

The fictional portrayal of the West Indian woman reflects the existing reality in the society: too often she is "antillaise, et par conséquent inconsciemment honteuse de son origine directe,"[11] (that is, her West Indian origins). Changing the social structures alone will not be enough, however. What is needed is an accompanying change of the individual mentality of the woman. Crucial to this change is an exploration of the past in order to come to terms with it, for, as the orphaned Christophe asks in Une Saison à Rihata: "Comment devenir homme (or femme) quand on ne connait pas son passé?"[12]

In female Caribbean writing the autobiographical form is the fictional manifestation of this attempt to grapple with the past in order to be able to arrive at a sense of self.[13] Fanon describes three different phases which characterize the evolution of the intellectual and the writer in a colonized society. The first is the phase of "unqualified assimilation" in which the intellectual is inspired by and slavishly imitates European norms. Then comes a reaction: "In the second phase we find the native is disturbed; he decides to remember what he is."[14] In this phase, Fanon says, the intellectual immerses himself in his history and "culture" but as he is not really "a part of his people" his relationship with his society can sometimes be superficial, "exterior" and problematic. "Sometimes this literature of just-before-the-battle is dominated by humour and by allegory; but often too it is symptomatic of a period of distress and difficulty, where death is experienced, and disgust too."[15] In Fanon's view one does not really achieve a "national literature" until one enters the third phase, that of a "fighting literature, a revolutionary literature" where the writer "after having tried to lose himself in the people and with the people, will on the contrary shake the people."[16]

Women's literature, especially in the Caribbean, is mainly in the second phase, where the "native" decides to "remember what he [she] is"--hence the prevalence of the autobiographical form. Kenneth Harrow points out that in literatures of "colonized peoples," in black American writing, for example (a literature like West Indian literature considered "littérature engagée"), the most obvious function of autobiography is to "redonner leur identité à des déracinés, fournir les fondements de la reconnaisance par lesquels on fait corps avec les siens."[17]

Now the Antillais(e) represents, as already pointed out, the déraciné(e) par excellence. If the autobiography does not always allow him/her, as it does in Schwarz-Bart, to reconstruct a past of which he/she can be proud, it at least allows others to begin to exorcise the ghosts and to understand in order to be able someday to demolish those restricting and negative structures which hamper mental health and progress, and which, as Condé points out, need to be destroyed.

The Caribbean woman sees herself as an orphan, a déracinée, out of tune even in her own society. Moreover, in many novels she does not see any chance of changing either herself or her society. Like the problematic hero described by Goldmann she is a "degraded" heroine seeking "authentic values" in a "degraded" world--a futile task.[18]

Manicom's work, however, suggests that although the woman is in a difficult position there is a possibility of breaking out of her situation by facing it lucidly and by engaging in political action. The situation of the middleclass educated woman is seen as particularly problematic as it is she who most suffers from alienation. She is most "aware," most assertive and ambitious and hence most vulnerable and alienated. But the woman in a rural milieu also, in addition to physical hardships, is shown as subject to an extremely negative self-concept, the legacy of colonialism and slavery. Schwarz-Bart's Lougandors are superior, almost mythical, "superwomen" who survive and transcend their destiny by a sort of physical and spiritual "marronnage." They deliberately cut themselves off from negative and destructive influences and like the defiant and hardy Maroon, symbol of resistance and endurance, they manage to triumph. But it is a path open only to a special few.

However, there is hope. The act of writing itself is symbolic of

liberation. It is cathartic and soothing. Not only does it bring release to the individual writer but it serves as a unifying bond and "avertissement aux lectrices." Through their writing the women seek to reach and express solidarity with other women in similar predicaments. Some are already, in Fanon's terms, in the third phase where the writer "turns himself [herself] into an awakener of the people." For the works of Caribbean women writers like those of their African sisters, as Lloyd W. Brown says, "clearly imply that profound and pervasive changes can only take place when external reforms go hand in hand with fundamental personal growth."[19]

Francophone women's literature from Africa is in its very early years. Women's writing in the French Caribbean has not up until now been noted for its optimism or its success. Both literatures have so far been concerned mainly with recalling and examining the past. Fanon points out that "the colonised man who writes for his people ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope."[20] One hopes that more and more women, African and West Indian, will take up this challenge and continue to find in literature a means of sharing with and encouraging each other.

Notes

[1] See Maryse Condé, "La littérature féminine de la Guadeloupe: recherche d'identité." Présence Africaine 99/100 (1976), pp. 155-166. For self-doubt as a feminine phenomenon in general, see Annette Kolodny, "Dancing through the Minefield. Some Observations on the Theory, Practice and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism," in The New Feminist Criticism, ed. by Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985).

[2] See Diallo's De Tilène au Plateau, pp. 90, 132, and compare with Françoise Ega's Lettres à une Noire, pp. 84, 65.

[3] See, for example, Diallo's work and Fall's novels, especially La grève des Bàttu.

[4] Chinweizu, p. 25 ff, p. 135. The folktale is particularly evident and relevant for example as a point of departure for looking at Aminata Sow Fall's works.

[5] Diallo's narrator at times for example addresses the reader directly and suggests that her readership might not always share her interests or viewpoint. Thus her remarks can be seen as aimed at both the male and female critical "serious" reader:

> Ecrire un livre pour dire qu'on a aimé Père et Grand-mère? La belle nouvelle! J'espère avoir fait un peu plus: avoir été au-dela des tabous de silence qui règnent sur nos émotions (De Tilène, p. 132).

Sometimes also, as here, her remarks seem to be directed defiantly at the European or very Westernized African, from whom she fears ridicule because he/she would not understand or sympathize with the narrator's point of view which she feels she cannot "rationally" defend:

> Pourtant, si je souffrais d'avoir été humiliée, je souffrais aussi pour père. Comprenne qui voudra ou qui pourra (emphasis added). J'étais malheureuse, malade presque, d'avoir fait perdre à cet homme grave le contrôle de lui-même. Je souffrais de l'avoir fait, souffrir car il faut qu'il eût été profondément blessé (De Tilène, p. 90).

[6] Sonia Lee, "L'image de la femme dans le roman francophone de l'Afrique occidentale." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 1974, p. 203.

[7] Aminata Sow Fall, La grève des Bàttu, p. 43.

[8] Alioune Diop ("Les sens de ce congrès" - Discours d'ouverture, Prèsence Africaine, no. 24-25, fev-mai, 1959, p. 44) quoted by Madubuike, The Senegalese Novel, p. 163.

[9] Maryse Condé, "La littérature féminine de la Guadeloupe: recherche d'identité," p. 166.

[10] Maryse Condé, "Feminine Literature in Guadeloupe and Martinique,"

conference at Remy Nainsouta Centre, November, 1976, quoted by Roger Toumson in "La littérature antillaise d'expression française," Présence Africaine 121/122 (1982), p. 137.

[11] Condé's description of novelist Suzanne Lacascade, Condé, "La littérature féminine de la Guadeloupe," p. 158.

[12] Maryse Condé, Une Saison à Rihata, p. 38. Christophe, the orphan, haunted by a desire to discover an unknown past which he suspects is somehow shameful is as much a symbol of the West Indian condition within the text as the chief protagonist is.

[13] The frequent incidence of autobiography in African literature is perhaps explained not only by the individual's need to formally recount his history and establish his identity but by the presence of this tradition within tribal societies, as evidence by the function and importance of the "griot" or official historian/praise singer/story-teller. In the African context, the autobiography can therefore be seen also as a continuation of this long-standing tradition.

[14] Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove Press, 1966), p. 179.

[15] Fanon, p. 179.

[16] Fanon, p. 179.

[17] Kenneth Harrow, "Autobiographie et littérature engagée d'après des oeuvres des auteurs magrébins et noirs américains," L'Afrique artistique et littéraire 43 (1977), p. 5.

[18] Lucien Goldmann, Towards a Sociology of the Novel, pp. 1-2. Goldmann says "the novel is an epic genre characterized, unlike the folktale or the epic poem itself, by the insurmountable rupture between the hero and the world..." (p. 2).

[19] Lloyd W. Brown, Women Writers in Black Africa (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 181.

[20] Fanon, p. 187.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A
Selected Caribbean Women Novelists

"Early" Writers Born Pre-1930

BETZON, Thérèse de (Martinique, ca 1850-1912)	Yvette, histoire d'une jeune créole, Paris, Imprimerie Modèle, 1880
DESROY, Annie (Haïti, bn. 1893)	Le joug, Port-au-Prince, Imprimerie Modèle, 1934
CAPECIA, Mayotte (Martinique, 1928-1953)	Je suis martiniquaise, Paris, Corréa, 1948
	La négresse blanche, Paris, Corréa, 1950
CHAUVET, Marie Vieux (Haiti, 1917-1975)	Fille d'Haïti, Paris, Fasquelle, 1954
	La danse sur le volcan, Paris, Plon, 1957
	Amour, colère et folie (trilogy), Paris, Gallimard, 1968
EGA, Françoise (Martinique, 1920-1976)	Le temps des Madras, Paris, Eds Maritimes et d'Outre-mer, 1966
	Lettres à une Noire, Paris, L'harmattan, 1978
LACASCADE, Suzanne (Antilles)	Claire-Solange, âme africaine, Paris, Eugène Figuière, 1924
LACROSIL, Michèle (Guadelope, bn. 1915)	Sapotille et le serin d'argile, Paris, Gallimard, 1960
	Cajou, Paris, Gallimard, 1961
	Demain Jab-Herma, Paris, Gallimard, 1967

"Contemporary" Writers Born Post-1930

CONDE, Maryse (Guadeloupe)	Heremakhonon, Paris, 10/18, 1976
	Une saison à Rihata, Paris, Laffont, 1981
	Ségou, Paris, Laffont, 1984

	La parole des femmes, essay, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1979
JULIA, Lucie (Guadeloupe)	Les gens de Bonne Espérance, Paris, Temps Actuel, 1982
MANICOM, Jacqueline (Guadeloupe, 1938-1976)	Mon examen de blanc, Paris, Eds Sarrazin, 1972
	La graine, journal d'une sage femme (biography)
SCHWARZ-BART, Simone (Guadeloupe)	Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes, Paris Eds du Seuil, 1967 (with André Schwarz-Bart)
	Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle, Paris, Eds du Seuil, 1972
	Ti Jean L'horizon, Paris, Eds du Seuil, 1979
VIEYRA, Miriam Warner (Guadeloupe)	Le Quimboiseur l'avait dit, Paris, Présence Africaine, 1980
	Juletane, Paris, Présence Africaine, 1982