

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MARITAL FAILURE IN SELECTED FRENCH AND FRANCOPHONE NEGRO-AFRICAN NOVELS

Original Research Article | Volume 1 | Issue 3 | 2026 | Article Number: 006

Accepted: 16 July 2026 | Published: 10 August 2026 | ISSN: 2979-8582 (Online)



Crossref : <https://doi.org/10.67693/BJCR-BPQ4U75D>



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Abstract

This present article seeks to examine the theme of marital failure as a human reality through a comparative analysis of four French and Francophone Negro-African novels. These novels are: *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert, *Xala* by Ousmane Sembène, *The Bridge of Beyond* by Simone Schwarz-Bart, and *Juletane* by Myriam Warner-Vieyra. Positioned within the wider framework of transatlantic literary studies, the article interrogates the measure in which different cultural contexts - European, African and Latin American - converge in their transposition of marital failure as a material reality and existential necessity. Based on Maurice Morel's interpretation of the literary theory of realism and psychoanalytic criticism, the research highlights that marital failure in French and Francophone Negro-African literatures is a complex interplay of physical trauma, psychological conflicts and cultural factors. The research reveals that marital failure is not just a theme but a structural principle underlying the aesthetic fabric of the four texts. Employing documentary, qualitative and comparative methods, the study demonstrates that marital failure is elaborated through realist human traits such as conflicts, tensions, disappointments, trauma, and betrayal. Furthermore, the paper reveals causes of marital failure in the selection such as conflict of interests between husband and wife, inordinate desires, and traditional and religious practices. It also highlights effects of marital failure, often existing in binary forms such as boredom and incommunicability of the couple, impotence and conjugal violence, and madness and death. Finally, the paper recommends a number of qualities expected in marital couples such as responsibility, authority, resolution, maturity and courage, in order to avoid marital failure. The article concludes that the four selected texts illustrate the measure in which French and Francophone Negro-African literatures align with the aesthetics of realism, where marital failure is a brilliant narrative that reveals the nuances and complexities of human interior

and exterior conflicts, tensions, traumas, and contradictions that are interpretable through the realist lenses.

Keywords: Marital Failure, Realism, Inordinate Desires, Conflict Of Interests, Conjugal Violence

1. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is one of the oldest human institutions in human history with its failure at an alarming increase. This observable human phenomenon has persisted and worsened in modern human history, and has therefore been subject to essential literary representation by several writers across the Francophone world.

The search for realism in modern Western literary history led to the emergence of the French novel, *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert in 1857. This is a blunt story of Emma Bovary married to Charles Bovary, a naïve medical personnel living in the French countryside. Whereas the husband is occupied with family and work for breadwinning, the wife, who had left the convent, has her mind constantly in search for romance and an “undiscovered” life only existent in her fantasies. Naïve, Charles Bovary has no idea of what is going on in her wife’s mind.

The situation degenerates to the extent that Madame Bovary now finds her first lover, Leon. This is a law clerk living in the new town where the Bovary’s moved in to escape Emma’s boredom in the French countryside. According to *SparkNotes* study guide, “when Emma realizes that Leon loves hers she feels guilty and throws herself into the role of a dutiful wife. Leon grows tired [...] and [...] departs to study law in Paris” (www.sparknotes.com/lit/summary).

Immediately after Leon, Emma meets Rodolphe, her second lover. He is Emma’s neighbour, who is wealthy and passionate towards her. According to *SparkNotes*, “Emma is often indiscreet, and the townspeople all gossip about her. Charles, however, suspects nothing” (www.sparknotes.com/lit/summary). Sadly for Emma, Rodolphe soon abandons her, refusing to elope on her demand due to the former’s boredom with the latter’s love demands.

Back and forth love affairs, Emma re-encounters Leon, her first lover, at Rouen where his husband takes her to the opera. *SparkNotes* affirms that:

This meeting rekindles the old romantic flame between Emma and Leon and this time the two embark on a love affair. As Emma continues sneaking off to Rouen to meet Leon, she also grows deeper and deeper in debt to the moneylender Lheureux, who lends her more and more money at exaggerated interest rates (www.sparknotes.com/lit/summary).

Bored, heartbroken and broke, Emma Bovary eventually opts out by committing suicide.

Madam Bovary by Gustave Flaubert is a masterpiece novel. It is widely regarded as the precursor of literary realism, from which several Francophone writers, especially in the Negro-African world, draw inspiration. These novels include the three other selected novels for this present research: *Xala* (1973) by Sembène Ousmane, *Juletane* (1982) by Myriam Warner-Vieyra and *The Bridge of Beyond* (1972) by Simone Schwarz-Bart.

Whereas existent research has examined *Madame Bovary* within French realist and modernist traditions, *Juletane* and *The Bridge of Beyond* within Caribbean postcolonial and feminist discourse, and *Xala* within African post-independence discourse, few studies have undertaken a comparative analysis of these texts. This absence indicates a significant gap in multinational literary studies, where critical approaches are often compartmentalized within linguistic and cultural frameworks. By making attempt to bridge this gap,

this study contributes to a more integrated comprehension of French and Francophone Negro-African literatures as heterogeneous yet interconnected specialisations.

This article therefore proposes to:

- a. Compare and contrast the human reality of marital failure in the novels of Gustave Flaubert, Ousmane, Sembène, Simone Schwarz-Bart and Myriam Warner-Vieyra, articulating its major causes.
- b. Demonstrate through psychoanalytic criticism how marital failure affects the couple and the society.
- c. Suggest a number of solutions to help avoid marital failure.

By comparative approach, the study repositions the selected texts within a shared theoretical framework. Further, the research projects the discourse on comparative literature by demonstrating the measure of trans-nationality existing between European, African and Caribbean cultural and literary traditions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Intellectual research on *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert has mainly dwelt on the domain of European realist literary current. Critics such as Sharma (2020) and Lewis (<https://campuspress.yale.edu/modernismmlab/madame-bovary>) underscore the fact that Flaubert's representation of marital failure between Emma Bovary and her husband, Charles Bovary, is a brilliant example of realism in the modern era. According to Sharma (2020), "The novel has been considered ultimate for its depiction of realism and impressionism" (p.36). Similarly, Lewis asserts that "The novel exemplifies the tendency of realism, over the course of the nineteenth century, to become increasingly psychological, concerned with the accurate representation of thoughts and emotions rather than of external things" (<https://campuspress.yale.edu/modernismmlab/madame-bovary>).

Essentially, the brutal reality regarding marital failure in *Madame Bovary*, as critics point out, lies in the striking and revealing nature of thoughts and emotions. Lewis (<https://campuspress.yale.edu/modernismmlab/madame-bovary>) further reveals three opposing phenomena emanating from Emma Bovary's character: boredom, adultery and disappointment. According to Lewis, she is "a bored housewife who has two extramarital affairs but finds adultery almost as disappointing as marriage". This is what De Biasi (<https://www.item.ens.fr/index.php?id=13587>) calls "the disillusion of adultery".

In a symbolic dimension, Yustisiana (2018) sees marital failure in *Madame Bovary* as a portrait of failure of the bourgeoisie. The scholar argues that "Emma's disappointments stem in great part from her dissatisfaction with the world of the French bourgeoisie. She aspires to have taste that is more refined and sophisticated than that of her class" (Yustisiana, 2018, p.19).

The disillusion of adultery is what Jean-Jacques Rousseau is concerned about in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. As noted by Morel (1940), this French novel written by Rousseau in 1761 dresses the character of a school teacher called Saint-Preux who passionately loves his pupils, Julie. School over, both part ways with Julie now married to M. de Wolmar, a good and kindhearted man. Saint-Preux tries to forget about it and then travels far away.

However, after four years, Saint-Preux re-encounters Julie who now has two children. Julie narrates in confidence to her husband about the kindheartedness of her school teacher, and in his usual generosity, her husband welcomes Saint-Preux with open arms. Consequently, the love between Julie and her school teacher re-ignites in their hearts. However, in her ill luck, Julie soon dies in a car crash. Obviously, with regard to what De Biasi (<https://www.item.ens.fr/index.php?id=13587>) calls the disillusion of adultery,

Madame Bovary by Flaubert, under the critical lenses of realism, appears to be a literary accomplishment of the social and moral mission of Rousseau in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, a French enlightenment philosophy novel.

In contrast, critical interpretations of Francophone Negro-African works particularly highlight interconnectedness of marital failure and Black African and Islamic traditions. As noted by Mushengyezi (2004), *xala* presented in *Xala* by Ousmane Sembène is a symbolic depiction of the curse of impotence on the African elite. Referring to the practice of polygamy, Sirohi and Pandey (2022) observe that “emotional understanding [...] in African culture [...] that a man who has a lot of wife(sic) and children is able to support them is a real man of high class” (p. 739). This is an apparent illustration of the African post-independence bourgeoisie comparative to the French bourgeoisie. If Emma Bovary pursued it in failure in *Madame Bovary*, El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye is shown in *Xala* to be impotent in attaining it as well. In this light, Sembène’s *Xala* is an interesting replicate of Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*.

Staying on the theme of African and Islamic traditions as obstacles to marriage, *Juletane*, by Myriam Warner-Vieyra is a brilliant example. Presenting the novel as a mirror of the complexities of intersectional identities, Scheer (2019) shows in her honours thesis how “intersectionality in [...] race, gender, migratory status, and childhood experiences” (p.3) in addition to polygamy destroy marriage. As a matter of fact, marital failure in such circumstance is what Toivanen (2012) seemingly mockingly describes as “diasporic romances gone bad” (p. 432), noting that “tradition and communality build a gap between the married couple” (p.444).

With regard to polygamy and other African and Islamic practices that affect marriage, there are a number of other texts that are additional to *Xala* and *Juletane*. Lynn Mbuko’s *Chaque chose en son temps* is worth mentioning. This Nigerian play written in French in 2001, shows how a polygamous Northern Nigerian old man insists on marrying an underage girl. However, due to the fact the girl is biologically too young for marriage, medical complications develop that become challenging to child bearing. The unfortunate girl is then abandoned in the hospital to the mercy of the nurses. If the nurses take care of the abandoned girl ensuring to send her to school, Mbuko’s message in her play is to show the problematic African and Islamic religious practice of polygamy, highlighting how this situation, much like in *Xala* and *Juletane*, often leads to marital failure.

Apparently, there are a number of other African practices and beliefs that result in failure in marriage. Much related to the issue of early marriage in Mbuko’s *Chaque chose en son temps* is Mongo Beti’s earlier work, *Perpétue et l’habitude du Malheur*. Written in 1974, this novel presents a young innocent Perpétue who, under the requirements of African tradition, has to abandon school in obedience to her mother in order to marry a politician whom she scarcely knows. Perpétue however becomes a sex toy in the hands of men, as her husband literally hands her out to a powerful police officer. The sad note is that Perpétue will soon be found dead, with causes hardly known.

In a dramatic way, three novels highlight another African practice that often militates against marriage. This is the practice of female circumcision popularly known as genital mutilation. Two notable novels by Ahmadou Kourouma have dramatically presented this practice, articulating how it limits marriage. Both *Les soleils des indépendances* and *Allah n’est pas obligé* written in 1970 and 2000 respectfully, show women who suffer from female circumcision, struggle in vain to correct its negative influence on their childbearing capacities, but finally abandon their marriage. In a similar tone, Ramonu Sanusi’s *Le bistoury des larmes* which was published in 2005 shows an unfortunate victim who eventually looks out for and kills her circumciser, having been declared incapable of childbearing by the doctor.

Finally, critics comment on the different dimension taken by Simone Schwarz-Bart’s *The Bridge of*

Beyond, another Negro-African novel of West Indian origin, vis-à-vis the theme of marital failure. They highlight how circumstances other than African and Islamic practices such as polygamy and female circumcision, could also result in marital failure in a Black African society.

Thinks (<https://ellethinks.wordpress.com/2015/03/25/the-bridge-of-beyond-by-simone-schwarz-bart>) points out concubinage as the cause of marital failure in Schwarz-Bart's *The Bridge of Beyond*. For Bouchard (1990), marital failure in *The Bridge of Beyond* by Schwarz-Bart results from inexperience and confusion of feelings on the part of the seventeen-year-old young woman, Telumee, towards her first husband, Elie. This is what Bouchard (1990) describes as symptoms of love at first sight.

Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is the theoretical base of literary realism in all French and Francophone Negro-African literary texts. According to Agarwal (in the abstract of her work),

Madame Bovary is an illustration of a contemporary novel in which description is used as an element of action, new technique has been used to describe a new kind of reality and 'apprehended psychological state' has been portrayed which is a modern feature.

Therefore, this research bridges three critical literary domains that have often been treated separately:

- French Metropolitan Literature
- Francophone African Literature
- Francophone Caribbean Literature

With an attempt at integrating these domains, this study contributes to a transnational approach to Francophone literary studies, foregrounding the interconnectedness of European, African and Latin American cultures across the world.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is circumscribed by two theoretical paradigms. The theories provide a structural comprehension of marital failure in French and Francophone Negro-African literatures.

3.1 Realism

The first literary theory is realism. As a French literary critic, Morel (1940) highlights two key characteristics of literary realism. These features which are structural to all realist literature are: observation of the material world and analysis of phenomena of a moral order. These are two pillars of Gustave Flaubert's realist vision of the contemporary world, a literary vision that is replicated by several Francophone Negro-African writers including Simon Schwarz-Bart, Ousmane Sembène and Myriam Warner-Vieyra. As Lweis (<https://campuspress.yale.edu/modernism/madame-bovary>) clarifies, realism makes a novel to be "psychological, concerned with the accurate representation of thoughts and emotions rather than external things"

3.2 Psychoanalytic Criticism

Supporting realism in the analysis of this research is the framework of psychoanalytic criticism. This criticism is based on the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud whose tripartite model of the psyche which comprises the id, ego, and superego, provide a useful optic for analyzing the dynamic principles that underline the behaviour and actions of characters.

The primary objective of psychoanalytic criticism is to reveal the hidden motivations, interests and tendencies that define human attitudes. Within the framework of this study, this theory provides a vivid examination of how marital failure occurs, not only at the exterior level of physical crises but also within the interior psychological realm. Essentially, the characters in *Madame Bovary*, *Xala*, *The Bridge of*

Beyond and *Juletane*, are preoccupied with constant negotiations between instantaneous drives (id), careful decision (ego), and moral and social considerations (superego).

As a matter of fact, Emma Bovary's bewildering quest for sexual gratification can be interpreted as an indication of the ego, with an inclination to self-pleasure. In the same vein, the experiences of the characters in the other texts show complex psychological tensions influenced by disappointment, trauma and social expectations. By this framework, marital failure manifests itself as a cultural as well as physical phenomenon, characterized by conflict, violence, and even death. Operating together, these two theoretical paradigms produce an essential analytical tool that captures both the causes and effects of marital failure, resulting in a detailed interpretation of the selected texts.

4. METHODOLOGY

This present research adopts a comparative, qualitative and documentary approach. The purpose is to produce vivid interpretations of the selected literary texts. Whereas the comparative nature of the study facilitates the examination of similarities as well as differences existing in the four novels within a unified theoretical framework, the qualitative dimension of the research permits a thorough identification of narrative forms, thematic contours, and symbolic features.

In this regard, *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert, *Xala* by Ousmane Sembène, *The Bridge of Beyond* by Simone Schwarz-Bart and *Juletane* by Myriam Warner-Vieyra are the primary texts. They constitute the core data for analysis. They are supported by secondary sources such as critical works, journal articles, and theoretical books that produce interpretative and contextual clarifications for the research. The documentary component of the research methodology tends to ensure scholarly and original discourse.

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Causes of Marital Failure in the Selected Texts

Realist literature emphasises observation of the material world and exactness of analysis of phenomena of a moral order. These two qualities, as initiated by Gustave Flaubert, manifest intensely in the four selected novels, *Madame Bovary*, *Xala*, *Juletane* and *The Bridge of Beyond* through the characters' consistent actions and reactions in the face of personal desires, interpersonal conflicts and existential outcomes. In this perspective, marital failure is not just a thematic concern but a literary representation shaped by the dual realist aesthetics of material observation and moral analysis. Through these critical lenses, a number of causes of marital failure are observable and identifiable in the four novels.

5.1.1 Inordinate Sexual Desires: Sexual Gratification to the Detriment of a Marriage Partner

Madame Bovary by Gustave Flaubert is precursory in this regard. In the narrative of this work, inordinate sexual desires constitute the primary cause of marital failure. The disillusion of adultery observable in *Madame Bovary* whereby Emma Bovary is sexually unsatisfied with her husband, Charles Bovary, and has to relentlessly pursue extramarital affairs with two other men, primarily underlines marital failure. As a matter of fact, Emma Bovary,

Getting disappointed, she was unable to find those pleasures and joys about which she has read in books. Charles was not more than an ordinary man, a dull character with whom Emma's vivacity was mismatched. He remained stupid towards the end, incapable of understanding Emma. He had no desires, ambition and dreams at all (Sharma, 2020, p. 37).

Consequently, these inordinate sexual desires are built on unrealisable fantasies. As noted by the author of *Madame Bovary*,

Before marriage, she thought herself in love, but the happiness that should have followed this love not having come, she must, she thought, have been mistaken. And Emma tried to find out what one meant exactly in life, by the words, felicity, passion, rapture, that had seemed to her so beautiful in books... The comparisons of betrothed, husband, celestial lover and eternal marriage that recur in sermons, stirred within her soul depths of unexpected sweetness (Flaubert, 2003, pp. 27-28).

A similar confusion occurs in *The Bridge of Beyond* by Simone Schwarz-Bart regarding sexual desires and their tendency to eventually separate husband and wife. Telumee finally abandons her marriage with her first husband, Elie, because he is no longer sexually interested in her. In this regard, Ormerod (1985) argues that “it is not for moral weakness that Telumee herself blames Elie in the end, but for a failure of love” (p.125). Apparently, failure of marriage is caused here by failure of love in both husband and wife, which Bouchard (1990) points out in Telumee as well, showing all inexperience and confusion of sentiments. This eventually makes her first husband, Elie, to force her out in preference for Laetitia, his concubine.

In what appears to be a subverted replicate of inordinate desire for the bourgeois life highlighted in *Madame Bovary*, *Xala* by Ousmane Sembène is an illustration of a failed African bourgeoisie. In a rather symbolic manner, the “xala” (impotence) that befalls El Hadji Kader Beye on the first night with his newly wedded third wife, N’Gone, represents this inordinate desire for the African bourgeoisie in replication of the French bourgeoisie. In fact, an allusion is made in *Xala* to this failed African pseudo-bourgeoisie:

El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye was what one might call a synthesis of two cultures: business had drawn him into the European middle class after a feudal African education. Like his peers, he made skilful use of his dual background, for their fusion was not complete (Sembène, 1976, pp. 3-4)

It is interesting to note that the failed bourgeoisie in *Xala* is comparable to the one in *Madame Bovary* and is parallel to the failed marriages presented in both texts. As a matter of fact, this phenomenon is subverted because in *Madame Bovary*, it is the wife who is passionately in a hot chase for a bourgeois life while in *Xala*, it is the husband that desires it. Whereas the one in *Madame Bovary* is described as high class bourgeoisie, the one in *Xala* is regarded as middle class.

5.1.2. Conflict of Interests between Husband and Wife: Confusion of Feelings

Conflict of interests between husband and wife as a cause of marital failure can be interpreted as a manifestation of the egos mediating between the antagonistic desires of husband and wife. This reality exists in the couples presented in the four selected novels.

First and foremost, in *Madame Bovary*, the marital interests or expectations of Charles Bovary are different from those of Emma Bovary. Starting with Emma Bovary, according to Sharma (2020),

She was convent-educated and was interested in love songs, [...] lovers, horse riding, somber forests, sobs, tears, kisses, nightingales in shady groves, gentleman brave as Lions, gentle as lambs, gentleman with well-dressed attitude. She had great interest in Walter Scott and was well read [...] she was adventurous, delicate and intelligent hence had a great impression on every male whether it was Heloise, Leon, Lheureux or Rodolphe [...] she was superior to Charles in every way. Every time, she was feeling herself a caged bird in the name of conventional marriage.

On the contrary, “Charles was not more than an ordinary man” (Sharma, 2020, p. 37). He was “a dull character with whom Emma’s vivacity was a mismatch” (p. 37). Before marriage with Emma, notes Sharma, Charles “had always been manipulated by the female world, first by his mother, then by his middle-aged wife”. Furthermore, according to Sharma, Charles “was a good husband but can’t be called an ideal one since he was not concerned for Emma’s ambitions and conditions”.

Consequently, conflict of interests between husband and wife makes marriage appear like a theatre of mirage. In *Madame Bovary*, instead of Emma displaying her passionate love towards Charles, her husband, she is observed doing that to Leon, her adulterous partner. In fact, her husband’s dullness is so annoying to him: “Everything in him irritated her now, his face, his dress, what he did not say; his whole person, his existence in fine” (Flaubert, 2003, p. 141).

Essentially, *Xala* and *Juletane* are comparable to *Madame Bovary* in the measure in which husbands are presented as being too dull for their wives. This situation is what Sharma (2020) describes as “dullness versus vivacity”. In *Xala*, El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye, who is solely interested in his business and social prestige just like Charles Bovary in *Madame Bovary*, is far too dull for his three wives. This is to the extent that he suddenly becomes impotent even after swallowing sex pills, on the very first night with his third wife, N’Gone (Sembène, 1976, pp. 23-24). Similarly, *Juletane* presents an extremely weak Mamadou who cannot only take control of his three wives, but watches his family get destroyed, with all his three children murdered at a time (Warner-Vieyra, 1987, p. 74).

The only exception to this Sharma’s “dullness versus vivacity” rule, where it favours husband, occurs in *The Bridge of Beyond* by Simone Schwarz-Bart. Although Telumee shows extreme resilience in the hands of Elie, her first husband, eventually, “she’s forced out of her own home by her husband’s acquisition of a new wife” (Thinks,

<https://elethinks.wordpress.com/2015/03/25/the-bridge-of-beyond-by-simone-schwarz-bart>).

5.1.3. Traditional and Religious Practices: Self-Perpetuating Cultural Patterns

Traditional and religious practices are often self-perpetuating and could avail destructive cultural patterns. The four texts highlight the measure in which some traditional and religious practices can cause marital failure.

In *The Bridge of Beyond*, Telumee’s marriage with Elie fails partially as a result of deep-rooted traditional practices. These are what Omerod (1985) calls “self-perpetuating and self-destructive aspects of West Indian sexual patterns” (p. 113). One such pattern is obliquely highlighted by this West Indian song in the novel:

No mother

No father

Bravo!

A woman without two men

Is not worth a straw

(Schwarz-Bart, 1982, p. 53).

This song elucidates on Telumee’s marital failure with Elie and her tendency to get remarried. Religious practices can be apparently destructive to marriage. This phenomenon is observable in *Xala*, *Juletane* and *Madame Bovary*. If El Hadji Kader Beye, in a passionate quest for prestige and recognition by marrying

his third wife, is eventually befallen by impotence, Mamadou procures tragedy upon his family the very moment Juletane realizes that he is a polygamous man.

Sembène (1976) shares with Flaubert (2003) the idea of the peculiarity of the Catholic tradition and the self-perpetuating influence it portends on the marital life of women, especially those who eventually renounce the practice. The background notion fundamentally developed in *Madame Bovary* concerning Emma Bovary having left convent before marriage, is incorporated into *Xala*. Referring to El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye's first wife, Sembène (1976) asserts that,

Adja Awa Astou had no friends. She was lonely, very lonely. If she wanted to confide in someone or pour out her troubles, there was not a soul to whom she could turn [...]. There was a time when she used to go every Friday after the main prayer of the day to the Catholic cemetery to visit her mother's grave. The caretaker had noticed the regularity of this woman, who was always dressed in the same way with her head covered in a white scarf. He watched her suspiciously from a distance.

This unique personality painted of a married woman who was formerly a devout Catholic, underlines the peculiarity of influence brought into marriage with a husband that does not share similar tradition. Looking at the depiction from Sembène (1976), it is comprehensible why Emma Bovary outmatches Charles Bovary, her husband. Apparently, if El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye does not have similar marital challenges with Adja Awa Astou as the Bovarys, this is probably because El Hadji has an escape route by way of polygamy.

However, the Islamic tradition of polygamy is overtly portrayed as being largely destructive of marriage. Referring to Oumi N'Doye, El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye's second wife, Sembène (1976) affirms it thus:

With Adja Awa Astou she could accept the life of polygamy, but the advent of a third wife reopened the wound of frustration suffered by all the Muslim women of our country. She even thought momentarily of divorcing El Hadji.

The life of Juletane, the young Caribbean woman, deceived to marry Mamadou, a polygamous man, is the most exemplary circumstance regarding the negative influence of polygamy on marriage. In this regard, Scheer (2019) observes that,

Juletane feels no alliance to her husband, her sister-wives, or any other child. She is completely disconnected from her deepest desire to be loved and be surrounded by family. What is evident in her account of these events is the significance of loss and its consequent mourning, aggravating her descent into madness and depression.

5.2 Effects of Marital Failure on the Couple and Others

Marital failure is shown in the four texts to have negative effects on both the couple and others. These effects are a manifestation of interior and exterior conflicts, tensions, traumas and experiences of the couple in marriage. They also reflect the realist principles of contradictions and oppositions obtainable through vivid observation of the material world and exactness of painting of the moral order.

5.2.1 Boredom and Incommunicability of the Couple

With intense tensions, conflicts and opposition, boredom sets into marriage. This idea is well represented in *Madame Bovary*, where husband and wife are in serious psychological opposition. Ultimately, Emma Bovary's boredom springs from the fact that she fails in her marriage with Charles Bovary. As noted by

Yustisiana (2018), this is because her “dreams of romantic love [...] are unfulfilled through her marriage to a simple country doctor, Charles Bovary” (p.19). As carefully observed by Yustisiana (2018), “Flaubert [...] devotes several paragraphs to a description of Emma’s overwhelmingly daily routine. Emma’s boredom becomes one of the novel’s subjects, a means of developing her character” (p.20). Further, she “attempts to realize her fantasies through love affairs with a local landowner and a law clerk and, later, through extravagant purchases” (p.19). All these struggles end in frustration and failure.

Emma Bovary’s boredom is replicated in *Juletane* in the character of Juletane. However, in Juletane’s case, the reason is not frustrated in looking for a romantic life. “The main reason [...] is the fact that Mamadou, her only point of reference, turns out to be already married and have children”. Consequently, “Juletane is seized by a sense of melancholia which reinforces her isolation” (Toivanen, 2012, p. 441).

Boredom precedes incommunicability. This scenario exists in all the four texts. The couple become so overwhelmed by their tensions, conflicts and traumas that they enter into a condition whereby interpersonal communication becomes difficult. In *Xala*, after El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye is discovered suddenly impotent, “N’Gone was in bed in her nightdress. At the foot of the bed sat El Haji Abdou Kader Beye, hunched forward, his head in his hands” (Sembène, 1976, p. 24).

5.2.2 Impotence and Conjugal Violence

It is apparent that each of the other three novelists have imagined and articulated a particular effect of marital failure. If boredom is central to Flaubert’s fictional imagination as a great symptom of marital failure in the modern times, Sembène has emphasized on impotence, even much like a punishment for greed amidst marriage due to inordinate desires and expectations. A man already with two wives in pursuit of an underage girl for a third marriage can only be qualified as greed. This is comparable to what Flaubert wants his readers to ponder on: “what is a married woman so relentlessly looking for in two men amidst her marriage?”.

For Simone Schwarz-Bart, conjugal violence is the most pronounced effect. In *The Bridge of Beyond*, the author presents two lovers Elie and Telumee who started so passionately together when they were still teenagers, always going to bathe together in the pond (Schwarz-Bart, 1982, p. 96). At this time, notes Ormerod (1985), it was “after the happy years of her [Telumee’s] early adolescence, during which she falls deeply in love with her schoolmate and neighbor, Elie” (p.118).

On the contrary, as soon as the lovers get married, conjugal violence sets in. Even though Telumee’s grandmother, popularly called Queen without a Name, counsels her relentlessness not to abandon her marriage with Elie, at a certain point she can no longer withstand the insults, the beatings, the molestations in what the author describes as a “descent into the void” (Schwarz-Bart, 1982, p. 102) for Telumee. According to Ormerod (1985), “Unable to get work, Elie turns to drink and begins to beat Telumee unmercifully (p.118).

5.2.3 “Madness” and Death

The theme of “madness” associated with marital failure is more intensely highlighted in *Juletane* by Myriam Warner-Vieyra than in any of the other selected texts. Scheer (2019) argues out about the “madness” of Juletane thus:

The representation of Juletane’s madness is shaped by various literary tropes: she experiences melancholia in loss and grief for a future family and domesticity that eludes her; she experiences diaspora as she migrates from the Caribbean to France to Africa, trying her best to reclaim the space afforded to her as a racialized woman; and she ultimately commits violence

on those around her in Africa when she is unable to accept the life she lives among them.

As a matter of fact, madness and death as effects of marital failure in *Juletane* constitute what Toivanen (2012, pp.3-5) describes as diasporic romances gone bad. In a tragic twist of fate, the marital romance between Mamadou and Juletane ends in a multiplication of deaths.

Talking about death as a consequence of marital failure, *Madame Bovary* is precursory. If Juletane sets forth in madness to kill others, Emma Bovary chooses to vent her own madness on herself, committing suicide. As Yustisiana (2018) clarifies, “Unable to pay her debts and unwilling to tolerate or to conform to bourgeois values, she ultimately commits suicide by poisoning herself” (p.19).

5.3 Solutions to Avoid Marital Failure

If Flaubert fails to propose any suggestion on how to avoid the disastrous marriage he paints in *Madame Bovary*, the other novelists follow suit. This is with exception of Simone Schwarz-Bart who, thankfully, has obliquely suggested a number of very useful solutions in the character of Amboise, Telumee’s second husband, which this present research will recommend as solutions to avoid marital failure.

In *The Bridge of Beyond*, it is noteworthy that Elie, Telumee’s first wife with whom Telumee’s marriage fails, was Amboise’s apprentice as sawyer. Amboise is much older than Elie who is about the same age as Telumee, given that they were school classmates. When Elie forces out Telumee, she leaves and gets married to Amboise, the sawyer. Although the second marriage with him is short-lived due to his sudden accidental death, Amboise shows impressive marital skills and experience.

Ormerod (1985) has carefully outlined a number of observable good marital qualities first, for husbands. According to him,

In this society where black men for centuries were denied the right to maintain a family, and where they still have difficulty in assuming the traditional masculine role of provider and protector, Amboise stands out as the novel’s only representative of male strength, responsibility and authority (Ormerod, 1985, p.127).

These qualities mentioned above are in tandem with Amboise’s description in *The Bridge of Beyond* as being “a tall, gaunt, gnarled tree that had already let fall its fruits” (Schwarz-Bart 77).

Consequently, three recommendable qualities for husbands to ensure a successful, unfailed marriage, are observable. These are:

- Husbands should be resolute in their decisions.
- Husbands should be responsible for their actions.
- Husbands should show authority in their leadership.

On the other hand, for wives, Ormerod (1985) points out, as a point of reference, the characters of the two old women with whom Telumee closely associates and from whom she gets counseling. These two old women are Telumee’s grandmother, popularly called Queen Without a Name, and her friend, Ma Cia, “who have fled society [...] to live in the woods, and exemplify the same maturity and courage as does Amboise” (p.127). As a matter of fact, as Ormerod (1985) argues, “Telumee’s early identity and self-confidence are established by the gaze of her grandmother [...] and by the enveloping gaze of Ma Cia” (pp.125-126).

Therefore, from these two characters, three good qualities are observable and recommended to wives for an enduring marriage. These are as follows:

- Wives should show maturity of character amidst their marriage.
- Wives should demonstrate courage in the face of marital challenges.
- Wives should not be oppositional but complementary to their husbands.

CONCLUSION

This research has demonstrated that marital failure is an enduring human phenomenon that is caused by factors such as inordinate sexual desires, conflict of interests between husband and wife, and traditional and religious practices. It has also revealed that effects of marital failure include dual elements such as boredom and incommunicability of the couple, impotence and conjugal violence as well as madness and death. Through a comparative study of the four novels, the research demonstrates that marital failure occurs on a number of interrelated spheres: physical, cultural, psychological, and symbolic.

The four novelists reveal that marital failure is not just a physical phenomenon but a deep complicated process defined by historical realities, individual factors, and cultural traits. The use of Maurice Morel's interpretation of the literary realist theory across the four texts underlines the measure in which marital failure, regardless of nation and cultural peculiarities, is based on a structure that is composed of conflict, complication and variation.

By interpreting the four novels within a unified optical framework, the research challenges the traditional compartmentalisation of literary studies along linguistic and cultural levels. It indicates the fact that European, African and American literatures within the boundaries of French and Francophone Negro-African literatures, though distinct in context, are analysable based on common existing patterns. Essentially, the research declares that the literary aesthetics of realism provide powerful optics for comprehending the manner in which marital failure is experienced and represented within French and Francophone Negro-African literary cultures.

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