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INVESTIGATING THE SYMBOLISM OF ARCHEOLOGICAL IMAGERY IN FEMINIST FICTION OF BÉYALA

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ABSTRACT

Literary archeology is analogous to traditional archeology in that both excavate layers of meaning. The former analyzes tiers of context of texts, while the latter excavates layers of soil to understand past civilizations. Archaeology uncovers the remnants of past culture, revealing how people lived, interfaced and built their worlds through interpreting the symbols and functions of cultural materials. One of the major areas where the nexus between the archaeological process and the literary data intertwine is the identification of historical investigation terminologies mentioned in literature. African feminist fiction has gained significant traction in various academic disciplines, yet its integration with archeological literary analysis remains a largely unexplored frontier. Therefore, this study investigates the symbolism of archeological imagery in relation to the experiences, perspectives and representations of women in Beyala's *Tu t'apelleras Tanga*. By addressing questions to the material evidence such as landscape, oral tradition, masques, ruins, excavation and artifacts among others, the fiction under study further examines gendered roles and identities thereby bridging the somewhat arbitrary divide between archaeology and literature. Ethnoarchaeological theory is employed using content analysis as its methodology. Findings reveal that our writer leverages on archeological imagery to represent the women's struggle, memories and identities. The historical accuracy of Beyala's fiction lends credibility to its narrative voice and rendering its portrayal a trustable presentation of reality. The study contributes to the discipline of archaeology and feminist fiction, with the view to awakening new possibilities in the pursuit of research areas in the field of ethnoarchaeology feminism.

Key words: *Gender; Anthropology; Material Culture; Archeology; Metaphor; Béyala*

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INTRODUCTION

Many scholars have contributed to the characterization and the classification of the female experiences to understand the motivation and impact behind female writers' composing narratives within archeological genre. More than often, cultural materiality 'is the key to Ethno-archaeological investigation' (Said 1979). The raison *d'être* is to understand the behavior behind the material pattern, resulting in attempts to strengthen analogy by increasing number of similarities which literary elements or characters might mirror, thereby revealing a literary symmetry in other to enrich our understanding of the narrative. This is what Béyala, one of the feminist fiction writers aims to achieve by employing archeological specialized lexicons in formal similarity, reflecting the confinement within domestic ideologies, the gender roles, expectations and the rhetoric designed by patriarchal institutions. In other words, Calixthe Beyala's *Tu t'apelleras Tanga* uses relational analogy rather than formal similarities in archaeological reasoning to produce more epistemological force by aesthetically deploying archeological imagery to explore the experiences of women in Cameroon. Archeological imagery in fiction refers to the use of metaphors and symbols related to archeology, such as excavation, artifacts and ruins to convey feminine themes and emotions. In our selected novel, Béyala uses archeological imagery to represent the women's struggle, memories and identities which are often buried or hidden like ancient artifacts. The use of archeological terminologies in this fiction describe the experiences of marginalized groups to represent the oppression and limiting factors that the African women are confronted with in male dominated spaces. The female gender lives in a society constructed and predominantly controlled by men, a social structure that has been in power for eras. The material world gives conspicuous and physical expressions of power of the imbalance power dynamics of the male hegemony. The portrayal of women in this narrative using archeological materials illuminate how patriarchal systems have repressed, and continue to oppress, female sexuality, autonomy and political freedoms.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ethno-archaeology is a method used in archeology as well as anthropology to reconstruct the behavior of the past (prehistoric and pro historic) people with the help of ethnographic analogy. Ethno-archaeology is a combination of two disciplines: archaeology, which is constituted by techniques for recovering and recording material remains of culture, and ethnography, which is the study of human behaviour and social organization in living societies (Haaland 1988:130). Traditionally, ethno-archaeology has, the one hand, been the sub-discipline which aimed to bridge archaeology and anthropology and, on the other hand, it has been seen as a methodological tool providing analogies and interpretations.

Matthew Johnson discusses four current approaches to archaeology in Archaeological Theory (Johnson 1999:177p). Archaeologists have different emphases in their practices and the different aspects and approached can be summarized schematically: Firstly, the scientific aspects of archaeology, as emphasized by Binford (1987). Secondly, the discursive approach as stressed by Shanks and Tilley (1992) in which they argue that theory is thoroughly

subjective. Thirdly, the consensus approach advocated by Renfrew and Bahn (1994:473) as a "cognitive processual" synthesis in the 1990s, which is supposed to unite the best of the processual and post-processual thoughts and finally, the plurality of approaches and interpretations, as celebrated by Hodder (1991). Ethnoarchaeology can be defined as a study embodying a range of approaches to understand the relationship of material culture to culture as a whole, both in the living context and as it enters the archaeological record. The aim of ethnoarchaeology is to exploit such understandings in order to inform archaeological concepts and to improve interpretation (David and Kramer, 2001).

In ethnoarchaeology, researchers study living contexts where human activity and culture can be directly observed. Then, by applying similar analytical methods as in archaeology, the researcher is able to understand the nature of archaeological finds and their formation. In that sense, ethnoarchaeology is part of the archaeological scientific analysis aiming to enable better understanding and interpretation of the archaeological record by examining the ties between human activity and culture and archaeological physical finds. A central topic in archaeology is the relation between culture and nature (materiality). It is the interconnectedness of culture and nature not as opposing categories but as different interacting spheres of human beings and materiality.

Since it is not possible to direct observe the human behavior in archeological data, there is a need to analyze them albeit through the lens of narratives with the view to revealing patterns and trends that can inform our understanding of human evolution, cultural development and societal change. Thus, the metaphorical meaning of cultural heritages in the feminist fictions will help to provide valuable information about their literary linkage. The interpretation of archaeological data depends on an understanding of how human beings behave in the literary scenes and particularly how their behaviour is produced in the material culture.

Archaeological research uses various analytical methods to understand the nature of physical remains found in archaeological contexts. In many instances, their formation, function and meaning enable an interpretation and reconstruction of past human culture, behavior and environment.in this study we are going to explore this paper by looking at these subheading.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ortman, S.G. 2000.in his work titled *Conceptual metaphor in the archaeological record: methods and an example from the American Southwest*. American Antiquity in Urbana: University of Illinois Press attempted to unify recent theory on cultural meaning in material culture using the notion of conceptual metaphor. He put forward that Ethnographic studies and psychological experiments indicating that conceptual metaphors are expressed in numerous forms of human expression, including speech, ritual, narrative, and material culture. He generalized on the nature and structure of metaphor emerging from cognitive linguistic research which

could be used to develop methods for reconstructing ancient metaphors from archaeological evidence.

As a preliminary application he examined pottery designs from the Mesa Verde region of the American Southwest that were conceptualized as textile fabrics, and suggested the connections between these media derived from a worldview grounded in container imagery thereby opened up many new avenues for research, including the role of worldview in cultural evolution, and the discovery of cultural continuities between archaeological cultures and historic ethno-linguistic groups through what he called 'The ability to decipher conceptual metaphors in prehistoric material culture."

Scott R. Hutson (2006) in his paper titled *Self-Citation in Archaeology: Age, Gender, Prestige, and the Self focused on self-citation in archaeology* and he systematically analyzed the factors that affect rates of self-citation. He found out that Self-citation correlated weakly with the gender of the citing author and the geographic and thematic focus of research, but correlated strongly with the age of the author. His additional analyses revealed partial evidence for the use of self-citation as a prestige tactic. He concluded with a discussion of citations to writers close to the author.

Margaret W. Conkey (2007) also worked on Questioning *Theory: Is There a Gender of Theory in Archaeology using J Archaeol Method* in the Department of Anthropology and the Archaeological Research Facility, University of California—Berkeley, 232 Kroeber Hall, Berkeley, CA 94720-3710, USA where she raised questions about the practice of theory in anthropological archaeology. Particular attention is given to questions surrounding the gender of theory: what genders are more heralded in the theoretical spotlights and how the subject position of doing theory is gendered. An analysis of the contents of four Readers of Archaeological Theory showed the problematic selection and thus representation of women's theoretical contributions, including their effective ghettoization in gender and feminist archaeology. Insights from how feminists have been grappling with theory were considered, and archaeologists were urged by way of suggestion, to confront the ways in which "doing theory" is (is not) valued and how it is differentially valued, and to discuss the place and uses of theory that are more explicitly and critical.

In a book titled *A short reflection in image and text* edited by Laura Coltofean-Arizancu, Bisserka Gaydarska & Uroš Matić (2021) in Sidestone press, Illinois, They discovered the gender stereotypes encountered on a daily basis in archaeology from the way archaeologists used to interpret the past and present to the general public to how they practice it as a profession. The book openly addresses often uncomfortable topics concerning gender in archaeology. In an attempt to raise awareness both among the professionals and others interested in the discipline, the authors re-explained and deconstructed the ambiguities in 250 words with expertise on gender in the past and in contemporary archaeology with the view to integrating new researches and experiences and alternative interpretations.

Annemarie du Plessis (2021) titled her study *Biblical Archaeology to Africanist's Influence or Non-Influence in the Religious milieu of Ancient Israel* in the College of Human Sciences at The University of South. Her motivation and purpose revolved around the goddess Anat and the possible influence or effect that she might have had on the religion of the ancient Israelites. The study of Anat, as war goddess led to comparisons between the Ugaritic mythologies and the Hebrew Bible After examining the archaeological results from excavations such as Jericho (by Kathleen Kenyon 1960) and the city of Ai and realised that much of the historicity of the book of Joshua was disputed. The research continued to the religion of ancient Israel and she discovered that there were two religions: the one archaeologically discovered about the people of Israel and their daily lives and the other the religion of Israel as portrayed in the Hebrew bible.

Sarah Irving, (2024) in her paper *entitled Gendering Labour in Palestinian Archaeology, 1890s–1930s in the Journal of the History of Archaeology*, Staffordshire University, UK. developed a wider account of the experiences and places of women in early Palestinian archaeology. She expanded her focus only on women workers, where she considered what assumptions underlain the place of male workers on archaeological digs, questioning how gendered social practices shaped the experiences of all archaeological workers. In attempting some answers, she drew on the archives of excavations by Europeans and North Americans, informed by a broader literature on women's labour in the Levant. Seeing female archaeological workers in the context of other forms of paid work done by women. She concluded that archaeological labour as a type of paid work, embedded in broader experiences of rural labour, the changing work and economic environment under Ottoman and British rule.

In sum, after a comprehensive review of the extant literatures, there is a revelation of the research focused on archeology and feminist discourse This study seeks to bridge this gap by investigating the symbolism of Archeological imagery in feminist fiction of Beyala with view to providing new insight into Ethno-archaeological investigation of feminist literary study. By exploring this uncharted territory, this study aims to expand the boundaries of our current knowledge and understanding of literature and archeology.

SYNOPSIS OF *TU T'APELLERAS TANGA* AND BÉYALA'S THEMATIC PREOCCUPATION

Raised by a father who orders her not to look at people in their faces, the protagonist, Tanga is a typical example of a woman who refuses patriarchal structure and stricture from bending her back. She is physically tortured and psychologically traumatized by rape and incest at the tender age of twelve by her father, Tanga was forced to undergo a clitoris test in order to go into prostitution by her own mother. Tanga, like is determined not to let the tragedies that have become part of her daily life deny her the efforts of personhood in a post-colonial climate of destitution and male hegemony. Tanga's story reveals the degradation that children in the

African slums are forced to live with. This is an indictment on a society that has lost its traditional family values.

Notwithstanding, in the bleakness and hardness of Beyala's stories, there is a persistent glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. The women and the children that are at the center of her stories seek out other forms of agency. What we see constantly is Beyala's ability to portray tragic conditions that Africans in the post-colonial era has created something to live with. She also leaves the post-colonial subject with a potential for change. For instance, the heroine's friendship with a group of disinherited but streetwise children brings her closer to children, especially their daily, live realities and experiences. Tanga gives a new meaning to her own existence. She spiritually survives death through the woman called Anne-Claude with whom she shares her story in prison. Women in Beyala's stories are an intrinsic and inevitable component of a network of support for other women, even though individual women must eventually redefine their own lives.

Women's oppression and subjugation are the major thematic concerns of Beyala's fiction. Beyala criticized the way women are oppressed and repressed in the African society. She lays emphasis on people's reactions to sexual issues particularly as they affect women in their relationships with men. She criticizes and downplays many aspects of patriarchal system especially the traditional notions of African family practices which include marriage and motherhood. In this narrative, the male characters that are usually regarded as symbols of patriarchy are held responsible for the sad conditions of women.

The African woman is regarded as a commodity that can be used and be disposed at will. Beyala's novels dramatize to the fullest the feminist attitude of Francophone female novelists in their revolt against male domination. She recognizes that the woman is complete in herself but the man's violence and domineering attitude have succeeded in corrupting her. The author bemoans the oppression of women hegemonized under African traditional beliefs. Her female fictional characters are bold and courageous. They often demonstrate their commitment to the liberation and progress of their society.

THE ARCHEOLOGICAL IMAGERY IN THE NOVEL AND THEIR IMPLICATION

i. Oral tradition

Oral tradition is the cultural knowledge and information that has been passed down through speech from one generation to the next. Oral tradition holds a significant symbolism for an oppressed woman representing voice and agency it provides a means for her to express herself, share her story and assert her presence in a society that silences her. It also serves as a means of resistance and resilience.

By passing down stories, songs, and legends, it serves as the woman's resistance against oppressive forces allowing her to preserve her culture and identity. It also fosters a sense of belonging, support and solidarity among women who are experiencing similar

struggles. it empowers through knowledge by serving as a repository of knowledge, passing down wisdom, strategies, and experience from one generation to the next with the view to empowering women to navigate their circumstances. Oral tradition connects women across generations, providing a sense of continuity, shared experience and collective memory.

Béyala deploys oral tradition to highlight the importance of female friendships and the necessity for female voices in historical writing. Our author's narrative could be seen as a demonstration of the typical problems women encounter in society. She does not only demonstrate the limitations faced by women operating under a patriarchal system but also portrays as well how women cooperate with and participate in a system which diminishes and denies the feminine potential. Béyala emphasizes the importance of female relationships constructed between sisters, mothers, friends, and female guardians. Her advocacy for recognizing the importance of female relationships to experience and understand their similar subjugations to domesticity and the circumstances in which they experience repressive, gendered culture is noteworthy. It thus provides a unified environment of women to exist within and express frustrations regarding their imposed imprisonment by domestic ideologies. This is depicted in the statement made by the narrator: "Les ancetres nous ont légué leurs secrètes , leurs histoires, leurs mythes….".[The ancestors left us their secrets, their stories, their myths; our translation] (p. 145).

Patriarchal gender politics assigned women within domestic ideologies, and Béyala's fiction served as a space for women to state their struggles in a repressive society. It also appealed to women as they could use the coded and political expressions of the mode to express female sexuality and the desire to escape domestic entrapment by uncovering family secrets through oral tradition: "Ma mère m'a raconté l'histoire de notre famille comme si elle découlais un tissue ancien," [My mother told me the story of our family as if she were unrolling an ancient fabric; our translation] (p.12). Ateba's mother shares stories about their family's past, excavating secretes and hidden truths. By using stories, the past society, cultures and events could be reconstructed. In this context of Beyala's work, oral tradition symbolizes the power of woman's voice, the importance of community and solidarity in the face of oppression.

ii. Mask and broken pot

Masks according to *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* are grotesque carved heads or faces used as an ornament. In the narrative under study, our author use of mask symbolizes concealment, revelation, social roles and expectation imposed on women highlighting the performative nature of female gender and identity. The declaration made by the narrator is an evidence:

"Le masque que mon pére m'a donné est un symbole de notre identité …" [The mask my father gave me is a symbol of our identity… ; our translation] (p. 56).

Béyala's deployment of mask in this narrative serves to explore themes of identity, gender, culture and power connecting women to their ancestral past and cultural practices.

while pot is a rounded metal or earthen container used chiefly for domestic purpose. Repeated strain or stress on a pot such as constant heating and cooling cycles can cause it to break. Broken pots as used in the fiction by Beyala signifies shattered dreams, disrupted traditions, fragmented identities and lost heritages:

"Les femmes de mon leurs village, leurs vies, leur souffrances, leurs resistances, tout cela était enfoui, comme des tessons" [The women of my village, their lives, their sufferings, their resistance, all of it was buried like shards of pottery; our translation]

Béyala's use of broken pots serves as a powerful metaphor for the complex experiences of women, reflecting themes of oppression, resistance, resilience and transformation. Both symbolism of objects as used by Beyala serve to criticize women's oppression by using architecture to symbolize the patriarchal, monarchal, and religious institutions that enforce women's confinement to domestic ideologies dictated by patriarchal rule.

iii. Historicism

Historicism is a doctrine in which history is seen as a standard of value or as a determinant of events. Historical accounts are used to verify archeological interpretations, with the goal to ensuring a more accurate understanding of the past. It is used here, it helps to understand the social, cultural and political factors that contributed to women's oppression.

With the use of this archeological element in this fiction, Béyala explores and challenges women's confinement and oppression within literal and domestic spaces through a narrative rooted in the historical. Though forced domesticity and confinement limit women's freedoms, however women still find opportunities for community and empowerment through their shared experiences of oppression through historicist approach.

It is important to note that while our feminist write used the archeological terms to expose women's confinement, her work led toward the recognition of women's literary and public works outside of prescribed notions of female societal functions. It simply suggests that women can better use the resources that are frequently available within the patriarchy. Béyala offers a narrative that advocates the recognition of the potential of women outside of imposed notions of femininity. Historians observed the importance of language in the evolution and civilization of societies and how a civilized society is distinguished by the sophistication of its language use, and by the good manners which it fostered, and such usage are themselves historically conditioned by the positivity that underlies them.

iv. Land and landscape

Land is defined by Merrian- Webster dictionary as a portion of the earth surface distinguishable by boundaries or ownership. Men do use land in a male dominated space to exert power over women. Women are sometimes economically dependent on the land and those who control it use it as a weapon of oppression on women. Landscape on the other hand is a portion of territory that can be viewed at one time from one place. Thus, landscape had

originally connotations to scenery or picturesque images. By tying a woman to a landscape too means tying her to her identity and livelihood which is capable of limiting her autonomy and freedom. The protagonist is confined and trapped within these too edifices when she bemoans the hardship land and landscape can subject a woman to in spite of her richness and fertility:

"La terre de nos ancetres est rich, fertile mais, elle est aussi dure." [The land of our ancestors is rich, fertile but it is hard; our translation] (p.200).

These two resources are metaphors for the patriarchy's strategies to oppress women and enact violence on them when they transgress socially normative behaviors based on gendered hierarchy. It reveals the metaphors that represent socio-political constructs designed to keep women submissive to patriarchal control. Béyala, our Francophone feminist writer considers the cultural and patriarchal influences that repress women, reflected by the land and landscape in her fiction. Lands and landscapes as used in the novel have subjective undertone to trap women, figuratively and metaphorically. The author uses the two resources to expose women's confinement within domesticity that encases them. The enclosure looks like a refuge, but it simultaneously serves as a prison that keeps the woman confined and isolated from the outside world. Our author illustrates the complexities of gender politics by creating a narrative of a heroine bound by gender and using architectural metaphors to represent entrapment.

v. Excavation

An excavation could be defined as a cavity formed by cutting, digging or scooping Excavation could represent uncovering hidden aspects of a person, one's history or one's identity much like an archeological digs reveal hidden artifacts. It symbolizes introspection, self-discovery and exploring one's own depth. It also helps in retrieving memories, experiences and stories. By using excavation as an archeological terminology, Beyala explores the themes of memory with the objective of highlighting the need to uncover and confront the past to build a more authentic present. Hear her: "Je creausais dans ma mémoire comme un archéologue qui deterre des ossements". [I dug into my memory like an archeologist uncovering bones; our translation]

The protagonist, Ateba, excavates her childhood memories, uncovering painful experiences and emotions. Literary excavation here represents a transformative journey of growth for the heroine and by extension the African woman, with the aim to create self-awareness, and much needed liberation that come from exploring and understanding of self and which could lead to freedom from societal gendered role expectations and constrains.

vi. Artifacts

Artifacts tools or ornaments represent human workmanship or modification as distinguished from a natural object. They are objects made by a human being, typically one of cultural or historical interest. Figuratively, they represent historical trauma, displacement and cultural

disconnections among others. It represents effects of oppression, buried dreams, aspirations and desires. To the feminist writers, they uncover hidden histories and experiences of the oppressed woman and denotes weight of patriarchal restrictions and violence. Ateba's own artifacts like her journal and photographs represent her personal history and identity:

"Mon journal, mes photos… c'était ma vie, ma mémoire" [My journal and photographs…. That was my life, my unpleasant memory; our translation]

The heroine's use of artifacts in this fiction symbolizes fragmented pieces of her battered life especially in the hands of her incestuous father. Beyala used these elements to symbolize the complexities and challenge faces by her protagonist and by extension the woman in patriarchal oppressive socio- economic context of Cameroon. They embody fragmented self, disjointed identities and fractured sense of the selfhood of Ateba.

vii. Ruins

Ruins mean the remains of something destroyed. It also connotes the remnants decay of something. In Béyala fiction, it embodied the crushing effectives of patriarchal oppression, silencing women's voices and erasing their stories. Ruins, in Ateba's life signifies her fragmented nature of memories, histories and experience highlighting the disruptions caused her by the oppressive male. Ateba's own life is marked by personal ruins, including the loss of her family and her sense of identity. Her confession attests to this:

"Mes ruines personnelles, mes pertes , mes regrets…. C'etait un paysage de devastation" [My personal ruins, my losses, my regrets… it was a landscape of devastation; our translation]

Beyala's, reference to ruins in her work, function as a metaphor exploring themes of oppression, of women in patriarchal contexts. Not only are the ruins and refuse capable of enticing the speculative spirit, they seem to be the privileged content for speculative interpretation. The speculative thinker has to become an archaeologist of waste, trawling through the oppressive instances that permeate Beyals's fiction. The theme of ruins seeks to restrict women's access to society, limiting them within domestic ideologies where they were assigned domestic duties and prescribed feminine behaviors with the aims of subjecting them to the cyclic powers of patriarchal oppression in other to keep them inferior to men in society. The novel uses ruins as a metaphor for the destruction of women's lives and bodies particularly in the context of violence and abuse.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the symbolism of archeological imagery in relation to the experiences, perspectives and representations of women in Beyala's *Tu t'apelleras Tanga*. The novel chronicled the themes of sexual abuse, oppression and subjugation, violence and the indispensable roles of women in male dominated African society. Beyala's novels denounced social concerns and defects that characterize her African native country because of the molestations of and discrimination lavished on women. Women, generally are regarded as

second class citizen, suffering humiliation and oppression as depicted by Ateba the protagonist.

Beyala opined that women should not only be subjected to maternity and domesticity alone but also be seen as a national asset. This is because no nation can achieve Millennium Developments Goal without the contribution of womenfolk. Beyala exemplified the oppression and subjugation suffered by women in a male-dominated African society using ethnoacheological theory to examine gendered roles and identities with the aim of bridging the arbitrary divide between archaeology and literature deploying material evidence such as oral tradition, ruins, land and landscape, mask and broken pots, ruins, excavation and artifacts among others.

The paper adopted content analysis as its methodology to facilitate the exploration of the themes reeled off in the text interrogated. Beyala criticized the way women are oppressed and repressed in the African society. She lays emphasis on people's reactions to sexual issues particularly as they affect women in their relationships with men. She criticizes and downplays many aspects of patriarchal system especially the traditional notions of African family practices which include marriage and motherhood.

In this narrative, the male characters that are usually regarded as symbols of patriarchy are held responsible for the sad conditions of women. She employed archeological elements in her work to uncover the hidden histories and stories of women particularly in the context of colonialism and patriarchy. By integrating archeological terminologies, the writer reclaimed and reasserted the cultural heritage and traditions of African women thereby challenging dominant narratives.

The ethnoarcheology theory helped our author to explore themes of identity, belonging and dislocation, reflecting the experience of the African women caught between cultures. She also deployed these archeological lexicons to subvert dominant narratives and challenge the eradication of women's stories in other to reclaim their voices and perspectives. The archeological presence in the fiction creates a sense of timelessness, connection of the past and present and highlights the ongoing struggles and resilience of the African women in the patriarchal world.

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