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9. NARRATING JUVENILE MENTAL DISORDERS IN CALIXTHE BEYALA'S SELECTED NOVELS

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Abstract

Critics of Calixthe Beyala's feminist discourse have located her narratives within the walls of radical feminism. For instance, her feminist language is often labelled with linguistic violence. Beyala's outcry against oppression is voiced through adolescent girls who she refers to as *femme-fillette* and whose gloomy world is characterised by parental violence. The social and psychological degradation of the children Beyala presents in her novels are instances of immeasurable misery impregnated with aggression of adults towards children. Through these same children, Beyala impugns various forms of disintegration eating into postcolonial Africa. Introducing a psychological paradigm into the readings and interpretations of Beyala's radical feminist works using Freudian psychoanalytic approach to literary criticism and Nietzsche's theory of resentment clearly shows that Beyala is a feminist author whose anger is directed towards male hegemony, and it forms the avenue through which she aptly portrays that young girls living under oppression decline into psychological wrecks.

Key words: Calixthe Beyala, Oppression, Postcolonial Africa, Juvenile mental disorders, Feminist discourse.

Introduction

Calixthe Beyala's Biocritical Survey

Calixthe Beyala is a francophone feminist based in the Diaspora. Beyala, a Cameroonian, born in 1961 to poor parents who abandoned her, was brought up by her elder sister in the ghetto of Douala up to the age of seventeen before she left for Spain and later for France to continue her studies. She was married with two children, but now separated. She is engaged in several social and political movements some of which are the committee of the Decade for the Promotion of a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, *Collectif Egalité*, fight against HIV/AIDS, and promotion of francophonie. Beyala's childhood experience and background in the decadent Cameroon socio-milieu obviously influences her literary career given the scenes painted in her narratives.

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A prolific feminist writer, Beyala has published many novels, among which are: *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée* (1987), *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* (1988); *Seul le diable le savait* (1990), *Maman a un amant* in 1994; *Assèze l'africaine* (1994), *La Sonnette* (1994), *Lettre d'une Africaine à ses sœurs occidentales* (1995), *Les Honneurs perdus* in 1996 (*Le Grand prix de l'Académie Française* in 1996). In 1998, she published *La Petite fille du réverbère*, *Le Petit prince de Belleville* (1998). Other literary works to her credit are: *Amours sauvages* (1999), *Comment cuisinier son mari à l'africaine* (2000), *Lettre d'une Afro-française à ses compatriotes* (2000), *Les arbres en parlent encore* (2002), *Femme nue femme noire* (2003), *La plantation* (2005), *L'homme qui m'offrait le ciel* (2007), and *Le Roman de Pauline* (2009).

Feminism, Freudian Psychoanalysis, and Calixthe Beyala's Radical Feminism

Literary Art

This paper draws on a combination of radical feminist theory and Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory to analyse the neurotic conditions of the protagonists in the selected novels. However, the aspect on the moderating power/function of the ego is downplayed in this paper because it does not have a strong presence in the selected texts.

The approach adopted in this paper reflects the possibility of interdisciplinary approach to the discussion and analysis of Beyala's works centred on the salient issues of tracing the aetiology, symptoms and identification of specific neurotic disorders of oppressed adolescent females. This is a gap identified and intended to be filled by this paper in order to deviate from the traditional or conventional paradigm applied to the study of African feminist texts. This is more so because such traditional and/or conventional approaches hardly provide that window of opportunity to go beyond the simplistic claim that oppressed women, and for the purpose of this study, oppressed adolescent girls, suffer from psychological disorders.

Therefore, the syncretic nature of this presentation gives room for a breakaway from the hegemonic hold of analysing African feminist texts using indigenous African Feminist theories such as Motherism, Stiwanism, Negofeminism, and the like. As a matter of fact, these traditional approaches have become over flogged; it is therefore considered in this paper that a paradigm shift is expedient to prevent the subject of feminist literary criticism from remaining fixed in a coat that no longer fits or in what could be termed "monolithic integrated circuit".

In order to balance the argument, this paper locates Beyala's radical feminism within Nietzsche's theory on resentment, which as cited by Hayes (2000) is an attitudinal

response of black people to racial oppression. Feminist movement is borne out of resentment of patriarchal oppression. F.W. Hayes III (2000), in his reading of Nietzsche's work on resentment, concludes that the character of resentment is an attitudinal response by black people to historical and present conditions of racial oppression. It may therefore be apposite to apply this argument to Beyala's feminist advocacy against patriarchal oppression. Hayes narrows down Nietzsche's view to how culture stimulates oppression and perpetuates domination. Culture, especially patriarchal African culture, becomes a tool for perpetuating oppression of African female children in Beyala's narratives and their eventual decline into myriads of psychological disorders.

The structure of oppression observed in Beyala's novels is fashioned into a hierarchy where her male characters oppress young and old female characters. Seven patriarchal oppression processes are evident in her novels, namely: gender discrimination, female-sexuality control, girl-child commodification, marriage or forced marriage, motherhood, widowhood, and rape/incest/paedophilia. Beyala's protagonists often strive to be free from these processes of patriarchal oppression. However, the world of Beyala's female characters' world is heavily charged with androcentricism in such a way that they cannot easily be free from suppression, their primordial drive for freedom being constantly repressed by extant patriarchal cultural laws. As a result, their decline into a state of psychological malaise is inevitable because they find no room for self-expression. In "their" world, they are left with no personal internal choice, but to live by coercion according to the dictates of a world external to their preferred life choices. As noted by Thomas Szasz, cited by J.T.W. Bouchard (2007),

A person's ability to make uncoerced choices is contingent on his internal and external conditions. His internal conditions, that is, his character, personality or "mind" – comprising his aspirations and desires as well as his aversions and self-discipline – propel him toward, and restrain him from, various actions. His external conditions, that is, his biological makeup and his physical and social environment – comprising the capabilities of his body, and the climate, culture, laws, and technology of his society – stimulate him to act in others. When the internal and external is out of balance, madness occurs. At times, this is the result of the environment (or a set of externally imposed definitions) in which the protagonists find themselves. At times, it is the result of attempting to come to terms with an irreconcilable state of unbelonging (p. 62).

Szasz's internal and external forces that motivate and modulate actions of protagonists are corollaries of Sigmund Freud's conceptualizations of id and superego. The internal force is the id, and the external is the superego. The internal desires, that is, the id drives of Beyala's protagonists, are eternally in dissonance with prevailing ex-

ternal forces, the superego. Consequently, unresolved id drives, the fears and pains of female characters render them susceptible to psychological disorders.

1. From Oppression to Subversion: Ateba's Journey into Madness

Nathalie Etoke (2010) observes that the failure which meets the passion with which female protagonists undertake the task of ameliorating women's conditions in Africa often results in madness. This suggests that the patriarchal structure of most African societies where women are oppressed is unyielding and insensitive to African women's conditions. It therefore explains why Beyala's protagonists who set out to claim the freedom of African women from oppression end up as individuals who irredeemably suffer psychological disorders.

In *C'est le Soleil qui m'a brûlée* (1987) (henceforth *Soleil*), the journey of Ateba, the protagonist, into the abysmal psychological disorders she suffers begins when she becomes aware of her family situation, her biological parents having deserted her and leaving her as a surrogate daughter in the cares of Ada, her maternal aunt. Being a cunt herself, Ada's social condition proves that she does not possess motherly nurturance instincts required for a child's proper social and psychological development. Referring to her study of female madness in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1996), Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Le Quimboiseur l'avait bien dit* (1980) and Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* (1980), Odile Cazenave (1996) indicates the obnoxious effects that abandonment of children, including child abuse, can cause. Cazenave states that:

en dépit de contextes historique, sociologique, racial, différents, les protagonistes respectives partagent une même histoire de rejet par l'un ou l'autre parent ... et éprouvent toutes, en grandissant, solitude, insécurité et désespoir. Un tel terrain de base conduit fatalement à une involution du personnage vers une fragmentation de Soi et à une marginalisation progressive, qui, poussée à l'extrême, aboutit à l'aliénation du personnage. (p. 104).

despite different historical, sociological, and racial contexts, (the) respective protagonists share same history of rejection by one or the other parent ... and they all show, while growing up, solitude, insecurity and despair. Such a background fatally leads to an involution of the character towards Self fragmentation and to a progressive marginalisation, which, pushed to the extreme, results into the alienation of the character (our translation).

Under Ada, Ateba is ruled with a rod of iron as commented by the narrator: « Ateba fonctionne à coup de trique. La trique le matin. La trique à midi. La trique le soir. Tout est sujet à trique (Ateba functions with strokes of cudgel. Cudgel in the morning. Cudgel in the afternoon. Cudgel in the evening. Everything is subject to cudgel)

» (p. 41). It can be inferred that Ateba's behaviour is symptomatic of behavioural outcomes observed in children who are or have been victims of emotional neglect. John Briere (1992) claims in his findings that "children who are raised by unloving, unresponsive, or otherwise emotionally neglectful parents are at risk for psychological disturbance in the short and intermediate term, perhaps especially in terms of disturbed attachment to and relationships with others" (p.12). Likewise, children, who are subjected to physical or psychological abuse, have the potential to distort perceptions and assumptions regarding self, others, the environment, and the future. They react in ways that impact negatively on their psychological functioning, resulting from depression and anxiety.

The initial stage of Ateba's degeneration starts with unipolar depression, a type of mood disorder, which occurs as a result of the absence of her progenitors and the socially, economically and psychologically compromised environment of « Quartier Général » (QG), a notorious slum in Awu, the imaginary setting of the novel, where she is forced to grow up; QG is a depiction of a rundown residential area like the image of the taxis that ply that part of Awu, « Graiseux, sales, négligés, débraillés. Image du QG... les façades des maisons ressemblent à de vieilles dames ridés et les vieilles dames ressemblent à de vieux bidons rouillés, les uns comme les autres rongés par la vie, momifiés par l'attente de la vie » (Fatty, dirty, neglected, dishevelled. Image of QG ... façades of houses resemble old wrinkled ladies and old ladies resemble rusty cans, all alike worn out by life, mummified by the demand of life) (*Soleil*: p. 10-11). The inhabitants of QG are burdened and maddened by life, men, women and children walking slowly and heavily, soliloquising. All these qualifiers depict a people whose destiny is short-changed by history, place and environment. This depiction is not different from other motifs in other novels of Beyala set in Africa which readily present a "mutilating experience of life" (Arenberg, 1998, p. 111). Growing up in an environment as presented in *Soleil* presupposes that most children are susceptible to mental disorders. Thus, Beyala launches the debut of her questioning of parenting and parenthood in postcolonial Africa with *Soleil*. She demonstrates the high potential of irresponsible parenting in jeopardising the lives of African children, especially female children, who, oppressed to an insupportable extent by their societies, decline into madness and nervous depression (Bouchard, 2007).

The intrinsic nature of child abandonment in juvenile mental disorder atrociously limits the choices Beyala's female children have in pursuing a life trajectory that leads to self-fulfilment. Having waited endlessly for the return of her biological mother, Betty who deserts Ateba in order to fully engage herself in prostitution, Ateba, is plunged into unipolar depression, a state of lethal malaise which she experiences since the time her mother abandons her. The narrator says:

Depuis que Betty l'a quittée, elle a ce type de malaise. Ce ne sont pas seulement les caprices d'une enfant abandonnée. C'est quelque chose d'autre, une angoisse qui la meurtrit, la ronge, la creuse avant de la brûler toute. A chaque changement de sa vie, l'angoisse la pénètre et grossit d'heure en heure. Elle n'est plus la même, elle n'est plus tout à fait la même. (p. 30)

Since Betty left her, she has this type of malaise. They are not only the tantrums of an abandoned child. It is something else, an anguish that bruises her, gnaws away at her, digs into her before burning her completely. At each change in her life, the anguish penetrates and increases hour by hour. She is no longer the same, she is no longer completely the same. (Our translation)

Ateba's lack of choice in voicing out her desires, aspirations, and frustrations, inhibits healing, and deepens her state of unipolar depression with a chain of other psychological disorders. Her lack of choice implies then that she only obeys orders as dished out by Ada and the society. Moi, the narrator, comments:

Certes, elle obéit comme toujours et, comme toujours, elle lave, elle cuisine, elle masse. Mais, en son dedans, naissent d'autres discours qu'elle s'acharne à garder par peur d'Ada, des autres et surtout d'elle-même : puisqu'elle ne connaît plus, puisqu'elle ne voit plus, puisqu'elle est au bord du gouffre, puisque la folie l'appelle (p. 30).

Certainly, she obeys as always and, as always, she washes, she cooks, she massages. But deep inside her, other things she would like to say crop up which she strives to keep away for fear of Ada, of others and especially of herself: since she no longer knows, since she no longer sees, since she is at the edge of a gulf, since madness beckons her (Our translation).

Obedience to the totalitarianism of patriarchy forecloses the possibility to define self-identity. This is noted by Bouchard (2007) who with reference to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's observations argues that "it is debilitating to be any woman in a society where women (female children – emphasis mine) are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters" (p. 61). Hence, Ateba's identity has to be in conformity with society's expectations of her and not what she herself desires her identity to be. Working contrary to her internal conception of self-identity results in a loss of autonomy and folly (Bouchard, 2007). External factors premised on patriarchal injunctions dictate the mode of Ateba's existence as she daily has to obey orders by Ada who ignores her social, psychological, physical and emotional needs with staunch hostility. Discernible from Moi's narration is the psychological

alienation that characterises their relationship:

Elle (Ada) ne lui a rien demandé sur sa vie, ses angoisses, ses désirs. ... Elle (Ada) ne lui dit (Ateba) pas bonjour. Entre elles, ces mots sont morts et enterrés depuis longtemps. Seuls subsistent les mots d'ordre : Fais. Prends. Donne (pp. 43-47).

She (Ada) does not ask her anything about her life, her anxieties, her desires. ... She (Ada) does not say good morning to her. Between them, these words are dead and buried long time ago. Only words of orders subsist: Do. Take. Give (Our translation; emphasis also added).

From unipolar depression, Ateba's condition disintegrates into anthropobia, a type of phobic disorder that occurs in her as a result of her aversion for the masculine gender. This is no less caused by her exposure to abnormal family setting where Ada's concubines come to patronise her. Against her internal desires, she is compelled to call Ada's lovers fathers as dictated by the external force, the superego, personified by Ada.

Elle (Ateba) ne connaît pas l'homme. Elle n'a jamais eu de père. Les amants d'Ada ne l'intéressent que dans la mesure où ils passent comme une note, glissent sans imprégner sa mémoire. Combien de pères Ada lui a-t-elle donnés ? Dix ? Vingt ? Trente ? Elle ne les a pas comptés, elle n'a jamais essayé de les compter. Ils passaient, elle disait « papa », elle aurait dit « monsieur », cela aurait été du pareil au même, puisque le mot avait perdu sa dimension, puisque le mot était devenu fou. Papa... Papa... (p. 57).

She (Ateba) does not know man. She has never had a father. Ada's lovers only interest her to the extent that they pass like a note, slip without permeating her memory. How many fathers has Ada given her? Ten? Twenty? Thirty? She did not count them, she has never tried to count them. They passed by, she said "father", she would have said "Mister", that would have been the same, since the word had lost its dimension, since the word had become stupid. Father... Father... (Our translation; emphasis also added).

More importantly, buried in Ateba's unconscious, is the fear and hatred she has developed for the opposite sex because of the latter's oppressive tendencies vis-à-vis women. Each time she has an encounter with a male, the fear and hatred she feels for the latter come to the surface. For example, her first encounter with Jean Zepp makes her imagine she is being raped by the former even without him touching her and «

Soudain, ... elle se met à hurler, elle a peur, elle a le vertige, elle a mal » (Suddenly, ... she starts howling, she is afraid, she is dizzy, she hurts) (Soleil, p.16).. Ateba's reaction to her physical contact with Jean Zepp resonates that of an individual suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder and confirms the fact that she suffers from anthropophobia. Even though Jean Zepp only kisses her in the end, she bursts into tears and begins to recount man's sins against her and women in general.

Furthermore, Ateba's strange hatred for men also stems from the lack of gratification of her primordial libidinal drives and the fixation she experiences at the various developmental stages mapped out by Freud in his psychosexual development theory. The constellation of Ateba's life experiences becomes the stimulus of her id drive – the desire to be free from patriarchal oppression by voicing out the need for man to discover himself «dans la forme limitée de ses vérités» (in the limited nature of his truths) (Soleil, p.14). Ateba's main preoccupation then will be to embark on infanticidal and homicidal actions and missions that will result in metaphorically exterminating the male gender so as to subvert the latter's power over women. The first step that Ateba wishes to take is to castrate man in order to castrate the pain of patriarchal oppression because she is «la femme écartelée est elle, elle doit s'écartier, courir ailleurs, castrer la douleur» (she is the woman torn apart, she must step aside, run elsewhere, castrate pain) (Soleil, p. 30). Etoke (2010) aptly writes: «Le pénis étant une arme, l'acte de castration évoqué par Ateba devient la solution radicale proposée par la narratrice afin de mettre fin à son asservissement» (The penis being an arm, the act of castration evoked by Ateba becomes the radical solution proposed by the narrator in order to bring her servitude to an end) (p. 107).

Moi's comment during the initiation of Etoundi's son, Soto, adequately points out Ateba's opinion about the phallus being men's weapon of oppression against women. The phallus, when forced into Ateba's mouth by the man who raped her symbolises the androcentric social order that suppresses women's voice and, ultimately, the latter's ability to assert her freedom. Ateba's hatred for men (and her subsequent id drive for revenge through revolt and violence that would lead to her emancipation), «qui veut que sa valeur se reconnaisse à la longueur de son sexe et sa qualité à l'absence de prépuce» (who wants his value recognised by the length of his penis and his quality by the absence of the foreskin) (Soleil, p. 31) is therefore borne out of the manner in which men objectify women. The objectification of women by men is seen by Ateba as a crime which, according to Moi, is inscribed in the books «des tonnes de livres où sont inscrits les crimes monstrueux que les hommes ont commis contre l'Homme» (tonnes of books where the monstrous crimes committed by men against Man are registered) (Soleil, p. 25). Men in Ateba's conception destroy humanity with the phallus. For this reason, men in Ateba's view are agents of destruc-

tion who «... saccagent, mutilent, mais réussissent à se blanchir les mains en un clin d'œil» (...devastate, mutilate, but succeed in washing their hands white in a flash) (Soleil, p. 35) because the society assumes that nature including celestial bodies have designed it so: «Ainsi le veulent la lune, le soleil, les étoiles» (So the moon, the sun, the stars want it) (Soleil, p.36). Ateba therefore desires to cut off from every emotional attachment to men: «Bientôt, dans son corps, elle surprendra l'émotion de l'homme, elle la brisera et se tiendra à distance pour ne pas attraper le germe du désordre» (Soon, in her body, she will suspend feelings for man; she will break it and will keep a distance in order not to contract the seed of disorder) (Soleil, p.22). For survival, Beyala's protagonists must have a sure means of subverting all existing nexus of oppression, either through infanticide, homicide, quasi-homoeroticism, diserotisation of the body or reification of the body. Thus, Ateba, in her attempt to help Irène, her friend, aborts her pregnancy; she does not just want an abortion, but she would rather desire «quelque chose de plus radical, qui arracherait l'œuvre de l'homme de son amie, d'ailleurs elle ne voulait plus de remède traditionnel, plus jamais» (something more radical, which will uproot man's work from her friend, besides she no longer wanted traditional remedy, never again) (Soleil, p.116). In actual fact, infanticide is pushed beyond just destroying the works of man in woman's body. It goes to the extent of a desire to metaphorically annihilate man and all that represents him. Therefore, the painful but necessary act of abortion in which Ateba and Irène are both accomplices is symbolic and is tantamount to the death of patriarchal practices. It signifies victory over every patriarchal vice that oppresses and enslaves women and children; it is an act that delivers woman and children from the claws of oppressive patriarchal injunctions, because «Tout s'est bien passé, ... L'homme ne me prendra plus» (Everything went well, ... Man will no longer take hold of me) (Soleil, p.140).

Significant to the gratification of Ateba's id desire for liberation from patriarchal oppression is the murder of Ateba's one night lover. The process through which Ateba gets him killed is synonymous with the mode of Beyala's aggressive mission towards making oppressive patriarchal practices extinct. Moi's comment «je sens l'apocalypse venir» (Soleil, p.152) is indicative of an apocalyptic war that will see to it that the breath is taken out of "patriarchy" symbolised by men. Furthermore, the act of spitting out sperm at the feet of the nameless man and urinating on him are both symbolic. They signify total rejection and abjection of every element of the oppression of women by men. It is an act of apocatastasis, a message of salvation for the oppressed women/female child. They are acts of purgation targeted at cleansing oppressed women/female children of the debris of patriarchy deposited into and onto them by men (Chioma Opara, 2004).

To extirpate patriarchy represented by men, Beyala tends to suggest quasi-homoeroticism through her protagonist, Ateba. This suggests sexual disorder suffered from by her protagonists, a theme which has become controversial in Beyala's works. While some critics like Pius Adesanmi (1996) claim that she portrays lesbianism, critics like Rangira Gallimore (1997) argue that it is rather a re-appropriation and revalorisation of the female body. In a review of Cheryl Thoman's *Contemporary Matriarchies in Cameroonian Francophone Literature: "On est ensemble"* by Eloïse Brière (2009), the latter observes that Thoman's major preoccupation is to prove that female intimacy is an avenue that offers agency to African women within patriarchal structures to overturn male abuse of power. In her view, Thoman's position emphasises that interpreting female intimacy in African literature as a practice of homosexuality is as a result of the failure of critics to satisfactorily analyse African feminist literature from a theoretical perspective that underscores the importance of patriarchy in African societies. Beyala herself refutes the argument that her work is lesbian in nature. According to Etoke (2010), Beyala confirms her stance on the theme of lesbianism to Rangira Gallimore during an interview by claiming that she is suggesting tenderness between women and not necessarily lesbianism.

Beyala's declaration thus makes the notion of lesbianism in her novels ambivalent. At the same time, it brings forth the hallmark of Hélène Cixous' concept of difference. According to Cixous, the field of signification must be thrown wide open by playing upon the signifier in order to set feminist language free from the prison house of patriarchal language. The window of interpretation is therefore open to individual readers such that they can decipher meanings based on their perceptions, or as Etoke succinctly (2010) puts it, « dire ce n'est pas faire » (saying is not doing) (p. 146).

The treatment of quasi-homoeroticism in *Soleil* through massaging and caressing suggests that female victims of oppression may opt for homosexuality. However, before this phenomenon occurs in the life of an individual, there must have been events that predispose her to that type of sexuality. It is necessary to consider that homoeroticism suggests that patients suffer from a sexuality disorder which according to Freud stems from inappropriate identification with the opposite-sex parent during the psychosexual stage of development (R.S. Feldman, 1996). While Adesanmi (2006) accuses Beyala of phallu-phobia, a more objective look would rather suggest that Beyala's writing is an act of subversion tilted towards saying the formerly unspeakable in order to realistically reflect the reality of oppressed women/female children. J.F. Ndong's observation in C. Salé's (2005) *Calixthe Beyala: Analyse sémiotique de Tu t'appelleras Tanga* confirms the fact that with Beyala, feminist writing escaped from the box of modest and classic tradition of African feminist

precursors to brilliantly outpour sentences that bear libidinous and lewd themes. Beyala's era is therefore that of an era where emerging Francophone feminist writers decide to choose a language that is apt in portraying the psychologically debilitating conditions of women and female adolescents in patriarchal African societies like the one described in *Soleil*. It is a path Ateba embarks upon to revalorise the female gender ridding her of the masculine waste deposited into her body by man and purifying woman of man's « mauvais sang » (unpleasant blood) (*Soleil*, p.90) which in Ateba's view corresponds to dirt and miasma.

The peak of Ateba's resentment against men and her ardent desire to set herself and all other women/female adolescents like her loose from suppression culminates into the sense of need she considers necessary to annihilate the male gender and underscores the fact that she obviously suffers from unipolar depression, hypoactive sexual desire disorder and anthropobia. These two disorders, coupled with unipolar depression, are the major psychological conditions that lead to her acts of infanticide and homicide.

2. The Audacious Id Drive: Tanga's Rebellion in *Tu T'appelleras Tanga*

Published in 1988, *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, (henceforth, *Tanga*), is Beyala's second novel set in Iningué, an imaginary African shanty town. It is the story of the eponymous protagonist, Tanga, rendered in a flashback in the first person singular pronoun. It is a talking therapy employed by the author that enables Tanga uncover her anguished past which often resurges from the unconscious to influence her actions. The experiences Tanga recounts are instances of her id drives for freedom from patriarchal oppression are ungratified. Through her confessions and actions, traces of neurotic disorders resulting from fixation of her primordial desires are discovered. Tanga's agony penetrates every line of the narrative from the beginning to the end. It shares affinity with *Soleil* in thematic terms and linguistic violence because both novels "present an unremittingly pessimistic vision of fictional African societies characterised by violence and oppression and a lack of willingness to change" (N. Hitchcott, 2006, p.10). Incarcerated in a cell in Iningué, Tanga recounts the traumatic story of her life to her prison inmate, Anna Claude, a Jewish who shares the same fate with her and in whom Tanga is incarnated after the latter's death.

The name Tanga in Eton, Beyala's mother tongue, is synonymous with a life of insult (C. Salé, 2005). The reader, having discovered the meaning, should then be prepared to have an encounter with a protagonist whose life is dominated by situations that cause anguish and sorrow. Subjected to female genital mutilation, raped and impregnated by her father, sexually abused by other callous men of Iningué, and condemned to the commercialisation of her body, against her wish, for the gratifi-

cation of her parents' primordial drives, Tanga ends up a sufferer of posttraumatic stress disorder, generalised anxiety disorder, hypoactive sexual desire disorder, unipolar depression, antisocial personality disorder, derealisation and depersonalisation disorders. As in the case of Ateba, the theme of irreconcilable conflict between internal and external forces comes to the front burner position. Tanga is constrained to living with lack of personal internal choice within her family structure and order which smack of oppression.

The picture portrayed of children in general, and especially of girls like Tanga, is gloomy. They are often denied the "Joys of Childhood" to partially borrow from Buchi Emecheta's title *The Joys of Motherhood*. For example, Ngono, daughter of Ngala, one of the passive and secondary characters in Tanga, is serially impregnated by her uncle who, ironically, is supposed to be her custodian who would offer her the kind of easy life Ngala dreams for her. Ngono is saddled with child-care and becomes the chicken that dies « avant de pondre l'œuf » (before laying the egg) (Tanga, p.68). Consequently, Beyala's « femmes-fillettes » ("adolescent-women"), are defined by a life where happiness is confiscated, and where prostitution, exploitation, and rape, abound. Succinctly put, Beyala's women are:

femmes ou enfants, définies par l'humeur ou le profit, sœurs d'une même destinée, d'un même désespoir, une odeur mêlée de femmes-fillettes qui traversent la vie sans laisser d'autres traces que les vibrations éphémères d'un papillon (p. 33).

women or female children, defined by mood or profit, sisters of same destiny, of same hopelessness, a mixed odour of adolescent-women who pass through life without leaving traces other than ephemeral vibrations of a butterfly.

Tanga's experience, an experience that would render her psychologically debile, is not inseparable from this as her mother makes her take to the streets where she « amenais mon corps au Carrefour des vies. ... le plaçais sous la lumière. Un homme m'abordait. Je souriais. Je suivais. Je défaisais mes vêtements. Je portais mon corps sur le lit, sous ses muscles. Il s'ébrouait » (I brought my body to the crossroad of lives. ... placed it under the light. A man accosted me. I smiled. I followed. I undressed. I placed my body in bed, under his muscles. He snorted) (Tanga, p.15).

Like her predecessor, Ateba in *Soleil*, Tanga chooses to rebel against patriarchy that subjects women and children to a life of disappointment, pains, deep emptiness, grief, and despondency. Although male children are equally subjected to such unpleasantness of life, female children are the most affected. Mala and the nameless Yaya's son are examples of male characters in Tanga whose lives testify to the life of

abandonment and oppression of Iningué children. Mala, considered by his mother a « don du mal » (gift of evil) (Tanga, p.75), is left in a carton to rot away. Yaya, with his own hands, removes the two eyes of his son, sends him into the streets, turning him into a beggar who will fetch them food.

The situations of Iningué children are horrid and ludicrous. There seems to be no end to their suffering in an environment where « la montre s'est arrêtée là où commence la culture » (the watch stopped where culture begins) (Tanga, p.22) and where elders prey on them for narcissistic purposes. According to the narrator, a child does not exist in Iningué. Tanga's sole desire will therefore be directed toward emancipation for women and children which is mapped out from the beginning as she declares below.

Les larmes me montent aux yeux. J'ai envie de pleurer sur rien et je comprends soudain que, jusqu'ici, je suis entrée dans des histoires qui se ressemblent, des histoires qui se chevauchent et ne laissent aucune trace d'amertume mais qu'aujourd'hui je veux les épisodes suivants, ceux qui libéreront la femme et enterreront à jamais l'enfance morte. Comme les autres, ceux des pays lointains, je veux enjamber le malheur, m'embarquer dans le train du devenir (p. 32).

Tears in my eyes. I feel like weeping over nothing and I suddenly understand that, up till now, I have had similar experiences, experiences that overlap one another and leaving no trace of bitterness but that today I want the following episodes, those that will liberate woman and bury forever dead childhood. Like the others, those of faraway countries, I want to skip misfortune, embark on the train of becoming (our translation).

The mission she wishes to embark upon towards the achievement of her vision is clearly stated in stages. The first stage is to change her universe in order to accede to peace. Thus, she declares, « changer d'univers » (change my universe) (Tanga, p.5), leave with her belongings rolled under her arm to some strange places « Partir avec mes affaires dans un sac en plastique roulé sous mon bras. Partir vers des lieux sans terre ni ciel » (Leave with my belongings in a plastic bag rolled under my arm. Leave towards places without soil or sky) (Tanga, p.5). Her decision is a psychological response in a fright-flight situation whereby the sympathetic division of her autonomic division is activated in reaction to threatening or stressful situations (R.S. Feldman, 1996). Her flight from oppression to feminist utopian spaces of Bangkok, Dar-es-Salaam, Mississippi, Kilimanjaro and Cheops, gives the impression of tourist locations. They represent a break away from oppression, a life lived in illusion like that of a schizophrenic who, having lost touch with reality, construes an imagi-

nary cocoon as a safe dwelling place, where she will raid misfortune of its powers and become free from oppression.

Beyala's protagonists therefore wage war against oppression from men and women, especially from their own parents. Just like Ateba determines to fight patriarchy in all its forms, Tanga decides to fight against patriarchy as she takes a decisive step to arm herself against misfortune and oppression. The second stage of her mission towards the fulfilment of her vision is to plough the paths of possibilities because she believes liberty from oppression is attainable. She decides to put her history in order and give it a soufflé of amorous fables. She will also assassinate her monsters and offer them in sacrifice to celestial powers. To rid herself of realities, of miasmas inhaled from her mother, she will enter into the swamp of oblivion where she will remain for seven days and seven nights to emerge a virgin from purifying waters and glide slowly into the amnesia of the normal woman.

Yushna Saddul in a review of P.G. Ndimubandi's (2009) *Angoisses névrotiques et mal-être dans Assèze l'Africaine de Calixthe Beyala* succinctly sums up the various forms of psychological malaise that characterise Beyala's protagonists. Saddul opines that Ndimubandi's attempt is to throw some light on the neurotic state of Beyala's women who are permanently subjected to institutionalised oppression in socio-cultural contexts. In his opinion, Beyala's female characters are victims of existential anguish and neuropathology hunted and destroyed by the patriarchal society they live in (Ndimubandi, 2009). One is not surprised then if, as an amazon-feminist, Beyala creates protagonists whose ungratified id drives for an ideal life embark on a battle to vehemently denounce patriarchy.

In the third stage of her mission towards liberty, Tanga decides to arise not just by word of mouth as in the first two stages, but armed with a hammer this time around to break the stones and the walls of pain, « Briser les cailloux, les murs de la peine » (Break the stones, the walls of pain) (Tanga, p. 118), plundering all day long to annihilate all the hurtful vibrations of life. The hammer therefore becomes a veritable weapon in her arsenal of fighting against oppression. The hammer is a tool to be used in breaking the walls of the prison cell where Tanga in a flashback recounts her experience to Anna-Claude, her Jewish-French inmate, incarcerated in the same cell with her. Their incarceration in the prison cell where « l'air est oppressant » (the air is oppressive) (Tanga, p.35) is symbolic, and it is a trope of female oppression and silencing. Both Tanga and Anna-Claude are in a state of mental disorder because each of them shares a common destiny of pathetic blow to their psyche by the society and the male gender. Tanga is completely devoured by patriarchy represented by her father, mother, Hassan, her lover and the several men who have exploited her sexually. Although Tanga's landscape is in Africa, Tanga often escapes to Paris in a dream-landscape that exists only in her imagination. This is one of the utopian spaces where she

escapes to « à pied chaque fois que les aberrations du monde m'attrapait ... Paris, la belle vie qu'on aura ... la plus belle chose qui me soit arrivée dans ma putain de vie » by foot each time the aberrations of the world caught me ... Paris, the beautiful one will have ... the most beautiful thing that ever happened to me in my bloody life) (Tanga, p.119-120).

In the imaginary landscape of Paris which Tanga creates for herself, she conceives of all possibilities that make life worth living as a child and for a child. She imagines herself as a baby sleeping in a proper baby cot. At other times, she construes the image of a grown-up « pour croquer la pomme de France et le jambon. Ensuite je redevenais petite dans mon berceau, ma tétine à la bouche, et j'avais de vrais sourires » (to eat the apple and ham of France. Next I became a little child again in my cradle, my dummy in the mouth, and I had some real smiles) (Tanga, p. 120). In tandem with Freudian defence mechanisms, Tanga chooses to regress to infancy in order to cope with the neurotic anxiety arising from her state of oppression and hopelessness. However, it is very clear that Tanga suffers from a type of psychological disorder known as derealisation and depersonalisation having lost reality of herself, her status and environment. According to D. Baker, et al. (2003), derealisation disorder is associated with cognitive distortions in how the sufferer perceives the external world, while depersonalization disorder is characterized by perceptual distortions about how the sufferer perceives her/his body and feelings. Both disorders have been positively correlated to childhood abuse as well as domestic violence (D. Baker et al., 2003).

The society Beyala depicts is that where « l'enfant naît adulte, responsable de ses parents » (a child is born an adult to take care of her parents) (Tanga, p. 60). Parental nurturance is completely lacking, and instead of benefaction, care and love of parents for their children, they, children, are commodified, cursed and exploited by narcissistic adults. At Iningué, children are born, raised and subjected to a condition of absolute destitution. Iningué is therefore a metaphorical representation of a society where: « l'enfant n'a pas d'existence, pas d'identité » (a child has no existence, no identity) (Tanga, p. 67). Iningué children are inexistent and are thus « séparés de la vie, enfermés dans la cage de la mort. ... boivent de grandes tasses de la tristesse » (separated from life, locked up in the cage of death. ... drink massive cups of melancholy) (Tanga, p. 43). Without doubt, it is impossible for a child brought up in this sort of society presented in Calixthe Beyala's novels to successfully resolve the oedipal (in boys) and electra (in girls) complexes. The outcome of their pathetic situation is therefore that they are thrown into different forms of psychological disorders, and this explains Tanga's pathetic psychological state and resolute to bring an end to the excessive demands of patriarchy which necessitate the commercialisation of her body. Tanga revolts against all orders to stipulate a child's blind obedience to

cultural injunctions of the superego represented in her parents, Pâ and Mâ, and other exploitative older members of Iningué community.

The *Id* drive and Borderline Personality Disorder: Méagri in *Seul Le Diable Le Savait*

This novel is a fairytale centred around Méagri's family popularly called « la famille miraculée » (the miraculous family) (*Diable*, p. 23) because of the unusual father, mother, child structure – Méagri has two surrogate fathers, le Pygmée and bon Blanc housed and fed by her mother, Bertha. She is only privileged to know her biological father's name, Alejandro Gomez, after much ado, towards the end of the narrative. The setting is in Wuel, a fictitious African village, with temporary relocation to Paris in Europe. Wuel is a society that leaves much to be desired in terms of acceptable moral standards. It is a community where women are considered evil and treated as second-class citizens who deserve no right over their children. Wuel is presented as a community where children are used instead of money as a means of exchange of goods and services: « C'était le droit du père, le bébé remboursait la dot » (It was the father's right, the baby reimbursed the bride price) (*Diable*, p.120), says the judge, when Bertha files a law suit against Ndonksiba, her first husband, for making away with her newly born baby and first child, Magda. To Ndonksiba, the female gender is fatal and full of flaws. In his view,

Le diable seul sait pourquoi la femme a été créée avec de tels défauts. Perverse. Mentreuse. Prête à corrompre la morale la plus pure, à briser, à vaincre le courage le plus entêté. Peut-être Dieu n'a-t-il pas mesuré toute la dimension du mal auquel il exposait son monde en créant une telle créature ? (*Diable*, p.125)

Only the devil knew why woman was created with such flaws. Pervert. Liar. Ready to corrupt the most pure moral, to break, to overcome the most obstinate courage. Perhaps God did not take into cognizance all the dimension of evil to which he exposed his world by creating such a creature? (Our translation).

This statement reiterates men's patriarchal attitude towards women in African societies. It is this patriarchal attitude that informs the theme of women's liberation campaigned for by Beyala in *Diable*, de facto, in the two previous novels earlier discussed.

In a flashback which resonates a comical fairytale, Méagri recounts the pitiable story of her life, which she describes as « une matière inscrite au programme, immobile » (a matter inscribed on a programme, static) (*Diable*, p. 10). The unkempt house where Méagri was born is situated in a ghetto and described as:

Une maison sans âge. Éternelle. Posée dans l'immobilité de ma mémoire. Une maison étroite, malgré sa toiture de chaume haute semblable à un képi et où se mêlent sans cesse les odeurs de graisse, de suie, de vin de palme, de hareng fumé, de manioc trempé, de truie. (p. 10).

An ageless house. Eternal. Posed in the motionlessness of my memory. A narrow house, despite its high thatched roof similar to a kepi and where the odours of fat, soot and palm wine, smoked herring, soaked cassava, hog fish, are endlessly mixed together. (Our translation).

Her id drive, like that of her predecessors, Ateba and Tanga, is to rebel against patriarchal practices in Wuel, first by finding meaning to her life and laying claim on her sexuality and body to redeem her identity as a woman, regardless of the tradition that forbids such.

The abnormal family situation surrounding Méagri ignites her desire to know her biological father between Pygmée and bon Blanc. Unfortunately, her mother is unable to provide a satisfactory answer as she is only told that she is of a special breed being « l'œuvre de deux hommes: un bâtard gréco-bantou, éternel fauché à l'esprit court, aux pieds bots ... et un Pygmée dur d'oreille ... » (the work of two men: a Greco-bantu bastard, perpetually penniless man with a narrow mind, with club feet... and a Pygmée (pygmy) hard of hearing...) (*Diable*, p.11). Méagri finds it unbelievable and impossible that two men would be her father: « Après tout, comment deux hommes, normalement constitués, auraient-ils pu accepter qu'une telle chose se produisît. ... Non! Impossible qu'il fût mon père. Je l'aurais su » (After all, how could two normal men, have accepted that such a thing happened... No! Impossible that he was my father. I would have known) (*Diable*, p.52).

Each step she takes towards discovering who her father is turns out to be a frustrating attempt and further proves that her life is a mirage embellished with falsehood: « ... j'empruntai des chemins qui menaient à la vérité, à écouter la vérité, encore et encore... Mais, à chaque carrefour, je rencontrais le mensonge tant et si bien que j'avais fini par le connaître de l'intérieur » (...I took the routes which led to the truth, to listen to the truth again and again... But, at each cross-road, I would often be confronted with lies and so I had ended up knowing it from within) (*Diable*, pp.52-53). Undoubtedly, Méagri's electra complex is improperly resolved, and this finally plunges her into unipolar depression, low self-esteem, and antisocial personality disorder. As a result, she becomes perturbed and determines to chase away forever from her head, those « vagabondes ... bizarres et terrifiants » (vagabond ... bizarre

and terrifying) (Diable, p. 53) feelings and ideas resembling dense thick clouds that surround her birth.

The peak of Mégri's malaise is her eventual susceptibility to borderline personality disorder. This disorder, according to Gerald Davison and Neale (1998), was adopted by Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM) as an official diagnosis in 1980 to describe patients with unstable relationships, mood, and self-image. Patients suffering from borderline personality disorder are described as having considerably and inexplicably varying attitudes and feelings toward other people over short periods of time. They are also identified as erratic and abruptly shifting in emotions particularly from passionate idealisation to contemptuous anger. These patients are said to be argumentative, irritable, sarcastic, quick to take offense and generally very hard to live with. Their unpredictable and impulsive behaviour is considered to be potentially self-damaging and may include gambling, spending, sex and eating sprees. The patients are identified as people who do not possess a clear and coherent sense of self and remain uncertain about their values, loyalties, and career choices and cannot bear to be alone. They exhibit fears of abandonment and are attention seeking, tend to have a series of intense one-on-one stormy and transient relationship alternating between idealisation and devaluation. They are equally said to be prone to feelings of depression and emptiness, suicide and self-mutilating behaviour.

Furthermore, Davison and Neale (1998) suggest that paranoid ideation or dissociative symptoms may occur during periods of high stress and that of all the symptoms cited above, unstable and interpersonal relationships are the most critical. Kernberg (in Davison and Neale, 1998) associates the aetiology of borderline personality disorder with adverse childhood experiences. For example, inconsistent provision of love and attention by parents. For instance, when parents praise children and are unable to offer emotional support and warmth commensurate with the praise offered, this may cause children to develop insecure ego. To corroborate Kernberg's suggestion, Patrick et al., in Davison and Neale (1998), claim that borderlines report a low level of care by their mothers. They are also said to view their families as emotionally inexpressive, low in cohesion and high in conflict. Childhood sexual and physical abuse (Silk et al., 1995, in Davison and Neale 1998) also feature in their report as well as separation from parents (Paris et al., (1994), in Davison and Neale (1998).

A careful investigation of Mégri's enunciations in *Diable* confirms that she suffers from a number of the problems cited above. The aetiology of her psychological disorders is also similar to suggestions by Kernberg, Patrick et al., Silk et al, and Paris et al., referred to above. From the second paragraph of the narrative, Mégri reveals her psychological make-up as that of someone whose life is filled with confusion,

depression and undefined despite her desire to have a purposeful life. In Mégri's words, her life is « faite d'oubli et de robes. Pas de murs dans ma chambre. Rien que des robes. Débordantes. Lourdes » (is made up of neglect and dresses. No walls in my room. Nothing but dresses. Oversized. Heavy) (Diable, p.9).

Mégri's speeches and thoughts are sometimes incoherent: « Il me faudrait évoluer désormais dans un jour opaque qui ne s'élèverait jamais, survivre dans le crépuscule d'une nuit qui ne tomberait pas » (Henceforth it would be necessary for me to evolve in an opaque day which would never rise, survive in the dusk of a night which would never fall) (p. 12). All these point to lack of clarity, confusion and incoherence of thoughts, depression and frustration as a consequence of oppression and abandonment. Her relationships also turn out to be unstable even though intense during the short periods for which they last. First, in Paris, with Jean-Pierre whose period of relationship with her is unknown. Secondly, Erwing with whom she breaks up as a result of the former's parents' disapproval of his relationship with Mégri. Mégri highlights her chagrin and inner rage after the breakup which succinctly depicts the psychological state of an emotionally ruined woman-child. She notes: « Erwing ... m'avait abandonnée, oubliée. ... Je me sentais blessée, bafouée, trahie, égarée de m'être laissée subtiliser un fragment de substance, dont l'absence se communiquait à ma chair tout entière » (Erwing ... had abandoned, forgotten me. ... I felt wounded, ridiculed, betrayed, distraught, to have allowed myself to be substituted for a fragment of my substance, the absence of which is communicated to my entire flesh) (p. 65).

At sixteen, Mégri falls in love again for the third time with l'Étranger. This relationship, as the preceding ones, is not sustained because l'Étranger dies. Mégri's declarations constantly reveal her neuropathological state, and none of the "amorous" relationships she gets involved in is able to bring her gratification. Says she, « J'étais amoureuse de l'Étranger. Et cette constatation ravivait des blessures anciennes » (I was in love with l'Étranger. And this observation rekindled old wounds) (Diable, p. 65). Thus, Mégri's past experiences of abandonment with Erwing resurge in the form of depression, sexual dysfunction, fear and anxiety because she does not want to be abandoned again. This she confesses thus: « J'avais peur d'une nouvelle séduction qui inexorablement conduirait à l'abandon » (I was afraid of a new seduction which would inexorably lead to abandonment) (Diable, p.65).

The reader is compelled to sympathize with her because of her failures and disillusionments as one observes all the efforts she makes towards finding answers to the questions that bug down her mind about her birth and about woman's condition in her society. Ironically, beyond her fear and anxiety, Mégri allows her emotional feelings and fantasies for l'Étranger to prevail. In utter admiration, she coins names

for him, creates images of him in her imagination, draws them and sticks them to her wall : « J'avais tapissée ma chambre de ses portraits retracés grâce à ma mémoire farouche de femme amoureuse, foudroyée par le charme d'un homme venu le diable seul savait d'où ... » (I carpeted my room with his portraits thanks to my wild memory of a woman in love, crushed by the charm of a man where only the devil knew ...) (Diable, p.65).

Ironically, Mégri finds joy and assurance in her imaginary relationship with l'Étranger. Armed with this new horizon, she lives momentarily in a ray of hope where she is able to forget her past abusive life. In a comical arrangement, Mégri happily gets married to l'Étranger, and the union remains a blissful one until they are separated again in a most unceremonious manner; Mégri already carrying a child for him, sending Mégri back to her state of depression.

After l'Étranger comes Angounou, the chief's son, whom she marries for only a few hours before she elopes while the marriage celebrations are still on. Before the marriage, their courtship was a turbulent one indicative of the fact that Mégri is unable to have a stable relationship. She intentionally avoids Angounou, insults him publicly, refuses his marriage proposal with a view to showing her disapproval of him. At other times, as typical of borderlines, she praises and shows her sense of appreciation towards him, declaring, « Tu es au fond un brave type » (Inside of you, you are a brave man) (Diable, p.248). Two Object Relations theorists, H. Kohut and O. Kernberg, as cited by Davison and Neale (1998), explicate that children imbibe values of significant others which may conflict with their (children's) wishes and interests. The conflict that arises coupled with the characteristics described above thus results in borderline personality disorder.

Obviously, her incessant failures and the inner rage engendered by those failures are the reason for her desire to become "DEVENIR"; and escape from all the social ills of Wuel where there is no rule of law and unimaginable vices. It is in the midst of all these vices that l'Étranger nicknamed « le causeur des méfaits » (the bearer of evils) (Diable, p.62) arrives Wuel. The contact of Africa/Wuel with the white man's civilization signified by l'Étranger, as it were, is symbolic of chaos and disorder which do not seem to have been the case in pre-colonial period. Therefore, a childlike Mégri, from an unstable, unconventional and bizarre family is unable to survive. This further contributes to her psychological malaise. She is unable to negotiate her survival in the midst of the social ills (perpetrated by the superego – that is cultural laws and practices) her socio-political community compels her to experience. The murder of l'Étranger, the only man who treats her like a woman, promises to marry her, and gives her hope, coupled with the hostile treatment she receives from la Reine-Mère (l'Étranger's mother), after l'Étranger's demise, finally sends her into depression. La Reine-Mère accuses her of being responsible for her son's death and, for that

reason, banishes her from Bambali. Mégri becomes desolate and deserted. She locks herself up in their hut and ruminates in sadness, her entire life and relationship with l'Étranger questioning:

Qu'était, au fond, la vie d'une femme? ... Très peu d'entre elles ont une vie digne, supportable. Même les femmes des villes, les femmes instruites ... toutes doivent batailler ferme. En plus de se servir de leur intelligence pour aller de l'avant, ... elles doivent subir le poids de leur féminité (Diable, p. 280)

What, basically, was a woman's life? Very few among them have a dignified, bearable life. Even women in the towns, educated women ... they must all fight strongly. In addition to making use of their intelligence to forge ahead ... they must bear the weight of their feminine attitude.

The only way to escape from these negative experiences will be for her to relocate to Paris, where, according to her, she would be able to redefine her life, find meaning to it and reconstruct it on her own terms. Her relocation to Paris, the usual utopian space for Beyala's protagonists, turns out to be a temporary defence mechanism and insufficient in providing the psychological balance she needs. She is forced to return home because she cannot adjust to the life-style of the ethnic majority. Mégri therefore never really becomes anything tangible as one would have expected. Things continue to go worse year after year « Mais, au fil des ans, tout alla de bien en mal et ne cessa d'empirer » (But in the course of many years, everything went from good to bad and did not cease to worsen) (Diable, p. 63).

With strains of what one could term feminist rebellion against patriarchy, Mégri shows her desires to resist oppression, but Beyala never truly imbues her with that power to confront patriarchy. From the beginning to the end, Mégri keeps desiring. The only definitive action she takes towards escaping from oppression is her fairytale flight to Paris with l'Étranger, her imaginary husband, in a helicopter. The fact that Diable is a fairytale confirms the lack of fervidity with which Mégri faces life. The imaginary Paris where she escapes to can only be described as a utopian space that offers her temporary opportunity to avoid the patriarchal challenges of living in Wuel. She is met with disappointment on arrival there because the "reality of Paris bears little resemblance to the images of monuments, cafés, intellectuals and elegance she had imagined from the picture postcards she had seen (N. Hitchcott, 2006, p. 67). Paris, she discovers, is populated with strange looking human beings like ghosts. It is a city with no emotion, where no one shares his/her pains with others: « Ville sans larmes, rien que des blessures secrètes » (A town without tears, nothing more than secret wounds) (Diable, p. 9).

Through *Mégri*, as in the first two novels, Beyala highlights the plight of children whose future is doomed because of irresponsible parents in a morally compromised patriarchal society. Her schoolmates molest and subject her to all sorts of psychological torture because of her bastardised birth. *Mégri*'s situation at school heightens her state of depression. She equally begins to exhibit anti-social personality disorders as she turns a bully in her attempt to free herself from the aggression she faces from her schoolmates. *Mégri*'s anguish is lucidly described in the narrative with the use of words that resonate her state of depression and hopelessness:

Quant à moi, moi, la fille au cheveu rouge, j'étais le sanglot du chagrin, le désespoir du malade, le mauvais rêve des morts. Mauvaise herbe, il fallait m'arracher. Ma mort serait-elle l'éclair qui illuminerait la nuit ? ... j'avais un affreux mal de tête et le soleil insistant corrompait ma peau, lui faisait prendre une couleur violette (pp. 165-166).

But as for me, I, the girl with red hair, I was the tear of grief, the hopelessness of the sick, the bad dream of the dead. Weed, it was necessary to root me out. My death, would it be the light that will illuminate the night?... I had a dreadful headache and the insistent sun tainted my skin, made it change its colour to purple (our translation).

Mégri's hopelessness results in low self-esteem. She condemns herself and, in the end, she is left in a situation worse than she was in the beginning.

Conclusion

Efforts have been made in this paper to underscore the importance of an eclectic approach that combines application of Freudian psychoanalytic literary theory with radical feminist theory to the criticism of African feminist narratives. This approach is useful in determining the extent to which the oppressed and abandoned girl-child in patriarchal African societies is susceptible to neurotic disorders. For instance, a combination of psychoanalytic approach and radical feminist theory for the analysis of the novels presented in this paper enables us to go beyond the usual claims that children suffering from abandonment and patriarchal oppression have psychological problems. The approach goes as far as revealing the aetiology, symptoms, and identification of some of the specific neurotic disorders that oppressed and abandoned female children are likely to suffer from.

The profile given of Ateba, Tanga and *Mégri* is that they journey in anguish, armed with the determination to overhaul society and free it from political and social ills to make it a habitable place where all will find joy and fulfilment. In the process,

they become psychologically traumatised because their id drives remain ungratified. Therefore, the presentation of a decadent postcolonial African continent in the novels discussed evinces that Beyala's style of criticising the inadequacies and failures of African patriarchal societies is diametrically opposed to that chosen by her predecessors of the first wave of African feminism. Instead of speaking half-truths about the deplorable conditions of African women and children, (with emphasis on female adolescents), Beyala decides to tell the whole truth. Beyala decides to be audacious in her approach to the issue of oppression of children.

In the three novels, *Soleil* (1987), *Tanga* (1988) and *Diable* (1990), Beyala spurns what society sees as ethically standard and aesthetically acceptable. Beyala disparages phallic logocentricism in order to foreground the fact that African children are suffering the martyr and are fast becoming psychological wrecks before they even have a chance of tasting real life. In the light of this, Beyala can be viewed as a writer who foretells the impacts of patriarchal oppression of female children. For example, the acerbic criticisms for being "unafrikan" in her radical approach to the liberation of oppressed African women may no longer be tenable. This is because of the various proofs that now exist in Nigeria with respect to the phenomena of rape, incest, paedophilia, female genital mutilation, child marriage, and adolescent pregnancies. Therefore, Beyala, forewarns, in these novels, that African children, who constitute the future of the continent, are mentally sick as a result of poor leadership and deficient parenting.

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