

Woman as Project of Self Perspectives of Feminine Subjectivization, Facing Identity and Social Challenges in Cameroon

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Summary: Our research, entitled “*Women as a Project of Self: Perspectives on Feminine Subjectivization in the Face of Identity and Social Challenges in Cameroon*,” places us at the heart of the challenges facing women, a topic to which UN Women is particularly dedicated through its major areas of intervention (gender equality, women's empowerment, combating violence against women, and improving women's political and economic participation). Significant progress has been made in women's rights worldwide with regard to reducing traditional structural inequalities. But many challenges remain, particularly regarding the construction of feminine identity, specifically in Cameroon, where the interconnected dynamics of tradition, modernity, and openness to a new world are at play... Speaking of woman as a “project of self” means that woman is in a process of becoming in her very being, and reminds us that it is a process of self-construction within a complex and rapidly changing social context, where the following interpenetrate and clash: **a)** the free project of self of the woman, stemming from her desire to autonomously structure her own identity, and **b)** the social and cultural constraints that traditionally assign a woman her identity and status... Here, we observe tensions between sociocultural determinants, the subjective autonomy of the woman as a “project of self,” and the models of being imposed by a dynamic modern society, with its ideological, political, and economic constraints. How can we understand this construction of self by Cameroonian women in the different forms of subjectivization without an analysis of the African society's interweaving of anthropological, psycho-sociological and ideological challenges facing the challenge of modifying its unequal structure which generates violence, especially against gender?

The qualitative clinical approach of our research will therefore highlight how the Cameroonian woman's self-construction project places her at the heart of a very dynamic tension between **identity assignment** (sociocultural inscription which assigns a place and an identity) and **quest for autonomy** (dynamics of differentiation, subjective affirmation and social validation), through her relationships first with herself, then with others, with the global society, and considering the impact of ideological-religious and socio-political representations as regards implementation of the project to build her personal self.

Key Concepts: women's status, project of self, identity, autonomy, narcissism, psychic conflict, subjectivization, clinical.

I. Introduction

Women's condition constitutes a global human challenge, and Simone de Beauvoir (1976: *The Second Sex*) clearly recalls this condition in the following lines: “*Women today are dethroning the myth of femininity: they are beginning to assert their independence concretely; but it is not without difficulty that they succeed in fully living their condition as human beings*” (p 9). For Simone de Beauvoir, the traditional destiny of women “*still rests on solid economic and social foundations*” (*ibid.*, p. 9), and she specifies here the basis of this destiny: male prestige... She also highlights in two short texts, one from Kierkegaard: “*What a misfortune to be a woman!, and yet the worst misfortune when one is a woman is, in the end, not to understand that it is one,*” and the second from Jean-Paul Sartre: “*Half victims, half accomplices, like everyone else,*” the responsibility of the whole society, and the challenge that women must then take up to become themselves, as actors of their own project of being. UN Women (United Nations Agency) is also working to meet the global challenge of the condition of women, namely to become an autonomous subjectivity and thus give substance to gender equality through implementation of some fundamental axes: - **a)** - fight against violence against women, - **b)** - women economic empowerment, - **c)** - emergence of feminine leadership and political participation of women in the management and transformation of society through education.

In a contemporary context where all societies are undergoing profound transformations on every level, the condition of women continues to constitute a fundamental challenge; and the fact that we speak of women as “project of self” places our research at the very heart of UN Women's concerns. Indeed, the concerns of UN Women, shared by governments worldwide, consist of transforming the various limiting socio-cultural representations inherited from traditions, and it is within the framework of these transformations that women can and must now be recognized as subjects of their own existence, autonomous subjects in the face of socio-cultural

constraints, and no longer merely as objects of social functions assigned to them by traditions. This gives substance to Simone de Beauvoir's well-known statement (1949: *The Second Sex*): "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." No biological, psychological, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human feminine assumes within society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediate product between the male and the castrated male that we call feminine" (op cit (page 13) . Woman is therefore the product of education, culture, norms, and social relations; she is the result of a symbolic system characterized by the domination of autonomous becoming, and which thus imposes a destiny. What is highlighted here is the important challenge of subjectivization, which refers to the necessity for woman to become a subject, based on an autonomous self-choice. Subjectivization then unfolds this personal dimension of the choice of what woman wants to become and what she actually becomes as a capacity for freedom, creation, and self-transformation, outside of the representation made of her as "Other" in relation to man, that is to say, the other in relation to the masculine posited as the centre of reference, as a being who posits or affirms himself as a being for himself, and this representation therefore constitutes an identity alienation.

Subjectivization is a complex process, simultaneously psychic, identity-related, and cultural; a woman's identity is a construction, a dynamic self-construction, in accordance with her own project of self. But this subjectivization, which originates in the psyche and individual freedom, unfolds as a project; it cannot ignore the social assignment of women, the attribution to them of a status whose limitations must be overcome by questioning its ideological, cultural, and historical foundations. Indeed, it is a matter of making the socio-political environment capable of enabling women to move from their current status as objects, in accordance with the prevailing hierarchy of the sexes, to that of autonomous subjects, beyond their reduction to a status conceived and assigned to them, beyond the roles defined for them and in which society confines them. Because woman is not a fixed being, being a woman thus constitutes a trajectory. The work of subjectivization for women, their becoming subjects process, and the ongoing transformation of their self constitute a continuous process, a dynamic and perpetually unfinished undertaking. This work is embedded in a constant tension between social and legal advancements achieved at the national and international levels, and the very persistence of traditional ideological and cultural structures and representations.

Cameroon, as a setting, perfectly illustrates this particularly intense psychological and social tension within which women will evolve and undertake the implementation of their "project of self." It is indeed a space of extreme sociological diversity where strong traditional cultural norms, which serve as a social framework, coexist in a more or less conflictual manner with the powerful general aspirations of individuals for autonomy. In this context, considering women as "project of selves" enables us to articulate three essential levels: **a) the social level**, that is, the condition and status reserved for women; **b) the subjective level**, that is, the way in which women construct their personal identity; and **c) the clinical level**, that is, the obstacles and contradictions that generate psychological suffering that women will confront in the implementation of their project of self.

II. Woman's Condition: Figures and Dynamics

2.1 Psycho-anthropology of the dynamics of women's condition.

Since the last century, women's status has constituted a major global challenge, focused on gender equality and women's empowerment. Two institutional declarations from UN Women support this. The first, "*Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world*," then forms the basis of the second, which is intended to give it substance: "*Women's empowerment is a major driver of human development*." These declarations essentially reiterate the objectives of the women's libber movement, which strongly advocates for women's rights and, above all, engages in fundamental reflection on women's identity, economic freedom, and political freedom. Most societies traditionally assign women a fixed role based on justifications grounded in biology, religious texts, or history. At the heart of women's demands for identity and autonomy lies the essential question of shaping a woman's destiny: should this shaping be done exclusively according to societal expectations? Or should it be done within the framework of a personal project which, once implemented, a woman becomes the subject of her own existence and not merely an object?

It is precisely at this level that women face these unavoidable questions: **a)** -What is a woman, and what is she aware of being, outside the roles assigned to her by society (as wife, mother, and bread provider)? - **b)** How can she be herself and exist in a different way, how can she be another person, which proceeds from a free personal choice (personal identity) and not from the mere completion of collective expectations?

Many countries within the international community have obviously made some progress (improved access to education, increased participation in economic and political life, significant legal advances in terms of laws and respect for rights, etc.). Despite this progress, we must note persistent economic inequalities; insufficient political representation of women in representative or governmental bodies; gender-based violence; and in general, the challenges of dependence and autonomy. The quest for identity remains dominant for women; yet a

persistent question remains: how can one constitute oneself as an individual, through a process of self-construction, when the social framework still contains significant constraints, foremost among them those related to identity, individual aspirations, community traditions with their ideological or religious justifications, and the current demands for performance and power in this highly competitive modern society? Faced with identity conflicts and the psychological situations of women, where multifaceted suffering alternates with even possibly a very paradoxical psychological guilt experienced by the woman in the face of her own successes, the dynamics of the search for freedom and autonomy continues to unfold...

2.2 Cameroonian Specificities

In Cameroon, this dynamics of seeking freedom and autonomy is for the present obviously accelerated, it unfolds in a plurality of aspects: the condition of women truly remains generally marked by the existence of a constraint which refers first and foremost to traditional norms and values, and then to the values and norms of current modern society. Women's condition is indeed shaped by: **a)** a symbolic hierarchy between men and women, maintained despite some progress, a hierarchy illustrated by domestic and sexual violence, or by economic exclusion; **- b)** - expectations for conformity (sociocultural pressures linked to traditionally assigned roles for women), for example, **marriage** (including early or forced marriages), given the central role of marriage, **motherhood** (considering the absolute value placed on motherhood), **submission to patriarchal organization** of society, and obedience to community norms; **- c)** discrimination between girls and boys as regards education; **- d)** -economic and professional inequalities; and **-e)** - discrimination against rural women, young girls, widows, and in general women involved in precarious situations. To these traditional expectations stemming from the symbolic hierarchy maintained between men and women are now added or intertwined, modern society's demands for autonomy, intellectual training within the framework of education, performance and professional success, ...and all this can therefore ensure the self-affirmation of women by achieving their project of being.

Women's status in Cameroon: An overview

Discrimination	Typologies	Explanations
Psychological and physical violence in various sectors	Unequal access for boys and girls to education and vocational training. Humiliation, social control, threats, identity devaluation, emotional manipulation. Limitations on freedom of choice and autonomy. Inculcation of fear of social judgment and masking of depression in the face of challenges...	Violence as a legacy of a patriarchal tradition that interferes in the overall management of roles, assigns essentially secondary roles to women, and imposes silence on women through culture and traditions facing challenges, at the risk of self-stigmatization and narcissistic suffering.
Women's access to economy and profession	Educational, socio-cultural, and skills barriers; girls dropping out of school; and excessive domestic responsibilities. Limited skills development. Lack of resources, low income, imposed and maintained financial dependence, unequal access to credit and financing, exclusion from inheritance and property ownership, particularly land ownership. Low levels of women entrepreneurship.	The continued marginal (though diminishing) position of women within a family, informal, local economy, rendered invisible and undervalued, and poorly recognized at the institutional level; economic dependence on men. Wage inequality, a professional glass ceiling, various forms of harassment, and underrepresentation in leadership positions...
Marital life	Marriage, a socio-culturally valued institution that impacts a woman's psychological development and identity, is also a space of psychosocial pressure. There is a risk of self-effacement and loss of identity. Marriage can be a source of psychological overload. Domestic violence, early/forced marriages, emotional exhaustion, frustrations are usual. The specific situation of polygamous households is also a factor. Marital difficulties can lead to depression, anxiety, psychosomatic disorders, existential distress....	A necessary transformation of social representations of femininity is needed to allow women social recognition, self-esteem, identity construction, and psychological autonomy. This involves interference from extended family influences and intrusions into marital conflicts and family economic management. It also generates emotional suffering and narcissistic insecurity in polygamous relationships, and marital suffering is often masked.
	Sexual violence with psychological, iden-	Traditional male domination, taboos sur-

Sex life	tity-related, and physical consequences: rape, sexual and moral harassment in general, sexual assault, sexual exploitation and blackmail, early and forced marriages, violence in schools or workplaces, exploitation of young girls in vulnerable situations, social silence	rounding sexuality, victim -blaming and a culture of family silence, survival prostitution, poverty and economic dependence, inadequate legal protection for victims, and lasting psychological disorganization (Freud) following sexual trauma.
Overall role management, access to politics	Constant tension between tradition and modernity, limited access to institutional and decision-making political positions despite strong participation in social and economic life, underrepresentation or exclusion from strategic positions within political parties and in economic or security decision-making spheres, limited financial resources and networks of influence... Low participation as regards feminine leadership,	Phallocracy, male and patriarchal authority, sex-based discrimination and the devaluation of women's role in politics, but progress is underway thanks to the State , organizations such as UN Women, the African Union, and the UN: access to voting, to elected or administrative and governmental positions, within the judicial system, higher education, and scientific research.
Symbolic violence	Subtle, even invisible, forms of domination lie at the heart of social norms, language, beliefs, and everyday interactions, ensuring the internalization and social and cultural normalization of segregation between men and women and the general devaluation of the feminine. These are generally internalized, trivialized, and stereotyped forms of psychological violence.	Traditional customary practices persist despite the existence of a legal framework for combating them. Violence unfolds within the family, in education, in marriage... leading to the internalization and acceptance of inequalities, minimizing suffering, and fostering a sense of guilt among women who demand their rights.

This brief overview of women's status in Cameroon presented in this table enables us to see the current situation and the challenges they face in most of its aspects. This table also reveals numerous ongoing changes at various levels: - **the State** , - **national bodies, and specific organizations, then non-governmental ones** : particular interest is put on women with regard for example to economic empowerment which constitutes a condition for women's balance, the emergence of feminine figures at the level of public administration and public political positions, (implementation of quotas for the sake of social justice in municipal or regional councils and for parliamentary assemblies: The Senate, The National Assembly)... We also perceive in this picture a dynamics of struggle against discrimination inherited from traditions and culture, against multiple forms of violence, discrimination and exclusion made to woman's gender, all with a view to the restructuring social roles.

The transformation of gender relations is therefore underway: it constitutes a global challenge (psychological, cultural, political, legal, etc.) for families, communities, the State, and its institutions. As we can see it, the modern Cameroonian woman presents a true **hybrid figure** between tradition and modernity: as a project of self, the Cameroonian woman appears as **-a)** "a subject fashioning her own identity," **-b)** a spot of conflict between the traditional heritage that confines her and the aspiration for openness. At the same time, woman fashioning her identity sometimes presents herself simultaneously as a site of silent suffering endured despite herself, but also as a space of creativity as regards redefining gender roles, hybridization of identities, and invention of new forms of feminine existence.

III. The Theoretical Frame of Our Research

3.1 Clinical thematic readings

In "**Woman as a 'project of self'**", our objective as using the **model of three tensions** (inscription, emancipation and recognition), is to identify the dynamics of women's project of self construction. These tensions and dynamics reveal the ongoing transformations of Cameroonian society, the social environment for women, fraught as well with multiple constraints (social, cultural, emotional, economic, symbolic) as with fundamental contradictions which give impulse to the conflict between tradition and modernity in the milieu of globalization, and women's desire for autonomy. Women must therefore become true subjects, fashioning their own existence and identity through personal choice, free meaning given to their lives, and projection into the future (autonomy and freedom, social recognition and subjective affirmation), beyond the roles inherited from tradition and imposed upon them by society.

Tensions and dynamics of the project of self

	Consistencies	Dynamics	Contradictions
Tradition/modernity	Traditional cultural expectations and community values versus modern individual aspirations and the desire for autonomy	A simultaneous desire for professional success. Maintaining discreet lifestyle. Complete family privilege. Avoid competing with men.	Production of identity conflicts. In women, the emergence of various feelings: anxiety, anguish, guilt, self-rejection, fragmentation.
Autonomy and belonging	Essentially relational and community-based identity; difficulty reconciling personal affirmation, individual desire, family loyalty and solidarity with the community.	Exclusion for women from any pure individualism and constant negotiation with the social group. Avoid limiting ambitions, doubting their legitimacy, and self-censorship.	Devaluation of women's voices; traditional assignment of women to fixed, marginal, minor roles; internalization of inferiority; guilt-tripping of autonomy.
Professional life and family life	Undertaking as a priority vocational training, so to achieve self-employment, and at the same time public and social responsibilities and positions.	Transformation is underway in the social position of women based on these various accesses, despite the current slowness of the process of this access.	Weight of family responsibilities, motherhood, and the emotional management of families, weakening psychological balance and lessening sense of self achievement.
Personal desire and social norms	Possible conflict of emotional, professional aspirations, religious, familial /cultural expectations	Support for personal desire can emerge from within and from maintaining self-esteem and self-worth.	Potential difficulties in choosing a spouse, choosing single life, motherhood, career, and social mobility

The table we read above highlights the fact that as regards women, self- as "their own project" is a process widespread with numerous and various tensions, contradictions, and conflicts, which include:

- At the first step, personal autonomy to achieve facing conformity to highly social expectations,
- Individual success to implement in accordance with the woman's project of self and marital acceptability in traditionally accepted forms,
- Individuality or personal identity and necessity to be part of the entire community, to belonging to it.

Speaking of woman as "a project of self»therefore invites us to observe the relationship to her own body, to image of her own self, and her narcissism as regards social scrutiny and recognition. The identity conflicts women experience, the forms of inhibition and self-censorship they experience, and the over-adaptation strategies they may in these conditions adopt, globally considered stem from the intrapsychic tensions highlighted earlier within the framework of the contradictory interplay between the desire for autonomy, familial and cultural loyalty, and the internalization of social and cultural norms. These tensions can thus produce specific clinical manifestations such as masked depression, somatization, and behaviours which consist of social withdrawal or overinvestment, etc.

3.2 Authors examined and literature review

The woman person thus goes on board in a path of self-achievement, this process which is fraught with tensions and conflicts where her personal identity is challenged by the fact that she belongs to the community with its norms and values. Numerous authors have studied this process, highlighting the identity conflicts it generates, and the strategies employed to resolve the observed tensions.

3.2.1 Some classical authors

A. Sigmund Freud

In *Freud and the Human Soul: From Translation to Betrayal* (1984, Editions Robert Laffont, Paris), Bruno Bettelheim evokes "a perpetual battle that Freud conducted to enable us to understand who we are, and to prevent us from being, throughout our lives, victim of unknown forces that can bring about both our own misfortune and that of others" (op. cit, p. 75). But Freud is criticized, as we will see with Simone de Beauvoir, for his phallocentric conception, namely, his interpretation of femininity as lack, incompleteness, unlikeness, and for relationship, based on the normative masculine model. This phallocentrism, present in *Moses and Monotheism* (1938), "confers upon the penis an exclusive power of representation" (André Green (1983, 2007: *Narcissism of Life, Narcissism of Death*, Editions de Minuit, p. 304), is seen to be the continuance of a phallographic vision which is itself anchored in patriarchal sociocultural representations that, in a way, naturalize Woman's

condition. However, our research on woman as a psychic and social construct (beyond its mere connection to nature) can benefit from revisiting Freud's contribution to examination of woman's identity fashioning process within the frame of achieving her own self project. We must therefore begin with the concepts and problematics of narcissism, the dialectic of desire and prohibition - that is, the psychic conflict, the Oedipus complex (objectal investment in both boys and girls), and of sexuality, identification and subjective autonomy.

The Freudian approach to the process of identity construction - that is, the constitution of the constant consciousness of the "self" resulting from the unification of drives, social prohibitions, relationships with parents, intrapsychic conflicts, sublimatory mechanisms, repression, and identifications, which begin in childhood - is essentially phallogocentric. André Green (1983, 2007: *Narcissism of Life, Narcissism of Death*) emphasizes this point: "*Freud's conception is phallogocentric, (...) since, according to him, the essence of all libido is masculine, in both sexes. This is why castration is of interest - albeit in different ways - to both sexes*" (op. cit., p. 291). Woman's identity construction thus begins with awareness of a lack: the little girl's discovery of the difference between sexes. This triggers in her the castration complex or anxiety (*Mourning narcissism*, André Green, op. cit., p. 298), resulting on the one hand in emergence of a preferential attachment to the father and, on the other hand, in the desire for a child. The hierarchy of the sexes thus finds its origin at this level; and it is reinforced by cultural idealizations of masculine status. As regards women, this will produce a particular impact on the construction of the ideal ego and on the sense of self-esteem, with the emergence of identity-related suffering that reveals the concern for integrity of a narcissism which constantly confronts with the reality of womanhood and with her desire to be a unique, autonomous being, the product of her own project of self. This substantiates the following André Green's lines (op. cit., p. 292): "*The individual indeed lives a double existence: as he is his own end, and as a link in a chain to which he is subjected against his will or at least without the intervention of the latter.*"

But can we truly without nuance criticize Freud as he acknowledges that feminine sexual identity is a process, a construction arising from lack and incompleteness, even if this incompleteness, this lack, is only so in relation to the representation of masculinity as a model of completeness? This Freudian approach was criticized as mentioned by Simone de Beauvoir for its emphasis on biology and its reduction of femininity to the body, while somewhat minimizing the impact of culture and society; this conception, she argued, does not sufficiently acknowledge a woman's desire to define herself as herself and not merely as "*the other, the antagonist of masculinity.*" Yet, the Freudian approach does take into account both the intrapsychic dynamics of women (overcoming incompleteness, shifting attachments, etc.) and, specifically, the very complexity of human reality, which is constructed from a social environment in relation to the complex relationships that women are led to forge within it. Can feminine subjectivity exist and then develop by itself and for itself, without previous examination of its psychological and social grounding which is made up of values, of constraints and limits (social structures, education, assignment of roles and cultural models...) which the woman's "project of self", stemming from her aspirations and creativity, must precisely transcend?

The Freudian approach, grounded in both the psychic and the social, enables an appropriate clinical psychological examination of the condition of woman as a "project of self," of her identity and her own development, so that she is not reduced to being merely the object of male desire, instead of being an autonomous subject of her own existence, conceived according to a model that is uniquely hers. This means that she must resolve the identity conflicts and all the psychic suffering (narcissistic conflicts, fragmentation of self, depression) to which she is exposed due to the contradictory demands of society and culture, lest she find herself trapped in an overvalued false self that disregards the reality of her social integration, which must precisely be taken into account in order to achieve her full development.

B. Simone de Beauvoir

The impact of Simone de Beauvoir's studies on gender and on the transformation of the condition of women is well known. By stating in *The Second Sex* (1949): "*One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,*" Simone de Beauvoir establishes that woman, far from being a natural biological inevitability is a social construct: it is the product of education, culture, norms, and social relations. For Simone de Beauvoir (1949, op. cit., pp. 30-31), "*One of the curses that weighs upon women (...) is that, in their childhood, they are abandoned to the hands of women. The boy, too, is first raised by his mother; but she respects his virility and he quickly escapes her control; whereas she intends to integrate the girl into the feminine world.*" This femininity, this feminine world into which the mother integrates her daughter, thereby reproducing the traditional vision of femininity, is indeed a complex environment; and Simone de Beauvoir demonstrates this in the following lines: "*The daughter is for her mother both her double and someone else; at the same time, the mother cherishes her imperiously and is hostile to her; She imposes her own destiny on the child: it is a way of proudly asserting her femininity, and also a way of taking revenge on it*" (ibid., p. 31). Femininity is therefore not merely biological; it is the result of a symbolic system, and the process of a woman's subjectivization is indeed the initiation of a self-

choice that should avoid, as much as possible, any alienation of identity. This choice constitutes a challenge: to become freely oneself, to create and transform oneself not merely as the "Other" of masculinity whose image is imposed by the environment and culture as a reference point, but in accordance with one's own project.

For Simone de Beauvoir, woman, shaped by education, culture, norms, and social relations, is indeed the product of a symbolic system of organization and domination within which society confines her to imposed roles and functions, roles and functions centred on men, and which undeniably limit her existential freedom. Woman is thus posited as essentially "Other," as "other" to a man posited as the universal subject and central reference point; she is therefore assigned a fundamental status of dependence in relation to him. This has, among other consequences:

- a) **A difficult subjectivization**, that is to say a difficult becoming oneself, becoming a subject; personal desires arising from the project of self are replaced by social expectations, that the social image and imposed social models (the woman as object of the social gaze of the dominant masculine, according to Jacques Lacan) take precedence over her intimate experience; of the identity void that Winnicott speaks of, we will then speak of identity alienation;
- b) **An identity alienation**, which consists of the suppression of the subject's deep identity and the introduction of models imposed by culture and society, within the framework of the triadic relationship: **self - other - group**, inspired by Edmond Marc (2005, *Psychology of Identity. Self and the Group*. DUNOD, Paris); this constitutes the best illustration of the conflict between, on the one hand, what the individual is and what they are forced to be, and on the other hand, what they aspire to be according to their own project. Society will therefore impose upon them a life according to the desire of the Other, a search for completeness in conforming to the Other, in which the false self is constructed as an adaptive personality in order to ensure its acceptance by the Other, who is simultaneously adored and feared, and who grants it its value. Simone de Beauvoir will say here: *"Thus women, when a child is entrusted to them, attach themselves with zeal where arrogance is mixed with resentment, to transforming her into a woman like themselves. And even a generous mother, who sincerely seeks the good of her child, will usually think that it is more prudent to make her a 'real woman' since that is how society will most easily welcome her"* (ibidem, p. 31);
- c) **Reduction of women to simple social functions** (wife, mother; object of desire, guardian of socio-cultural traditions and social history), in compliance with dominant social hierarchy of sexes;
- d) **The conflict-generating experience of this hierarchy of the sexes by women as the source of their project of self**, since women are aware of participating in human identity, in the specificity of humankind; they are aware of being, like men, a freedom, a transcendence, endowed with the capacity for choice, action, and project of self. Referring here to the conflict-generating experience of this hierarchy of the sexes, Simone de Beauvoir said: *"It is a strange experience for an individual who experiences themselves as a subject, autonomy, transcendence, as an absolute, to discover in themselves, as a given essence, inferiority. It is a strange experience for someone who posits themselves as the One to be revealed to themselves as otherness. This is what happens to the little girl when, learning about the world, she grasps herself in it as a woman."* (Ibid., p. 52);
- e) **The project of self as a break from this masculine-dominated world**. For Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex* (op. cit.), woman must be the result of her free subjectivization through the construction of her own identity. Thus, to achieve this goal, she should be able to create and express herself, to liberate the depths of her being; she should become a fully free subject through the struggle for social and symbolic recognition, thereby ceasing to be merely an object of control at the disposal of the male sex, and thus transcending the alienated identity that forces her to live "in accordance with the Other person and for the Other person."

The woman's project of self, which is part of current evolutions, then constitutes an urgent break with conformity to traditional social expectations and the marginal status of subordination to men as we have seen with the injunctions to motherhood and the resultant pressure to marry given the social value of the status of married woman... It then presents itself as a real program: to be a self and proud of herself and not to be the Other or somebody else's double with unequal and marginal status, to acquire social visibility, to have access to speech, to invest in an equal way in political action and in professional activity, to gain access to economic autonomy which is the condition for the implementation of any project of self.

C. Donald Winnicott

Winnicott's psychoanalytic anthropology (1988, *Human Nature*, posthumously published Free Association Books) approaches the problem of women's project of self differently from Simone de Beauvoir. It illuminates this issue based on the fundamental assertion that the human subject, as a being in the process of becoming, is created or fashioned in a progressive process within an affective and social environment whose impact is

decisive. The subject evolves within the frame of a threefold quest: a quest for personal recognition (**the true self**), a quest for autonomy (being oneself without excessively conforming to social expectations), and a quest for authenticity. As he distinguishes the **false self** from the **true self**, Winnicott sheds valuable light on the examination of the identity alienation to which the process of building a person's identity is exposed. And the construction of women's identity is not exempt from this alienation created by multiple pressures, foremost among them adaptation and conformity to social demands. It is in the light of these pressures that we can apprehend the distinction Donald Winnicott establishes between **the true self** and **the false self**.

The false self, which can also serve to protect the true self (Winnicott: 1965, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating environment*, The Hogarth Press, indeed, refers to the construction of personality in such a way that the individual is accepted by the other one and by others, that is, by the society that must be satisfied. Woman, as playing the expected role, then adapts as desired to the cultural norms imposed upon her, these norms which shape her through the repression of personal desires and the pressure to conform (marriage, motherhood, etc.), in order to meet social expectations, with the real risk for her of no longer "recognizing herself in who she is." We thus perceive that Winnicott illuminates the gap between **adaptation** and **authenticity**; adaptation of this woman who "does not inhabit her own desire" (since she is anchored to the false self), and her authenticity, which tallies with the spontaneity and subjective creativity (accessing the true self) that enables the woman to "live her life". Winnicott also reveals that this identity alienation produces both an identity void (with a feeling of unreality) and an eccentricity or an extroversion of identity (which creates a feeling of inauthenticity, a feeling of not living in an authentic way): the context strongly encourages adaptation, even over-adaptation, to social conformity, in order to correspond with the expected image (for women, this is the image of the "good daughter," the "good mother," or the "good wife"). In the personal identity construction process, the emergence of a false self and a true self then confirms that this construction, which results from personal creativity and capacity for choice, is the foundation of the self, of the subject's personal investment. Winnicott calls it "inhabiting one's life," a life to which the subject provides meaning, her own meaning, a woman's life "invented" in which she thinks of herself as a subject, in accordance with the "project of self" (the quest for personal identity and continuity of being). This is the sign of emotional maturity, which implies the capacity to be alone (1958, *The Capacity to be Alone*, *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, vol 29, n^{os} 5-6,), to build a personal inner space, without total dependence on other persons appreciation, of that of society, and why not to endure psychic solitude.

Our analysis of the identity conflicts of women confronted with the obligation to conform to social, familial, and cultural demands, and thus to construct a false self that extinguishes or marginalizes their project of self, the project of an independent existence that creates the authentic feeling of being, is thereby lightened in a timely manner. Identity creativity, which constitutes a condition for subjectivization leading to an authentic existence (choice of one's future, transformation of social constraints, and creation of a facilitating and non-oppressive environment that ensures symbolic recognition, emotional and economic security...), thus appears as constituting the foundation and objective of women's current struggle to transform traditional sociocultural legacies through the various aspects of existence, namely -a) - profession, - b) sexuality and motherhood, - c) - life with the status of a single or a married woman, - d) -spirituality, - e) - political engagement... Winnicott approaches this aspect of creativity (creation of the true self) as much in *Playing and reality as in Home is Where We Start From*, and *The Child, the Family and the Outside*. This creativity also enables to reduce or even eliminate the influence of traditional stereotypes and representations of feminine roles, while opening up perspectives of emancipation in a new space that could be called a "transitional space" and in which everything must be thought of differently, in a new way...

D. Jacques LACAA

As we continue to move in the footsteps of Simone de Beauvoir, who strongly affirms that women are capable of freedom, creation, and self-transformation. Our position can appear as similar to Lacan's general position: identity of the human subject - who is a subject of desire, the desire of the other person, and then shows a lack of being (Lacan, 1966, *Écrits*. Le Seuil) - cannot be a fixed, rigid identity confined to a universal definition. In this regard, Lacan's formula, "Woman does not exist", is often reminded, referring to the fact that femininity eludes all generalizations. A woman's identity is fashioned as regards the other woman; this identity is a singular project, a progressive construction process. Lacan reiterates this idea in these lines (1975, *The Seminar*, Book XX: *Encore*, Le Seuil): "There is no 'Woman,' a definite article to designate the universal". Woman is therefore the result of a subjective construction that is always uncompleted; she is the result of an experience that is both singular and plural, within the frame of a permanent tension between the subject's personal desire and symbolic social expectations. Woman, whose identity isn't therefore naturally given, is thus constructed in connection with the other, in the symbolic recognition upon which human desire depends, and this desire is indeed "the desire of the other" person. And when Lacan (in *Écrits*) affirms that "The ego is constituted as another," or

once more that “*The subject discovers his identity through the Other and the effects of language*,” there is an emphasis on this fundamental reality: human identity is built in image and otherness. Lacan then notes at this level (in: 1981, *The Seminar, Book III. Psychoses*, Le Seuil): “A woman awaits to be named woman” by society, by the Other, which exposes the woman, as Freud was opportunely able to point out, to find herself locked within the reproduction of identity alienation and on these conditions totally imprisoned by the social look, as well as by parental expectations and cultural and symbolic norms. This therefore produces a real dependence, even a certain extinction of her own desire, which consists satisfying others in order to be recognized, at the cost of sacrificing her subjectivity: this is indeed the anchoring of her behaviour to the desire of the other. This constitutes a risk, not negligible risk of course, but the essential point is that in the building process of the self as a project, the woman, ceasing to conceive herself on the basis of the look of the other, with the resulting narcissistic fragility which is a true woman’s obsession with validation and emotional dependence since she is imprisoned by the desire of the Other), can once back appropriate her personal desire by breaking free from the identifications imposed by society and culture, and truly become a subject again. (Lacan, 1975, *Seminar XX. Encore*. Le Seuil).

In this regard, Lacan speaks of the “*not-all*” woman, that is, the woman who is not entirely confined within the dominant representations or symbolic systems of femininity, or absolutely reduced to the social roles assigned to her, in particular in connection with what he calls “*the phallic function*”. These representations and systems relate to social norms, values, and categories that are nothing else than logics of control and management of women. To acknowledge their presence and the pressure they exert on women is indeed the fundamental condition to adjust to them, to transcend them, and thus to restore for women their capacity to be creative subjects, therefore enabling them to invent and guide the trajectory of their own existence, and thereby expressing or rather affirming their irreducible subjective singularity. Lacan thus invites us to a psychic work of subjectivization that enables women to build their own existence in a unique way, beyond any breaking up of identity and any guilt linked to feminine autonomy.

E. Françoise DOLTO

We find in Françoise Dolto’s work practically the same themes as those presented above. Starting from the fundamental assertion that the child, girl or boy, must be considered as subject in their own right, as a desire seeking to unfold in existence, Françoise Dolto doesn’t insist, as Freud did, on the child as a “being of lack”, a being of incompleteness, nor on the specific constraints imposed upon them by symbolic structures and social roles. Rather she emphasizes the necessity of taking charge of the individual and understanding them through language, which enables them to develop at the psychological level and express themselves, insofar as unexpressed conflicts weaken their sense of self. The individual must indeed be taken into account and understood on the basis of the perspective of their desire, their body image, their subjective development, - that is, their emotional history and the process of self-recognition: “*The body image is the living synthesis of our emotional experiences*,” notes Françoise Dolto (1984, *The Unconscious Body Image*. Le Seuil). Françoise Dolto (1997, *The Feeling of Self: At the Sources of the Body Image*, Paris, Gallimard) anchors this approach to the individual and the understanding of this individual in the very feeling of self founded on the unconscious body image, whose “*subjective and subjectivizing*” dimension is crucial, thus enlightening “*what subjectivity has as loan from the body*,” from which “*the full human subject’s identity in relation to others is constructed*”. In the interesting Preface he wrote to Françoise Dolto’s work (op cit, p. V), Gérard Guillebaud explains the meaning of the body image and affirms that: “*By this term, Françoise Dolto means, with regard to the subjective and subjectivizing dimension, the body image. Faced with characterized lack of the object, it is a matter of perceiving in which ways the subject reacts in order to sustain himself despite everything in his being, to recover the permanence of his being in the world. The body image therefore takes part in the building of the subject; it determines the very possibility of a feeling of self, but of self in a body, of bodily manifestations*” (Idem, p. V).

Françoise Dolto’s position will then be articulated in a linear way:

- a) **The sense of self based on the body image**, which reflects both what the subject represents to themselves as they are on a psychic level and the linguistic and relational product (relationships with guardian figures) that they actually are. “*The body image is (...) always a complex, organized and living image, with a dynamics of break and a dynamics of activity. All the structuring relational affective objects of this body are introjected and primarily imaginary in the dynamics of break; they are apprehended as being primarily factual and bodily within the dynamics of activity*” (Ibid, p. 276).
- b) **Social expectations**: (social injunctions, cultural prohibitions of tradition, symbolic violence, with the body as a spot of social control...):
- c) **The process for the woman to become the subject of her own desire**, in a progressive and evolving construction process. According to Françoise Dolto: “*To say ‘I’ means that one wants to be the sub-*

ject of one's actions, which are acted upon by 'me,' the body, an object for others, obviously, but also for the subject of this saying in a deliberate, most often unconscious acceptance of the desire-body relationship. On the contrary, the one who speaks uses only the signifier 'me' when the little or 'grown-up' person that, depending on the youth or maturity of their body, they believe themselves to be, is aware of playing or having played the role of an object in relation to another person, or an entity which, in space-time, considered as master of their being as a subject (willingly or unwillingly subjected to this master), has imposed upon them a role whose intentionality was not their own". (Ibidem, pp 130-131).

- d) The continuous transformations of his being from existential experiences** which have an influence on self-esteem, on narcissism, on the capacity for autonomy.

For Françoise Dolto, the struggle of women for access to personal expression appears as a structuring element of identity, and therefore of the realization of subjectivization. "*Freedom is being oneself without fear*", Dolto asserts. Subjectivization is indeed achieved through: - **a)** the autonomous expression of oneself through an expression of one's emotions and desires that transcends the repression of desires, which constitutes a break from expectations of external approval and many dependencies; - **b)** the construction of a personal identity that constitutes an empowerment that values the dignity of the subject based on self-acceptance, one's existential choices, the recognition of one's own limitations related to context, and, more generally, relational experiences and symbolic recognition, since "*Every person needs to be recognized in their own truth.*"

F. François de SINGLY

Within this open global context, Singly's thought can be summarized in the following phrase: "*Modern individuals must become themselves*". This fundamentally means that "*personal identity is not reducible to social roles*". From the outset, it appears less centred on the unconscious, as we see in Freud, and on desire and lack-in-being, as in Lacan, than on the individual's becoming-self within the frame of the process of individuation and subjectivization, and on the impact of social transformations on the individual's becoming-subject, considering the tensions provoked by these transformations, for example, the tension between autonomy and attachment. As regards women, the questions relating to this tension then unfold in connection with this fundamental assertion: a woman must become herself with a unique personal identity; "*Personal identity is not reducible to social roles*" notes François de Singly to this effect; she must be considered as an autonomous subject, even within the couple, with her personal aspirations, values, and projects. "*The modern couple must allow each partner to be himself or herself*", notes François De Singly in this regard. (1996, *The Self, the Couple and the Family*). This means that the couple must constitute a space for both the recognition and the self-implementation of each partner, without absorption of identities, thus on the contrary becoming a support for the individual project. (2000, *Free Together*)

At this level, François De Singly introduces an essential element concerning the way to apprehend identity (2017, *The Double I: Personal Identity and Status Identity*). Indeed, to be oneself doesn't only refer to **personal identity**, but also simultaneously to status identity. These two identities can even be in conflict, without this actually implying any break with affective and social **ties**. This means that the self-centred individual connects personal autonomy, the feeling of being oneself, with solidarity, and this constitutes an important social value. It is here, for example, that the urgent need arises for women to reconcile, positively and without conflict, their personal aspirations, their professional life, their married life, as well as the potential expectations or demands of motherhood.

G. Didier Anzieu

According to Didier Anzieu, feminine identity construction can be understood through the link of several fundamental concepts, such as the skin-ego, the psychic envelope, the body as the support of identity, and the process of subjectivization. To Anzieu indeed, the skin-ego refers to the psychic representation that the subject constructs from bodily and relational experiences, the body being conceived from the outset as a boundary between self and the other, between interior and exterior, between dependence and autonomy. Of course, to Anzieu (1985, *The Skin-Ego*, Dunod), "*The skin-ego is a representation that the child's ego uses to represent itself as Self*"; a biological envelope, certainly, it is therefore conceived as a unifying psychic envelope for the subject, it allows for the development of a stable, autonomous psychic and relational identity, with a narcissistic security that plays on self-esteem within the framework of protection against traumatic experiences, narcissistic wounds, and situations that weaken the psychic envelope and thus become a source of suffering: marital domination, physical and psychological violence, dependency, emotional and relational breaches, etc. This skin-ego constitutes the foundation of a subject who avoids constructing a false self but allows for the construction of an autonomous personal project (*The Body of the Work*, 1981, Gallimard). It provides inner security and, through a

creative transformation of relational experiences, achieves a continuity of the self, that is to say, a stable psychic envelope (Anzieu, 1995, *Psychic Envelopes*, Dunod).

The construction of Feminine Identity in Anzieu

No	Dimension	Function
1	Skin-self	Identity security, positive body appropriation, overcoming excessive social control and experiences of domination
2	Body image	Self-esteem, freedom to desire and to build an independent and personal project
3	Psychic envelope	Protection or narcissistic reinforcement against psychological violence and humiliation
4	Autonomous thought	Developing a personal project: beyond contradictory injunctions, pressures and social expectations
5	Creativity	A unique expression of self, transcending the demands of norms, and autonomous self-creation

3.2.2 African and Cameroonian Perspectives

The modern African woman, as we have seen, presents herself as a woman torn between complex tensions: between sociocultural traditions and the demands of a changing modernity; between feminist identity claims for the construction of a subjective identity born of personal desire and the project of an autonomous self; and between the imperatives stemming from traditions and cultures, the objective of self-realization and self-promotion, and social constraints. This theme of woman as a "project of self," now central in our African countries, is addressed by a number of African authors, two or three of whom we will examine: - **a)** - Were Were Liking: (1983). *She will be of jasper and coral. Journal of a misovire*. Paris, L'Harmattan, - **b)** - Calixthe Beyala, (1988) *You will be called Tanga Paris*, Albin Michel, - **c)** - A. Thiam, 1986; *Speak out, Black Sisters. Feminism and oppression in Black Africa*; Pluto Press; (translation of the French edition: 1978: *La parole aux Nègresses*. Paris, Denoël; - **d)** - Oyéwùmi. Oyeronké. 1997. *The Invention of Women: Making an African sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minneapolis. University of Minneapolis, et 2011: *Gende, Epistemologies in Africa: Gendering, Traditions, Spaces Social Institutions and Identities*. Palgrave Macmillan...

A) WERE WERE LIKING :

In *She Will Be of Jasper and Coral: Journal of a Misovire* (1983), Were Were Liking invites women to personal transformation, that is, to a true revolution. "*The true revolution begins within*," she says. In doing so, she generally echoes certain intuitions we have seen from Simone de Beauvoir: - **e)** - **the project of self as a break from this male-dominated world**. And, rather than remaining the inheritor of an identity imposed by social traditions and the dominant culture, women must be creators of their own existence, in a process of self-reconstruction. She then addresses this strong injunction to women: "*You must recreate yourself every day*" (*op cit*). The four axes of the women's revolution advocated by Were Were Liking's ideas can then be broken down as follows: - **a)** a radical ideological demystification and an awareness of the social and cultural determinisms that women internalize; - **b)** a critical break with socioculturally imposed identities; - **c)** the creation of the woman as an autonomous subject, as a personal subject; and - **d)** community engagement and activism in the service of social change. The table below illustrates the major themes of Were Were Liking's thought..

The new subjectivization of women in Were Were Liking

	Major themes	Consistency and variations
1	Identity Renaissance	a) - Reconstruction of the African subject, - b) - overcoming historical and cultural alienations, - c) creation of new forms of existence " <i>She will be of jasper and coral</i> " (1983) and <i>Love-a hundred lives</i> (1988) Overcoming narcissistic wounds, psychological resilience, and reclaiming personal history
2	Women's emancipation	a) - Rejection of traditional roles, - b) - Psychic and social autonomy, - c) - Affirmation of Woman's voice: Psychic and social feminine emancipation at the same time... Affirmation of the woman's own desire, overcoming emotional dependence.
3	Creativity and transformation	a) Art as a means of healing, b) Culture as a resource for self-reinvention: <i>The Amputated Memory</i> (2004) and <i>Orpheus Dafric</i> (1981): no destiny is definitive; it is about breaking free from imposed identity labels... The necessity of art for a woman's self-transformation
4	Spirituality and becoming	a) - The person conceived as becoming, - b) - a continual construction of the subject through its choices and commitments: the human being as an unfinished work.

B) Awa Thiam

Awa Thiam's seminal work , **La parole aux Nègresses** (1978), Paris, Denoël, with a preface by Benoîte Groult, in our view, lays the groundwork for the essence of her thought: a thought of rupture and affirmation, enabling her subjectivization. This rupture is primarily organized in relation to the identity imposed by tradition and colonial and racial legacies, unequal social structures, and the male gaze, whose sexist and devaluing nature is inherited from the dominant phallocratic culture. Generally speaking, this rupture is essentially organized to define woman, freeing her from all oppression based on "her sex," "herclass," and of "his race". And this is precisely what has been called intersectionality, or the need to confront several axes of struggle simultaneously.

Thiam 's thinking then shifts from a rupture to affirmation of woman as a subject in her own full right, to affirmation of her human dignity and freedom. And it is in this way that she declares here, speaking of women, that "They have the right to freedom, respect, and dignity," that they are subjects , meaning that they are engaged in a multifaceted struggle to ensure each woman's construction of her own project of self, which then allows her to reclaim her voice and therefore her identity.

- a) The woman is the subject of her speech, and it is this speech that consecrates her birth as a true subject, as a subject in her own right: "For a long time the Negresses have been silent. Isn't it time that they rediscover their voice?", asks Awa Thiam (1986; *Speak out, Black Sisters. Feminism and oppression in Black Africa*; Pluto Press;
- b) Subject of her own history and subject of her own destiny, by transcending the self-imposed isolation of woman, since the project of self cannot be conceived as exclusively individual, as a solitary project of the woman. The construction of the self by the woman, which can only be carried out in solidarity with other women, is thus inscribed at the heart of a multifaceted struggle, at once political, social and cultural, for the transformation of society.

C) Calixthe BEYALA

It's a practically identical route to that of Awa Thiam that Calix the Beyalaengages the quest of woman, conceived as a subject of desire, as an aspiration to speech for an adequate expression of herself, as the author of her existence and the agent of her own autonomy in and through revolt, to rediscover herself and rebuild herself. For Calixthe Beyala , what appears to be the very essence of the woman's project of self is the rejection of all traditional assignments of woman as simply a social object, wife and mother...

Woman as author of her own existence

Shutter	Consistency and variation	Reference work
Conquest of identity	Transcending social, cultural, and sexual constraints, as well as the contradictions of modernity, to rediscover one's self. A journey from submission to subjectivization and from the identity assigned to women as a personal project.	"It was the sun that burned me."
Freedom of the body	Claiming bodily and sexual autonomy; the body as a space of freedom, resistance (territory of revolt), self-reappropriation, and control of one's destiny: for women, living their lives independently of belonging to anyone.	"Nakedwoman, black woman"
Women's voice	From silence to speech, which allows women to emerge from invisibility and reclaim their voice beyond what is expected of them, enabling them to become historical subjects. Overcoming the conflict between loyalty to community norms and autonomy. Convergence with Awa Thiam	"Your name will be Tanga"
Fighting patriarchy and hierarchies	The woman experiences multiple forms of suffering; "I want to tell my story," and she must therefore embark on a difficult quest for dignity.	"Your name will be Tanga" "LostHonors"
Reconstruction of Woman's subject	The process of subjectivization: the woman regains control of her existence by telling her own story, rebuilding a positive image by fighting against any erasure.	"It was the sun that burned me."

On the basis of this summary table, we could then present CalixtheBeyala's thought as a set of linear psychic connected dynamics and at the same time as a series of passages or transitions: - **a)** –first from social assignment (definition of woman by roles and expectations emanating from the community - **b)** - to inner revolt (emergence of the desire to be achieved oneself) - **c)** - and to identity conflict, source of psychic suffering and narcissistic fragility - **d)**- then to speaking out as a breaking process of silence in order to insure self-affirmation

as subjectivization in and through resolute empowerment - **e** - and finally to the construction of an autonomous identity as a project of self.

3.3 At the end of the literature review...

Drawing a model of transcultural clinical analysis

From our literature review presented above, we will draw upon some elements here to develop a preliminary model for the clinical analysis of femininesubjectivization. The various authors consulted include: Anzieu (1995, *Les enveloppes psychiques*), François De Singly (*Double Je: identité personnelle et identité statutaire**, 2017), Françoise Dolto (1997, * *Le sentiment de soi. Aux sources de l'image du corps**), Simone de Beauvoir (* *Le deuxième sexe* *, 1949), Awa Thiam (*La parole aux Nègresses*, 1978), and Calixthe. Beyala (*It was the sun that burned me*) (1987). *"You will be called Tanga"* (1988), etc. , lead us to conceive of this subjectivization as a woman's access to the position of subject of her own speech - of her desire - of her body- of her choices; in short, as subject of her own history. The key idea of this model is therefore the following: far from being a completed and fixed identity, a woman's identity is a living construction, a dynamic construction made up of social adaptation and subjective affirmation, which articulates, in a more or less contradictory and conflictual way, the psychic, the social, the cultural, and the existential aspects.

Model of Feminine Subjectivization in Tension (MSFT): Fundamental Axes

Axes	Consistency	Possible tensions	Authors
Body and Subjectivization	Woman's body conceived as simultaneously biological, symbolic, social, desiring, and controlled by the social gaze of the Other.	a) Tension between personal desires and aesthetic norms, b) Tension between bodily autonomy and social control, c) Tension between pleasure and guilt, d) Tension between chosen and imposed motherhood	Didier Anzieu : Skin-Me Françoise Dolto : unconscious body image
Desire and speech	Subjectivization: the expression of needs, not merely the satisfaction of others' desires; womanhood recognized, not a privilege granted to the desires of the Other; access to personal expression.	a) - Tension between personal desire and expected desire b) Tension between authenticity and conformity to society c) Tension between Free subjective speech and imposed cultural silence	Jacques Lacan , Donald Winnicott
Narcissism and recognition	Feminine subject as: - Need for recognition, symbolic value, and emotional security, but socialization creating emotional dependence, over-adaptation, narcissistic fragility, and fear of rejection	03 types of voltage: a) - Tension between Self-esteem - external validation, - b) Tension between Autonomy - emotional dependence – c) Tension between self-affirmation - fear of losing love	Didier Anzieu , Donald Winnicott ; Calixthe Beyala
Social and cultural roles	A woman caught between several models: tradition and modernity, personal autonomy, motherhood, married life, religious expectations , community norms	a) – Tension between individualization and community belonging b) - Tension between Personal success - family duty, c) Tension between personal freedom and social respectability	François de Singly Simone de Beauvoir Calixthe Beyala
Existential creativity	Creative capacity to invent one's own path, transform constraints to produce meaning, to become the author of one's own existence	a) Tension between Repetition of patterns - self-invention; b) Tension between determinism and individual freedom c) - Tension between adaptation-transformation	Simone de Beauvoir WereWere Lik-ing Awa Thiam

The clinical model of analysis we prefer in our work to understand the subjectivization of women as it is constructed within their own project of self considers three poles of subjectivization, each one associated with three possible outcomes. These poles are: **a)** - the pole of ascription, which highlights the pressure of family, community, and cultural norms on the process of becoming oneself; **b)** - the pole of subjectivization, which highlights the challenge women face in expressing their desires, aspirations, and need for autonomy; and **c)** - the

pole of clinical regulation, which reveals the psychic strategies women employ to ensure their adaptation to society.

The pole of outcomes of subjectivization presents three possibilities: - **a)** - the possibility of harmonious integration, where the woman achieves a relative balance between the free expression of her aspirations and respect for community and social norms; - **b)** - identity splitting, where the woman will experience an internal conflict and therefore lead a double life; - **c)** - subjective erasure by which the woman marks her absolute submission to norms, this submission then provoking in her inhibition and forms of masked depression...

IV. Operating Framework

A. Clinical vignettes

The four clinical vignettes we will present here highlight the various consequences of discrimination experienced as psychological conflicts by women, as well as the challenges they must overcome (stemming from subjectivization) in the context of implementing their project of self. They revolve around: **a)** the ambivalence of professional success ; **b)** the socially invisible woman who nevertheless aspires to exist; **c)** the student torn between two projects: completing her studies and getting married immediately; and **d)** motherhood experienced as an existential obligation.

A1. Vignette n°1: Ambivalence of professional success

Presentation

Contextual elements: Ms. Armande, a bank executive in Douala, is 34 years old; she is married and the mother of three children aged 8, 6 and 3 respectively.

Reason for consultation: Ms. Armande was referred for consultation due to persistent fatigue, chronic headaches, and episodes of nighttime crying, which she concealed from her husband, children, and everyone around her. No significant organic disorder was found following multiple clinical examinations.

Speech. Mrs. Armande reports her feelings in these terms: "*When I'm too successful, people say I want to dominate my husband,*" even though all the conditions for achieving success are fully met.

Clinical observations. During the interviews, a deep conflict emerged in Mrs. Armande between three contradictory demands: - **a)** - her desire for professional development, based on the brilliant university studies she had pursued; - **b)** - family expectations of availability, and - **c)** - marital pressure regarding the image of "good wife" that she must present to society.

Clinical analyses: - Mrs. Armande is therefore a victim of affective inhibition, - of guilt of success, - of a progressive narcissistic devaluation of herself, and of psychosomatic manifestations of this situation.

Clinical interpretation: In Ms. Armande's case, there is a tension between self-affirmation (subjective) and adherence to community norms. On a psychological level, Ms. Armande experiences her success as a symbolic transgression. The symptom (persistent fatigue, chronic headaches, episodes of nighttime crying) functions here as a compromise between the desire for autonomy and the need for social belonging.

A2. Vignette n°2: The socially invisible woman

Presentation

Contextual elements: Mrs. Bernadette, aged 52, is a shopkeeper in Yaoundé. Widowed. She lost her husband 4 years ago.

Reason for consultation. Ms. Bernadette is referred for consultation following episodes of insomnia, diffuse anxiety, and migrating bodily pains.

Speech. Speaking about herself, Ms. Bernadette repeats: "*I no longer know who I am since my husband's death.*" She claims to have lost all her bearings and all her reasons for living since her husband's death.

Clinical observations: Mrs. Bernadette's entire identity was structured around motherhood, her relationship with her partner, and how society viewed her marital status. After becoming widowed, she experienced a near-total social withdrawal, a loss of narcissistic investment, and here she expresses a feeling of utter emptiness. Physically, she exhibited a slight psychomotor slowing.

Analysis: This situation reveals as regards Ms. Bernadette a feminine identity that is strongly based on social recognition linked to traditional cultural criteria, foremost among which is the value placed on marital status. The loss of her spouse therefore causes her not only suffering related to the loss of identity and any new narcissistic investment, but also a partial collapse of her sense of self.

Clinical interpretation: The case of Mrs. Bernadette thus reveals a woman who is not an autonomous subject, living according to a personal project of being, but rather a woman performing a relational function. She has been merely her husband's wife, without any other psychic investment of equal importance. The therapeutic work for her consists of reconstructing a personal psychic space, with new investments.

A3. Vignette n° 3: The student torn between two projects

Presentation:

Background: Ms. Caroline, 23 years old, is a law student at the University of Buea. Coming from a background deeply rooted in traditional values, Ms. Caroline, who is pursuing university studies, wishes to postpone marriage as long as possible in order to continue and complete her education. Her family considers this plan a real threat to traditional values and family expectations.

Reason for consultation. Ms. Caroline is brought in for consultation due to severe anxiety, panic attacks and relationship difficulties.

Speech: Ms. Caroline expresses the inner conflict and contradictions she experiences in these terms: "At home, I must be a submissive daughter; at University, I must be independent. I am two persons"

Clinical observations: The following symptoms are observed in Mrs. Caroline- **a)** - a psychic disturbance of identity characterized by anxiety, - **b)** - behavioral splitting as a defense mechanism as described by Freud, - **c)** - social hyper-adaptation with a profound disorganization of one's inner personality, and finally - **d)** - a chronic feeling of illegitimacy...

Clinical interpretation: The case of Ms. Caroline highlights the phenomenon of dual normative belonging. She belongs to the traditional community space in which she is rooted and to the modern academic space. This leads her to develop a split psychic functioning in order to simultaneously maintain two contradictory systems of expectations. This manifests as a structural division of the subject, as Lacan describes it (a double psychic life and multiple social masks).

A4. Vignette n° 4: Motherhood experienced as an existential obligation

Presentation

Contextual elements: Mrs. Denise, a kindergarten teacher in the city of Garoua, North-Cameroon, is 39 years old.

Reason for consultation. Mrs. Denise comes for consultation for deep sadness coupled with relational withdrawal: she is developing ideas of self-deprecation because she has not yet given birth at her age.

Speech: Ms. Denise complains of being subjected to repeated humiliations and derogatory remarks from her family and social environment, who suspect her of being cursed; she is continually marginalized, more or less overtly, during community ceremonies. This leads her to say: "A woman without children is not really a woman in our culture".

Clinical observations: In Mrs. Denise, a global alteration of the person and behavior is observed, with: **a)** - a weakening of narcissistic fragility and a weakening of the stability of the sense of self; - **b)** - an internalization of the stigma, - **c)** - a depressive syndrome resulting from a devaluation of self, a syndrome masked by somatic complaints.

Clinical interpretation: In Mrs. Denise, personal desire and the realization of one's project of self are gradually crushed by a social definition of femininity centred on reproduction; it is the colonization of the subjective feminine identity by cultural norms, with what this produces in terms of moral pain, despair, and loss of interest.

B. A Cross-Sectional Analysis of the Vignettes

Table of axes and manifestations

Clinical axis	Demonstrations	Reference authors
Identity conflict	Observable examples of manifestations: - psychic, social or existential tensions between several non-harmonizable identities, affiliations, values and representations - the multiple types of conflict (personal, cultural, sexual, professional, relational, spiritual) and the disorganization of the personality, - the conflict between tradition and autonomy, the tension between cultural belonging and personal freedom, the internalization of imposed identity norms, social networks as sources of identity conflicts	Simone de Beauvoir (Struggle to exist as a subject, and to assume a personal destiny, the necessity of breaking free from biological destiny); transcending the equivalence of Man/Subject and Woman/Other Sigmund Freud (contradictory identifications) Jacques Lacan , Donald Winnicott (true self and false self)
Narcissistic fragility	- Vulnerability and fluctuations in self-esteem and sense of personal worth (self-deprecation) - Emotional dependence on the social gaze, which becomes a psychic organizer; psychic collapse in the	Freud: Narcissism as a libidinal investment of the Ego Donald Winnicott : the link between narcissistic fragility and the develop-

	face of criticism, rejection, and failure; hypersensitivity to humiliation; relational hypersensitivity; compensatory defenses	ment of the false self Jacques Lacan : narcissistic fragility, lack of symbolic recognition
Maskedsuffe- ring	- Real psychological distress either poorly verbalized or completely concealed. Somatization, fatigue, inhibition, addictions, behavioral disorders, clinical manifestations, hyper-adaptation, emotional withdrawal, depressive syndrome...	Freud, Winnicott, Didier Anzieu, Jacques Lacan, Edmond Marc : <i>Psychology of Identity</i>

V. Conclusion

Our clinical examination of the identity and social challenges currently faced by modern Cameroonian women reveals that womanhood ceases to be merely a social status: woman becomes a project of her own self, a reflective project criss-crossed by identity tensions where the very possibility of existing as a subject is at stake. Feminine subjectivization thus appears as a complex, differentiated process, unfolding within the framework of sociocultural constraints. It is a dynamic process at the heart of which multiple conflicts can be identified between:

- a) Rupture or preservation of community belonging within the framework of a negotiation between this belonging and personal fulfilment;
- b) Construction of psychological autonomy (subjective freedom of choice); and
- c) Maintaining identity coherence despite the contradictory injunctions and demands of a changing society.

This therefore explains the approach adopted by the model of **feminine subjectivization in tension**, which lies at the intersection of psychological, socio-economic, political, and cultural dimensions. Woman's identity cannot be defined without her, and even against her, in this conflictual social space where the aspirations of the woman desiring to be herself clash with the contradictory demands of tradition and modernity, which can negate or disaffirm woman (identity tensions) in what she is and in what she aspires to become, in accordance with her own project and thanks to her existential creativity, beyond the community normative pressures, that is to say beyond what society expects her to be.

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