



**HAL**  
open science

# Female Empowerment and Political Change: A Study of Bole Butake's Lake God, The Survivors, and And Palm Wine Will Flow

Emmanuel N. Ngwang

► **To cite this version:**

Emmanuel N. Ngwang. Female Empowerment and Political Change: A Study of Bole Butake's Lake God, The Survivors, and And Palm Wine Will Flow. *Alizés: Revue angliciste de La Réunion*, 2003, Henry James and Other Essays, 23, pp.197-211. hal-02344243

**HAL Id: hal-02344243**

**<https://hal.univ-reunion.fr/hal-02344243>**

Submitted on 4 Nov 2019

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

# Female Empowerment and Political Change: A Study of Bole Butake's *Lake God*, *The Survivors*, and *And Palm Wine Will Flow*

---

Bole Butake's three plays *Lake God* (1986), *The Survivors* (1989), and *And Palm Wine Will Flow* (1990) were all written against the backdrop of rapacious and inhumane oppressors of the seemingly silent and marginalized masses of the fictionalized communities of the North-West Province of the Republic of Cameroon, Africa. These plays treat among other issues the themes of corruption, tyranny, nepotism and the rampant abuse of power. These themes are not new in African literature, but Butake's approach shifts the traditional responsibility of the fight for political liberation, which has hitherto been the preserve of the men to women. The silent suffering masses come to rely solely on the women who take the leading responsibility for their liberation. This sudden and unexpected resurgence of females on the political field and their overwhelming success is intriguing and new to an audience that has for a very long time minimized and denigrated women to secondary and/or subsidiary roles.

One question which comes up several times in these plays is: "Where are the men?" The men have either been exiled, incarcerated, or totally emasculated. In *And Palm Wine Will Flow*, the male sacred society, the Kibarako, is stripped of its judicial powers, unmasked, and sent into exile. The males regain their posture only after the female leader Kwengong calls a general assembly and declares a revolution against the Fon. She declares, "He cannot be Fon. The women have decided. No more Fons in the land" and that "Only the people will decide [who] the Fon will be and for how long. And the affairs of the land shall be decided by all the people in the market" (111). She, in effect, declares the overthrow of the dictatorship and the institution of a genuine democracy. Again in *The Survivors*, it is Mboysi who overpowers the police officer, and before shooting him, she declares mockingly:

If I die after killing you, I will be satisfied that I had my revenge. Now, this is the moment of truth. Man! Man! Come and see what a woman can do. All of you, come along and celebrate the victory of woman over Officer. Come along and celebrate your liberation. (84)

Throughout his plays, Butake tends to suggest that, in reality, women are born with extra-ordinary powers which have simply been submerged, if not totally stifled, by the male-oriented and chauvinistic society, a society that has conspired to put women in a subordinate/secondary position. Butake's plays therefore are eye openers to the people who have usually assigned the business of political liberation only to men. In fact, the women reveal the truth subsumed in the saying that "What a man can do, a woman can do even better," and also that women can succeed where men have failed. And looking at the history of failed governments and revolutions in the continent of Africa, Butake may be sending out a coded message to the natives to give women a chance in the struggle for liberation from dictatorship, corruption, tyranny, and the nepotism that have come to be the mainstay of African governments. Butake's projection of the woman as liberator parallels Ngugi's in East Africa: both of them attempt to uplift the female from their traditional domain of household chores and sex objects to a higher plane of political activism and change. Butake's contribution is particularly significant given the fact that the traditional African society is predominantly a patriarchal society, one in which the woman has no voice in the domain of politics and decisions that affect the entire community.

This might have been true in certain African societies and also in the past, but, as bell hooks discusses in *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981), we cannot form an accurate picture of women's status by simply calling attention to the roles females are assigned under patriarchy (12). Butake's women often operate not as isolated, mystical priestesses imbued with cultural or spiritual powers, or as women who only use their hidden powers when men are confused; they constitute a force, an entire group, with powers enough to effect profound and lasting socio-political changes in the set-up of an entire community, and by extension a nation. Their men are not only confused, but they are completely emasculated and powerless. Furthermore, Butake has no qualms portraying his heroines in feminine terms and characteristics: they are first and foremost women, both young and old, married and/or unmarried, faithful to the institution of marriage and child-rearing, and all other responsibilities attached to their gender. Unlike with most African feminist writers, Butake does not argue for the women, nor does he let his heroines argue for their emancipation, but he portrays them the way they are: intelligent, politically conscious, militant, capable of taking charge of both

the family and the larger unit—the community or the state. His women therefore operate at a level much higher than that intimated or studied by the above critics and authors, especially as evidenced by the isolated and individualized women of Achebe's novels (Egejuru 14-18). Butake is equally ahead of his time in moving courageously and treading against the prevailing gender war and stereotypes in revealing, without any excuses or excesses, the woman as heroine in a society where men fear to act or men have been stripped of their power to act. This conviction was definitely borne out of the *Takumbeng* and *Anlu* Principles of the North West Province of Cameroon, with which Butake was very familiar, a phenomenon that casts women in fresh and more dynamic lights, uplifting the heroism of women (married and unmarried) to greater heights. And this was to be the taking-off point of Bole Butake's plays.

The *Takumbeng* and *Anlu* traditions in the North-West Province of Cameroon consists of elderly, usually married women who wield and exercise immense political powers in the presence of issues of grave socio-political importance. In his discussion of its importance, Takougang maintains that this sacred society of women, born in Kom and eventually spread throughout Bamenda in the North-West Province of Cameroon, manifested its tremendous powers in the state of emergency period when the main Opposition political party leader and 145 others (one-third of them women) were confined in Ni Fru Ndi's residence in Ntarlikon, Bamenda following the uprising in protest of the stolen presidential election victory of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) in 1992. "The core of the recent *Takumbeng* is," Takougang asserts, "the public, silent, but eloquent practice which brings post-menopausal women to disputed terrain with sacred grasses and other materials from nature, invoking maternal authority to restore peace, threatening and using bodily exposure against violators, whom it is meant to shame and stop" (232-33). Following up in the footsteps of the Kom *Anlu* in the region, the practice gained sharper political focus and wider attention in the context of the political disturbances of the 1990s, particularly in the North-West Province of Cameroon. A week after the declaration of a state of emergency in the North-West Province, the *Takumbeng* scored their most decisive victory over Cameroon's security forces when they challenged the Cameroon security forces in Bamenda who attempted to block a protest march for the release of members and sympathizers of the Social Democratic Front that had been arrested and incarcerated. They displayed traditional paraphernalia and postures of defiance to excessive authority, including disrobing, against very uncomfortable security forces. This open, though unarmed, defiance buttressed by cadets and party

placards, was led by sixty Njinikom women who trekked over 50 miles led to the immediate and unconditional release of the village SDF officials by the governor (232). Clearly a localized experience and unmatched anywhere else, *Takoumbeng* demonstrated an unleashed or hidden power of the women folk, thereby constituting a convergence zone within the female sociopolitical field of custom and innovation. The women achieved what their boys and husbands could not. They not only disarmed the security forces, but they unleashed the power of women to effect meaningful change.

Butake's plays therefore dramatize in much more poignant and vivid terms the ferocity of the proverbial sleeping dogs. In *The Survivor*, *And Palm Wine Will Flow*, and *Lake God*, Butake portrays a society in which the "less noble sex," phoenix-like, wakes up to the reality of the helplessness of the so-called "more noble sex" to assert their hitherto dormant political power and to effect change. In *The Survivor*, this is no easy task as the heroine must first succumb to the stereotypical role of woman as a sex object in order to put herself in a vantage position to defeat the much dreaded and all-powerful, but corrupt police officer. The ultimate liberalization of the survivors is attained when Mboysi tricks the officer who has exploited her sexually into giving her the gun with which she shoots him. In *And Palm Wine Will Flow* the women take the action to a broader and much more political arena as they team up in defiance of their husbands to oust the tyrannical, tribalistic, and corrupt Fon from his palace in favor of a more democratic form of government whose head will henceforth be decided by the people. In the slogan of the SDF opposition party, the power is reverted to the people (Power to the People).

As seen above, Butake's plays are fundamentally concerned with moral choices. In this light, Butake seems to be asking the same questions the American playwright Arthur Miller asked:

How may a man make of the outside world a home? How and in what ways must he struggle, what must he strive to change and overcome within himself and outside himself if he is to find the safety, the surroundings of love, the ease of soul, the sense of identity and honor which, evidently all men have connected with the idea of family? (73)

The answers to these fundamental questions are found in the various forms of revolt borne of a strong desire to overcome the corrupt and tyrannical leadership. In Butake's imagination, the men have lost their ability to raise these questions or find answers to them that will adequately address the political conditions that prevail. In *And Palm Wine Will Flow*, the initial revolt of the women begins with their coming to terms with their innate, though traditionally ignored, qualities: that they have inbuilt powers combined with

their primary responsibilities of providing sustenance to the entire family and community at large which they could use to effect change in the community, to create a sense of dignity, identity, and honor. In fact, the women in a chorus challenge their husbands into action by revealing to them how “manless” they have become:

Shey! Our husband!  
Father of our children!  
Shey, our husband! Are you sitting there quietly  
When our farms have been seized from us?  
What shall we eat? What shall our children eat?  
What shall you eat, Shey? We know you are in there.  
Speak up, Shey. Or shall we come into the sacred presence in  
Our present condition? Speak up, Shey! (95-96)

This challenge falls on deaf ears, as the men refuse to come out of hiding to stand up against the Fon who has seized their wives’ farm lands and given them to “manless men like Kibanya [who] have their caps topped by red feather by the Fon himself” (96). In fact, Kwengong, the leader of the women, and all the other women are impatient with their husbands’ lack of courage and heroism in the presence of this crisis. So Kwengong asks Shey, “how long shall we wait to see this judgement come? What shall we, your wives, do?” (97). The men’s sacred society, traditionally empowered to resolve conflicts between the Fon and his subjects, has been emasculated. Even the Kibaranko has fallen; it would do nothing to restore the lands seized by the Fon. Shey is so helpless that Kwengong confesses and regrets this change in her nostalgic bewilderment:

The times are changing, Shey. The times have changed. Look at you ! What is your reward? After how many years of royal service to the gods and the land? The farmlands of your wives have been given to the wives of the lowliest of the low. . . Because he pays respect to the Fon. (97)

Shey Ngong’s reaction is limited to speaking instead of to action. He can only say sheepishly:

Wife, I will not pay respect to a man who respects only palm-wine and food. When does the Fon really rule? How often has he consulted the council of elders or even implemented decisions by that revered body for the common good of all the land? (97)

And talking about the Fon, Shey Ngong remarks regrettably, “As soon as he smelt, tasted and felt power, he turned against me” (106). Tapper confirms this unfortunate turn of events by saying, “The Fon has seized the palm-bush.

His watch-dogs are there now. They beat me severely. My clothes are tatters” and that, “only women are singing, the whole land is full of women, not a single man is left” (107). Tapper’s statement virtually affirms my hypothesis, pointing to transvaluation that has taken place: the women have now become “men,” and the men who have taken to silence, hiding or verbal threats have become “women.” Hence, Kwengong declares war against the all-powerful Fon with the war song “The sun of the land has set! The elephant has fallen! The lion of Ewawa is no more!” She promises that the Fon will not escape “the wrath of the women” (108). She tells Shey Ngong that the women have “decided to take very drastic action against the desecration of the gods and the ancestors” (109). She invokes and assumes the posture of the “Earth-goddess [who] needs no one’s leave—to walk where her feet will. . .” (109). She challenges the Fon who still holds to the patriarchal belief that women are powerless. The exchange between them portrays in vivid terms this tension between the women and the Fon, the eventual victory of the women over the Fon and, by extension, the victory of women over the men:

*Fon:* Watch your tongue, woman Earth-goddess indeed !  
Your wretched husband, the self-made priest of  
nonexistent gods and sower of bad words against  
our royal person, is still smart from the venom of my power  
and you dare to insult our royal presence  
by profanely pronouncing our sacred name?

*Kwengong:* The only husband Earth-goddess honors Chila Kintasi  
Is the whole of Ewawa.  
Here [urine] are the wares the women commanded deliverance to their Fon.  
.....  
May they make you call another feast before the sun goes to sleep.

*Fon:* Urine! Urine! What is the meaning of this abomination?

*Kwengong:* Not urine, Cila Kintasi,  
But the savvoury juice from  
The vaginas of those upon whom  
You wield power, Fon. . .  
Drink the liquor from the vaginas  
And feel the power of power

*Fon:* I will die first.

*Kwengong:* Then you will die indeed, Chila Kintasi.  
Your own mouth pronounced judgement.  
Die and deliver the land from the

Abominations of drunkenness and gluttony!  
Die ! Chila Kintasi, die!  
And save the land from merry-making!  
Die, Fon! So that we may think!  
The people need your death to think!  
Die! Die! Die! (109-110)

(As the women continue to chant in the courtyard, the Fon dies.)

The above exchange brings out two very crucial and irrefutable new pictures of women: that they have awakened to their own strength by overcoming the traditional notion of powerlessness that was formerly ascribed to them, and that they have realized and used the idea that the liberation of their land resides in their own hands. Hence, they refer to their power as the “power of power” (110). It is therefore only the women who come to the conclusion and assert publicly that the Fon is the source of their problems. His death will therefore liberate the land from the abomination of “drunkenness and gluttony” and mental stagnation. Up to this point in the play, the men have not had the courage to confront their Fon. They have either complained about him in his absence, or they simply “adulate him” (102), because the men who attempt to oppose him “disappear;” that is, “they are taken to Ekpang. And killed” (103). The fear of Ekpang (the modern equivalence of the political prison in Kondegue, Yaounde) has reduced the men to cowards and puppets of the tyrannical and corrupt Fon (President) who has pushed aside the council of elders (the National Assembly) to rule the people according to his whims and caprices.

In the same vein, Kwengong declares the overthrow of a dictatorship, an autocracy, saying “The [women] have decided. No more Fons in the land!” And to Tapper’s question, “so what will happen?”, her response is emphatic and definitive: “The people will rule through the council of elders led by Shey, here. The day he takes the wrong decision, that same day, the people shall meet in the market place and put another at the head of the Council of elders” (113). It is at this point that the men become galvanized to join the victory chorus. Shey Ngong comes out of hiding to declare this triumph of democracy over dictatorship:

We must break clean from the past. Take the sacred gong of Nyombom and let it resound in all the nooks and corners of the land. From today, this bugle will stay here in the sacred grove, a living symbol of our enslavement by the Fon and his notables. Take the sacred gong to the people and let its sound vibrate through their very souls, a symbol of their liberation.  
(114)



The play ends with the chanting of the song of liberation led by Tapper (114). Although the final lines of the play are given to the men, it is crucial to note that it is the women who fought and won the battle of “liberation.” The men are simply second-class partakers of the fall-outs of the struggle. The women are conscious of the fact that they must return the manhood of their husband to them, after having made the cogent point that theirs was the “power of power” (110). The men are therefore the proverbial empty vessels that make a lot of noise.

The women’s remarkable achievement in *And Palm Wine Will Flow* is equally matched by Nboysi’s *The Survivors*. In an attempt to find sustenance after a devastating natural disaster, four survivors (Old One, Tata, Bolame, Mboysi, the lone adult female, and Ngujoh) approach a relief camp set up by the national government with contributions from foreign donors to provide free food, clothes and shelter. This camp is manned by a corrupt military office from the national army to oversee the peaceful and equitable distribution of the materials to the unfortunate victims of the disaster. Unfortunately, Officer transforms the camp into a trading post, from which he enriches himself and extorts sexual favors from those female victims who come for the goods. As the children start crying of hunger and thirst, Ngujoh and the young boy Tata go down the valley to search for water. At their first encounter with the officer, Ngujoh, the mature male retreats, freezes and then collapses. The Old One, who by virtue of his gender and age is supposed to protect the survivors, challenges the officer in martial, patriarchal terms:

Who are you, hiding your face in the bush like the coward you are, uttering menaces and pointing things (gun) at people? If you’re a man, show your face and talk to me. Man to man!  
(62)

Old One’s challenge here again is borne out of the stereotypical concept that only men can and ought to be engaged in martial activities, and that the survival of the family lies solely in the hands of the males. However, when Ngujoh intimates that Mboysi should negotiate with Officer on the basis of her education, we begin to see a shift in power:

*Ngujoh*: We can get him to negotiate. With [Mboysi’s] cooperation.

*Mboysi*: What do you mean? With my co-operation?

*Ngujoh*: You speak to him in the language he understands, having been a teacher at our school. Moreover,  
you’re a woman with great charms.

*Old One*: Oh hoo! A woman will soften the hardest heart.

*Ngujoh*: Especially the heart of Officer. ( 63-64)

In fact, Old One and Ngujoh assert, though ironically, that the woman has unfathomable powers at her disposal to use in times of crisis. Mboysi's literacy and "great charms" become stronger weapons than guns in the fight for survival. Mboysi is no Lady Macbeth in terms of political astuteness and hunger for power, but she has the demagogic connivance of a Lady Macbeth as she endears herself to Officer through sexual favors. But she is no fool, as she studies her way into the comfort zone of Officer. But before she sells herself to Officer for food, water and clothes, she asks the men a very critical question about Officer: "How do I ask him? If you, men, have failed to convince another man, can a poor woman do?" Old One regrets that things have changed and that the old values have given way to the new, now to be controlled by women. This comes out clearly in his dialogue with Ngujoh:

*Old One:* I see. In our times problems were resolved by men. Men discussed and, as you put it, negotiated with other men. Man to man. But today, I am learning something new I now know that Officer prefers to discuss and negotiate with. . .

*Ngujoh:* Never mind your times, Old One. Those days were ancient days. Today, women are the key to power. Even the door with seven locks on it can be unlocked by a woman. In your days you used reason. And only when reason failed did you fall back on combat.

*Old One:* Those were the days, indeed. Man to man. Word against word. Fist for fist. Those were the days! (65)

Indeed, today is the day of the woman! As Ngujoh suggests prophetically, "With her by his side [Officer] will even forget his gun. The charms of that woman will unnerve any man" (65). Later and as Mboysi succeeds in bringing food and water and therefore life back to the survivors, Ngujoh, who is disgusted with the airs Mboysi is putting up, questions such effrontery: "When did women start talking like that in the presence of men" to which Old One replies, "You sent her to Officer, didn't you?" Ngujoh therefore has to contend himself with the fact that, "this woman has power over us" and the Old One reminds him that "this woman has power over Officer. With her help Officer will allow us to go to Ewawa" (70). Officer himself echoes Old One's conviction, telling Mboysi that the people's survival depends on her: "They can wait. Their survival depends on you... No one cares if they survive. Without you, I don't care about their survival. . ." (73). At the climax of the play, Mboysi has come to the realization that she has reduced herself to a prostitute to save her people. She must now make a moral choice between, on the one hand, wallowing in prostitution to save her people and, on the other hand, regaining her self-pride and dignity. She sees the clothes Officer gave her as

“the prize of [her] disgrace,” and confronts Ngujoh for having sold her into prostitution:

It was you who sent me to him, not so? You will pay for it now. Now ! I say, you will pay for it now! You **manless man!** (78, highlight mine)

She then metamorphoses into a “man” to face her adversary, Officer: “I will show Officer that in spite of his gun and loud menaces, he is only a man, a mortal.” After all, Mboysi has just proven that men are no longer men, that they are not invincible, they have become “manless,” and Officer is no exception. Old One recognizes this truth as he remarks to Ngujoh about Mboysi’s “manness:” “Between you and that woman, I do not know who the man is” (79). Officer himself confesses and succumbs to the power Mboysi has over him, as he says: “Woman has power over Officer. My heart is soft because of you, woman” (83). Mboysi uses her pretext of ignorance about guns to take the gun away from Officer. Now with her literacy, feminine charm, and the gun in her hand, Mboysi exercises total control over Officer and all the men. She points the gun at Officer to extort his confession of corruption, sexual harassment, and public theft:

Your generosity, indeed, Officer! Tell me more. How much have you carried away for yourself and those who order you from above. . . . How much you have looted and hidden away. . . . This is the moment of truth. The moment of your death and the moment of our liberation. . . . Keep crawling, you rotten maggot ! Even if I die after killing you, I will be satisfied that I had my revenge. Now, this is the moment of truth. . . . Man! Man! Come and see what a woman can do. All of you, come along and celebrate the victory of woman over Officer. Come along, all of you and celebrate your liberation.

The elephant has fallen!  
The elephant has fallen!  
The lion is no more  
Woman is great! (83-84)

As the play is about to end, Mboysi shoots Officer, but is in turn shot by another officer who has come to relieve the fallen officer. Her killing of Officer is tantamount to a symbolic blow for justice and liberation. Her act is a model for all the Ewawas and the Cameroonians at large who have been cornered by powerlessness, passivity, and poverty to wake up and fight for their dignity. Mboysi’s struggle is a struggle for some measure of dignity. Unfortunately, the new Officer looks at Mboysi’s corpse still in sexist terms: “What a beautiful body to waste! Strange! Strange! . . . [a] casualty” (85).

What *The Survivors* and *And Palm Wine Will Flow* make clear is that the words and chorus of liberation are sung by women and not men. Although Mboysi pays with her life, her soul sings the song of freedom. Freedom has

never been given on a platter, but it has always been fought for. In these plays, Butake sounds a very prophetic note by telling the Ewawa people, and by extension Cameroonians, that the present times are the best for change and that they must take off their cloak of gender chauvinism and give the *Takumbeng* a chance. In Cameroon, for over forty years now, palm-wine flowed and the hand-clapping legislature fed fat on the wealth of the nation like “maggots” and that it is time for the Mboysis, the Kwengongs, and the *Takumbeng* who have the “power of power” to exercise this power to bring sanity to the nation. It is a moral choice between letting things the way they have always been, as the men do, or standing up against tyranny by sacrificing their lives (as Mboysi does) to change the course of history. In the two plays, the men are completely aware of the fact that the nation is in dire need of change of leadership, but they have been incapacitated by the all powerful but still vulnerable Fon or Officer. The struggle for liberation can only be sustained and ultimately attained through a concerted stand against the tyranny that threatens to undercut their cultural roots and traditions. The women in *The Survivors* and *And Palm Wine Will Flow* live out the principle that a noble cause is worth fighting for. In fact, Ngugi in his *Devil On the Cross* addresses the dilemma of the Kenyans in a way that echoes the Cameroonian ethos, especially as both artists (Kenyan Ngugi and Cameroonian Butake) share a common sense of history:

Our lives are a battlefield on which is fought a continuous war between the forces that are pledged to confirm our humanity and those determined to dismantle it; Those whose aim is to open our eyes, to make us see the light and look to tomorrow, asking ourselves about the future of our children, and those who wish to lull us into closing our eyes, encouraging us to care only for our stomachs today, without thinking about the tomorrow of our country.  
(DOTC 53)

In the two plays these two contending forces are very obvious. In *And Palm Wine Will Flow*, the Fon and his red feathered hand-clappers align with the dismantlers, who lull the natives into closing their eyes, encouraging them to care only for their stomachs. That is why palm wine keeps on flowing. The officer in *The Survivors*, who feeds maggot-like on the misfortunes of the survivors, plays the same role. In the opposite camp, we see the women who think about their families and the welfare of the commonwealth. They stand up against the tyrants because they are “pledged to confirm our humanity.” They are poised to regain the atmosphere of peace and sanity of the Council of Elders that used to exist.

In *Lake God*, the women rise up against their Fon for condoning the destruction of their crops by the cattle. While it is true that farming is almost

the sole preoccupation of the women, the crisis caused by the destruction of the crops would normally cause the women to look up to their husbands to resolve the situation. Tanto alludes to this when he says:

This is an emergency, and there are still men in the land. Kwifon will forget the crimes of the Fon in order to save the land. I will get the seven pillars of Kwifon and they will put their heads together. They will meet here since they can no longer gain access to their sanctuary in the palace. (22-23)

To the above, Shey Bo-Nyo replies in the affirmative: "There are still men in the land. It might still be saved" (23).

The above exchange between the two men points to two very cardinal issues: traditionally, the men have always had a very essential role or even the primary role to play in resolving crises; secondly, however, the men have been bereft of their sacred power by being barred "access to their sanctuary in the palace." Hence, Tanto's and Shey Bo-Nyo's declarations are impotent as these declarations are issued from a position of weakness. Instead of the male war society, it is the women's Fibuen and its adherents who take up the war song against the Fon. In fact, the stage directions capture this situation vividly:

There is a crowd of women in the village square. After the abortive encounter with the Fon, and because of the fever of the Fibuen, [the women] display a spirit of defiance that would shock their men folk. Something like mob action in which the women have no inhibitions. When action begins, there is the sound of the now familiar horn of Fibuen followed by an exhilarating ululation. . . (24)

This is immediately followed by the celebration of victory song led by another woman Yensi:

I lack words with which to express my joy. The happiness that is in my heart cannot be shown on my face. The happenings of today have shown that, in spite of what some people say, the ways of the land are alive. We must be one person to succeed in our present undertaking. We must be one woman. Some here have only recently been given into marriage. Their bellies are hot. There are others who cannot control their emotions of love and sympathy. There are still others who will easily succumb to threats and the fear of being beaten. You all know where we have built the sanctuary of the Fibuen. [...] The sanctuary is the refuge for those without a heart. Go there if you cannot look your man in the face and tell him to go eat shit. (24)

The women then take the "oath of sealed lips" in rebellion against their husbands. In addition they decide not to go to bed with or to give food to their husbands. Here, we find the women breaking loose of their traditional status of sexual condescension and household chores of cooking for and feeding their husbands. In fact, they turn their "supposed" weaknesses into strength. The vacuum created by the exiled male Kwifon (39, 41) is filled now by the women's

Fibuen. Fisiy, one of the notables, quickly acknowledges the importance of women in response to Forgwei's challenge to female political activism ("Who gave such powers to women?"): "We cannot really blame the women. The Fon is the one breaking the laws and destroying the land in the name of this new religion brought by Father Leo" (30). The overthrow of the men and Fon by women in defense of their land falls in line with Jodi Jacobson's assessment of women's contribution to development in the Third World. It is as if women were reacting to Jacobson's article, "Closing the Gender Gap in Development" in which Jacobson argues that:

[...] women perform the lion's share of work in subsistence economies, toiling longer hours and contributing to family income than men do. Yet in a world where economic value is computed in monetary terms alone, women's work is not counted as economically productive when money changes hands. Women are viewed as "unproductive" by government statisticians, economists [...] and even by their husbands. A huge proportion of the world's real productivity therefore remains undervalued, and women's essential contributions to the welfare of families and nations remain unrecognized. (61-26)

The above assertion justifies why Butake's men are very reluctant to accept the fact that the women folk can rise up against them and their Fon. On the other hand, the plays reveal how far Butake was ahead of his contemporaries in depicting a new woman, one who could rise out of the ashes of the past into a position of imminence. Their fight is both spiritual/sacred and political. In *Lake God*, the women's fight to regain their land is a sacred duty because, as Alan Durning maintains, "the sustainable use of local resources is simple self-preservation for people whose way of life is tied to the fertility and natural abundance of the land" (91) and who are "bound to their land through relationships [that are] both practical and spiritual, routine and historical" (85). This commitment to causes which comes naturally to women seems to be what is lacking in men.

*Emmanuel N. NGWANG*  
*Mississippi Valley State University (USA)*



## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Butake, Bole. *Lake God and Other Plays*. Yaounde: Editions CLE, 1999. *Lake God* (1986), *The Survivors* (1989), and *And Palm Wine Will Flow* (1990).
- Carby, Hazel V. *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Durning, Alan Thein. "Supporting Indigenous Peoples." *State of the World: A World watch Institute Report on Progress Toward a Sustainable Society*. Ed. Linda Starke. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993, 80-100.
- Egejuru, Phaniel A. and Ketu H. Katrak, Eds. *Nwanyibu: Womanbeing and African Literature*. Number 1. Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 1997.
- hooks, bell. *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Boston, Mass.: South End Press, 1992.
- Jacobson, Jodi. "Closing the Gender Gap in Development." *State of the World*. Ed. Linda Starke, 61-79.
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Devil on the Cross*. London: Heinemann, 1982.
- Obiechina, Emmanuel. "Feminine Perspectives in Selected African Novels." *Nwanyibu: Womanbeing and African Literature*. Number I. Eds. Phaniel A. Egejuru and Ketu H. Katrak. Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 1997: 33-46.
- Pallister, Janis L. "From *La Noire De . . .* to *Milk And Honey*: Portraits of the Alienated African Woman." *Nwanyibu : Womanbeing and African Literature*. Number 1. Eds. Phaniel A. Egejuru and Ketu H. Katrak. Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 1997: 135-145.
- Ramiez, Victoria. "The Impact of Colonialism on African Women's lives in Novels by Marian Ba, Buchi Emecheta, and Ama Ata Aidoo." *Proceedings of Southern Interdisciplinary Roundtable on African Studies (SIRAS): Africa in Transition: A Retrospect of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. Kentucky State University, 14-15 April, 2000. Ed. Funwi Ayuninjam. Kentucky State University, 2000: 144-49.
- Stratton, Florence. *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Sudarkasa, Niara. "The 'Status of Women' in Indigenous African Societies." *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora*. Eds. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Sharon Harley, and Andrea B. Rushing. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1987: 25-41.
- Takougang, Joseph and Milton Krieger, eds. *The African State and Society in the 1990s: Cameroon's Political Crossroads*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998.
- Tuana, Nancy. *The Less Noble Sex: Scientific, Religious, and Philosophical Conceptions of Woman's Nature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.
- Uwakweh, Pauline Ada. "Female Choices: The Militant Option in Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* and Alice Walker's *Meridian*." *Nwanyibu: Womanbeing and African Literature*. Number 1. Egejuru and Katrak, Eds. 47-60.

Wallace, Karen Amyley. "The Black Female Presence in Black Francophone Literature." *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora*. Eds. Terborg-Pen, Harley and Rushing, 181-207.

Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860." *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in Nineteenth Century*. Columbus: University of Ohio Press, 1976.