

have been circulated and have legitimized social transformations of various kinds. In the context of postmodernity, the convergence of revolution with the commercial culture of capitalism has defused the idea of social revolt by reducing the sense of revolution to novelty and the world of commodities – the Revlon revolution (femininity), Che Guevara T-shirts (avant-garde masculinity) or Zapatista dolls (progressive life-style).

3. By hegemony I mean both the competing social and ideological forces as well as those forms of representation that are major sources of hegemony. Gramsci (1971) and Foucault (1980) are guides to the circulation of power in the context of representation, and in particular the ability, both through coercion and seduction, to gain consent in establishing leadership and authority.

4. As argued by John Beverly (1999: 141–2) the function of the nation is not only to articulate to itself elements of other class or group projects as the embodiment of the nation, but to articulate the nation as a necessary signifier for hegemonic articulation.

5. There is not much engagement between post-colonial and subaltern studies and Middle Eastern Studies with regard to the formation of subaltern consciousness and subjectivity in the context of Middle Eastern societies. *Mostaz'af* can be referred to as the subject position of the subaltern as a social category.

6. In the war of position, in the Gramscian sense, the Islamic movement achieved hegemony over the other oppositional movements by referring to a revolutionary agency that was not uniquely defined by class relations. It also distinguished itself from the secular nationalist movements and their primordial notions of the nation by calling for a transnational nation of disempowered Muslims 'in becoming', in an alliance with all the wretched of the earth.

7. See Moallem (1999a) for an analysis of oppositional models of femininity in the context of the 1979 revolution.

8. I am not able in this discussion to elaborate on the representation of ethnicity in Iranian cinema. It should, however, be noted that the post-revolutionary cinema has included a representation of various ethno-linguistic groups. For the first time, Persian subtitles were used when Turkish, Kurdish and other minority languages and dialects were spoken. For example, *Bashu, the Little Stranger*, by filmmaker Bahram Baizai, depicts ethnic and regional differences. The representation of religious minorities, however, is still missing from Iranian films.

9. In a fascinating semi-documentary entitled *Salaam Cinema*, by the Iranian filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf, hundreds of people from all classes, genders, ages and ethnicities show up for an audition for new actors and actresses.

10. Two shifts a day are a way of dealing with the increased demographic pressure on the school system.

11. Throwing acid is a common form of violence against women in Iran.

12. The *Basiji* and revolutionary guards were volunteer forces composed mainly of young men, who took part in nation building in the post-revolutionary era. Among their tasks was the disciplining of women to conform to Islamic rules and regulations.

CHAPTER II

Mariama Bâ's So Long a Letter: Women, Culture and Development from a Francophone/Post-colonial Perspective

Anjali Prabhu

The discipline is a principle of control over the production of discourse.
(Michel Foucault 1981: 61)

§ THE main argument put forth in favour of the WCD paradigm is the urgency to move away from economistic analyses, specifically in the context of Third World women, in order to understand women's lives and agency in all their complexity. In this chapter, I begin by explaining the position from which I consider this proposal, and further clarify how this position articulates with the triad proposed. I actively engage with the proposals put forth by Chua, Bhavnani and Foran (2000). My reading of the now canonical Franco-phone text, *Une si longue lettre* (*So Long a Letter*), by the Senegalese author Mariama Bâ, is preceded by a consideration of the position of literature within the proposed paradigm.

Francophone studies – loosely defined as the study of literature and culture (in/through the French language) outside of hexagonal France and within France's post-colonial communities – is, in the US academic world, linked closely to the larger field of post-colonial studies, which is in an eternal struggle to generate and define itself with and against, most notably, post-structuralism and postmodernism (see, for example, Appiah 1991, Kadir 1995 and Shohat and Stam 1994). The departure from 'pure' literary studies (departments are more and more using the term French studies, as opposed to French literature) has the field bound up with cultural studies, a field or sub-field under constant redefinition (for a recent questioning of this field, see Schwartz 2000).

It is from this position that I come to understand the terms Women, Culture and Development. If 'women' is retained over 'gender' to focus on women rather than on men (Chua, Bhavnani and Foran 2000: 824), I would, in addition, insist that the 'gendered' articulation of this category of 'women' is what becomes important within the current project: gendered in the sense of socially

constructed with and against the signifying practices at a specific location.¹ Therefore, opting to study 'gendered women' implies that 'women' act from, define and defy positions that are recognizably those of women in the culture in question, and that significantly affect their daily lives and their relations to individuals and aspects of society in immediate as well as not so immediate ways. On that account, the idea of the 'feminine' – mostly suggested from the domain of the literary – as resistant, defying definition, the uncontrollable and the physical becomes ostensibly of less significance – because the 'feminine' is not necessarily tied to 'women'.²

Since the 'Third World' is largely the context whence the paradigm is proposed, I should clarify that my engagement with the Third World is specifically invested in the 'national' and the 'post-colonial' as they relate to nations formerly colonized by France.³ The purely chronological signification of the latter term (referring to the period following official independence or the dismantling of colonial administration), as well as the more complex concerns involving differential sources and forces of power and resistance that it has come to encompass, become important in this study, which is built around the rhetoric of independence.⁴ Moreover, and perhaps more pertinently, the recognition in the field (and in the term) of the 'post-colonial' is that the colonial encounter can only account for part of the structuring force, because newer external pressures, as well as older societal and historical realities, figure alongside colonial legacies in very real ways, in the daily deployment of agency in the lives of the peoples of these geographical regions.

Development is therefore tied very specifically to the idea of (new) nation, with the nationalist rhetoric of development being clearly linked to catching up with the 'mother' country, and to modernization. While the WCD paradigm quite judiciously calls for a retreat from these simplistic definitions of development, which have to do with modernization and measurable economic progress, such definitions must be actively engaged, if only to subvert them, precisely because it is the resulting policies, procedures, laws and practices in the new nation that in part structure – and perhaps often hinder – women's practices of everyday life. If literature is easily seen as belonging to the realm of the cultural, then the location from which I write, and the texts that I consider, vitiate the force of privileging the 'cultural' over the 'economic'. In fact – and location aside here – any extrication of the cultural from the economic, quite simply, gives renewed pertinence to the old base-superstructure metaphor and – specifically here – precludes the understanding of the literary text in its material reality. One of the definitions of the cultural engaged by feminist analysts, namely, as the 'non-economic' (Chua, Bhavnani and Foran 2000: 820, 826), proves to be less theoretically productive from the disciplinary location that this chapter is written. The approach taken to 'culture' delineates the framework within which 'being' (and thus agency and

resistance) can be theorized and understood. It is useful, for this reason, to consider Homi Bhabha's notion of culture as 'enunciation' rather than as epistemology, where the 'enunciative is a more dialogic process that attempts to track displacements and realignments that are the effects of cultural antagonisms and articulations – subverting the rationale of the hegemonic moment and relocating alternative, hybrid sites of cultural negotiation' (Bhabha 1992: 443). We could read this process of generating culture as one that is anchored in the specific social context, but tied closely to disruptions of static ideas of culture and tradition within it. The consideration of these disruptions that are enabled by oppositions and ongoing practices within the circumscribed space upsets an understanding of culture as a given that pre-exists action. Such an understanding would then provide the means for questioning purely 'economistic' understandings and open up possibilities for reading development that can take into account multiple areas, especially those inhabited and generated by 'women' and unconventional types of action, with, for example, a new understanding of 'production'.

In the Francophone context, the voices of nationalist movements have been largely male and masculinist. The privileging of 'women's' writing, therefore, immediately complicates these discourses, since, as is known, women's concerns were seen as too 'narrow' to be addressed in the urgency of independence movements. These nationalist voices have also stemmed from extremely elite locations, in the language (in the specific Francophone context: in French, but also in the most encompassing sense of language that Bourdieu gives it, for example) of the elite: in the language of the (ex-)colonizer.⁵ Class and, or rather with, gender (specifically women here), then, enter this idea of development when seen through literature, not as entities which have been privileged in previous analyses and need to be done away with, but rather as problematizing and questioning the unitary nature of the elite nationalist discourses. Yet – and this is of utmost importance – the category of writing 'women' hardly fits *a priori* as a counter-discourse producing entity: women (authors and their texts) can reinforce and advance masculinist nationalist causes with efficacy, even if not necessarily with intention, and this is because all writers are 'significantly situated even before [they] come to write' (Williams 1989: 258). If these points call for a slightly different set of tactics, the overall strategy remains the same: to reach a more complete, nuanced understanding of women in the context of development, which engages their creative resistance to various hegemonic forces.⁶

Culture is by far the most problematic of the terms implicated. My understanding of its definition is filtered through the battles waged over it in the arena of cultural studies. The borrowing of Williams's term, 'structures of feelings', by WCD as an antidote to the vulgar Marxist and economically determining trends in the previous approaches, brings with it, however, first,

the debate over what the cultural is; and second, how other terms such as economic, material, gender, class, race or ethnicity, for example, articulate themselves within this definition. This warrants some attention, since any understanding of agency or resistance within particular cultures must necessarily relate to how exactly this notion of culture is defined.

The development of the idea of culture from Raymond Williams and those who followed has always been closely tied to the idea of class – in particular, working class. For Williams, ‘there is a distinct working-class way of life’, which he goes on to propose as a model for English society as a whole, based on ‘its emphases of neighbourhood, mutual obligation and common betterment, as expressed in the great working-class political and industrial institutions’ (Williams 1989a: 8). The type of working through proposed by the WCD project is, then, similar to the one that took place in ‘cultural studies’ and continues to do so. As Stuart Hall has summarized its dominant paradigm:

It stands opposed to the residual and merely-reflective role assigned to ‘the cultural’. In its different ways, it conceptualizes culture as interwoven with all social practices and those practices, in turn, as a common form of human activity: sensuous human praxis, the activity through which men and women make history. It is opposed to the base–superstructure way of formulating the relationship between ideal and material forces, especially where the ‘base’ is defined as the determination by ‘the economic’ in any simple sense ... It defines ‘culture’ as *both* the meanings and values which arise amongst distinctive social groups and classes, on the basis of their given historical conditions and relationships, through which they ‘handle’ and respond to the conditions of existence; *and* as the lived traditions and practices through which those ‘understandings’ are expressed and in which they are embodied. (Hall 1986: 39, emphases in original)

Thus, how people live and experience structures of relations is what is privileged, and the emphasis is on creative and historical agency. But as Hall continues, in his understanding of Thompson (1963): ‘every mode of production is *also a culture*, and every struggle between classes is *also a struggle between cultural modalities*; and which, for [Raymond] Williams, is what a “cultural analysis”, in the final instance, should deliver’ (Hall 1986: 39, my emphases).

If we invoke Williams’s term, ‘structures of feelings’ (Chua, Bhavnani and Foran 2000: 821), then we are also obliged to account for how feelings are structured: feelings of happiness, sadness, competence, powerlessness, ambiguity, fitting in, standing out, complacency, enthusiasm, independence, dependency, desire, repugnance, attraction, love, are all experienced within and around, in resistance to and complicity with, forces of (most pertinently here) patriarchy, and dominant and accepted ways of being, which are in turn reinforced by laws and supported by relations that cannot be adequately

understood outside their economic figuring. The sanctioning of feelings through these forces cannot be discounted. In other words, approaching the problem through structures of feelings still requires some accounting of the structuring of these feelings. Experience and culture thus serve as overarching unities within which specific struggles, feelings, lives and agencies, can be figured: ‘This sense of cultural totality – of the whole historical process – over-rides any effort to keep the instances and elements distinct. Their real interconnection, under given historical conditions, must be matched by a *totalising movement* “in thought” in the analysis’ (Hall 1986: 39). This type of analysis recalls Fredric Jameson’s conception of the dialectical method, where everything, as it were, must be figured at once: ‘The peculiar difficulty of dialectical writing lies indeed in its *holistic*, “*totalizing*” character: as though you could not say any one thing until you had first said everything; as though with each new idea you were bound to recapitulate the entire system’ (Jameson 1971: 306, emphases in both quotations mine). The impossibility of this task, from the point of view of systematic study, clearly calls for practical measures. The first of these, in my view, is interdisciplinary dialogue, which can provide far more complexity than academic disciplinarity generally permits, and in which this volume participates. Another, suggested elsewhere by Jameson himself, is specific to literary criticism. It has to do with criticism being able to ‘transform’ statements about aesthetics or form ‘into genuinely historical ones’ (Jameson 1988: 120). Still in the context of such formal analysis, he is interested in pursuing them ‘all the way’ until they re-emerge in or as history. Such ‘momentary contact with the real’ can emerge when ‘literary criticism abolishes itself as such and yields a glimpse of consciousness momentarily at one with its social ground’ (1988: 120). I will consider the literary text from a new perspective and therefore be obliged to rethink its functioning. My textual analyses will constantly seek out such momentary contact with the real.

Francophone literary production, framed in the ways described, must be understood in its elite and representational (of the nation, of the people) complexity. Many of the early figures in Francophone writing were also implicated politically on the national scene, whether or not they were endorsed by the ‘official’ nation: Aimé Césaire (mayor of Fort-de-France, Martinique until as recently as March 2001); Léopold Sédar Senghor (first president of Senegal for 21 years); Frantz Fanon (radical Martinican, involved in the struggle of the National Liberation Front in Algeria and later associated with the Black Panther movement in the USA). All of them went through the French school system and went to university in Paris. Most of the figures – and this is more so with the early writers such as Mariama Bâ (in her own way) and the men named above – were involved in the dual processes of representation: as artists and political representatives.

Literature and WCD

Every act of criticism is always literally tied to a set of social and historical circumstances; the problem is in specifying or characterizing the relationship, not merely in asserting that it exists. (Said 1984: 956)

My next task is to understand and, what seems even more formidable, to explain, what it means to read a literary text in the context of a WCD project. How does an ostensibly fictional text become pertinent to the working out of women's experience in the Third World? First, I have obviously chosen to read a text by a woman that largely concerns women's struggles – and therefore implicates authorial position (the biographical). Can we then assume that a woman writing automatically remedies the masculinist tendencies of nationalist discourse?

The author, as the point at which various forces come together to generate the text, is but one point of juncture between the fictional textuality and the other texts/discourses with which it connects.⁷ The literary text, or at least its reading, is a practice that exploits the ideas of 'contiguity, metonymy, the touching of spatial boundaries at a tangent' (Bhabha 1992: 452). Is the subject (content) of the text, in that case, to be revealing of the corresponding realities? For Williams, a 'correspondence of content between a writer and his [sic] world is less significant than his correspondence of organization, of structure' (quoted in Hall 1986: 37). In the following reading, I engage the contiguity of the literary text with its outside reality in terms of both the shared content and the significance of its narrative organization. In fact, the societal structures that are subverted in the story of the text are also inscribed 'narratively'. I suggest, in this piece, a greater scope for the literary text might be generally conceded. 'Allegorical' readings – notwithstanding the furore this suggestion has caused with regard to the 'national'; see Jameson 1986; then Ahmad (1994) and Bensmaïa (1999), for example – provide another effective mode of linking the literary text to its larger reality for the paradigm in question. In making a choice of what can be done here, I will not pursue such a reading, even though the text certainly invites it.⁸

I should clarify, then, that my interest in Mariama Bâ's text is specifically in identifying 'moment[s] in which the *system as a whole* [specifically the post-colonial national],⁹ or *some limit of it*, is being touched' (Jameson in Stephanson 1998: 27, my emphasis). In any case, the reading, while revelatory of certain specificities of Senegalese society as presented by the text, does not consequently become a study of the women in Senegalese society (for a descriptive study that discusses WID and GAD approaches to 'social service' interventions in Senegal, see Sarr, Bâ and Sourang 1997). Following Lucien Goldmann, Williams suggested the importance of the use of common 'categories' between a fictional text and the 'outside' world (see Hall 1986: 37). Just as the author

provides one of the connections between text and world, the common categories between these two realms provide a conceptual fulcrum for our articulation of one with the other. I actively pursue, through Bâ's text, such an articulation.

Articulating Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* in Women, Culture, Development

This entire novel takes the form of a 'letter' (from Ramatoulaye to her childhood friend Aïssatou) in which the writer of the letter reminisces about her life and that of her friend: shared childhood, meeting and falling in love with their respective spouses, marriage, polygamy, the heartache of the first wives and the very different ways in which the two women manage this situation. Published in 1979, this novel, which received the Nouma prize in 1980, remains one of the benchmark texts of Francophone literature and is taught in virtually every programme. One of the early texts by a woman, its ideas about progress, feminism and modernity are very nicely, up to a point, recuperated into Western understanding of these issues (see Champagne 1996: 22–30, and for a discussion of how the 'feminist' side adequately explains only part of the text, Guèye 1994). The text is also short, and makes relatively easy reading for introductory courses in Francophone literature.

While Ramatoulaye's narrative censures nationalist discourse in various ways, there is not, in fact, such a radical departure from nationalist views of development and progress, thus debunking any unproblematically radical ascription to women's writing. The practice of writing by women in this period, of which Bâ's text is an instance, while in itself radical due to the restricted entry of women into French schools in Senegal at the time, must thus first be seen in the conditions that reproduce it. This reproduction (of the practice of women's writing) is inseparable from the reproduction of the social relations in which access to writing (here in French) is restricted to those who have the possibility of a high level of literacy in French. This latter possibility is in turn tied to the structural positioning of such individuals and groups in the period just preceding independence in French colonies.¹⁰

Still, the return of the familiar nationalist rhetoric concerning development and modernity, couched in terms borrowed from the colonizer, is destabilized through the uprooting procedure by which the female narrator appropriates it. The discussion of such issues from the perspective of a woman, and a mother, and the weighing of these consequences at the level of the personal and the familial, effectively wrenches their significance away from 'objective' large-scale measurement processes, while reinstating them as having consequences at the micro-level. As Mariama Bâ has indicated in an interview, there was not much space for women's voices in official spheres, and she

herself preferred to work through non-governmental agencies to promote change (Dia 1979). Ramatoulaye's fictional engagement with this sphere of education and progress effectively uproots this discourse from its possession by precisely such figures as Léopold Sédar Senghor, then President of Senegal. For example: 'Did these interminable discussions [around the political career of Ramatoulaye's husband Modou], during which points of view concurred or clashed, complemented each other or were vanquished, determine the aspect of the New Africa?' (Bâ 1981: 24). Ramatoulaye and her friend Aïssatou are clearly in this new 'we' that has the 'privilege ... to be the link between two periods in our history, one of domination, the other of independence ... With independence achieved, we witnessed the birth of a republic, the birth of an anthem and the implantation of a flag' (25). As the above passages indicate, the concerns of the larger context of the nation and its society are not just present, but become the preoccupations of the personal voice of autobiography (of the character).

Writing of the idealism of their youth and of the two couples, Ramatoulaye notes that they 'were full of nostalgia but were resolutely progressive' (19). The young women were formed by the French school, where the aims of the 'admirable headmistress' were, in the words of the narrator: 'To lift us out of the bog of tradition, superstition and custom, to make us appreciate a multitude of civilizations without renouncing our own ... to develop universal moral values in us' (15). Along with the standard, dominant nationalist ideas of Western universalism, the idea that tradition lives unquestioned as long as it is outside the influence of the colonizer is further suggested by Aunty Nabou, Aïssatou's mother-in-law: 'You have to come away from Dakar to be convinced of the survival of traditions' (27). This is similar to the suggestion that vices were brought from the outside, while in tradition lay virtues: 'Now our society is shaken to its very foundations, torn between the attraction of imported vices and the fierce resistance of old virtues' (73). Here, Ramatoulaye struggles in her parental role with her twelve children, especially her girls, three of whom have not only taken to wearing trousers, but also smoke cigarettes.

As Williams has argued (1960: 320–21) and subsequently Hall (1981, especially 227–8), among others, tradition is born of a process of selection and reworking. Bâ's text, while overtly subscribing to a rather static understanding of 'tradition', does provide for a more nuanced view. In describing the rituals that follow Modou's death, Ramatoulaye remarks on the annoying presence of her co-wife, Binetou, who 'has been installed in [Ramatoulaye's] house for the funeral, in accordance with tradition' (Bâ 1981: 3). Then comes the 'moment dreaded by every Senegalese woman, the moment when she sacrifices her possessions as gifts to her family-in-law', finally 'becoming a thing in the service of the man who has married her, his grandfather, his grandmother,

his father, his mother' (4). In this painful recollection there is now a sharp observation on the functioning of this tradition: '[The woman's] behaviour is conditioned: no sister-in-law will touch the head of any wife who has been stingy, unfaithful or inhospitable' (4). Without a doubt, this 'conditioning' is to be read in Ramatoulaye's 'tolerance' narrated in a different chapter: 'I tolerated his sisters, who too often would desert their own homes to encumber my own ... I tolerated their spitting, the phlegm expertly secreted under my carpets ... I would receive [Modou's mother] with all the respect due to a queen, and she would leave satisfied, especially if her hand closed over the banknote I had carefully placed there' (19). There is a clear suggestion of the structuring of the woman's propensity for tolerance, her respect for her in-laws, her regard for tradition, as it were.

'Woman' becomes the site for the playing out of 'tradition'. If behaviour is conditioned, as seen above, her reputation brings her recognition from society at large: 'I receive the greater share of money and many envelopes ... The regard shown me raises me in the eyes of others' (Bâ 1981: 6). Yet this recognition is followed by the wives being stripped of it all. The family-in-law leaves them 'utterly destitute' (7) after the ritual of the 'dreaded moment' discussed in the above paragraph. This is a propitious moment for reconsidering the useful concepts of injustices of distribution and recognition that Nancy Fraser presents in her response to Judith Butler's statement that new social movements have been viewed in recent theoretical discussions as 'merely cultural' (Butler 1997). For Fraser, 'misrecognition' is 'analytically distinct from, and conceptually irreducible to, the injustice of maldistribution, although it may be accompanied by the latter' (Fraser 1997: 280). It also includes 'the material construction through the institutionalization of cultural norms of a class of devalued persons who are impeded from participatory parity' (Fraser 1997: 283, all emphases in original).

The complexity of the situation described by Ramatoulaye arises from the fact that it is through a recognition of her supposed value that the visitors hand out money to the widow. This recognition is then reaffirmed in the paradoxical way in which her possessions are transferred to the dead man's family, sanctioning and materially constructing the destitution of widows. That is, even if the outcome is negative and deplorable for the woman, the recognition, as process, continues and is accredited in that 'dreaded moment'. None of the above (traditions) would be possible, however, without the injustice of maldistribution (related to laws against women's inheritance of property, for example) to begin with. In the situation described, I suggest that the injustice of maldistribution functions as an enabling condition of the specific ritual of 'recognition' (in the 'regard shown for [her]'), which actually accomplishes *misrecognition* (as it is an institutionally accomplished devaluation of this widow and contributes to creating a group of destitute widows)

and results in further maldistribution (because she is forced to sacrifice her belongings to her family-in-law). One is not merely accompanied by the other, and even if they are mutually irreducible, misrecognition and maldistribution become cyclical processes that endlessly reinstate each other.

Clearly, Ramatoulaye writes from an elite perspective of French education, available only to a few. The Rufisque boarding school (with the enlightened headmistress) served all of West Africa – it is also the school Mariama Bâ herself attended. Modou's death, from the perspective of the 'scavenging' old woman who is seen at the funeral, is therefore beyond her appreciation:

My horizon is lightened, I see an old woman. Who is she? Where is she from? Bent over, the ends of her *boubou* tied behind her, she empties into a plastic bag the left-overs of red rice ...

Standing upright, her eyes meeting my disapproving look, she mutters between teeth reddened by cola nuts 'Lady, death is just as beautiful as life has been'. (Bâ 1981: 7–8)

The meaning of the two questions (Who is she? Where is she from?) requires more than a cursory examination. The narrator cannot know her nor understand where she is from, even if she indicates she might be from the poor outskirts of Dakar – 'Ouakam, Thiaroye or Pikine' (Bâ 1981: 8). This short intervention could be a significant moment immediately following the widows becoming 'utterly destitute' in the consideration of incommensurable spaces within post-colonial locations. It forces into deliberation spaces within post-colonial worlds that do not share the same 'language' in the senses I alluded to in the introduction following Bourdieu. It is a moment that problematizes Francophone writing because 'the area of a culture ... is usually proportionate to the area of a language rather than to the area of a class' (Williams 1960: 320). The text's silence here and elsewhere, even on the question of language, for example, when education is critically evaluated (see Bâ 1981: 17–9), becomes a reason for productive interrogation beyond the scope of this piece.¹¹

Nevertheless, the most radical proposal in Bâ's text is the narration of the friendship between Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou, because it challenges the structural stability of heterosexual polygamy (for men) that is held in place by the forces of colonialism as well as older patriarchal forces, operating in tandem. Using the form of a letter for the intimate account of the lives of Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou creates a space for critical discourse (as I have shown earlier) between (and by extension among) women that excludes from her text the male as either producer or receiver. It creates 'narratively' (rather than *in* the narrative), a female–female couple in the form of a new discursive practice within the 'national', even if the text is silent about sexual intimacy for these two women after the break with their husbands. At first, Ramatoulaye

establishes the endurance of friendship between women over the 'love' in the heterosexual couple: 'If over the years, and passing through the realities of life, dreams die, I still keep intact my memories, the salt of remembrance [of friendship]' (Bâ 1981: 1). And later: 'Friendship has splendours that love knows not. It grows stronger when crossed, whereas obstacles kill love. Friendship resists time, which wearies and severs couples. It has heights unknown to love' (54).

This latter quotation is from the chapter where Aïssatou purchases a car for her friend, after learning how difficult it is for her to get about with the children using public transportation. It is impossible to ignore how this couple of Ramatoulaye–Aïssatou replaces the heterosexual one. She recounts elsewhere her refusal of offers of marriage from various suitors (appropriate according to 'tradition') because she is still true to her one love, Modou, but also due to a reticence to reproduce a 'co-wife'. The above quotation is preceded, in the same chapter, by Ramatoulaye's admission that she begins to wait for 'another man', even if she knows that 'It would not be easy to get [her] children to accept a new masculine presence' (53). I believe that the suggestion becomes stronger and is rendered radical, perhaps paradoxically, by Ramatoulaye's admission that she 'ha[d] never conceived of happiness outside marriage' (56). What I am proposing is that it is the structuring of this feeling of the necessity of the couple – through the repeatedly sanctioned polygamous practice of the husband in which the first wife 'accepts' her role as secondary for the purposes of financial support, as well as through the Western and romantic notion of one true love for one man, to which Ramatoulaye wholly subscribes – that prevents what is otherwise logical, effectively real and materially actualized: that of the female–female couple.

One of the categories that Bâ's text shares with larger society is that of heterosexuality. Following the above proposal, one might ask if 'it [is] not possible to maintain and pursue heterosexual identifications and aims within homosexual practice, and homosexual identifications and aims within heterosexual practices' (Butler 1991: 17)? In fact, the division here between aims and practices becomes blurred. This friendship, as it is constructed, could be seen as the accomplishment of an aim (homosexual interdependency, as in the example of the car, and emotional intimacy, as the entire letter testifies), accomplished in heterosexual practice (both women are in heterosexual relationships and subsequently deal with separation from their respective spouses, without any explicit reference to homosexual practice). Or it can be seen as a homosexual practice (in the forming of a couple, whether or not the physical sexual is implicated) which maintains heterosexual identifications and aims (by not changing the structural relations between men and women, even if polygamy is contested). It is perhaps in this way that the 'feminine', which I more or less excluded from this study in the introduction, could

productively re-enter the discussion of women's agency: the feminine as that which is not contained by practices and which can accomplish aims that are contrary to those suggested by a specific practice, for example.

If the masculinist *négritude* writing and the movement in general were able to propose a new radical understanding and functioning of the 'Black' man, even through the feminine (see, for example, Smith's 1994 study on the feminine in Césaire's poetry), various new material practices through the innovative strategies of individuals and collectivities in the Francophone world demand a reassessment of the understanding of the active being/becoming of women.¹² I ask, then, that we consider this writing as a means of producing this woman, outside heterosexual married polygamy, and not quite, as Jameson writes (of Sartre's understanding of Flaubert), as a resolution 'in the imaginary, [of] what is socially irreconcilable' (Jameson: 1971: 383). I also ask that we go beyond 'remember[ing] the fact of successful revolutions as well, and mak[ing] a place for an art which might be prophetic rather than fantasy-oriented, one which might portend genuine solutions underway rather than projecting formal substitutes for impossible ones' (1971: 385). I urge, indeed, that we credit this discursive forging of a female subjectivity as one which is (part of) a solution to women's oppression in polygamous, patriarchal (here) Senegalese society, as well as an articulation of a social resolution to women's participation in forging (a) national culture. I suggest we think of the literary text as the material from which we work towards that 'totalizing' moment in thought and materially inscribe it in language, as we seek to approach what, as Hall put it, 'for Williams ... a "cultural analysis", in the final instance, should deliver'. I hope, before these ideas are seen as over-extensions of the scope of the 'literary', that the intervention of the concept of 'languaging' with which I conclude this piece, helps in arguing for them.

There is no doubt that through a gradual changing of a structurally supported feeling, by changing the practice, Ramatoulaye alters the supportive structure. For example, she begins going to the cinema on her own:

I overcame my shyness at going alone to cinemas; I would take a seat with less and less embarrassment as the months went by. People stared at the middle-aged lady without a partner. I would feign indifference, while anger hammered against my nerves and the tears I held back welled up behind my eyes.

From the surprised looks, I gauged the slender liberty granted to women. (Bâ 1981: 51)

Yet it is clear that Ramatoulaye extends the limits of this liberty through her persistent practice. I suggest that the writing of this letter is ultimately the larger extension of liberty that one must both appreciate as agency and problematize with regard to the question of language, as indicated earlier. It is the creation of a discourse (about the future of the nation and of the

women in it) that disrupts the properly political field as being that of men; it is an appropriation of this discourse and its injection into the sphere of autobiography and women's lives at the level of 'story', and into women's and men's personal lives through readership. Both the act of going to the cinema on her own, as well as the larger act of (this) writing itself, can be read as acts that effectively question social practices and redefine the aims of the character. Ramatoulaye ends her letter with: 'I shall go out in search of [happiness]. Too bad for me if once again I have to write you so long a letter ...' (Bâ 1981: 89), thus clearly inscribing any quest for happiness in this discursive search, in-between aims and practices as it were, anchored between herself and her friend. Given the wide readership this text enjoys, I believe its readings in the context of WCD are significant because their framing through this paradigm opens the exploration of new practices, or at very least, the exploration of the same practices in new terms.

Yet, the instability of categories such as those of aims and practices, or misrecognition and maldistribution, must be invited into the field of assessment with much caution. It is one thing to show that categories are not as fixed as we would like, and quite another to reject completely their possibility as tools for research. Also, before the 'cultural' shift, one might more rigorously scrutinize the investment in individual agency or, rather, the pursuit to tell the story of individual agency.¹³ In other terms, our narrative and the assessment towards which it strives are deeply situated in Western academic discourse. Are we certain that it is from this vantage point that the story of individual agency in Third World contexts can, and should, be most appropriately theorized? Alternatively, how does the telling of individual agency alter the research agenda and methods, and what types of outcomes could one anticipate for the understanding of development?¹⁴

Conclusions: Literature and 'Languaging'¹⁵

Taking culture, as proposed through WCD, in its most dynamic and complex conception for the analyses of women's practices in the context of what is seen as development, would consequently require a radical restructuring of these very categories. From this perspective, therefore, how would considerations of 'development' in the 'Third World' alter the constituent of 'woman' as proposed? Evidently, the definition for woman will be inadequately achieved from the older paradigms through which development has been studied. For example, would we find useful Judith Butler's call for the understanding of gender as performative, as 'a kind of imitation for which there is no original' (1997: 21)? It would follow from this that there is no essential quality or basis for the category of 'woman', which would be generated in its entirety by performances that create an image (of woman) for which the 'original' is never

attainable. We would understand 'gender [as] performative in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express' (Butler 1997: 24). How ready and equipped are we, really, to attend to how 'woman' is created through processes of performance, by series of individual acts by women in our societies, even as the role in development of the provisional group these acts posit is studied? Butler's proposal, that 'those ontologically consolidated phantasms of "man" and "woman" are theatrically produced effects that posture as grounds, origins, the normative measure of the real' (1997: 21), would require us to forgo the category of woman as a given from which we can easily analyse its role in development. We would, moreover, be obliged to seek out the conditions that enable such a category to exist, and to exist as such, in particular situations. This would create huge problems for any kind of measurement, and preclude, for example, numerous generalizations. The WCD concern with resistance and agency would also have to be re-evaluated.¹⁶

Further, the linking of women to production, reproduction and (making visible of) agency that is central to the WCD paradigm also becomes implicated in this 'cultural' shift.¹⁷ From here, reproduction can be understood in terms of making a copy from an original as well as making a new organism of the same species (see Williams 1995: 185). Are we interested, from a WCD perspective, in using these valences of the terms to understand women's agency? What would be the consequences of considering women's production to be innovation in practices by women, as they constantly and conditionally define themselves; and the consequences of including in reproduction the idea of the reproduction of practices as well as the relations that condition them? Even (especially) giving birth will be seen as a practice which reproduces not just the species, but the relations for this practice – in most cases heterosexual male–female relations, sanctioned and maintained through a complex set of other practices, indubitably tied to relations of production in the economic sense.

Walter Mignolo explains that: 'The very concept of literature presupposes the major or official languages of a nation and the transmissions of the cultural literacy built into them' (1996: 188). Its relevance to any study involving spaces demarcated 'nationally', or with reference to the 'nation', thus become important, especially in those instances where the idea of a shared culture is of consequence. Mignolo submits that the concept of literature should move towards 'the idea of languaging as a cultural practice' (1996: 189), where 'languaging' suggests a 'moving away from the idea that language is a fact (e.g. a system of syntactic, semantic and phonetic rules) toward the idea that speaking and writing are moves that *orient* and *manipulate* social domains of interaction' (1996: 188, my emphasis). I have tried to attend to the dual actions of 'orientation' and 'manipulation' that the text effects through its work on specific categories.

It is only by privileging cultural analyses (in the sense discussed earlier) in the context of development that literature can make any contribution to our understanding of specific issues within development. Still, the idea of culture suggested by Stuart Hall – as the meanings and values shared by groups and arising from their historical conditions, relationships and dynamic relation to their existence, along with the practices that can be read as contingent inscriptions of these different relations – demands that cultural analyses 'deliver' an understanding that matches this totalized conception of culture through a similar movement in 'thought'.

Cultural analyses and dialectical thought, accomplished through areas that have too often eschewed the logic of the economic within them, must necessarily move in that direction, while analyses achieved through domains that have reductively considered economic structures outside of experiential and innovative figuring, which is difficult to quantify, for example, must necessarily learn to articulate these areas of what generates the 'culture' in question. For WCD both directions become consequential, because a more complete understanding of women's lives would mean not just making the very important (but measured, as I have suggested above) cultural shift in analyses relating to areas already considered in development studies, but rather, would involve a parallel enlargement of the field of inquiry itself, which would require a legitimization of other bases of information on, and insight regarding, its central questions.

Notes

I gratefully acknowledge Dominic Thomas for his useful comments, particularly those regarding Francophone literature; Tim Watson for his thoughtfully suggested readings on/in cultural studies for a different project, many of which inform this piece or have led to readings used here; Sarah Karim for her excellent research assistance; and the editors of this volume, whose patience and generosity in engaging with my arguments are appreciated and have greatly improved this chapter.

1. The term 'gender' 'suggests that relations between the sexes are a primary aspect of social organization (rather than following from, say, economic or demographic pressures); that the terms of male and female identities are in large part culturally determined (not produced by individuals or collectivities entirely on their own); and that differences between the sexes constitute and are constituted by hierarchical social structures' (Scott 1988: 10). Although it does not attend specifically to differences between gendered women, Scott's definition does move away from an emphasis on the purely economic.

2. Drawing from Cixous or Irigaray, for example; and in general from psychoanalysis, especially following Lacan.

3. While it is clearly impossible to understand the 'Third World' in terms of geographical divisions alone, for the purposes of this chapter the nation of Senegal implicated in the text under consideration as an area of post-coloniality is of significance.

4. See McClintock (1992) regarding the pitfalls of the terminology associated with the 'post-colonial', and McClintock (1992), Bahri (1995), Michel (1995) and Li (1995) for considerations of the field.

5. Bourdieu (1994) convincingly shows how language (different languages, but also differently accented or otherwise marked versions of a single language) is both a marker of social and economic class and also a symbol of status, and thus an important factor in the access to material and discursive power.

6. For a discussion of 'tactics' and 'strategies' see de Certeau (1984: xii–xix). Simplified here for my purposes, tactics are provisional and time-bound, while strategies visualize a more easily identifiable opposition. So, if my tactics differ from those proposed (for example by engaging more actively the economic or by emphasizing structuring processes rather than those that allow their disruption) due to what is more commonly examined in the discipline from which I write, the overall strategy that aims to reach a more complete understanding of women's actions in the context of development is shared.

7. 'The author is what gives the disturbing language of fiction its unities, its nodes of coherence, its insertion in the real' (Foucault 1981: 58).

8. Such a reading is suggestive of the literary text as a space in which to imaginatively and in imagination deal with realities external to it. I believe strongly that they indeed accomplish this, and that this is a valuable and important process. In this discussion, however, I want to engage with a different articulation of the literary text.

9. To be sure, the specific national space would itself be too reductive for Jameson's conception of the 'system as a whole'. Yet, to invoke the post-colonial national space necessarily forces into consideration the larger systems that validate and oppose it.

10. For a discussion of this sense of 'reproduction', see Williams's essay on 'Reproduction' in *Sociology of Culture* (1995: 181–205). I return to this understanding of 'reproduction' in my conclusion below.

11. For a forceful argument regarding the place of indigenous (specifically African) languages, see Barber (1995). See also Alexander, Bambose, Obanya, Rabenoro, Rassoul and Wolff in the special issue of *Social Dynamics* (1999) regarding this question of languages in the more recent African post-colonial context.

12. To be sure, the disciplinary demarcation of 'Francophonie' (and, for example, its separation from other areas of post-coloniality, its connections to other spaces of post-coloniality in the same areas) also becomes problematized in such a consideration.

13. Clearly, I believe that individual agency and a recognition of this agency by individuals is crucial to any kind of positive self-image; it is essential to survival in many instances. I also see the effect of telling these stories: to combat the essentializing, generalizing theories that label Third World women as victims in need to be rescued. I still think, however, that there is room for further discussion of the investment in the narrative of individual agency.

14. My use of 'we' here and elsewhere in this chapter relates specifically to this WCD project and book and the debates and questions it summons. The questions my chapter raises are the result of my thinking through the new WCD proposal, and I therefore participate in this collective project of evaluating how best to figure women's lives in the Third World while analysing development.

15. The term is from Walter Mignolo (1996).

16. See, for example, Seyla Benhabib's objection to this idea of performativity:

First, what kind of empirical social research paradigms is Butler privileging in her views of gender constitution as performativity? Are these adequate for the explanation of ontogenetic processes of development? Second, what normative vision of agency follows from, or is implied by this theory of performativity? Can the theory account for the capacities of agency and resignification it wants to attribute to individuals, thus explaining not only the constitution of the self but also the resistance that this very self is capable of in the face of power/discourse regimes? (1995: 111)

See also Butler's response regarding agency. She argues: 'To the extent that a performative act appears to "express" a prior intention, a doer *behind* the deed, that prior agency is only legible as the effect of that utterance' (1995: 134), underscoring the need to reconsider the consequences of the cultural shift proposed.

17. Note the frequent return of these (linked) terms in Chua, Bhavnani and Foran (2000). Early in their essay, they propose the fruitfulness of viewing culture 'as the relationship between production and reproduction in women's lives, and when women's agency is made explicit' (2000: 821).