

## The Actual Self versus the Expected Self: Beyala's Dialectical Feminist Discourse in C'est le Soleil qui m'a Brûlée & Tu t'Appelleras Tanga

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### Abstract:

As a reader, one is confronted with issues of race, ethnicity and gender inequality, in some societies, where thinkers' challenge lies essentially in enhancing questions of human values, equality and justice. Writers, during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> and of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, have endeavoured to operate with new assumptions that are judged appropriate to face the traditional system of understanding.

The new world order which is, in fact, the result of writers' common efforts towards globalization, imperatively requires the regeneration of lenses that acquaint one with new praising human philosophies, and existential questions. The question of the self is among many other questions asked about the "one self" and the "other self".

Since Beyala's works are not just mere additions in the field of literary studies, it would be prerequisite to note the author's attitudes and dialectical way of thinking, as well as the knowhow of writing a discourse based on rational thoughts, it is very necessary to bring and suggest new viewpoints over the way life should be like.

**Key words:** self, actual self, expected self, existentialism, equality

### Résumé:

En tant que lecteur, l'un se trouve confronté à une situation d'inégalité et de temps plus critique. En réalité, cette situation est à caractère raciale, ethnique et sexuel. Dans certaines sociétés, les défis des chercheurs sont concentrés, essentiellement, sur les questions relativement liées aux valeurs humaines, égalité et justice. Les auteurs, durant les dernières décennies du XX et du XXI siècle, se sont fortement engagés de faire avec les nouvelles suppositions qui ont été jugées appropriées de mettre un terme au system traditionnel de compréhension.

Le nouvel ordre mondial, qui n'est, en réalité, qu'un résultat de quelques efforts majeurs de certains auteurs pour enfin renforcer l'idée de la globalisation, demande impérativement la régénération des visions qui prônent des philosophies humaines et des questions existentielles. La question du « soi » est parmi d'autres questions soulevées concernant le « soi-même » et « l'autre ».

Comme les travaux de Calixthe Beyala ne sont pas uniquement considérées comme étant une simple contribution au monde des études littéraires, il est indispensable de noter que l'attitude de l'auteure en question et sa pensée dialectique ainsi que sa façon de faire avec le discours basé sur les pensées rationnelles, incitent à suggérer et proposer des points de vue différents vis-à-vis de l'existence de l'homme et sa façon de vivre.

**Mot clés :** Moi, moi réel, moi attend, existentialisme, égalité

### ملخص:

عادة ما يواجه القارئ المتمرس في الأدب قضايا ذات علاقة وطيدة بالعرق الجنس البشري، وعدم المساواة بين الجنسين في بعض المجتمعات. وعليه فإن جموع المفكرين في تلك المجتمعات يصادفون تحديات في طرح قضايا تشجع القيم الإنسانية المساواة والعدالة. في هذا السياق نجد أن كتاب العشرية الأخيرة من كل من القرنين العشرين والواحد والعشرين قد دأبوا على العمل والتعامل مع المسلمات الجديدة لمواجهة النظم التقليدية للفهم.

إن النظام العالمي الجديد ما هو إلا حصيلة تضافر جهود كتاب لتأسيس نظام العولمة الشيء الذي يتطلب تغيير الروائي بتعزيز الفكر الفلسفي الإنساني المعتمد في أساسه على قضايا وجوديه. من هذا المنطق أصبحت إشكالية (الذات) من ضمن عدة قضايا تتمحور حول الأنا\* و\*الأخر\*.

بما أن أعمال بيالا\* ل تعد مجرد إضافات بسيطة في الدراسات الأدبية بل تتعدها إلى كونها تعرض مواقف الكاتبة وكذا نمط تفكيرها الجدلي، كما أنها تقترح طريقة تحرير خطاب مبنى أساسا على أفكار عقلانية وعليه وجب اقتراح وجهات نظر حول ما يجب أن تقوم عليه الحياة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية :** المساواة، الذات، الذات الحقيقية، الذات المتوقعة، الوجودية، المساواة.

## Introduction

Besides the gradual unrest of the former colonies from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, the emerging political self-determination and cultural self-esteem of previous colonies produced a plethora of so-called new literatures. Though post colonial writers have intended to imitate the Europeans, their literature remains rather a self-conscious literature of otherness and of resistance. Cultural critics raised many questions over the changes brought about by post colonialism including established concepts of cultural authority and self identity.

Boehmer, one of these postcolonial critics, shows that postcolonial literature is a tool "to resist the colonialist perspective" and to be a "part of that process of overhaul", the process that includes "a reshaping of dominant meanings"; postcolonial literature, the critic adds, is viewed as being a platform to give a voice to the voiceless (Boehmer, 1995: 03). The investigation of post colonialism, does not only imply the treatment of some questions related to multiculturalism and/or hybridity, but goes far beyond these issues to deal with some subjects related to feminine conditions within the postcolonial universe and scope. Concretely, the dominant post colonialism discourse is questioned by women who feel marginalized owing to the obliteration of some notions such as 'oneness' and 'sameness', in a time when the new social and world orders have become very debatable subjects.

The present work is, in fact, not an attempt to make a review or reconsider feminist discourse and post colonial theories; it is rather an attempt to bring something new that could be added to these two fields of research for both fields have long been thought of as associative, even complementary, in that like imperialism, patriarchy is a phallogocentric and a supremacist ideology that subjugates and dominates its subjects.

### 1. The Question of Discourse and Self

The new set discourse is likely to be framed as to advocate a peculiar universalism in that it is an unusual articulated feminist discourse and which is certainly qualified as a global discourse. Some writers are no longer interested in what differentiates the local from the global for the simple reason that they are developing a thinking mode that is more vertical, paradigmatic than horizontal or syntagmatic. Michael Kalton interprets most art as expressing vertical transcendence; he says: "I view much of our experience of nature as emphasizing vertical transcendence as well because these sorts of experiences emphasize a dimension beyond the real , the ordinary" (Philip Clayton, 2007: 101); Feminist women writers, during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, endeavored to operate with new assumptions that are judged appropriate; they align themselves to some degree along this vertical axis; their vertical thinking strategy is usually concerned in how to solve the problem of the woman, for they already know everything about themselves as women; they do not need to make a diagnosis to understand why such a particular problem occurs; they know almost everything, if not everything, related to their living situation. In reality the experience of going beyond specific experiences (vertical paradigm) (Ibid: 100) is the most accessible one, because along the horizontal axis, things are taken in the way they are without imposing on them levels or degrees of reality. (Op.cit)

In general, when women meet on the global ground, they do not appear as equals, yet their sameness as well as their difference are essentially linked. The importance beyond their link is that they are socially conscious of their oppression as second level citizens representing the one self, while the first level citizen or the Other self is man. The question asked about the 'two selves' is undoubtedly based upon divergent perceptions of the one but about shared social matters. This very situation kept feminist women writers constantly asking themselves whether this issue deserves being dealt with dialectically as an essentially asymmetrical issue nowadays, because symmetry is something that is imposed on the world in that it is the construction of human civilization. This is undoubtedly why some feminist women writers engage in meaningful debatable subject matters over the female self: the actual self and the expected self or the idealized self

The question that is raised over the relationship which exists between the two facets of the same self (the African woman's self) is substantially philosophical. Carl Rogers, who accounted for the importance of the self, explains that it is the central ingredient in human personality and personal adjustment; for him the self is a social product, developing out of interpersonal relationships and striving for consistency (1947). Like many Other post modernist writers, Calixthe Beyala, through different forms of representation, regardless of confessional and ideological orientations, develops a positive halo over Woman in general. In Beyala's fictitious world, woman mostly appears as the epitome of change; she stands between two worlds; her world as an African woman in so far as it is infused with stiff and unchangeable predominant, traditional, visual representations, and the world she aspires to; a world she longs for; a world based on equal opportunities, mutual understanding and respect, void of vehement animosity of sexual discrimination and self stigmatization. In Beyala's society identity is determined by social role, and "the individual is identified and constituted in and through certain of his or her roles" (MacIntyre 1985: 160). Therefore, "the individual discovers his true identity in his roles, and to turn away from these roles is to turn away from himself" (Berger, 1984: 154)

Beyala's role and process of thinking lead to new identification within a space which may help her feeling no compulsion to conform to extreme traditional forms of femininity or to abide to males' superior captivity. She could foresee a new position, or at least, could aspire to the adhering to different visions of the world. It is, in fact, an attempt to go beyond the predefined set category of norms and rules, for the self-concept is not instinctive, but rather a social product developed through experience, and thus a woman can perceive herself in a way different from the way others may see her. The change at the level of the perceptive self is the supremacy of the new feminine identity over the socio-cultural barriers which have long been established by the Other. The ego development and self-interpretation (Anna Freud, 1946)<sup>1</sup> are, certainly, what preoccupy Beyala.

## 2. A Feminist Approach: Reading and Interpreting Beyala's Novelistic World

Although the projects of criticism might be eclectically ordered, there remains one shared point which lies essentially in the inevitability of exploring more than what a literary text may treat overtly. A feminist literary approach, which helps to analyze and understand the representations of woman in literature, and which is seen to explore challenges to literary canons that are said to be dominated by men, is in itself reshaped in a way as to fit a given systematic nature of gender inequalities, focusing on particular issues surrounding consciousness in a particular society such as the African society.

The question of woman, in a world like the one created by the Cameroonian Calixthe Beyala, has become one of self-determination. Indeed, her works bear the seal of commitment. The novels she published since 1987 and until 2009, respectively from *C'est le soleil qui m'a Brûlée*<sup>2</sup> (1987) until *Le Roman de Pauline* (2009) are a case in point. In spite of the miscellaneous themes and subject matters<sup>3</sup> she has fervently and sweepingly provided, her works remain, nevertheless, opened to further criticism and different readings. Her novels represent distinctly and unquestionably a set of arguments vis-à-vis the emancipation of women, for they present different approaches which are strongly committed to ideas of social justice and overtly suggest a better future for mankind in general and woman in

<sup>1</sup> Anna Freud (Freud's daughter) gave central importance to ego development and self-interpretation, while Freud (1900), who provided new understanding of the importance of internal mental processes, and many other of his followers hesitated to make self-concept a primary psychological unit in their theories.

<sup>2</sup> In the body of the work, I will use acronym **SLQM** to refer to the novel

<sup>3</sup> Rangira Béatrice shows the major theme in Beyala's work as: "phallogentrisme, l'univers des bidonvilles et son impact sociopolitique sur l'écriture, l'amour, la femme, l'enfance, le rationalisme et l'irrationnel (le merveilleux), le langage et la problématique" (1997 : 26). What could be noted here is that Beatrice has published her book before the appearance of other novels written by Beyala after 1997; this means that there are certainly other themes dealt with. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many views and realities have started to be conceived and perceived differently owing, obviously, to the new doctrines and ideologies (political and economic and even social ideologies) among which, Globalization is underlined.

particular. Does this mean that Beyala is rejecting man and destroying his very natural social structure?

It is important to indicate here that the feminine characters of Beyala quite like those of Werewere Liking do not reject man as such. Contrary to their detractors' allegations, their feminine characters, simply, got bored and felt disgusted because of African man's incapacity to define himself and define as well woman far from any sexual lust and body. In *Journal d'une misovire*, Liking through the voice of "misovire" predicts the birth of a new race of men:

Et l'Homme de la prochaine Race se présentera dans un corps sain plus fort et plus harmonieux avec des Émotions plus riches, plus stables et plus affinées. Sa Pensée sera plus rigoureuse et plus créatrice, sa Volonté plus ferme et mieux orientée, sa Conscience plus ouverte [...] (Bernard Magnier 1984: 22).

And the Man of next Race will present himself in a healthy more extremely and more harmonious body with richer, more stable and more refined Emotions. His Thought will be more rigorous and more creative, his firmer and better oriented Will, his more open Conscience [...] (My translation)

Such perceptive views in literature or in literary criticism might be perpetrated against women. Yet, on the Other hand, one has to be sensitive to imaginative insights and perceptions, to these new forms and ways of expressions—partly as a result of man's negation. In Other words, one has to be too sensitive to the new order of facts and realities and new forms of consciousness. To explain this, Josephine Donovan says that the "perspective critic relates literature to changes that are occurring in the structure of human consciousness, in the pattern of identification by which we organize our social, cultural, and moral reality" (1975: 75). Therefore it is needless to blame Liking or Beyala for their categorical refusal of man, and it is even unfair to accuse them of a blind adoption of western feminism, for Beyala herself shows her reservations about feminism; always in her interview with Matateyou, she refuses to be associated to western feminism and advocated instead "féminisme africain".— "Partisane des droits de l'homme qui incluent ceux de la femme", she prefers substituting the term feminism by "féminitude" that she links to "négritude" :

Le mot « féminitude » [...] n'exclut pas la maternité — je suis une mère d'enfants — mais inclut cette femme qui veut l'amour, le travail, la liberté, qui veut être humaine sans pour autant perdre ses prérogatives de femme. En Occident, le féminisme a quelque peu dévié vers une espèce de « machisme » : les femmes occidentales ont essayé de tuer ce qu'elles ont de féminin en elles. Il y a une ressemblance aux hommes, la pratique du pouvoir masculin. Moi, je refuse cela et j'utilise le mot « féminitude » rattaché à une culture nègre profondément liée à la femme à partir d'un concept purement africain. Il y a donc ce mot dans *Seul le Diable le Savait* (1996 : 611-612)

The word "féminitude" [...] does not exclude maternity - I am a mother of children - but includes that woman who wants love, work, freedom, who wants to be human being without losing her prerogatives of woman. In Occident, feminism has , a little bit, deviated towards a species of "machism": the Western women have tried to obliterate what they have as female in them. There is a resemblance with the men, the practice of the male power. Me, I refuse this state of being; having in mind a purely African concept, I use the word "féminitude" which is related to a negro culture that is, nevertheless, deeply related to woman. This word does, therefore, exist in *Seul le Diable le Savait* (1996) (My translation)

The feminism which Beyala has presented, in her essay *Lettre d'une Africaine à ses soeurs occidentales* (1995), takes into consideration the African socio-cultural context. The message of the writer defends a universal feminism, a feminism which welcomes everyone's opinion:

Cette lettre est une porte ouverte. Elle ne donne pas de leçon. Elle ne se veut pas un prélude à la guerre, mais un débat ouvert. En tant que femme africaine, je vous parle avec mes tripes et mes instincts [...]. Je laisse les théories et le cartésianisme aux intellectuelles. Je ne juge pas, je constate que le cartésianisme et les sciences qui en découlent ont permis à certaines sociétés, non seulement d'évoluer mais aussi de dominer le monde (09)

This letter is an open door. It does not provide a lesson. It does not make a prelude to war, but an open debate. As an African woman, I speak to you with my tripe and my instincts [...]. I leave the theories and Cartesianism to the intellectuals. I do not judge, I note that Cartesianism and sciences which result from this have allowed certain companies, to not only evolve but to dominate the world as well (**My translation**)

The author underlines, here, differences among the feminist movement, through which it is possible to foresee the question of Universal feminism which is, in fact, an appropriate sphere of influence and action. The fact of being stigmatised urged black African writers such as Beyala to raise a new philosophy of writing through which she remodelled the image of the dichotomies (male/female) and (black woman/white woman).

The question of Universal feminism is more than to be conceived as an idea in the author's mind. Universal Feminism is an approach to the feminist movement. Indeed, within such movements Beyala does not only devote her efforts to putting an end to social injustice, but, most importantly, to acknowledging the issue of woman as a common issue to both males and females; and therefore an attempt to build a coalition between individuals (males or females, blacks or whites and Africans or non Africans) seems of paramount importance. Is it necessary to ask a question about this anti-feminist remark? Therefore, the social relations are appreciably complicated to the point that traditional social binary oppositions (male/female, majority/minority, and proletariat/bourgeois) have become problematic. In reality, this movement aims at enhancing substantial social change. How does one qualify Beyala's efforts of writing a discourse based on unrestricted rational thoughts? Does it require a particular way of writing?

### 3. The "Knowhow" of Writing a Positive Feminist Self-discourse

Writing is very important for any writer to communicate his/her ideas; it enhances his/her reputation, and helps propagate his/her thoughts and ideas. Beyala's knowledge of the woman as subject she wishes to write about, helps her to a great extent dealing with requirements of women. Does one learn through the process of Beyala's writing? Undoubtedly, the wide audience her literary works have so far gained have enhanced her reputation and have made of her novels great achievements owing to the subjects whereby she engaged a Knowhow of writing a discourse based on new thoughts which do not, compulsorily, favor women at the expense of men, and which praise highly all what is essentially human.

I believe that Beyala's choice of various and distinctly different characters is not haphazard; the white and the blacks<sup>4</sup>, the Muslim<sup>5</sup> and the Christians in addition to the Jewish character provide a certain power to the author's ideological convictions (that there is no particular dominant ideology). I assume that Beyala's feminist conviction tends towards the decentralization of leadership and the increase of openness to the multiplicity and diversity of perspectives; for her, a constant redefinition of women's issues is prerequisite and a priority.

Far away from Africa, Calixthe Beyala deals with some questions related to the tyrannical arduous situation of women by means of the author's suggestion of a given social schema. The latter

<sup>4</sup> Anna Claude as a white Jewish character and Tanga as a black Christian character in Beyala's novel *Tu t'Appelleras Tanga* translated (Your Name Shall be Tanga)

<sup>5</sup> Ousman and Hassan in *Tu t'Appelleras Tanga* translated (Your Name Shall be Tanga)

transcends horizontally a sort of a universalism which springs from peculiarism. For a woman, what might constitute the universal is what could be seen as "separatism". Calixthe Beyala, by means of her introduction of and character having different ideological confession, divergent geographical space, but sharing the same human nature, she redefines this universalism which is considered as model for all the rest of humanity

As a third wave feminist and certainly, to a great extent, as an activist writer, Beyala tries to unit women cross ethnic, racial, and whenever possible, class divisions, for Andrea Benton Rushing shows that activists manage to promote a greater transnational and cross-cultural sisterhood among women from various races, classes, religions, socio-political backgrounds, sexual orientations and so on (1983:134). But what it is striking is that Beyala's sense of effort tends towards the emphasis of such sort of practical application of theory while her orientation, as an Afro-French feminist, barely included feminist social movements' percepts. While American feminism included a concern with practical and radical feminist social movements, French feminist theorists did not lay emphasis on such practical application of theories. This is why the author does not put concretely abstract thoughts and ideologies into practice.

Beyala does not seem to have gone beyond the feminist framework in that her task, as feminist critic, consists in developing more fully her understanding of what a female perspective or vision includes. Her exposition to the state of some of her female characters such as Tanga and Anna Claude, in *Tu t'Appelleras Tanga*<sup>6</sup>, means in fact nothing but her eager belief in the gradual falling together of truth and probabilities about women, to tell their common experience of women, their history as being ethnic individuals, their wisdom as mature ladies despite Tanga's age, as well as their culture as being a means of censorship; this constellation provides the basis of feminine aesthetics. However, one has to admit the fact of constituting the female identity and society as well as culture, for it gives a start to a new type of postmodern feminist African literature: the Universal Humanist Feminist<sup>7</sup> literature rather than simply Black African feminist literature.

In her essay entitled *lettre d'une Africaine á ses Soeur Occidentales*, Beyala insists again on this community that unites both white and black women:

...nous ne pouvons gagner qu'en faisant front commun face á l'anti-féminisme. La souffrance des femmes quelles que soit leurs origines, leurs nature et leurs extraction sociale, est notre affaire a nous toutes! Nous devons, toutes au autant que nous sommes, ne jamais oublier que le mot 'aïe' que exprime la souffrance, se dit dans toutes les langues et de la même façon... Nous sommes dans le même bateau nous coulons ensemble ou ensemble nous dressons un barrage. (Op.cit: 104-106)

We cannot win, but only when taking common position against anti-feminism. The suffering of the women whatever their origins, their nature and their social extraction, is their nature and their social extraction, is our business and responsibility! We should, all in so much that we are, never forget that the word 'aïe' which the suffering expresses, is, however, said in the same way in all the languages... We are in the same boat sink together or together we raise a dam (**My translation**)

<sup>6</sup> In the body of the work , I will use acronym **TTT** to refer to the novel

<sup>7</sup> Beyala's position tends more to encapsulate an area of common agreement between the different ideologies, and that she praises all sort of agreements between different systems of thought. Beyala's universal humanist feminism is free from the abstract postulations that may characterize individual ideologies such as preconceived ideas. In reality, Beyala believes that sexually different human beings (males and females) and racially different women, as well as ideologically-oriented people should agree to set aside their differences, and attempt to forge some common rules of conduct and behaviour which, undoubtedly, enable them to live in communion as human beings.

The author insists on the unity of women and thus of women writers, no matter what their origin, race or their religious ideology<sup>8</sup>. Her objective, beyond putting on equal footing racially and ideologically different female characters, is to underline, undoubtedly, her conception of an identification which consists in studying the relationship of women, in general. I do not propose the forms in which African culture and civilization constructed gender to study them at the moment or in periods of change, for these forms consist of social norms embodied in social roles and laws. These forms represent historical artefacts. Therefore, I believe, women have to think in terms of chain of individuals, or as "Women-as-a-group" as Gerder Lerner underlines (1986). This double vision of feminist scholarship is well illustrated by Joan Kelly in her article published in 1979:

Woman's place is not a separate sphere or domain of existence but a position within social existence generally... [F]eminist through is moving beyond the split of social reality it inherited from the recent past. Our actual vantage point has shifted, giving rise to a new consciousness of woman's "place" in family and society... [W]hat we see are not two spheres of social reality (home and work, private and public), but two (or three) sets of social relations (1979: 221-22)

In *Tu t'Appelleras Tanga*, the liberation of feminist discourse is achieved through the 'Deliverance' or "Release" of African speech of the unfortunate child-woman and the Jewish European intellectual bourgeois Anna Claude. Subjects to miserable conditions, the two ladies try vainly to communicate. Using a wide array of tones and narrative techniques, Beyala bears witness not only to the plight of both Tanga and Anna Claude but, more importantly, to the difficult emergence of their power, independence, and capacity for self-determination in a society which has lost its sense of direction. The question of self-determinism for Beyala's characters, in this case, is not of a horizontal order, i.e., it is not a matter of pushing man backward but proving their strong-minded women.

Through Beyala, one tries to offer a rich approach to understand the process by which women construct their identities within an actual social context; the fictional world she creates is a disturbing yet perceptive echo of nowadays 'real world'- that is, the one where an individual is deprived of his/her right of living as a human being owing to social calamities and shoddiness. This sort of image could be well noticed through, for instance, her character Tanga who is deprived of her childhood through poverty, prostitution, corruption, and violence. Tanga, Beyala argues, suffers most in this environment where unbearable social and political pressures are combined with patriarchal values and self-doubt. The decaying situation, Beyala wants to show, pushes this girl into womanhood before her time, usually through a chain of traumatic experiences. One can notice that Beyala controls her initial presentation of the self by means of written discourse.

There is more than a faint glimmer of hope on the fringe of Beyala's dark view of the human condition. To determine her character's sense of emotional well-being or self-worth, the author of *Tu t'Appelleras Tanga* tries to emphasize the fact that an individual like Tanga learns more from the environment which is hostile and frustrating; her (Tanga's) social experience is to be translated into a basic sense of worthiness which, undoubtedly, serves as a foundation of self-esteem, or simply the way one frames his/her particular self-view.

Beyala's non-conformist protagonist Tanga tries to survive the bruising of her body and the torments imposed upon her mind although she was ill-treated in life, abandoned by society, and threatened by annihilation,. She is optimistic in that she believes in possible social change because she dreams of being a respectable mother despite her state of being thrown into the world of prostitutions by force and despite of the unacceptable societal values of being a whore.

<sup>8</sup> I refer to religious ideology because Beyala makes no clear cut and difference between her characters (Tanga/Anna Claude) in *Tu t'Appelleras Tanga*, although the two characters belong to different religious faiths, respectively Christian and Jewish. This shows that Beyala praises ideological differences. Yes indeed, it is not directly or even clearly stated, but it appears through the characters' complicity, and it is obvious in literature since the writer should not be ideologically oriented, while ideology can never be overlooked or avoided

One has to believe that her specific self-view cannot be measured except when associated with others' specific self-views. This explains, certainly, Tanga's and Anna Claude's complicity. Tanga's story allowed Anna-Claude to share her sufferings and integrate her as a new constructive element of her identity. Therefore, they have constructed the "Oneself", and this is due to the fusion of the two identities as Beyala demonstrates at the end of the novel: "Elle (Anna Claude) se couche contre elle (Tanga). Elle sait que, pour mourir Tanga l'attendait, ouverte, offerte, pour lui donner à parler avant de passer les frontières et de s'étendre dans la nature morte" (TTT : 176), and also in "t'a rien à craindre. J'existe, donc tu seras" (Ibid: 177).

#### 4. The Shared identity and the Self-conception?

To provide a thorough analysis of the way Beyala's characters think, in *Tu t'Appelleras Tanga*, one could make sense of the idea of self-conception on which the characters stake their being. It is certainly a highly influential determinant of the characters' self-esteem. Although only faintly alluded to, the writer endeavours to demonstrate that female's specific self-conception or expected self/idealized self comes, most of the time, through self-identification.

Tanga died after bequeathing her name, identity and history to Anna-Claude; this is what the title of the story reveals essentially: Your Name shall be Tanga; the title shows the dying girl-child's tone when she is talking to Anna, as it shows her ability and even success to construct a new identity through her reincarnation in her cell companion Anna Claude. The fusion of the two identities does not come about straightaway for in the very beginning of the novel the two women could hardly communicate owing to their cultural differences; to keep abreast of their situations and stories, the white Anna Claude was obliged to abandon her to a white society: "Alors, entre en moi. Mon secret s'illuminera. Mais auparavant, il faut que la blanche en toi meure. Donne-moi ta main, désormais tu seras moi. Tu auras dix-sept saisons, tu seras noire, Tu t'Appelleras Tanga" (Ibid : 14).

Focusing particularly on interaction involving Beyala's characters, one hopes to better understand the relation between women, and hence their self-conception. In doing so, one tries to answer some preliminary questions about the structure of women's self, or the different facets of females' self. If woman's own view of herself as well as her belief in the way others may perceive her is seen as the actual self, then the attributes that someone believes a woman possesses, the attributes that someone would like the person to possess and ought believe the person should possess, are considered therefore as the expected self or the idealized self. Beyala's characters, in *Tu t'Appelleras Tanga*, for instance, are always worrying and uncomfortable; the protagonists Tanga and Anna Claude describe and account for their conflict with the a world reigned by Ionesconism<sup>9</sup>; although they are shadowed by Hassan and Ousman who are, in reality, illusory persons, they remain nevertheless insecure. In fact, female's self is like the one who "may have gnawing feeling of being a bluff, a fraud, a freak- a feeling for which he cannot account. His inside knowledge of himself shows unmistakably in his dreams, when he is close to the reality of himself [...] usually, the reality of himself intrudes painfully and unmistakably" (Horney Karen, 1950: 111)

The characters' complicity demonstrates Beyala's efforts to deal with the notion of self-awareness, and to victimize woman's actual self. One can understand from the portrait which Beyala provides that the question of self-awareness is not a matter of assumption that attention may be focused on the self or on the environment, but not on both at the same time as Duval and Wicklund (1972) explain. Beyala's characters are self-focused; they focus attention inward. The continuum of their stories makes of them the mirrors of each other or one another, for self-focusing situations, sometimes, include gazing into a mirror (significant other woman). I think the attention is paid more to

<sup>9</sup> I have introduced this concept "Ionesconism" to refer to the world /society in perpetual transformation. It is a world of human mutation which is owing to the absence of any sense of humanity and the subversion of the human values. It is a reference to Rhinoceros by Eugene Ionesco



the Tanga's and Anna Claude's selves or their self-identification, in that the shared woman voice and the common feminine instinct made of them oneself. And since they are conscious of their situations and convinced of their interlaced story, they are considered in a state of 'objective self-awareness.

The commitment of Beyala's characters to their self-conception consists in unveiling the feminine essence. The end of Beyala's first novel *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée* shows the embodiment of Irène in the person of Atéba. It is when the latter kissed the body of her victim, symbolically, as if she were Irène. When Beyala says: "autrefois quand Atéba était femme. Quand elle était des milliers de femmes... Quand elle était Atéba et toutes les femmes étaient elle. Quand elle séduisait la pluie et le vent" (17) In the past when Atéba was a woman. When she was thousands of women ... When she was Atéba and all the women were her. When she seduced the rain and the wind (**My translation**),

The author is certainly associating her character's name to all women all over the world, and therefore, showing the extent to which a woman can be a representative figure and can speak on the behalf of any other woman. It is important therefore to note that Atéba is, symbolically, the feminine essence. Beyala's self-focused characters are shown to stick more to their own feminine essence and to become more conscious of their presence as women. For in a given moment, "consciemment ou inconsciemment, la femme a fini par penser qu'elle ne peut pas se passer de l'homme" (Gallimore, 1997: 10) consciously or unconsciously, the woman eventually thought that she cannot do without the man (**My translation**).

To conceptualize the notion of the female's self, it is not necessary to ignore or even deny man/woman relationship, and thus needless to push backward man. For women are conscious enough of their problems. To survive, woman has to cease to "coudre sa presence autour de l'homme" (CSQB: 21), and to reach that "état d'esprit attendu" or the expected self, she has to accept the three rules set by Beyala's protagonist Atéba ((Ibid, 88), which are:

- 1st: to find the woman
- 2nd: to find the woman
- 3rd: to find the woman and eliminate the chaos (**My translation**)

The notion of the self from a Beyalian perspective, in the present work, is likely to be complex; especially that it is important to understand the author's feminist discourse. Beyala seems to have advocated a universal feminism; to praise a universal feminist discourse is to destroy the barriers which divide women among the feminist movement. It is legitimate thereafter to state that Beyala's intention is to make universal her cause not just as a writer but as a woman as well. The obliteration of the ideological as well as the racial differences between women homogenized the women voice and the cause, and created the oneself or the female self. Atéba has never written to a man, but to women through individual singular—\_names: "Elle a écrit aux Jeanne, aux Pauline, aux Carole, aux Nicole, aux Molé, aux Kambiwa, aux Akkono, aux Chantal... A toutes les femmes qui peuplent son imaginaires et lui volent ses nuits" (CSQB, 34) She wrote to Jeanne, to Pauline, to Carole, to Nicole, to Molé, to Kambiwa, to Akkono, to Chantal ... To all the women who populate her imagination and steal her nights (**My translation**); she has written in this way to show that the feminine voice is never a singular voice of peace, but a plural voice.

The self presents one principle with diverse interacting entities, bodies and, mental forces; they act complementarily to perform a certain function tending towards one objective which is the re/definition of Man. To account for both selves (actual self and expected self) in Beyala's literary context is to set a sort of dialectical debate about the way the author has dealt with her characters; the complexity of the world they are living in.

## Conclusion

To study Beyala's fictitious world is to put an emphasis on African women's issues in a world where women are, almost, denied. Considering world's women as one single unit of analysis is certainly providing new orientations and perspectives of analysis in the present study. The question of the self as being an important notion in the pronunciation of a given feminist discourse creates distinct opportunity of looking at the world's women in its regions and sub-regions in their particularity. The particularity of women's experiences, relations and thus complicity is especially relevant if the

argument that notion of self-conception is socially constructed. Unsurprisingly, such construction must be understood as emerging out of the particularity of women's situation and history. It ought to stand to reason therefore that constructions of women react to social realities from which they are drawn.

Beyala's universal presupposition of what it means to be a woman, and what feminism is, as well as what it ought to be resides, essentially, in the way she, subtly, deals with the question of female self through the development of glorious idealized image<sup>10</sup>. The presumptions of her feminist discourse are to trivialize certain denigrating anti-feminist discourses and to valorize natural multidimensional and anti-racist social realities. The author's polyphonic feminist discourse entails having a woman with different but complementary idiosyncratic behaviour. Beyala fundamentally questions the assumption that woman's expected or idealized self exists only in her own egocentric desires. She has shown in her novels that the characters' desire for change, thirst for new experiences in life, recognition, knowledge and love construct a common voice calling for an objective perceptible reality. And it is here that the originality of Beyala's conception of the expected self or idealized self lies.

An actual woman, from a Beyalian perspective, owes her existence to the reality that she is completed by another woman and that she does not represent only herself. According to Karen Horney, "when an individual shifts his center of gravity to his idealized self, he not only exalts himself but also is bound to look at his actual self from a wrong perspective" (Op.cit: 110). Therefore the expected woman's self is the one which is translated by other woman's ideas and knowledge. The expected voices are consequently the ones of those women with new confused, divergent, and limitless ideologies.

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<sup>10</sup> Robert B. Ewen says that the repressed aspects of the neurotic's personality and the painful inner conflicts, are further concealed through the development of glorious idealized image (2003:119)