The Body in Female Writings of Francophone Africa and the Caribbean
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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to show how women authors write about the body, be it male or female. What does the female body mean and symbolise in the novels and plays of these writers? Works by Calixthe Beyala born in Cameroun, Aminata Sow Fall from Senegal and Simone Schwarz-Bart from Guadeloupe will be used to approach the subject. In Tu t'appelleras Tanga Beyala treats the female body by transcending its essence, by creating a communion of destiny between a white woman who receives the mission of incarnating the life of her black prison's roommate. Femme noire, femme nue... exposes the woman as the embodiment of the evil. Comment cuisiner son mari à l'afriqueine? [How to cook one's husband the African way] links nourishing the body with strengthening the marital relationship. Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle and Ton Beau Capitaine by Simone Schwarz-Bart expose two opposite figures of women in relations hip to their bodies. There is a strong sense of symbolism in the language expression, in metaphors, in objects (such as money, a shirt, a gift) that directly refers to the human body. Douceurs du bercail by Aminata Sow Fall is built around the topic of the female body: the Senegalese Asta hits a security agent because she feels offended by the way she touches her body at Roissy Airport, France. She is refused entry and the French Media reports an attempt of crime. What can be concluded from a philosophical perspective? The range of conception varies from strict Puritanism to Libertinage, from self control and self-respect to no-limitation in the use of the body. Transfer of experience, embodiment of pleasure and evil, feministic freedom, protection of moral values against perversions can be found in these writings.

1 The traditional model: Body as a sanctuary

Aminata Sow Fall actually represents this category. A clear lesson of female leadership, Douceurs du bercail reflects a universe of harmony between human being and nature. The love of Africa as mother rather than place of birth, underpins the fiction in its ideological context. It opens the horizon for a dialogue between different members of society. Rooted in the belief that one has to love his native home and land, Sow Fall exposes a myth of lost paradise and a world ethically divided between Good and Bad.

In an article “Aminata Sow Fall et la condition féminine”(2007), I pointed out that the protagonist, Asta, is a victim of a racist assault because her voice is silenced by the ethnocentric and powerful machinery of the Western media. She is presented to and by the media as a criminal whereas she has been offended in her body, in her intimacy. Only one person refuses this allegation; it is her French friend: Being black and a foreigner does not make things easy at the boarders, regardless if your documents are in order or not. The woman struggles doubly just because of being who she is, because of her body that can exploited, harassed, aggressed or enslaved.

Traveling to Europe Asta, a Senegalese sociologist, to attend a conference in Paris, undergoes a strange search at Roissy Airport. She has an amulet in her handbag, which the security agent opens:

Le canif y passe encore. Le tissu saute. Le carré de papier est déplié et fait apparaître des signes cabalistiques. Asta ressent une profonde blessure de ce qu'elle considère comme la profanation de son territoire sacré. (26)

[The pocket knife goes in again. The fabric breaks. The square of sheet is folded and shows cabalistic signs. Asta feels a deep wound of what she considers as a profanation of her secret territory.]

An amulet is not just an object, it is part of the body. The fabric with cabalistic signs protects the body and the soul of the person who has it. As such, it is sacred like the female body. This destruction of this highly symbolic fetish prefigures another catastrophic aggression on her body. A physical search done on her body ends up with an incident:

[Asta has accepted to remove her jacket, her shoes and her stockings. She refuses to remove the rest. Gloved hands sweep up all her body’s parts, go under the bra, go down to the knees, come up back under the skirt. Asta shivers of disgust. She has the feeling that she is being broken. The hands go back up. [...] Asta tightens her legs. The hand insists, it has some vigour and, surely, experience. Asta does not want to surrender. [...] A bestial rage takes her. She would like to shout her anger but cannot give out a sound. Both her hands, like the hooks of an automaton, squeeze briskly on the neck of her counterpart. Asta catches with all her strengths, clenched teeth, and does not even hear the heart rending shout which attracts a pack of policemen.]

Asta is arrested because she has assaulted an agent, but nobody states that she has protected her body, her sacred body from profanation. By outrageously touching her intimate parts, the female security agent takes advantage of her dominating position to violate Asta’s intimacy, leaving her with no other alternative but to defend herself. Therefore, she is arrested without being heard, silenced to death, because she is nobody and has no rights. Worse, she is sent back to Senegal in a charter like a criminal. All this humiliation occurs because she has defended her body.

After this humiliation Asta is convinced that Africans do not need to move to Europe or the West, that Africa is the best home for Africans, she builds a Teranga village with some friends, where they wish to live in peace, understanding and mutual support. In that village life is so rooted in the African tradition that the marital relationship is conceived according to the traditional way as exemplified by Dianor, a blind man, and his wife Bineta. Actually Dianor has become blind following a snake’s poison attack:

- Je t’avais dit que je ne suis pas aveugle, n’est-ce pas…
- Je sais bien que tu n’es pas aveugle.
- […]
- Tu crois que je n’ai pas remarqué un peu plus de coquetterie, un peu plus de soins ?
- Hiii ! Bineta est passée par là !
- Est-ce que Bineta n’est pas celle par qui je peux voir le monde ?
- Mais si, mais si !
- Tu crois que je n’ai pas remarqué la manière dont Babou te regarde ? (222-223)

- [I told you that I am not blind, didn’t I.
- I do know that you are not blind.
- […]
- You think that I have not noticed a little more coquetry, a little more cares?
- Hiii! Bineta has gone through there.
- Is Bineta not the one through whom I can see the world?
- Right! Right!
- Do you think I have not noticed the way Babou looks at you?]
That man can proudly that his wife is his “eyes”. The absent eyes or the absence of vision is replaced by the perception of the other. Dianor sees through the eyes of Bineta. Both of them form a wonderful couple, discreet accomplices in the fulfilment of their marital commitments.

On the other hand there is in *Douceurs du bercair* a severe critique of the new society, especially of the youth in connexion with their carelessness and neglect of self-respect. Urban life opens to excesses. *Pikine Tougal*, a hot-red area of Dakar, incarnates the Bad, the sin, immorality and uncontrolled freedom of customs. It is a place especially dedicated to pleasures of music, dance, alcohol, food, sex, life. A place of extravaganza! As an illustration of excess, a girl named Câline has sex not with one but with a group of teen mates:

> [...] éméchée au sortir d’une boîte de nuit, elle avait laissé faire une bande de jeunes gens, sur le banc d’un jardin public et avait ainsi « ramassé » une grossesse ; elle avait voulu la garder pour voir comment c’était d’être maman, puisqu’elle-même n’avait jamais connu sa mère qui l’avait abandonnée sur le parvis d’une église (157)

>Câline: tipsy coming out of a night club, she had offered her body to a group of young people, on a bench of a public garden and she had thus “collected” a pregnancy; she had wanted to keep it to see how it looked out to be a mother, because herself had never known her mother who had abandoned her in front of a church.

Câline decides not to terminate pregnancy and to keep the unborn baby just in order to experience motherhood, to fulfil the absence of the mother she never knew. As a matter of fact, she has no guide to advise her. Lost or totally immersed in the chaotic world, she is the perfect female character empowered by feminist ideologies. Her body is hers; she treats it as it pleases her, nobody controls her voice and her body. No power, no authority, just herself with her fate. The same can be said of Fabala with her irresponsible motherhood: “Trois enfants sans père, n’est-ce pas une double calamité! Le pire est qu’elle s’en fout…” [Three children without father, it’s a double calamity, isn’t it? The worst is that she does not care…] By the way they handle their body, Câline and Fabala could easily act as typical female characters like the ones re-presented by Beyala, the only difference being that Beyala pushes the caricatured portrait to the extreme.

2. "Writing under the skin"

2.1 Construction of a “hybrid” Femininity

Beyala’s *Your Name Shall Be Tanga (Tu t'appelleras Tanga)* treats the female body by transcending its essence, by creating a communion of destiny between a white woman who receives the mission of incarnating the life of her black prison's roommate. Two prison cellmates, Tanga and Anna-Claude, join in a pact: “I am going to die, woman. White people die as well, you know? To dive into death as you do into life. Without a visa, without a passport” (1) “I am you, you are me, were are one” (1).

Beyond the races, there is a common destiny for these two women, marginalised by their African and European societies in which the male still dominates and send them in jail because of their irreducibility to the system. Tanga and Anna-Claude do not fit in those societies because they are different from the other. By building this pact, by putting together their bodies, they create a path for their survival in a corporal and surreal way:

> Here, the merging of diverse cultural elements does not necessarily signify an erasure of one culture or trait; rather all elements involved in the assimilation process are transformed by the encounter. In their shared cell, Tanga and Anna-Claude exist in a type of “border zone,” removed from their unique cultural contexts. ( Westmoreland Bouchard, 65)
2.2.1 The paranoiac Anna-Claude:

A former professor of philosophy in a French gymnasium, Anna-Claude does not fit at all in the school hierarchy. Delirious, crazy and totally insane, she lives in another world, she looks like somebody without any roots at her work place.

When the time for class arrived, she’d go to meet her students again, with haggard eyes und unkempt hair. She’d sit on top of the front desk, with her chest pushed out, and she’d speak. Decisive, hard, mysterious. A teacher of philosophy, who would sacrifice Hegel and Kant to occult sciences. She’d endlessly affirm that the meeting point of the world lay in the imaginary and that it would suffice to close one’s eyes, to listen to one’s own vibrations to reach it. (2-3)

In her mind, there is no limit between myth and reality, between dream and what actually happens around her. Convinced that she lived in Africa in a previous life, she start a quest for her African identity. Her merging with Tanga somehow constitutes the fulfilment of a mad dream. And the dream is materialised by a spectral being, a ghost who will complete all her desires and her emptiness. This confusion makes her fly in her imaginary, so that she embarks in a quest for Ousmane, the male embodiment of all her deepest desires:

Anna-Claude ! For the time being, she’d invented her man. Fashioned to fit her dreams. She called him Ousmane. He was handsome, he was tall, he was smart. He lived in Africa where he was building bridges and roads and soon he’d be returning to her in their Paris apartment. In her visions she imagined him. (3).

Ousmane is not just a creation of her “folie” but the main reason for her life, the aim of everything she has been longing for since she was born. The illusion even goes further.

To the men who accosted her in the street, on metro platforms, she’d say : "I am married ; I’m expecting a baby." They’d insist, she’d persist. She’s add another piece to this or that rickety detail, polishing it up. She’d ended up by sculpting her sex in marble. (3-4).

Not belonging to France any more, she opts to move to Iningué, Ousmane’s birthplace and obtains a teaching position in the imaginary former French colony. She is arrested because she participates in a march against the public power, a male dominated society.

2.2.2 “Ruined” Tanga:

Tanga’s life has an irretrievable lack since she feels an unfilled hole, emptiness in her body. As Lynne Nottage would state, she is “ruined” because she once for all carries a shame in her body. She resists the state by trying to overcome the situation. A shame incarnated by her mother. Rebellious, she never forgets the harm of her mutilation. Her mother made the mistake – although it is just usual tradition – to sacrifice her to the clitoris snatcher’s altar:

I can see her still, my mother old one, shimmering in her immaculate kaba, a black scarf in her hair, crying out to every god: ‘She has become a woman, she has become a woman. With that’, as she taps her behind, ‘she’ll keep any man.’ I didn’t weep. I didn’t say a thing. I fell heir to the blood between my legs. To a hole between my thighs. All that I was left with was the law of oblivion. Time passed, I was becoming accustomed to that part of me that was gone. I kidnapped the horde of memories. I tied them up with string. (12)
The practice of excision, that is highly spread throughout many countries of Africa, remains debatable. A girl does not become a woman unless she is excised. In recent times, voices have been raised against this dangerous and unfair practice but the mentality is still so strong that anyone living in that environment cannot escape it. Tanga courageously faces this “emptiness” left by this mutilation. That is the equivalent of circumcision for the male counterpart, the rape performed by her father when she was twelve digs another incurable hole. She keeps vigorously observing her father old one’s command: “Don’t forget, a child must keep its eyes lowered’. What I was left with were legs.” […] I was scrutinising legs, nothing but legs. Weak. Flabby. Shapeless. All of them revealed vices and shameful maladies” (9). It is also how she finally ends up meeting Hassan, the man of her life as long as a prostitute can enjoy a love story or a true relationship.

I met Hassan through his legs. I can see them still, grey trousers fitting them like a glove, crumpled around his penis and his belly. Black shoes. Yellow socks. […] Hassan’s legs. I see them parade before me. They move ahead straight in my line of vision; they’re laying the egg of desire in my body. (10)

The only two words he has spoken are enough to mark me, to take the husk off any amorous embrace in which I offer my body to feed the family. I refuse the costume which he wants me to put on my back. (12)

She is naturally bound to be a prostitute. Prostitution here is not a choice but an unavoidable option to feed her family. Giving her body to a man just for the purpose of survival is rebelling, but not a willing decision by Tanga. She is a victim of a male oriented community, which she opposes. Sent to prison, she is about to die when she thinks to transfer her story to Anna-Claude. The transmission of the voice works through a symbolic and ritual body merging.

3. The Fragmented Body as a symbol of a destiny

3.1 The Indomitable Woman in Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle

In this part, I would like to look at the body as a set of different parts which constitute the whole. Interestingly, every part constitutes the whole. There is a metonymic relationship between the body and its components. The heart means the entire human body, like the eyes, the nose, the legs as well. The heart includes the mind of the person who possesses it. The fragmented body functions as a paradigm of destiny, especially in the Caribbean where women had to construct their femininity following the abolition of slavery. Novel female protagonists such as Télumé Miracle in Simone Schwarz-Bart’s The Bridge of Beyond and Marie-Sophie Laborieux in Patrick Chamoiseau’s Texaco show their perseverance and spirit of resistance to adversities. And still the body remains the central reference in these novels.

The opening of The Bridge of Beyond is instructive, because it sets the reading hermeneutics as wished by the writer:

A man's country may be cramped or vast according on the size of his heart. I've never found my country too small, though that isn't to say that my heart is great. And if I could choose, it's here in Guadeloupe that I'd be born again, suffer and die. (2)

The stance shows the affirmation the "I" as a body in a space, a heart that can influence the vision of nature and self. The narrator expresses a fond love for her country and makes a clear statement. The opening symbiotically prefigures the narrative in its totality, a deep implanting in a custom and a world view point. The story told by Telumée is about a woman, Toussine, who will later become Queen
Without a Name. She is a very special woman, courageous, strictly attached to very simple principles of life and ethics.

Mama was a woman who carried her head high on a slender neck. Her eyes, always half shut, seemed to be asleep, dreaming in the shade of their thick lashes. […] No one in L’Abandonnée noticed her beauty, for her skin was very dark; it was only after my father set eyes on her that everyone else did the same. (17)

This praise of the female beauty reveals a secretive link between Mama and the place, L’Abandonnée [The Abandoned]. It suggests that Mama used to behave discreetly before she got married. The darkness of her skin came to light and shone through the eyes of the narrator’s father. In other words, her body was hidden, destined to be discovered by the right man of her dreams. Furthermore, the eyes of the husband over the woman’s beauty brought the latter to existence not only as a body, but more as a wife and mother. After the passing of her beloved one, she transferred her love and her life in the hands of her daughter:

She was only waiting for me to pour forth the last floods of her sadness, to revive the gleam in her worn-out eyes. […] She lived for me, she breathed through my mouth. When I was away she would get into a state of agitation that only ended with my return. (41)

She mingled with her daughter. The relationship mother-daughter constitutes the point of life and survival for the older woman. They are so narrowly united that they share every vital organ. Their completeness is so strong that any breach would create disappointment, dysfunction in their life. When Jeremias falls in love with Télumée and starts his unfaithful behaviour, Mama recounts them a tale based on body's parts:

At that time, when the devil was still a little boy there lived in Fond-Zombi a man called Wvabor Longlegs, a fine fellow the colour of burnt sienna, with long sinewy limbs and greenish hair that everyone envied. The more he saw of men the more perverse he found them, and the wickedness he saw in them prevented him from admiring anything whatever. […] but on all that he looked with disgust. The only company that pleased him was that of his mare, which he's named My Two Eyes. He loved the mare above all else, and would let her do anything; she sat in his rocking chair, pranced over his carpets, and ate out of a silver manger. (49)

One day […] he mounted and rode away. Great pain was in him, he was wretched, and let the horse carry him where it willed. […] One day, as he was riding about like this, he saw a woman with serene eyes, loved her, and tried to dismount. But it was too late. The mare started to whinny and kick, and bolted off with him far, far away from the woman, at a frantic gallop he couldn't stop. The animal had become his master. (50)

This tale illustrates that one needs a balance in life. The myth of the unbelievable, the hyperbolic qualities, often ends with disillusion. Wvabor Longlegs is unable to fulfil his love to a woman because he is already engaged to his mare he names My Eyes. The mare incarnating actually the wife cannot allow the presence of a woman around her beloved one. The tale metaphorically shows the irreducible harmony in the functioning of the human body as a set of different parts. So to say, there is no place for a woman in the heart of a man who displaces the object of his love on an animal; as the legs only go where the eyes guide them. “The animal has become his master” is a direct consequence of the man’s behaviour. And the mare incarnates the fatal woman. At the deepest structural level, the tale contains erotic suggestions: longlegs, my eyes, “he mounted”, all these words suggest in the end erotic connotations. The body-rooted tale definitely teaches about being faithful and trustful.
3.2 The Woman's Faithfulness in question in *Ton Beau Capitaine*

Simone Schwarz-Bart’s play *Your Handsome Captain* is about a Haitian young man Wilnor Baptiste who moves to Guadeloupe in order to get a better job and life. He communicates by tape with his wife Marie-Ange left in Haiti. The play starts with Wilnor listening to a tape sent by his wife: “I kicked all my people out of the shack, including the roosters, and now we’re alone you and me. You over there and me there, you here and me over there. It’s all the same.” (YHC 532) The tape allows proximity, quite a direct body contact between the two protagonists.

Marie-Ange prepares her husband to the embarrassing event by portraying negatively the young man who brought her the parcel of presents sent to her by Wilnor:

> And when I asked him [that young man] how you looked, at first he didn’t want to answer. Then he told me that you changed a lot, become skinny, melted like a candle. That you looked like a little shrivelled up black man. Shriveled up outside and shrivelled up inside. Shriveled-up, shriveled-up. (533).

"Shriveled-up" here a specific phallus related connotation, it evokes masculinity, male reproductive element. Clearly, the description of Wilnor’s body given by the messenger constitutes a strategy for him to influence and seduce Marie-Ange. It works apparently, because she has a dream annihilating Wilnor’s body:

> And that same night I had a dream. First I saw myself at the river washing your flannel shirt; you know, the grey one with the red stripes, the pretty one. And suddenly I realize I’m washing your body, (Pause), your living body. (Pause) You are all flat inside the shirt, Wilnor. Your head and your hands stick out; your legs, everything, flat. Flat as a newspaper picture. You try to slip away and I want to hold you back – but you melt between my arms and soon there is nothing inside the shirt. Wilnor, it’s empty… empty… (533)

This dream goes further than the messenger's description: the woman unconsciously causes Wilnor's masculinity to disappear. The lexical field made of cloth, body, flatness, melting confirms the process of the body's decrepitude previously started by the messenger. It is an attempt of resistance by the woman to the messenger's discourse, and to hide her carelessness since the "flannel shirt" symbolises Wilnor's presence and connects directly to his body. Losing this vital connection through the melting of his body, i.e. him, allows then Marie-Ange to tell the story of a lady of Port au Prince whose husband picks oranges in Florida:

> Suddenly, she is moved, so deeply moved on seeing the young man, she has the impression that he’s bring her some of her husband’s world, some of his scent. She looks at the eyes which has been the absent one. (*She gives a small sob*) She touches the hands which just the day before, just yesterday, had touched the absent one. My God (*She gives a small cry*) finally, she’s completely confused (*She sighs*) and ends up in bed with the young man (*She sobs.*) But, in reality, it’s her husband. (*Pause*) Seemingly with the young man, but in reality lying by her husband. (536)

The scenario is the same like their scenario. She is in Haiti and he is in Guadeloupe working to ensure the future of their common life. Acting according to a causality principle that the same causes have the same effects, Marie-Ange confesses her betrayal:

> That woman is me. [...] He joked exactly like you, Wilnor. The same way. And his eyes reminded me of your eyes. His hands reminded me of your hands. It was you I held in my arms. It was only you that I welcomed in my bed” (536)
The first time that your good friend came was Wednesday, January 2nd, St. Eustache’s day. I thought of you on seeing him and I gave in after he threatened not give me my money. He came back on Saturday, January 7th, and I thought of you again. Then I thought of you Monday, January 9th [...] (537)

From the visual and physical similarities, from the desire to its fulfilment, the pace is quickly made. The confusion is so powerful that the woman’s mind and body are brought to feel the same emotions as if the husband were present. The euphemised phrase “I thought of you” does not mean that she loves her husband, but she has an extramarital love affair.

When Wilnor answers, he does not blame her but he sarcastically affirms his masculinity, by lexicalizing the same phrase and altering it: "Since arriving in Guadeloupe, I’ve thought about you a great deal" (538). The thought which is equivalent to mind becomes, by transposition, equivalent to a reciprocal confession as if he ironically takes a smart pleasure to contend his own unfaithfulness to Marie-Ange: “With all these beautiful black women in ruffles and flounces and all of these jazzy mulattoes buzzing around you like mosquitoes from morning till night. Gorgeous, beautiful like the rainbow, if you really want to know" (538). The appeal and the beauty of the female bodies are irresistible, especially when their “eyes” and scent transfigure the whole experience: “And then I fell in the pit; I fell under the spell just like you. Their eyes reminded me of your eyes, their scent became your scent, do you understand Marie-Ange? (538-39). He then draws a conclusion: "A man’s body cries for a woman's body, a woman's body cries out for a man's and that's what the Good Lord wishes" (539).

The body incarnates all Marie-Ange’s desire, dream and reason of living. According to the title of the play, the linguistic expression takes a metaphorical tone:

Wilnor, I wish I were a boat sailing to Guadeloupe. Once there, you’d climb inside me, you’d walk on my deck, you’d place your hands on my frame, you’d explore me from stem to stem. And you would set sail and I would take you to a country far, far away. (Pause) On the other side of the world, perhaps where people don’t look at you as though you were less than noting, dried-out coconuts. [...] Wilnor, handsome captain of my ship [...].... (534).

The metaphor of the body becomes suggestive, imaginative and visual. Marie-Ange would be the boat and Wilnor the handsome captain. This dream however remains compromised by the weaknesses of the same bodies involved in the process. The change of dynamics has important implications for the male and female concept of self. The female body as boat obviously reflects the tropical insularity of the Caribbean.

4. The Libertine Body

4.1 The Body as food for man in Comment cuisiner son mari à l’africaine?

Calixthe Beyala’s Comment cuisiner son mari à l’africaine. [How to cook one’s husband the African way?] links nourishing the body with strengthening the marital relationship. This is an amazing novel both for its originality and for its triviality. The reader would expect a book entirely dealing with cooking recipes whereas it is mainly a narrative story intercut by culinary recipes. It is at the same time a love story through the delight of food and wine. In Paris, Aissatou a single woman wants to seduce Bolobolo, her neighbour of the upper floor in the building occupied by people from diverse cultures. The latter lives with his old mother, whose best company is a hen. Westmorland Bouchard notices a feature of Beyala’s poetics:

Like her protagonists, Calixthe Beyala is a complex, revolutionary storyteller who resists normative or imposed literary constructs. By pushing stylistic boundaries and challenging the prescribed categorizations of both African and European narratives, Beyala allows for a
Aissatou is presented as a black woman who has migrated to France, who repeatedly identifies herself as a white woman: « J’ignore quand je suis devenu e blanche » (12, 13). [I don't know when I became white].

To achieve her integration to her new environment, she transforms her body by using products such as a “strong Skin Success to remove roughcast off her hair, Venus de Milo to lighten her skin, and she opts for a slenderness diet.”(12). All these changes on her body is to attract man’s sight. Like Tanga and Anna-Claude, she passionately longs for a man’s love and she tries whatever to attract Bolobolo:

Souleymane Bolobolo – Malien et non baptisé sur les fonts – célibataire – manutentionnaire – vit avec sa mère qui a pour animal de compagnie une poule. Vous vous rendez compte ? Elle perd la tête, la pauvre ! (26)

[Souleymane Bolobolo - Malian and not baptised - single - a warehouseman - lives with his mother who has a hen as company animal. Do you realise that? She goes nuts, the poor.]

The rhetorical question above suggests that Aissatou is the right solution to Bolobolo’s loneliness and unhappiness. Therefore she manages to meet him again at his door, pretending to be there for another reason. After discovering that Bolobolo has a girlfriend, she consults a marabou: “An African woman without a marabou is like a navigator without compass” (43). An interesting scene takes place at Professor Gombi’s office. It is known that a woman usually goes to see a marabou for the purpose of solving a love problem.

- Qui d’entre nous peut prétendre ne pas être ici à cause d’un homme ?
- Une menteuse ! crie une Négresse blonde.
- Une sans-confiance ! Maïmouna, clame une Noire à la bouche si lippue qu’on pourrait en user comme d’un siège. Une sans-confiance et assassine de l’épanouissement féminin.
- Prends place, me propose Maïmouna. Il n’y a pas à avoir honte. (46)

Maïmouna criticises Aissatou's maigreur she juges contrary to African/Black habits or canons of beauty:

- Trop maigre, répète-t-elle. Qu’est-ce que tu veux qu’un homme mange là-dedans ? Les os, les arêtes ou quoi ? Des os, même un chien appartenant à un Blanc n’en veut pas ?
- Qu’est-ce que c’est, ces bêtises ? (48)

- [Too thin, she repeats. What do you want a man can eat in it? Bones, fish bones or what? Bones, even a dog belonging to a White man does not want it?
- What's all this stupidity?] (48)

There are here two different opinions about the woman body. The first one conceived the woman body as object of pleasure, food for a man. It is supposed that all her effort has to be made to fulfil the expectations of a man. The obsequious woman conforms her attitudes to the rules set up for her by an established male-dominated or oriented society. The second opinion (of Aissatou) firmly defends her freedom and rights. Liberated from the constraints of the African social model, Aissatou adjusts herself to the modern fashion and Western canons of beauty. Maïmouna remains fundamentally African with
regard to some life principles. According to her the secret of love is cooking: "cuisiner un homme avec un crocodile sauce meunière ou des gambas aux épices" (49) [cooking a man with a crocodile meunier sauce and spiced okra].

Aissatou daily faces serious racist stereotypes in Comment cuisiner son mari à l'africaine? although the racial component was not relevant in Your Name Shall Be Tanga. It becomes central in the novel of immigration and exile for the female narrator. When approached by a French gentleman who visibly wants to seduce her, the black woman replies aggressively:

- Vous permettez?
- Je ne permets pas, dis-je, à cause de ses vilaines dents
- Vous n’aimez pas les Blancs?

[...]. Il insiste:
- Vous vous êtes trop habituée aux gros sexes des Noirs, si je comprends bien. (18).

- [May I?]
- No, I don't allow, said I, because of his nasty teeth.
- You don't like Whites?
- [...]. He insists:
- You have too much accustomed to Blacks’ big sexes, if I understand well.]

Such a verbal exchange would have been censured some thirty years back because beside its indecency, it puts forward racial confrontations and racist clichés in the process. This is a typical discussion that Calixthe Beyala freely, if not provocatively, offers her readers. Her intent apparently is to shock, to hurt the puritan mind. Everything is allowed, without restrictions. Very far from the traditional writing canons and styles, the aesthetics developed by the Cameroonian woman exceeds any rule, any restricted behaviour or reserved attitude. The prostitute, like any mad person in search for survival, is the paradigm of a prohibited discourse. The grotesque language, surprisingly, forms part of her normal speech. The concept of “normal” is displaced from the usual social practice towards an unknown but possible way of apprehension.

4.2 The praise of immorality in Femme noire, Femme nue

_Femme noire, femme nue..._ exposes the woman as the embodiment of the evil. This novel first of all disturbs for many reasons. C. Beyala is known for her outrageous publications; she always pushes further her work of exploring human defects with a clear intent to trivialize them. She likes to exploit prohibited topics through appealing titles and an expression that obviously transgresses the norms of the decent language. Since _C’est le soleil qui m’a brûlée_ or _Tu t’appelleras Tanga_, going through _Maman a un amant_, the sensational goes along with the violation of social, moral and religious norms. _Femme nue femme noire_ is openly about sex, a taboo subject formerly, incredible and immoral. Once again, Beyala exposes the slums of the poor society, exploited and disoriented by life meanders. She shows the kleptomanie and the libidinous lubricity of her narrator, the islamic praxis, different classes of society and popular justice. From the opening, the tone of the language, the intention of the book, the receiver of the purpose are clearly indicated, and knowingly drawn by the homodiegetic narrator. The story is formed of « des mots qui fessent, giflent, cassent et broient ! Que celui qui se sent mal à l’aise passe sa route... » [words that spank, slap, break and crush. If someone does fell well, he better goes on his way] (p. 11)

Irène Fofo is a thief and a prostitute. She steals in a morgue a bag containing the corpse of a dead baby and runs away, followed by a multitude of people. She manages to escape and get housed by a pious Muslim Ousmane and his wife Fatou. All of a sudden the house of her guests is transformed into a bordel...
where people come to be healed of their sicknesses, even people get healed of their sicknesses and handicaps. Children, Jean-Baptiste and a couple Hayatou-Eva. Irène organizes collective orgies during which some patients get healed from their chronic sclerosis by calling to mind an old act of perversion or a homosexual scene. But when Irene leaves Ousmane's compounds, she is lynched by four men because of her previous crime.

All the characters belong to the popular mass, poor and perverse although Irène is a daughter of a decent family in rebellion against the conservatism of her dear ones. To tackle the urban misery she assigns herself as a mission to save the world by sex: "Je suis une déesse capable de faire ce qu’a fait le Christ, mais en plus jouissif : guérir avec mon sexe » (p. 77) [I am a goddess able to do what Christ did, but in more brilliant: heal with my sex.] A veritable praise of the libido. The vicious Irene breaks taboos, reveals the hidden face of human beings, decreases the serious man, demystifies the sacred, and transgresses all the noble traditions established forever. Every human being possesses a certain extent of perversion in him. She encourages Madeleine to go out with two lovers who are much younger than she is. The old lady would like to retrieve the lost time before dying. Hayatou who rediscovers his old vice sees his wife Eva taken by Jean-Baptiste, a young bisexual.

Does the topic of madness, here a synonym of sexual obsession, not hide a deep critique of the patriarchal society, a consideration of the opinion in front of the real problems of this time? It is known that madness is a literary device for the writer to create for himself a space for a specific discourse: the discourse of the unutterable. By so doing the narrator deprave her language in order to elucidate the social collective frustration because the society is sick due to the numerous taboos around the sex. The narrative is deliberately obscene, indecent, grotesque. The detailed description of eccentricities consists despite of its moral decline of a singular therapy based on the liberation of the senses.

Due to her experience, Irene invites her patients to tell interesting stories in order to bring them to reveal the secret origin of their frustration. Most of the time there has been a rape, sodomy, sadism, masochism, relational perversion under the forms of ambiguous promiscuities and other irrational behaviours. These breach in the conventional structures are emptied of defect, acquitted, even positively valorised. In the mise en scene with surreal contours, the therapist steps aside to the benefit of the woman who plays the role of the prostitute or the foolish whereas the man retrieves his fundamental obsession.

With a feminist realism which is particularly militant and aggressive, Beyala paints a world in foolishness, opposing any form of power. Because of sex, Beyala presents her protagonists sometimes as victims, sometimes as accomplices or manipulators of men. Religion contributes to subjugate the woman under the domination of the man, as seen with the couple Ousmane-Fatou. Society, eroded by hypocrisy, is similar to an unconscious mass of the human dignity where the body of a baby can be put in a bag or stolen. In last analysis, Irène Fofò, Fatou, Madeleine, Eva are just like their masculine counterparts - Ousmane, Hayatou, Jean-Baptiste - the last epigones of the worst specie of the vice.

Such a novel, if it was a movie, would be classified as prohibited for children. It is tasteless, awful to read because of its language which is disrespectful, scatological and licentious, or because of its trivial and obscene style. To me Femmes nue femme noire goes beyond the limits of pornography, scandalizes because Beyala easily opts for vulgarity and vice which its narrator and protagonist praises. She dismantles all principles of common sense, love and marriage, by prostituting the widow and the married woman as well, by exalting homosexuality, by pushing to libertinage. Taking negritude from the bad part, the Cameroonian writer consciously develops a stereotype well known of a black woman, for there are many readers - especially those qui affectionate sexual exoticism - who will appreciate her crude language. Is she not the female francophone writer presently most read?

5. Marginalization and Empowerment

The continental philosophy usually defines body as the passive part of the human being. The body is the centre of sensitivity, sufferance, dolour, emotion. As Lavelle states in La conscience de soi, he conscious Ego is not the one that is submitted to a more powerful force other than itself; it is the one that is active,
that acts freely and responsibly. Ego is the product of itself. This can be applied to the woman’s situation as well. Her body marginalises her and has to be empowered in order for her to become self. Female writers by evoking various women issues try to give themselves a voice for their liberation. Therefore depending on the writer’s temperament, the old order has to be changed smoothly, strongly, briskly, etc.

For a very long time, the woman was not heard: she was strictly bound to be a housewife and a mother. Her role never went beyond the family circle. But the world has changed so much that her status has changed as well. The woman can do whatever a man can do; she can enjoy the same rights, freedom and access any job she wishes. Although the world vision has changed tremendously, women still struggle to get their rights acknowledged and the phallocratic order or male dominated society disappear. In Africa, the Caribbean and other parts of the world, female writers and other activities fight for total women emancipation, starting from their body since the female body is the visible part of their being. It is mainly about making a female discourse effectively heard and accepted. In *Francophone African Women Writers: Destroying the Emptiness of Silence*, Irène Assiba D’Almeida writes:

> “Because of the hegemony of dominant discourses and socio-political structures within and outside Africa, African women have mainly been represented as “other” and also as marginal, silent, absent from the public sphere, confined in private spaces. […] Yet as they demonstrate, writing means empowerment and can serve to undermine the marginalizing project and move from margin to center” (D’Almeida 22)

The act of writing responds to the need, to the quest for liberation and self-creation. It implies rebellion against the existing male-dominant order. Self-determination, self-projection, self-made destination, those are the terms of the new woman. The new woman is a concept born of struggle as Leonard Harris would have expressed it. Writing for women is a way of escaping death, any kind of condemnation to silence. The former subjugated gets the status of an acting subject. From now on the woman takes control over her “self,” her destiny, destroying the previous stronghold of the male counterpart. So to say, there are various ways of being a female writer, as there are many conceptions of the woman. In other terms and to some extend every woman is a feminine writer in her way. Sow Fall, Schwarz-Bart, and Beyala represent different forms of femininity and feminism.

The intertwining process observed in *Your Name Shall Be Tanga* constitutes a common attempt to recapture the mutilated and exploited woman’s body, a kind of female universal effort to affirm their “self”. It is a process of abandoning the old order for the sake of the new one, to quit the form body for a new one, to embrace another spirit in a symbiosis of body and mind, in a filling the dying body with the strength of a living body under certain conditions. The merging of the body implies putting together mind and destiny, sharing a common sense of life and reaching a surreal degree of humanity:

> - Well then, enter into me. My secret will be illuminated. But first, the white woman in you must die. Give me your hand; from now on you shall be me. You shall be seventeen seasons old; you shall be black; your name shall be Tanga. Come Tanga, give your hand, give it to me”
> - I’m frightened.
> - That word must die.
> - But…
> - Give me your hand and my story will be born in your veins. You’ll see how, in my country, a child is born old since he cannot carry in fragrance on springtime inside himself. How he has only his arms to give to the peanut fields” (7-8)

The white woman is asked to become black by entering into the black woman’s body. This unification process functions as a healing liturgy: Tanga can die bodily once she has someone to carry on her living story and to take over her ideological discourse. This metaphysical relationship includes much more than just a mere transmission of a speech, a common attempt of survival. Time, race, skin are somehow abolished by this corporal union of two beings in one, in one identity, in one body that can, therefore, be
able to deliver the liberation message. As a result, the black woman gives up her story whereas the white gives up her skin colour and becomes a legitimate heir of the black woman's skin, speech and story. The merging empowers the white woman to reach her own universal achievement. This confirms what Odile Cazenave has noted:

Because these women are marginalized, or because they have marginalized themselves, they find themselves in a paradoxically privileged position that allows them to be introspective and to conduct an elaborate analysis of society. This position also affords them a fresh outlook not only on men but also on women, their parents, and their children. From this point, they grant themselves the means to move forward to a provocative exploration of areas that until now were either declared off limits or dismissed as trivial or marginal. (Cazenave 12)

From a philosophical point of view, this novel calls in question the concept of self and race in a very postcolonial context. The impossibility of melting in one pot does not annihilate the effort to keep one's individuality. In terms of cultural background, Anna-Claude joins her past by joining her original black body she claims to have come from. The destiny forces her to meet another woman not a same-sex relationship but on a mythical, metaphysical and psychological symbiosis beyond any rational consideration or any influence of any controlling authority. The new self that emerges from their intertwining process does not reflect any previous one; it destroys the convention of the traditional world. As Köhler notes, “the two women violate male order and mal economies in which the female body serves male (self-) constitution and male speech” (37).

The same way, Mama lives through her daughter’s body in The Bridge of Beyond. Resisting the old order and an attempt to educate her daughter, she chooses to tell the didactic folktales of the body. Your Handsome Captain applies somehow the principle of faithfulness and trust necessary to master the impulses of the body. On the hand Aminata Sow Fall’s Douceurs du bercair exposes a world where the woman, defying the Western order, becomes a leader of her community in her native Africa. And yet the environment remains closer to the old environment. The most radical and interesting of the three writers selected is Calixthe Beyala because she consciously trespasses and destroys the conventional boundaries, not hesitating to expose what F. Veit-Wild calls the “wandering wombs” (108-126) or "walking vaginas to signal the strong element of female agency attached to the possible transgression of bodily borderlines" (126).

Through her narrative and criticism publications, the prolific Cameroonian writer Calixthe Beyala is known as a strong voice for woman rights, a constant offender of rules, a trespasser of established order and traditions, speaking of taboo subjects such as sex, prostitution, homosexuality or perversions regardless of any “ethical” considerations. Therefore, it is interesting to understand how she treats the body. Jen Westmoreland Bouchard states that Beyala insistently goes beyond the allowed boarders of the common sense, “transgressing “fixed” notions of race, sexuality, and gender in both African and European discourses” (58).

The marginalised woman, the unconventional or insane woman forms the focus of Beyala’s creative production: the woman is seized in relationship with the other, with her status as “other”. In a feminist perspective the important focus is shifted from the subject (I) to the object (Other) as follows as G. Spivak would express it: “Who is the other woman?”

Conclusion:

To a certain extent, the three female writers selected in this paper have differently expressed the voice of the woman and let it heard across the world. From an introverted attitude, it evolves toward an extroverted impulse for action, revolution, liberation. Aminata Sow Fall and Simone Schwarz Bart share a similar ideological vision. For them, the world constitutes a coherent set of individuals gathered on earth in order to bring peace, understanding between different nations, races, religions. Therefore their apprehension of the male and female body coincides with the conformist ethic which sustain the male-
dominated society. For them, the female body is a sanctuary to respect according to natural order or God's commands. The admirable woman is the one who resists temptation, the one who faithfully corresponds to her male counterpart's desire and does not breach this eternal pact. Beyala on the other hand is a feminist activist who writes under the skin: she breaches all taboo subjects, explicitly treats sexuality without referring to the established male-dominated order. As S. Köhler notices, Beyala dismantles the patriarchal mechanism and sets up a female postcolonial discourse by privileging gender categories and exploring concepts of African culture (32). The female body being at the centre of her creative writings, prostitution and madness are beside poverty, violence and other vices the most important topics of her publications.

This short review of the Senegalese Aminata Sow Fall, the Guadeloupan Simone Schwarz-Bart and the French-Cameroonian Calixthe Beyala offers various conceptions of body and woman; it presents different attempts by women writers to resist the fatal silence imposed on them by the male order and speech and then to create their own voice, discourse and style.

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