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In the subject

GENDER INEQUALITY IN CAMEROON: FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN AGAINST WOMEN-A HOUSEHOLD INFLUENCE

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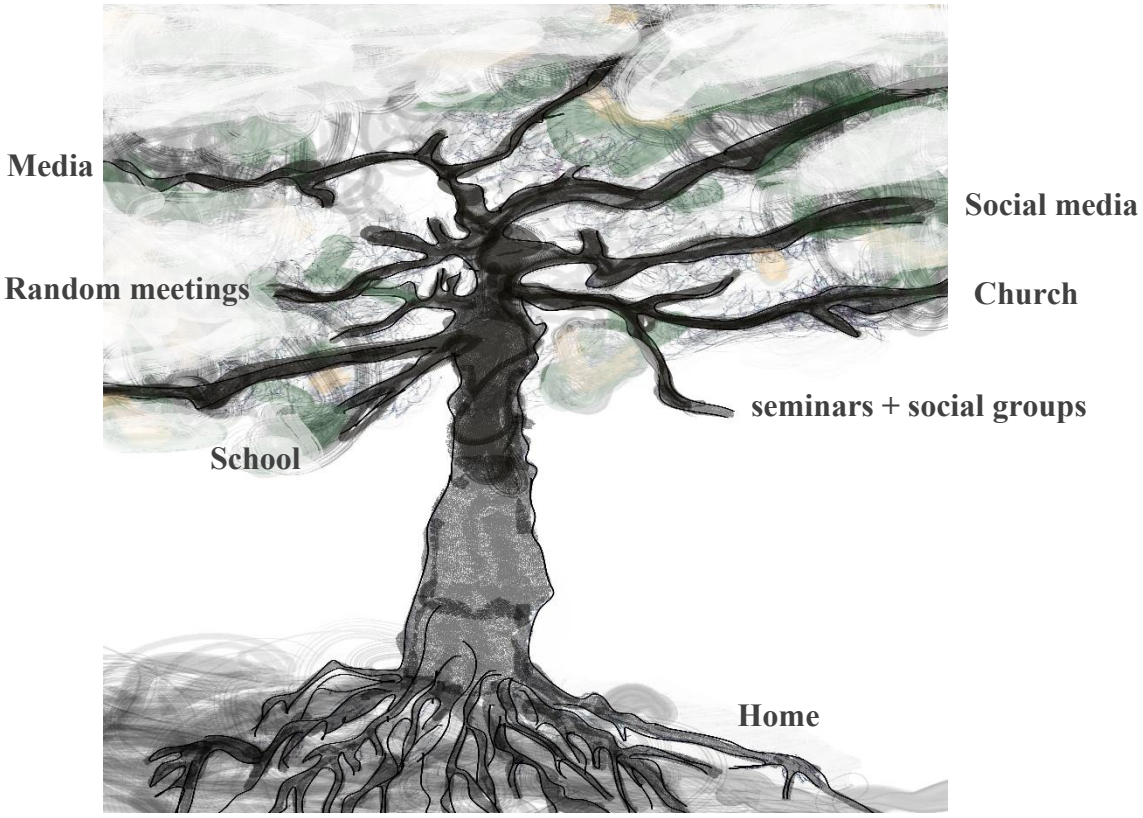
Place of birth: Bamenda, Cameroon

LIFE IILLUSTRATION TREE



A personal illustration of an individual's life from the home—connecting to many different areas in society (artist: Shetih Elkanah).

Dedication....

Dedicated to my late father Kengjise Emmanuel.

Papa, you believed in me a long time ago when you prophesied, I will be your ladder. This achievement was meant to be a surprise for you, but you could not make it to the end. To my mother, who despite not being informed too, never stressed my already stressed research brain and to my siblings who had been sweet all this while

Acknowledgement.

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Much thanks to my colleagues at Afrikanistik-Universität zu Köln; I will not forget our moments together in a hurry. Thank you for creating such an inspiring working environment. Thank you, Muhsin, for your frequent availability, especially these last days, to answer my many questions. Thank you, Janine, for being a wonderful office partner... I cherished our days of laughter and sharing our worries. Agnes, you have been a sweet soul; keep recommending me, please, and thank you too, Fatou, for always bringing some warmth.

I believe those who permitted me to talk about them in this dissertation will have the chance to read a copy. Thank you for making this fruitful through your openness. This is especially to my host family during my research. I love you all, and our time together was a beautiful experience to hold onto. Much love to family and special friends who indirectly supported this without a pre-knowledge about it

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ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

CPE: Cameroon Pidgin English

ILO: International Labour Organization

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund.

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Proof of copyright

PREFACE

In the process of writing my master thesis, I did research in Cameroon on gender inequality. The focus was on the disparities in the treatments men and women receive in the same community and when performing the same activities. When I spoke to many people, men, women, and children inclusive, I realised that as much as society influences the way people behave, their different homes help them implement these rules. Their parents, siblings, and other household members are their first teachers and sometimes their only role models. As young and innocent as they are at the point of birth, they take what is being taught to them with little or no objection. Their parents, on the other hand, follow the standards of society to bring them up, but they do have a mind of their own and can add their own personal rules to these teachings. At one stage in life, individuals carry this upbringing into society, and while they conform to what is seen in society, they still hold tight to what they were taught at home. Then a society of people with diverse minds yet bound by a particular culture is built. Society that I would love to term ‘a salad of people mixed in the same environment and bound by the same dressing, which is the culture’, is now what I met during my research. The concentration was on the people I met in churches, schools, and different job sites. From the responses I got from these people concerning gender inequality, I realised many of them thought women could solve 80% of their own problems if they chose to. Women complain of not being treated well and not being given the same opportunities as men, yet they do nothing to change the situation. Most women, according to the feedback, would still prefer to promote men than women. This got me thinking, especially when some of the older women indicated how much they would have loved to express themselves freely and tell their own stories, if not for the fact that the one language considered to be the ideal in their community is English. This language, in most cases, can only be acquired through formal education. Taking all this into consideration, I thought it might be interesting to expand on this topic using another dimension. It will be interesting to focus more on the home to see how these different methods of upbringing, though backed by society’s standards, affect the individuals, especially women, when they find themselves outside the home. I became interested in knowing how the lack of this formal education by some old women makes a difference compared to the younger generation, who are privileged to get what their mothers could not get—does it make any difference in the way they handle the issue of inequality? The issue of women not supporting one another was also a striking point, and it was necessary to find out how and the different milieus where they experience this lack of support from their fellow women. The topic is a complex one, and there are different ways of approaching it, as will be seen in the different chapters (from chapters 1 to 10). Hence, the different chapters and points might seem contradictory and 'messy’ at one point as you read. But that is rather the reality of life, and

the work has been written just the way the facts were observed, experienced, and told. It will be a privilege to deal with these different approaches, which will be fun to have an idea of women's experiences shared in different ways through different means and areas. These different areas were: WhatsApp, Facebook, home, worship areas, and workshops, just to name a few. Some of the experiences told here were experienced by me, while a good number of them came from the numerous number of women spoken to and from the many life stories I read from different social media platforms.

Chapter 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Among many vices plaguing the lives of women, violence has received much attention in African linguistics and even far beyond. This dissertation offers a new contribution and a new approach by examining the different media and contexts in which women address violence. Moreover, a better part of this dissertation criticises the use of language to relegate women. Hence, it aims at using precisely the language varieties and styles of speaking used by the women in question—women in the English-speaking parts of Cameroon—to present, discuss, and analyse the various aspects of its topic. This is also an effort to be able to reach back to these women spoken of in this research such that they could be able to recognise their own stories—as it is written in a language, they understand best. Therefore, it has a very particular focus on their language practices, communication patterns, and different areas of interaction. In addition to that, the examples used in this dissertation are sometimes compared to the Western perspective, owing to colonialism. It has an underlying idea that colonialism changed much in the Bamenda culture and equally shows the attempt made by the people of Bamenda (where applicable) and maybe not limited to Bamenda or even Cameroon, to change this perspective. Hence, it will be contradictory if I base my thesis predominantly on the Western perspective or theories that promote the Western perspective, yet it must be mentioned at least for the sake of history and a better understanding. It is therefore a summary of the perspectives, standpoints, and experiences of the many women from Bamenda reported in this dissertation. Being a part of this community, born and bred in Bamenda, it is difficult to take out my voice and perspective from this work. Furthermore, separating my role as a researcher from my role as an activist is not quite easy and is therefore intertwined here. It is for this reason that my research was garnished with activism, especially through programs like the workshops I organised as reported in chapters four and nine.

This dissertation therefore seeks to add to existing knowledge the different means by which inequality is observed or practiced. The different areas and meeting points sorted by this dissertation as the areas where women meet and experience or practice discrimination against themselves will be presented in different chapters, as follows:

Chapter one will be based on the general introduction. In this chapter, the different topics that will be addressed in other chapters like chapters four, five, six, seven, eight, and nine will be introduced, though in a shallow way. Research location will also be discussed in Chapter 1, as will the aim of the study and the influence of colonization on gender inequality in Africa, and particularly in Bamenda, Cameroon (research location). Chapter 2 will be on research design and methodology. It is also in this

chapter that the research questions will be addressed, the sources of data collection will be discussed, and the research time frame will be discussed. Chapter 3 will be on the theoretical framework, literature review, and historical point of view. In this chapter, I will look at the place of sociolinguistics when it comes to gender inequality, especially in Bamenda. The history of women's silencing will also be addressed in Chapter 3. Going to Chapter 4, it will talk about women and activism in Bamenda. The different areas where women act as activists, like online, workshops, and seminars, and feminism will be discussed here. As for Chapter 5, it will be on women's interaction on social media, especially on Facebook. The chapter will investigate the different activities women carry out on social media that give them the chance to teach or learn from one another and to support one another while experiencing different forms of discrimination in the process. Chapter 6 will be based on household experience. This chapter will concentrate on the observations I made of the family I lived with during my research and tell how they navigated the different areas where women are expected to take part in their home. It will give an insight into how home-upbringing can influence women's behaviour towards one another in society. As language is vital in women's daily interactions, chapter eight will elaborate on the role language plays when it comes to marginalising women. I will look at the different languages the women of Bamenda speak and how much these languages are prioritised or stigmatized. Chapter 9 will be on the role COVID-19 played in further marginalising women, especially when it was at its peak. Then Chapter ten will be the conclusion, having a summary of what the other chapters found out during the research. All the photos used in the dissertation are mine.

1.1 Aim of the study

This dissertation intends to analyse the communicative practices that help to construct gender inequality; it focuses on the marginalisation of older women and on how inequality is transmitted across generations. The project equally aims at finding out the strategies put in place by both women (especially those who have gone through the same experience) and men to react to social injustice and create options for the future. Taking into consideration the fact that the home is like the root of other societal aspects, this research also aims at concentrating on those areas in the home where gender inequality can be observed. Hence, special consideration will be given to discrimination against women by other women, drawing case studies from relationships with in-laws, sister to sister, mother to daughter, among other relationships among women. This will give a broader understanding of what we experience in the community and how it originates. The study equally aims to add to existing knowledge that gender inequality has been existing for quite a while now, though at different levels depending on the society in question, but the issue of gender inequality being imposed by women on

other women seems to be on the rise now. The different practices of inequality are being observed in different areas, as seen in this study, and are made easier with the rise of globalisation through technological advancement and other means.

1.2 About the study area

Bamenda is the capital of the Northwest region of Cameroon; it is also known as Abakwa and is well known for its cultural diversity. The Bamenda Grassfields have an area of land of 6,680 square miles. According to the 2010 census, the population in Bamenda stood at 1,829,953 people at a density of 100/km² (Nkwi 2018; 157), which has obviously changed due to the civil unrest that has been ongoing for the past seven years now, where a lot of people have been killed and also distorting the possibilities of carrying out a census. Hence, the latest official information that can be used is, unfortunately, only the 2010 census result. It has more than thirty ethnic groups and languages and was administered as part of the British Southern Cameroons from the end of the First World War between 1916 and 1961 (Fanso 1989; Ngoh 1987 cited in Nkwi 2018). About 80% of my research was carried out in Bamenda, and mostly around the Nkwen municipality and its environs. The rest of the research was based on women and their families from other areas of Bamenda. Nkwen is cosmopolitan, meaning the women interviewed and spoken with were not necessarily members of the Nkwen ethnic group.

1.3 Navigating society and the home

Society's influence on people's private lives cannot be completely ignored, as it plays an important role. In the same way, the home has its role to play in society, which can hardly go unnoticed either. In this work, I will specifically look at the influence of the home. I will look at individuals to see how their points of view differ, how they engage with one another, talk to one another, and how this makes a home. All the happenings in and around the home, whether considered big or small, will be analysed, so all these will be observed. It is important to mention that some happenings at home that might be considered "messy" still make up society; hence, everything observed during this research will be mentioned. As much as gender inequality has been in the discussion for quite some time now, it feels like it is still not saturated as it keeps spreading to different areas of life, and women in particular keep thinking they are not treated fairly in many aspects of life (see Paludi 2010). In this regard, it is therefore important to explore the different areas where gender inequality seems to be a call for concern.

This topic on gender inequality has been ongoing in different areas of society, such as the church, educational milieu, politics, and most recently, social media platforms. Different societies have

different structures or are unique in the way they are organised, and these structures might depend on certain practices governing the said society. The practices put in place, triggered by these different beliefs, are usually witnessed in different areas of society, as mentioned above. In my opinion, the first place where most people learn these practices, including gender-related practices, is at home (see Addabbo, Arrizabalaga, Borderias & Owens 2016:3). Hence, the public sphere is a reproduction of individuals with different home backgrounds. The aforementioned point is also confirmed by Stanley Winston, who is a retired pastor in the US, in his PhD, titled Parents: Adolescents Are Adults-With-Less-Sense (2013:74). He mentioned that "when politeness and courtesy are the order of the day in the home, these qualities exert influence for good. Others in the community will mark the results attained by such a home and will follow the example set, in turn guarding the home against negative influences." Looking at it from a Christian perspective, he urged the readers to note that the presence of Christ gives the home peace, making it a secured place for all; hence, when the home is carefully influenced and safeguarded in the early years of childhood and youth, it is the surest safeguard against a pervasively corrupt society (Ibid.). It is important to note that Stanley's ideology on the presence of Christ in homes, as mentioned above, does not, in any way, cancel the role the church has played in gender inequality, as will be seen in the chapters ahead. However, it will not go without mentioning that it could be the other way around too, as society has a great influence on the home as it consists of both laws and norms governing its people. The laws are usually put in place by the state or local authorities and are expected to be followed by all.

Norms, on the other hand, though unwritten in most cases, are usually highly respected or expected to be respected by all and sundry, which is why they have a great influence on the home. For example, Calderon, Cesar, et al. (2019:75), in the process of addressing social norms that limit women's economic opportunities in Africa, pointed out that women's economic opportunities and earnings may be limited by several social norms that influence the types of roles and responsibilities that are accepted for men and women. Moreover, norms can have a very strong influence on behaviour (Platteau 2000, Bicchieri 2006). For instance, norms can lead to differences in the way men and women see themselves and their aspirations. These norms often, in a subconscious manner, encourage and promote behaviours that are socially valued or accepted and discourage behaviours that can lead to social sanctions. It is worth mentioning that these societal practices equally include how gender relationships are being organised in society. It is in this regard that I find interest in looking at gender differences from the perspective of the home. Considering the fact that the home is the first learning ground for most people, not ignoring the point that what is being taught could be a reproduction of what the parents or carers get from societal norms and other areas such as religion and the state, what individuals portray in other

societal areas such as the church and school, among others, might be a reproduction of what they got at home. In this regard, life becomes a cycle as the parents pick from society and take the responsibility to pass it on to their children, who, in a later state, begin their very first interactions according to these home teachings even before getting the chance to be exposed to the wider society (see Stanley 2013:74).

It is important to note that though a society is made up of a group of people united by a common set of values, norms, and aims, individuals still come from different backgrounds where they have been trained to behave in a certain way, and this is the point where we hear of 'home training.' Having all these in mind, it is evident that both have an influence on the other: as members of different homes are being brought up depending on societal norms and values, society is equally affected by what individual members bring from their homes. This study will observe gender inequality with the home as its foundation or main source, using the home as a tree with many branches. The concentration is to see how the different home trainings that concern gender matters affect the increase or persistence of inequality.

Life tree

In my perspective of looking at gender inequality from the angle of the home, I consider an individual's life to be like a tree with the home as the root (not a norm but strictly my opinion). From the roots, one moves from one branch to another, and as branches of a tree are connected to the roots and have an influence on the fruits produced, so do I consider the importance and influence different areas of an individual's life have. This is illustrated, as seen below.

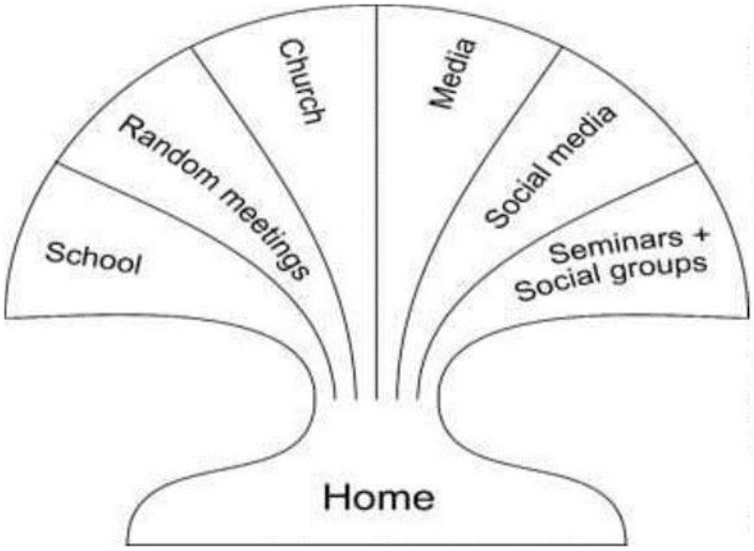


Illustration 1: A representation of an individual from home to other areas

1.4 The role of home training

Children could be very fast at picking up what is taught to them, and even faster than adults will. In the same way, the values one instills in children grow within them, and they carry this along to other areas in their lives. As a result, building a child's self-esteem is of paramount importance to any parent or household because this is likely to shape the child's mind regarding his or her position in society. Therefore, in order to understand a man or woman's position in society in terms of their rights and responsibilities, it is important to know where they come from. Talking about where they come from, I mean knowing what they learnt from home about themselves and the importance they attribute to themselves and to the opposite sex.

For example, I had a discussion with a friend, who mentioned that her friends can't stand the level of self-confidence she exhibits, and she will always be grateful to her father, who instilled this self-confidence in her. This explains the point that, at an early age, her father had always made her aware that she deserved the best and should be confident in what she could offer in any circumstances. This has become her reference point, as whenever she is faced with a situation, she quickly remembers the fact that her father has always made her understand that she can do whatever she puts her mind to. One can therefore say that her present life is a reproduction of the teachings she got from her father right from the time that she was still a kid. In my master thesis, one of the students interviewed mentioned that in his family, they were brought up to see men as the set of people who needed to be respected the most, while women were not accorded this same respect. According to him, his sisters and aunts are not allowed to fully take part in their family meetings. During these meetings, women are only permitted to listen but cannot give any contribution, even if they wanted to, while the men do the

talking. According to these participants, these are factors that trigger gender separation in society. By this, he meant that since these individuals were never brought up to freely mingle and talk with men, there is little or no chance for them to change when they are in the community (see Bih 2017).

Knowing who deserves more or less respect from society can either make them think better or less of themselves each time they are in the presence of the opposite sex. After some earlier research in 2017, I was triggered at one point to put down a short article, as seen below:

Dear parents and caregivers, as you teach your daughters to be responsible women, wives, and mothers, don't forget to teach your sons to be responsible men, husbands, and fathers. If your daughters must get up early to make breakfast for the family, your sons must be up early enough too to help with other house chores. As your daughters are being taught to be submissive and loving wives, please kindly teach your sons too to respect and love women unconditionally, and don't forget to tell them that GIGO (garbage in, garbage out) is real. Instill in your daughters a sense of pride and confidence; let them know they can "do it." Let them know they have the strength and only need the will; but don´t forget to tell your boys that having a strong woman is a plus and not a threat or a challenge. It's important to let your daughters know they deserve to be loved, respected, and celebrated, not tolerated or managed (they should be crocodiles when a crocodile is needed and lizards when a lizard is needed, but neither should be used in place of the other). Then let your sons know a woman's heart should not be toyed with or a place where you go because you want to satisfy your ego or prove a point to your friends; let them be taught how to love for real. Save the future by telling your daughters they should strive toward being a 'mate' and not a 'maid' and reminding your sons to work towards meeting a 'mate' and not a 'maid'. I am tired of hearing "He is abusive, he is a cheat, he has 50 children with other women, my neighbour´s daughter is pregnant for him and another neighbour´s wife is planning to get pregnant for him too, he doesn't care, he says I am too tall, short, fat, slim, medium, dark, white, straight, he says I can´t cook, he says I can´t iron, he says he is not so sure I am what he wants, he says we should keep our relationship low until he asks his parents if I am the right person; he says, he says, but I am confused, I can´t leave him because we have got kids, I can´t leave him because I need a man, I can´t leave him because I wonder what society will say, I can´t leave him because so many people know him already, I can´t leave him because I believe he will change, I can't leave him because.....". Whatever the case, as you raise beautiful and virtuous women, raise handsome and responsible men so that as they meet, society will be what YOU want it to be. Above all, do not forget to tell your daughters that being a strong woman doesn't mean overshadowing your man; it means knowing when to be respected and when to respect. Let men be men and let women be women. (Bih Emmanuella Facebook post May 4, 2018).

It is worth noting that the things said in the presence of kids, even about other people, sometimes highly influence their self-awareness, either negatively or positively, depending on how we say them. Imagine the situation of a mother who, in the presence of the kids, continuously body-shames her friends or other women, using words such as 'fat, smelling, ugly, unkempt, shapeless, short, lanky, etc.', among many others. In many cases, these points are being made in relation to the fact that they can't please a man, and they turn to body shaming to pass on the message that something needs to be done about a woman's body if she intends to have a man in her life. Dolezal (2015:113) opined in her work that "women in the patriarchal order identify with men and see themselves through the eyes of the men. Having made almost everything only about men, women adjust themselves to suit 'his' standards. She went ahead to say that these standards do not come from a particular male or group of people but are rather dictated by a mass standard coming from the socio-cultural norms or milieu, such as the patriarchal framework of late modernity and neoliberal consumer capitalism. As a result, at different levels, women become very used to experiencing their own bodies from a distanced perspective, more concerned about how they look to others than how they feel or their body abilities or capacities. This therefore leads to a situation where women feel their bodies are constantly under scrutiny. Their [women's] ideology of self-presentation becomes dominated by conscious methods to manage physical appearance, and this is linked to a tendency to feel body shame." When talking about patriarchy, it differs depending on the community in question. Going by Atanga's (2010:63) explanation of patriarchy in Cameroon, she begins by acknowledging the fact that it varies in time and space, changes over time, and differs according to class, ethnicity, religious, race, and global-imperial relationships. The laws of Cameroon, for example, still recognise male hegemony. This is to say that there is still much to deal with in the area of sexism, which is most often legitimated by the very law of the country. For example, the education of the girl child is still very low in some regions of Cameroon, female genital mutilation is still practiced, and women's position in the parliament is still very limited (Ibid.).

When people, especially women, fall for these societal pressures and start dictating to people how they should look through their degrading comments and side comments, they miss out on the fact that their audience, both intended and unintended, who could be their children in this case, are being pressured by them. They become so conscious of their bodies, always trying hard to do the things that will make them qualified to keep a man. This makes women vulnerable and hardly satisfied with their own bodies, hence always trying to effect some changes to their bodies at different stages in life (see Yenika-Agbaw & Mhando 2014:60). This issue of body shaming extends to skin types too, and body whitening has become the order of the day. The culture of Cameroon, not exclusive to Cameroon, has

made women think that having a darker skin tone disqualifies one from being an attractive woman, and many of them are doing all they can to change their skins to a lighter tone (see Olowa & Ogunlade 2012:43- 44).

It is in this regard that many stories of women who starve themselves with the aim of keeping up with an "attractive body or appearance" that will make men stick to them are being told. This research seeks to find out how much these intentional and unintentional pressures given to women by society in general and other women in particular influence their future or their reactions to societal demands at a later part of their lives. I did some small online research on the practices and activities partners take part in to keep their spouses or what singles do to attract a potential partner to them. What I realised is that there are more activities organised to teach women how to keep their men, more products sold for women to use and seduce men, and more groups created (including social media groups) to tell women what can be done in order not to lose their husbands. I was left wondering if men do not also need these lessons that much to keep their spouses, or is it solely women's responsibility to ensure that their marriage lasts? Looking at this, I saw how much this subject still ties with the above article, where the home has in many cases played the role of putting more pressure on the girl child and ignoring the boy child. Girls are trained on how to keep the home, work hard and take care of their families, satisfy their husbands when they get one, and make sure everything is in order without so much complaining to outsiders (keep your family problems to yourself, or else you will be exposing your husband and family (see Mougoué, 2019:190, Green, Gunn & Hill 2018:365). In doing all of these, the boy child is completely ignored at this stage due to the mentality that the women are the fragile ones who need more care while the men just need to get a good job that will make them bring the money back home. What the parents and caregivers fail to understand is that nothing will change when they instill 'good manners' in a woman and she finally gets married to a man who was only brought up to know that apart from supplying for the family, there is nothing more to worry about. Practices like this even hinder young girls from developing ways of defending themselves; they already have the mark of low self-esteem stamped on them, which makes it difficult for them to believe anything outside of that. This even goes to the extent that they find women who try to fight for themselves rebellious and sometimes take measures to separate themselves from these women. To better understand how this type of upbringing affects women right up to the time when they get to a marriageable age, I read from one Nigerian blog, pulse.ng, where I got more insights on how women in Nigeria, especially from the North uses different products and methods to attract and maintain their husbands. Remember that using different methods to attract their husbands is just a continuation of an upbringing which teaches that; it is a woman's responsibility to keep her man glued to her. Therefore, one of these ways, and a very

common one, was the use of a product they call Kayan Mata. It is a product that originated in the northern societies of Nigeria and literally means "women's things" in Hausa. The word is used to refer to potions or helps that play the role of sex or love enhancers. For a very long time, their recipes made up of natural products such as herbs and fruits have been used to stimulate the sexual feelings of one's partner. According to the writer, these recipes in the past were used by married women with the aim of spicing up their sexual relationships, and these days, they are being promoted on the internet and other platforms as voodoo-like herbs that can be used by young ladies to attract rich men. These recipes range from sweets, sex drops, lubricants, perfumes, sweetener powders, and zuman mata/maza (woman's honey), among many others. It is believed that when women who find it hard to be turned on during foreplay chew kayan mata sweets during the day, it will go a long way to create a tingling sensation in them, and they will get a satisfactory feeling when laid that night. Looking at this, one could not miss out on noticing how everything about the recipe is focused on women. The women are the ones to go through all these struggles of getting kayan mata, preparing them, and consuming them ahead of time before the arrival of their husbands, who might not even be informed about all of these but are certainly expecting to be sexually satisfied by their wives no matter what it takes[1]. Social media too acts as a powerful tool where one gets to see how women are being pressured to do whatever it takes to satisfy their husbands through some of the questions they ask. In one of the many Facebook groups meant to teach women how to keep their husbands, a lady came up with a complaint, as follows:

"I have a pot belly, and my partner always complains about it. I may lose my relationship because of that. House, please, what diet should I take? No insult, please."[2]

Looking at this story presented, one would have thought her worry should have been about her health condition. On the contrary, she wants to work on her 'pot belly' because her partner does not like it and she does not want to lose her relationship. As usual, many commenters made different points with different forms of advice, but the following caught my attention:

"My dear sister, nobody should put you under any pressure to do anything to keep him or her. Anyone who loves you will accept you the way you are, and if need be, he or she can advise you lovingly to lose weight for your health and yourself while helping you through the process and not putting you in a desperate situation. I counsel a lot of people, especially abused people and single moms; I hear a lot

[1] https://www.pulse.ng/lifestyle/food- travel/should-you-be-using-kayan-mata-products/nfmpeh7
[2] https://www.facebook.com/DellysMatchupsRe accessed on January 9th 2019

of them blame themselves, especially their weight over their cheating partners. That's not a healthy relationship; losing weight is a good thing, but losing weight in fear of losing a partner is not a good thing, my dear."[3]

Commenter one

"Please, you need counselling. The way some of you fight to keep relationships, eh! A man who truly loves u will never say that; how long will u be doing this n that just to keep a man?"[4].

Commenter two

Going by the above case, one is tempted to say that apart from the mindset this woman had that her body is always supposed to be intact in order to look good for a man, her partner is thorn in her flesh. She seems not to have built any self-esteem and therefore gets easily discouraged because her body is not approved by the man in her life. Some friends have confirmed the fact that getting married to a woman in their different villages in Cameroon comes with different conditions. Among these conditions is the fact that women with a fairer skin tone are 'more expensive' (in terms of bride price) than women with a darker skin tone. With this kind of mentality that has been transferred into marriage conditions, many young girls have been made to believe that being fair means you are more beautiful and expensive. Many girls have therefore resorted to skin bleaching in order to meet these requirements. This explains why, in this society, it is more common to see women bleaching than men, and usually some people even find it funny and strange when a man bleaches. One is left wondering: Why should it be strange that a man is bleaching? Isn't he supposed to be appealing to a woman too? The obvious responses or reactions are usually that women are the ones who need to attract men, not the other way around. The mentality on skin bleaching, as discussed by many, is highly influenced by colonisation, where Cameroonians might have been made to understand that everything about the white man is the ideal and should be copied to be 'civilised' (Severo & Makoni, 2020):157, Mawere, 2014:82-83). It is due to this that this work won't go through without looking at the influence of colonialism on gender disparities in West Cameroon, and this will be discussed at a later stage.

1.5 The position of language

Language will be an integral part of this research and will be discussed in Chapter 8 about how it plays a role in the relegation of women. When languages at home are even divided according to gender lines,

[3] https://www.facebook.com/DellysMatchupsRe
[4] https://www.facebook.com/DellysMatchupsRe

then there is already a need to figure out which is the best language and who is better placed to use it. During one of the many home-training discussions I had with interviewees, friends, and acquaintances, a friend, Mari[5], expressed her disappointment in the fact that, while growing up, her language was highly watched and followed by her parents, especially her mother, but she could hardly ever hear any of them controlling her brothers, even when they used languages that were out of place to her. Her mother will always remind her to remember what she says because women are supposed to be careful with the language and words they use. In many cases, as she mentioned, her mother had told her or even banned her from using pidgin, which is one of the most commonly used languages in Bamenda, where she grew up. She was encouraged to always speak in English, as it was or is considered 'a noble language' and can help her achieve many of her goals compared to Pidgin, which was not a good language, especially for women. This ties to research carried out by Anchimbe in Yaounde, where he discovered that more people had a negative attitude towards promoting the use of Cameroon Pidgin (Anchimbe, 2013:174). This can be seen on the table below:

Question	**Yes**	**%**	**No**	**%**	**Total**
Are you prohibited from using CPE in school or office?	57	31.3	125	68.7	183(100%)
Do you prohibit CPE for your children?	161	84.2	28	14.8	189(100%)
Should CPE become a language of instruction?	38	20	151	80	182 (100%)

Table1: Attitude towards the use of CPE (Kouega, 2001:20)

This, however, does not cancel the fact that many Pidgin speakers admit they have little or no problem using the language in whatever situation but support the idea that it should be banned from schools (see Ekembe, 2014: 148).

Back to Mari, she remembered that her brother will freely use any of these languages without fear of contradiction, and when she at one point questioned her mother why it had to be that way, her mother's

[5] Pseudonym for privacy purposes.

only response was “They are men, and men are obviously different from you and your sisters.” With cases like this, one already starts noticing how a girl will start feeling restricted right at an early stage at home when it comes to language usage. She needs to always count and measure her words before she utters them. Following the popular adage that charity begins at home, it might be difficult for someone to freely talk outside with strangers when she does not enjoy that freedom at home. The language background is something very important and can’t be omitted when talking about language. This is because it takes a lot of effort for one to deviate from a language they have learnt at an early stage. When this background training is highly dependent on gender lines, as seen in many cases, the speakers become so conscious of what they say and where they speak to the extent that some individuals (girls) have expressed their fear that this may be affecting their performances in school. According to these individuals spoken to, when they are in class, they are so shy and conscious of the fact that they are among boys. This makes them speak less because they are not so sure of how these boys will respond or act when they speak; hence, they become timid and prefer to stay quiet. This could be seen as a result of making women think their language is not proper and should always be watched. Women therefore grow up thinking they are not sufficient in the language they use and will always need the support of a man who is seen by society as the better communicator to pass across whatever information they intend to pass across. It is worth mentioning that, apart from English and Pidgin, the other languages in Bamenda cannot be ignored. Parents will prefer their children to communicate at home using the national language(s) or English rather than Pidgin. However, some writers are of the opinion that the use of national languages (for example, Babanki, Bali, Nkwen, and Mankon, just to name a few) at home, especially in urban areas, has declined drastically, such that these languages might be endangered due to some reasons. According to a good number of them, the fact that English is seen in Cameroon as a language of education makes parents choose English over national languages as a medium of communication at home. On the other hand, the increase in inter-ethnic marriages is also one of the main factors for these changes, as spouses will resort to using English as a means of communication given the fact that they come from different ethnic backgrounds and might not understand each other (see Mpoche & Mbuh, 2006; Harrow & Mpoche, 2009:114). According to Kari Dako (cited in Atanga, Ellece, Litosseliti & Sunderland, 2013: 217- 225), Pidgin in Ghana has always been a male language and can be traced back to itinerant migrant labourers who brought Pidgin from Nigeria and Liberia. Pidgin, at that time, was also associated with prostitutes from the riverine/Niger delta areas of Nigeria. According to him, when the first survey on student Pidgin was taken in Ghana, only about four out of fifty female students admitted to the fact that they could speak Pidgin, and they all learnt it from their brothers. This is different from the present situation,

where about 50 percent of female students can admit to speaking Pidgin. This, according to them, is also because Pidgin creates a level of solidarity and bond with their peers (see Huber, 1999:147). Back then, when these women were questioned on why they did not speak it, there were frequent responses such as: it might make them less ladylike; it might expose them negatively; as educated women, their aspiration was to be proficient in English, so the use of Pidgin was not important; they also considered it a deviant language; also saw Pidgin as a male language; and females were expected to conform to the societal norms, which were given. In addition to that, even the male students said they found it out of place for women to speak Pidgin and referred to those who spoke it as exhibiting abnormal behaviour, non-conformity, and a lack of morals. This was therefore evidence that women who spoke Pidgin risked having their characters questioned. It is interesting to note that even the men who speak this language, as presented above, find it unpleasant for women to use the same language. Connecting its origin to prostitutes who used to work along the red-light district in downtown Accra before independence makes them question the integrity of any woman who uses the language (Atanga, Ellece, Litosseliti & Sunderland, 2013:222). Apart from the training given to speakers in terms of how, where, and what language to speak. It is interesting to look at the derogatory usage of some African languages when referring to males and females. According to Garnham, Oakhill, Stockhausen & Sczesny (2016:6), gender inequality remains a contentious issue in many parts of the world, despite legislative and other less formal attempts to tackle it. According to them, language contributes to gender inequality in different ways: Information related to gender is passed through formal and semantic features of language, like the grammatical category of gender, through gender-related connotations of role names, and through customs of denoting social groups with derogatory as opposed to neutral names. Atanga et al. (2013) gave examples of some terms in the Zulu language spoken mainly in KwaZulu Natal province of South Africa, in which sexually active boys are called amasoka, meaning (‘men highly favoured by girls’), while sexually active girls are referred to extremely derogatorily as unondindwa, which means (‘a woman with multiple sexual partners’), isifebe (‘a loose woman’, a near synonym of unondinswa), and/or isikhebeleshe, (which has a similar meaning to the aforementioned). Worth mentioning is the fact that this phenomenon is reflected in many languages around the world. With such discriminatory usage of terms in a language, it is difficult for the users to see themselves as equals when one group is clearly praised for an action and the other is being degraded for the same action. However, despite the use of derogatory terms in some languages to address individuals according to the gender binary, the “he” or “she” gender markers are absent in many languages around the world. In some African cultures, like in Bamenda, for example, the use of gender markers is influenced by the presence of colonial languages like French and English. This might have influenced

to a certain level, but it has not changed much as most of the languages still do not have these differentiations. This can better be explained using Ihejirika's (2020) quote, "Go call your sister, tell him it's time to eat"—she made it from her mother's frequent interchangeable use of gender markers in English. Ihejirika only understood years later what her mother meant by the Igbo pronunciations are neutral. She realised that he/she address meant nothing to the Igbo people.

Taking into consideration how the use of language can be seen from different angles, such as age, class, and gender, among many others, this study is particularly interested in the language distinction between old women at home and the younger generation. It is important to know what differences have taken place from one generation to another. These differences are inevitable because a lot has changed when compared to the past, and one of those changes that can't go unnoticed is the fact that parents send their girls more to school these days as opposed to the past when it was considered a waste of time and resources. During my earlier research, most of the participants compared the past to the present, where they observed that a lot has changed with gender construction. According to them, more parents are sending girls to school, contrary to the past, when most parents thought, women were supposed to stay in the kitchen or behind their husbands, and therefore there was no need to educate them. Moreover, they made mention of the fact that more women have realised the need to be educated; hence, it is more common these days for women to educate themselves even at an old age (see Bih 2017). "A hallmark of current debates on ageing is the recognition that the current generation of older women in most developing countries is clearly disadvantaged compared to men in social and economic well-being and formal education in particular," (Fonchingong ,2013: 87). He mentioned 105 developing countries sampled by the United Nations population division, where it was estimated that among the population aged 60 and older in 2000, 69 percent of women and 41 percent of men were "illiterates." In addition to that, women's lack of education is cited by the Second World Assembly on Ageing as the main factor contributing to their poverty at old age, probably in contrast to men in that same age range. This was according to United Nations 2002 paragraph 109 (see Fonchingong, 2013:87-88). With these educational differences between men and women, especially in the past, women were forced to have fewer opportunities in the job market and other areas. In situations where the women could barely work, they were bound to fully depend on the men, who had the upper hand and better access to good jobs. Apart from this advantage that comes due to men (the older generation) being the most educated ones, there is also the cultural belief that men are the head of the family; hence, they are more likely to get jobs and better opportunities. As earlier mentioned, the educational trend has changed now due to many organisations that are out to fight for women's rights. Also, thanks to how much sensitisation has been given to the importance of educating a girl child, so many parents

now send their female children to school in the same way they educate their male children. With these changes, there are some unavoidable disparities in terms of generational communication. The English language, for example, is one of those languages in Cameroon that can, in most cases, if not all, only be acquired through formal education. As one might be wondering why this could be so, it is important to note that this is not only common in Cameroon, as many African countries tend to attribute the ability to use a colonial language to being educated. Djité (2008:64) was very clear on this when he noted that education in Africa is essentially regarded now in terms of Western education. Hence, it seems being very proficient in a European language is synonymous with being educated. According to him, these ideologies are linked to the reasons why parents fight against using national languages as media of instruction in schools, as they consider it a waste of time. As many Cameroonian parents even consider sending their children to school as a major investment, they believe that the main reason for sending their children to school is to learn the official languages (Portuguese, French, or English); hence, when policies are put in place forcing their children to learn local languages, it is like a plan intended to slow down their children and make them remain at the lowest level of socio-economic scale. Djité talked more about the choices of the languages used as media of instruction when he mentioned that when one takes into consideration a child's formal education in other parts of the world, there is an assumption that the child is being educated in her mother tongue or, better still, a language she understands better. To him, Africa seems to be the only exception to this, as Africa is the only continent that does not own a collective system of self-reproduction in this area. He went further to say that an African child does not see a book until she goes to school, and once in school, the first book she will come across will probably be in a language foreign to her. This implies that after fifty years of political independence, Africa is the only continent where access to knowledge and science is negotiated only through a language that is different from that which the child uses at home or in her immediate community (Djité, 2008:54–55). As "school remains one of the most important places where future generations can be empowered, schooling remains one of the most powerful institutions through which one can demonstrate one's commitment to language maintenance and development" (Ibid.). Now back to the case of Cameroon, considering how linguistically rich Cameroon is, there is always a high tendency that people from different linguistic or ethnic backgrounds might not understand one another except a common language(s), which in the case of West Cameroon are English and Pidgin that are being used. Cameroon Pidgin (CP) is one of those languages that are still gradually gaining their grounds and being widely accepted, as it was a language with so many negative connotations in the past. As a result of this, many people still want the privilege of being associated with English or being able to communicate fluently in English. English therefore became a language

of pride and the language that was and is used in most public spheres, especially in the cities; hence, only the privileged educated ones could fully take part in some prestigious functions; otherwise, the underprivileged ones would be bound to just watch without talking, even if no one restricted them from doing so. After being deprived of formal education, most of these older women missed the opportunity to communicate in this 'prestigious' language, and as a result, many of them lost their self-esteem and could barely communicate in public spheres. Since there are now more educated women compared to before, the behavioural trend has also changed drastically, and more women are becoming bold. This boldness exhibited outside, in my opinion, reflects what is happening in the home. It might not be an exaggeration to say that the younger generation now explores new things and takes steps their mothers never had the opportunity to. It is therefore worth mentioning that these changes in patterns and disparities in behaviour and reactions come with both their advantages and downsides. This work is interested in exploring how these new trends have affected the relationship between mothers, especially those of the older generation and their daughters, who fall under the new generation. The differences in their communication will be investigated, and it will be important to also mention the language differences, their reactions to societal pressures, their belief systems, and how much influence they have on each other.

Some time ago, I had a discussion with a young girl in my neighborhood, back in Bamenda who, (from my observation), was always in disagreement with the mother. When I asked her about her relationship with her mother, she told me she had the impression that her mother was jealous of her because she had the opportunity to go to school, something that her grandfather (her mother's father) deprived her mother of. To her, she knew so much and wished she could teach her mother the new knowledge, but her mother was not open to these changes and rather accused her of being overzealous. With this kind of mindset, she could hardly convince her mother to believe in anything she said or did, and this caused so much tension between the both of them. This discussion caught my attention, and it was worthwhile to know how her mother felt about the topic. In more general terms, I asked her mother about her opinion regarding the new generation, and she used her daughter as an example to explain her stance. Going by her experience with her daughter, she had the impression that the new generation had lost it. She could not understand the craziness that has come with social media these days and could barely understand when and why her daughter reacts to some situations at home. To her, young people spend more time doing little or nothing nowadays, apart from giving a false impression about themselves on social media. This mother also went further to say that she did not have the opportunity her daughter had to go to school but is equally comfortable communicating in the languages she is good at. Yet she does not find it appropriate when her daughter tries to force her to speak in English whenever the

daughter's friends are around. This usually gets to the point where the daughter will even try to teach her some basic English words and rudely correct her whenever she makes a sentence, even if her intention was not to speak in English. This gave her the notion that the younger generation thought they knew better than everyone else (especially their 'uneducated' parents) just because they had the chance to acquire formal education. To her, this 'over know' mentality is what is causing most of their downfall today, and she went further to say,

"How piking dem go di stay for married di day dem weh dem di want show people say dem know too much? No piking no wan hear e mami e advise again"

(How will children stay in marriages nowadays when they always want to prove to others that they know too much? No child is willing to follow the mother's advice again).

One of the things that disappointed her, as she mentioned, was the fact that she could not come to terms with the fact that she and her husband would sacrifice so much to give their daughter the education the mother never had, and their daughter, at this point, is using the same education to challenge her. Hearing from both sides, it was obvious that there was clear miscommunication from both sides because they were coming from different schools of thought. As one person feels like the other is too archaic to understand the changing times, the other party thinks that the other feels too educated to learn even from someone older than herself.

The above case is just one of so many cases where generational differences in terms of communication and other social activities at home can cause conflicts. Observing social media, it is worth noting that many mothers, even the less educated ones, are beginning to join social media, especially Facebook. This is something that is copied from the younger generation, as more mothers now feel like they will love to experience what their children are experiencing. Could it be competition or just an aspect of wanting to experience things meant for youngsters? This is one of those questions that prompted this research to take this direction.

Apart from these 'conflicts' or cooperation between or among mothers and their daughters at home, it will be a good opportunity to observe the type of training mothers, in particular give their daughters. When we talk about the fact that most of these older women had little or no formal education, it is mostly linked to the fact that their parents (especially their fathers, according to most of the women spoken to) never deemed it necessary for them to get formally educated. Talking to one lady, she recounted how her mother tried hard to convince her father to let her continue her education instead of sending her to an early marriage, to no avail. Her father kept insisting that women are like visitors in

the family (in other words, a woman belongs to the family of the man she will get married to); hence, it would be a total waste sending her to school for another person to reap the fruits. She was therefore forced to leave school and get married at that point. Today she wishes her father would have listened to her mother and let her continue her education; life would have been different for her. There are many cases as such, but the reception is what makes it different. Some of these women have no regrets that they never had the chance to get educated; they still believe in their parents' judgement and in the fact that a woman is better off in the kitchen, taking care of her family, and waiting for her husband at home than working or taking part in any other activities outside the family. Women like the above mentioned will simply pass the same training onto their daughters, because that is what they believe in. Even if they get their daughters educated, the teachings they impact on them at home concerning marriage and family are very similar, if not the same, to what they had while growing up. In this case, the home training will be centred around doing your best to become a good housewife, learning all the skills needed to keep a husband, and striving to be the best lady so that every mother in the village, quarter, or family circle will want you to be their daughter-in-law. This home training is in most cases meant for good (mothers wanting to protect the interests of their daughters by all means), but what many mothers seem not to realise is how much pressure they put on their daughters by doing this. When you spend time telling your daughter(s) how important it is for her as a woman to stay very clean and organised, make sure she can cook well, tell her to talk less, especially when among men, as a sign of respect for the men, and to ensure that she gets a husband before a certain age or else society will question her morality, then what more do you expect from her apart from striving hard to achieve all of these? She spends all her time thinking about how to become the best, not even for herself but for the sake of making another person (her husband) happy. This also leads to the many questions sometimes asked: how much do women help each other, is it possible that women's greatest problems are only initiated by fellow women, or better yet, how much influence do men have on the issues discussed about women?

1.6 Women-to-women relationships

Contrary to many other research studies that are concentrated on gender inequality as a result of men's dominance, this work is more interested in looking at the problem from the perspective of the women-women relationships. It might not be out of place to say that men have been in an advantageous position for so long that, this time, they do not need to work hard to be respected but can simply relax and enjoy their acquired position just by virtue of being men. By this, I mean that being born a man comes with the advantage of being accorded societal respect. This seems to be contrary to the case of

women, who need to work extra hard to be respected or to be considered independent in society. This gives me the impression that men sometimes refuse to see women as their rivals, while the women now spend their time "tearing" each other down. When we talk about tearing each other down, we mean a situation where women expect much support from fellow women but end up being pulled down by the same women, especially with very discouraging words. Looking at it from the level of the family, the pressure women sometimes get in society, in most cases, started with their mothers and sisters back home. In their quest to make them better, their families sometimes put them through situations that end up making them lose the ability to defend themselves when need be. With the high usage of social media these days, it has been observed that many women feel free to anonymously and even sometimes openly share their problems with other women they do not know personally rather than sharing them with their families. In some cases, these women come seeking solutions to their problems in public (though considered private as they hide their identities for the most part) places because they have tried from their families and got little or no help. If, in any case, someone finds herself in an abusive marriage and her mother keeps telling her to hold on to her marriage and cover her problems within her family sphere, then what benefit would it be to keep depending on your mother when you are literally going through a difficult situation? Many women have come up with cases where they were almost giving up or suffering from depression because, all along, they were made (probably by their families and the people around them) to know that a good woman is someone who can bear all her marital or relationship problems yet stand very strong. These relationships extend even to the level of the in-laws, and still, the discussion is predominantly on how women relate to their mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, and daughters-in-law. From most of the cases that will be presented in the chapters ahead, the women complained about the problems they face with their mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law; very few cases mentioned their fathers-in-law having problems or creating problems for them in their marriages. In the same way, mothers-in-law complain more about their daughters-in-law than you will hear them complaining about their sons-in-law. Family and kingship play a big role in maintaining the culture and values of Cameroon. In Bamenda, for example, women play an important role in indoctrinating new members into the family. It is known that mothers are usually in charge of training and bringing up children according to the norms of society, ensuring that they do not go outside the accepted social behaviour of a given community. Mothers-in-law are expected to extend the training they give to their children to other new adult members who come into the family, such as the daughter-in-law and the son-in-law. Normally, respect is supposed to be accorded to any in-law, but following the cases received, it seems more is usually expected from the daughter-in-law, especially in terms of working hard to make herself approved by the in-laws, than is expected of the son-in-law.

Worth mentioning is the fact that this differentiation still goes along with the ideology of women being household keepers while men are the breadwinners. It is because of this that daughters-in-law are expected to prove themselves by helping their mothers-in-law with all the house chores, respecting the husband, and sometimes not being expected to talk much or talk back at the husband, especially if the mother-in-law is around. On the other hand, sons-in-law are expected to take care of their in-law's family in the same way they would take care of theirs and are even sometimes put under the pressure of taking on responsibilities that they can barely handle. With these expectations, many daughters-in-law have complained that their mothers-in-law hardly see any good in them and will never appreciate them no matter what they do. A handful of them even had the impression that their mothers-in-law hated them even before they got married to their sons.

The idea of expecting more from a female than a male and, therefore, concentrating all the training, advice, and workload on her seems to have caused more harm than good. There is so much energy and time put in to produce the 'best' women society could have, but little or no time put in to bring up men who will interact with these women. This is one of the reasons why women think it is their responsibility to always put up their best behaviour, which will make men comfortable, and sometimes miss out on the fact that men at some point in their lives become adults who should be responsible for their actions. In this modern time, women spend more time teaching one another the best tips to keep their husbands glued to them. It seems to be common practice these days that when a woman complains about her husband's behaviour, especially in the area of cheating, instead of addressing it, society, especially the women to whom she complains, tells her to check her attitude. Instead of addressing the husband's disloyalty, she is told to work harder, have good manners, talk less, and treat her husband better. This is because the advisers believe that it is the lack of all or some of the above traits that makes the husband have no choice but to be unfaithful. These observations can be made even with products that are meant to enhance relationships, and there are products with captions like "clean pussy matters." Then one is left wondering if "clean penis" does not matter too, or is it just the female body that should be kept clean for the sake of the man? Additionally, society is so keen on how women dress, and they are always reminded of the need to maintain their decency. This gets to the point where women are sometimes even blamed for being harassed by men—there is this predominant idea that her dressing might have pushed the man to harass her.

All these have brought too many questions to mind, among which are: how are these reflected outside the home? What role does colonialism play in these lines created between genders in Africa? I will spread my research wings to some areas such as church, the school, the media, and social media, respectively, to see how much influence the home has on these areas.

1.7 Influence of home training on school performance

At some point in life (mostly at an early age), the next place that most people go to from home is school. This is another platform where individuals come with their different home training and learn new things. The school has its own doctrine to teach, but usually it's not so far or different from what has been learnt at home. During one of my fieldwork projects in preparation for my master thesis in 2016, I spoke to a number of young girls in different schools, and what caught my attention was the fact that most of them kept giving almost the same reason for not being active in class. Their point was that from childhood, they have been brought up to see boys as the ones who are supposed to be ahead leading, the ones who can freely talk and are bold, the ones who should be listened to and not the other way around, and the ones who need education more as they are expected to take care of their families. On the part of the girls, they were made to see education as a plus and not the only means of living, as their husbands will obviously take care of them when they get married in the future. With these kinds of ideologies, some of these girls actually faced much difficulty talking in class for fear of what their classmates would say or think. They even went further to explain that in terms of classmates, their male classmates could tease them and make them shy or simply give them looks that made them wonder if they were on the right path, while their female classmates would sometimes be so sarcastic, jeer at them, or even mock them when they became so active in class. This group of females who shared these experiences expressed how much they found themselves caught between their male classmates and their female friends, whom they would have expected support from. It was difficult for them to come from homes where they were not brought up to talk freely as women and start expressing themselves freely in other milieus. This made them express themselves less, and sometimes they had the feeling it even affected their performances in school. It's important to note that there were also those groups of girls who talked freely, acted freely, and even could act as role models to their friends, and most of them could testify to how much their parents contributed to building their self-esteem at home.

1.8 The reflection of home training on church activities

The church is an important milieu that is not void of discussion on gender disparities. Individuals come together with different cultures. This culture might differ at a certain level from one person to the next, but overall, it is common to see that people in a given society tend to have the same culture, of which the church is not left out. The Christian belief goes that all are equal before the eyes of God, but they will still not miss out on quoting parts of the Bible to justify why some people deserve better treatment than others. Looking at some protestant churches, one will realise that both men and women should

have equal rights when it comes to the appointment of pastors, but this is not what is experienced in practice. According to my research in 2017, the number of female pastors is always lower compared to the number of male pastors. I observed that having a female pastor is still not as common as it should be, such that one can get exclamations from Christians who are surprised at the fact that their female pastor preaches so well or can handle the matters of the church in the same way a male pastor will do. In the aforementioned work, I quoted an observation from a Christian who criticised the church for marginalising female pastors in his church, the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC). Going by his observations, while the number of female Christians outnumbers that of their male counterparts, the number of female pastors was just seventy in comparison to that of the male pastors, who were over 300. This case even seemed different and better in the sense that women were at least permitted in the above-mentioned church to take part in preaching, even if the number was not as expected. The situation was compared to the Catholic Church, for example, which does not even permit women on the pulpit (see Bih 2017: 43). It is worth noting that apart from men and women in the clergy, disparities are seen in other areas of leadership and activities in the church. This explains why, in a congregation with more women than men, it is still very common to have just one lady in a leadership position while the rest are men.

1.9 Social media/other platforms, a relief to women

Due to society's construction where women are expected to listen more and talk less, in the past, so many women used silence as their only means of communication, and a lot of things were not said even if they wanted to say them. Despite this, women always try to air out what they have in them to the people they trust when an opportunity shows up. Some use gossip as a means of communication (more analysis will be made on this in Chapter 5), which is done through different means such as small group gatherings, mobile communication, and social media, just to mention a few. It is because of the quest to speak out to someone who can listen to you and sometimes help you out with solutions that many women have taken to social media to express themselves. The concentration here will be precisely on Facebook and WhatsApp, which are the two platforms now commonly used by women to express their worries. With Facebook, it is easier for women to show up with their problems or concerns anonymously to get the ideas of others. In this way, many women get to open up because their identities are not known, and in most cases, these groups are female-only groups where they have little or no fear of male influence. WhatsApp is not left out, as a lot of groups are created for specific purposes where women are given the chance to share their experiences with one another. This research was conducted in Bamenda, a city that has been suffering from civil unrest for a long time. Hence, the

respondents and I made good use of platforms like WhatsApp, where information was shared without necessarily meeting. There will be a deeper look at how these women reflect their views on these platforms and how much they try to pass on to others the teachings they got from their respective homes. Social media is also a good platform where one could observe how much women stand for or against one another as people freely support or attack others, especially as they know they might never have the opportunity to meet these individuals in real life.

Apart from the above-mentioned platforms and places where women meet, there are also random meetings and even organised functions such as workshops and seminars meant for women only, where they can easily share their experiences and help one another where needed. In areas like these, it is worth noting that women often testify to experiencing a high level of competition, and many women have attested to leaving one meeting or another because they were being undermined. There are even cases of groups that restrict the types of women to be admitted, with some requiring only women of a certain class to be members of these groups. Looking at cases, it is possible that many women will go further into their shells if they are willing to join a certain group but can't join because they are not considered fit to be in this group (especially when class is the measuring rod). Then situations of low self-esteem might be observed here, where women start seeing themselves as less important than others. Even during seminars, like the ones that were organised during this research, many women were silent and only listened to others speak because they felt other women were more advanced and better placed to speak than themselves. On the bright side, some of these groups and platforms have helped a lot of women build their self-esteem and take steps in life that they could never have taken if not encouraged by their fellow women. A great deal of women could testify to being supported by their female-only groups either financially, emotionally, socially, or in many other ways. This is to say that it is a two-way thing. While some people find these groups very oppressing and think that women are not the best set of people to depend on, others find it very beneficial and will do anything to belong to these groups. There are also women who complain about the behaviours of other women in these groups but still think it is more beneficial to be in groups like these than to rely on men. It will be interesting to know if what these women share in these forums and the way they share their ideas or receive advice are in any way connected to their upbringing.

1.10 The influence of colonialism on gender inequality

Talking about the influence of colonialism on gender inequality in Cameroon, there is a need to look at what happened in precolonial times, in order to compare it to the changes that took place during the colonial period and what is actually happening in postcolonial times. The belief that the forefathers

played an important part in maintaining morality in the Cameroonian community is something that hardly dies, even to date. It is also true that, due to colonialism, African values and beliefs were significantly changed, and these changes are predominant today, despite the wish of many Cameroonians to return to the precolonial past. Anunobi (2002) wrote that with the introduction of colonialism in Africa, African societies were forcibly integrated into the expanding global capitalist economy dominated by the European powers. For these colonisers to be able to exploit the mineral and commodity wealth of the continent and to ensure the supply of cheap labour, radical changes were imposed. With the introduction of cash crops, there was a rising need for the commercialisation of agriculture, and this significantly altered the customary gender division of labour in ways that did not favour mostly women. With the new trend, men were taught to grow new cash crops such as cocoa and coffee that could be exported, while women were expected to continue growing food crops for family and local consumption. Moreover, the men were introduced into the wage economy, where they worked in mines, on plantations, or in cities, while most women stayed in rural areas. As concerns education, the opportunity to study and learn new skills was made possible mainly for the males. Anunobi also indicated that although both men and women were exploited within the colonial reign, men were still advantaged in many areas over women as they gained access to important resources like land, skills, education, and money, which were less available to women. Talking about politics, it is worth mentioning that the men were still at an advantage as customary sources of female power were ignored and the Europeans imposed their own preconceptions about the proper authority of men over women by dealing only with the male leaders. This also made them create all-male authorities in many areas, and tradition was frequently interpreted to suit or favour men's control over women, which allowed men to benefit more at women's expense. As men had these new commercial opportunities, especially in cash crop agriculture, they started using their customary rights to land and the labour of their wives to make more income and wealth for themselves, and they were not in any way obliged to share this wealth with their wives. An example, according to him, could be seen among the Beti in Cameroon, where some men got married to many wives to get free labour from them on their cash crop farms (Anunobi, 2002:48-49). Segueda (2015), on his part, pointed out that in precolonial times, the respect of African women was inherent in most African cultures. Natural phenomena such as childbirth were actually seen as mysterious; women enjoyed the prestigious positions for being able to go through these mysterious processes. It was considered that every life in nature came from women alone, and because of this, the people believed God was a female. Women were therefore highly respected, and this was an important factor for gender cohesion in society (Segueda, 2015 :5). According to some scholars, matrilineal societies have existed and still exist today in many parts of

the world, such as Africa, the Americas, Oceania, and Asia. Women in most African communities under matriarchy did not experience discrimination; they were allowed to inherit property, and it was okay for a husband to move into his wife's house (see Duiker & Spielvogel 2013:268). With this system, women were even considered superior in some areas and were privileged to own lands. This does not in any way mean that matriarchy is a kind of paradise in which women had or have complete power over men but simply implies that as much as the natural differences between sexes in matriarchal communities were identified, they were not in any case used as instruments to create hierarchies. It is in this regard that Elizabeth Annan-Yao, a Ghanaian sociologist, writes in one of her essays that "in matrilineal communities, although women are submissive to men, they have some decision-making powers and liberty of expression and can generally choose their own husbands. They can be queen-mothers in the political domain and can even inherit property from their maternal uncles and their mother, etc." (Annan-Yao, 2004: 1). Segueda further highlighted that religion is an integral part of colonialism and therefore difficult to separate; he said this in a bit to explain the effect of religion as a part of colonialism on gender inequality. According to him, Christianity and Islam were first introduced in North Africa and later spread rapidly into sub-Saharan Africa. As this was introduced, most African societies abandoned their beliefs and converted to Christianity or Islam. The missionaries saw Africans as backward and pagan and encouraged them to leave what they believed and their ways of life. This led to a situation where many African social structures and traditions were seriously affected, if not completely lost. This also had a serious effect on women's rights, and their valued statuses disappeared almost entirely (Segueda, 2015:8).

In many Christian congregations and Islam to date, women are still not ordained as priests or imams and cannot assume roles in church or mosques, especially during worship services. This gap between men and women is even promoted by passages in both the Quran and the Bible. Good examples to mention are those areas of the Bible and the Quran where women are asked to submit to their husbands and are not allowed to teach or take authority over men. According to both religions, women should also be seen as unclean and excluded from church activities during their menstruation. Some verses clearly state that women are impure during their periods and should be avoided and only approached when they have been 'cleansed' (Quran 2:222[6] and Leviticus 15:19- 23). With time, these teachings had a serious impact on gender roles. On the contrary, in the past, many African societies saw power in a woman who was menstruating. As blood remains one of the most important elements when it comes to their traditional religious practices, female blood had remarkable potency in their ritual

[6] 6 https://quran.com/ Accessed 5th July 2020

processes. Unfortunately, the situation changed, as seen above, when Christianity and Islam were introduced. Women started being stigmatised because of menstruation. Today, the consequences are so many, and according to UNESCO, there is an estimate of one in ten African adolescent girls who miss school when they are menstruating (Segueda, 2015). It has been noticed that during menstrual periods, a good number of women lose their self-esteem, and even many tend to lose concentration as they are so conscious of their surroundings and how people may react. If society had not placed so much negative connotation on it, it might have been a different scenario.

1.11 The contextualization of gender inequality

Looking at gender inequality from a global perspective, Vubo (2012) noted that the social construction of gender roles has so many implications for the participation of women and men in the economy. According to him, this construction has led to gender inequality in other structures such as economics, policies, and other forms of productive work. To him, in most parts of the world, women are virtually absent from many economic decision-making levels or are poorly represented. Despite the similarities, it is worth saying that gender topics are handled differently in different societies, especially as they are widely considered to be highly influenced by each society´s social construction, as put forward by many writers. The meanings given to gender differences vary greatly, even in the different feminist theories, which all approach the fact of gender inequality differently. This is one of the reasons why Sylvia Tamale is so particular about the need to move onto the next phase of Afro-feminist activism. This, to her, is to be done by taking away those parts of Western feminism that were adopted without any critical analysis or second thought and reconstructing the concept, bringing it to context in more relevant ways essential for addressing the marginalisation of African women (Tamale 2020:40). Some of these theories with different approaches, for example, are: liberal feminism, which focused on the removal of discriminatory practices in everyday life as well as from legal documents. It is also known as equality feminism and believes men and women are born equal and thus deserve equal treatment without any hindrance. It, however, does not seek to challenge the current social structures and practices but rather to open them to women. Cultural feminism, on the other hand, appeared in the late 1970s as a reaction to the failure of liberal feminism to achieve substantive equality. The idea was not to assimilate women into a male-dominated society and adjust them to male-oriented norms. On the contrary, it aimed at strengthening the institutional structures to support women's needs (see Anders, Raili, & Vasiljevic, 2017). From the aforementioned point, it is worth saying that if theories on gender inequality differ from one to the other, then the topic can't be handled entirely from a global perspective, as one society will obviously make its argument based on its experiences, which are

unique. It is for this reason that this study will be limited to a region (the Northwest Region), specifically Bamenda in Cameroon.

Chapter 2: DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this study, many qualitative methods were used to get the result. In-depth, open-ended interviews, participant observation, discourse analysis, media (Facebook, WhatsApp, and even Instagram), and document analysis were employed. The research was carried out through fieldwork (with many visits to the field), internet searches, and desk study. It was arranged in the following stages: desk study, main fieldwork period(s), primary analysis, analysis of interviews, and analysis of the whole field results.

Triangulation of results, which is the application of multiple methods in research, was employed in this work. According to Olsen (2004), "in social science, triangulation is defined as the mixing of data or methods so that diverse viewpoints or standpoints cast light on a topic. The mixing of data types, known as data triangulation, is often thought to help in validating the claims that might arise from an initial pilot study. The mixing of methodologies, e.g., mixing the use of survey data with interviews, is a more profound form of triangulation." However, my reason for using triangulation is not to cross-validate the data collected but rather to gain different dimensions of the same phenomenon. Moreover, by using multiple methods, I can highlight different areas of the study and have a richer and more in-depth understanding of the community under study. Hence, the methods employed in this study complement each other and allow me to give a better description and a broader insight into the cases than it would have been possible with one method.

The selection of the fieldwork municipality or area of study was based on the multicultural nature of this particular area. The aim was to be able to talk to women from different cultural backgrounds living in this part of the region, which could act as a means to understand how related or different their behaviours could be, taking into consideration their different home upbringings. The first field visit lasted for two months, from December 2018 to February 2019. It was during this first visit that contacts were created, some interviews were conducted, and the first workshop was organized. During the interviews, open questions were used since the aim of the interview was to gain a complete understanding of the social lives of the women who were interviewed. As the research is based on the inequality faced by women and how language influences this inequality, the main points raised during the interviews were about the interviewee's educational life, marriage life, their relationship with their in-laws, and their opinions about the influence of their past lives on their present situations. They were urged to give a recount of how their childhood had been, especially the challenges faced, if any, until the period when they finally got married. The goal was also to find out if these women chose their spouses by themselves or had no say when it came to choosing a life partner. Interviews lasted from

10 to 15 minutes for structured interviews and even longer for open interviews, depending on how convenient it was for the interviewees. There was the added advantage that all the interviewees were willing to have it done in any format, including videos.

The longer I stayed in the field during my visits, the more time I had for participant observation of the community's daily life and activities. These included all the planned and unplanned events, activities, and engagement in some of their activities. These also included attending seminars (like the ones I organised), gatherings such as church, meetings, and funerals, among others, and taking part in their everyday activities. During fieldwork, many unplanned gatherings took place that provided an opportunity for informal discussions too. These aspects were very practical during my second fieldwork visit in February 2020, during which I intended to spend two months but ended up spending about six months due to the COVID-19 pandemic that affected every part of the world. Borders were blocked, and there was no possibility of travelling. This gave me an opportunity to spend more time with my research participants, especially the family that hosted me (for participant observation). Spending this much time with them gave me a chance to take part in their daily activities and gave us much time to bond better. In other words, what was meant to be a hindrance turned out for my own good, and I used it to my own advantage. Apart from spending more time with active and passive participants, it gave me an opportunity to get enough data that served for a long time until I could make the next trip. These might not have been part of the planned sources of data, but they helped to a greater extent to put the information gotten through interviews and other means into context.

2.1 Research questions

Considering the point that gender inequality cannot be generalised, it will be important to know (1) exactly what gender inequality is in the West Cameroon context. (2) How does the home come into the picture? This implies that, at the end of the research, we hope to answer questions on the role that different home training plays in what is being observed in society. (3) How does women's upbringing on gender-related issues influence the way they treat each other? (4) What language(s) are used, especially by women, to express these disparities?

By the end of this dissertation, I hope most, if not all, of the above questions can be answered through the different cases, chats, interviews, and communicated experiences that will be analysed in the chapters ahead.

2.2 Research design

The research design used is a case study and descriptive. Descriptive research is a design used to describe phenomena as they exist. It is used to identify and get information on the characteristics of a specific issue or issues, such as a community or group of people. This kind of research describes social events, social situations, and social structure, among many others. It requires the observer to observe and describe what he or she finds out, and it answers the questions of what, who, where, when, and how. It is used to study the current situation and is commonly used in the social sciences (Akhtar, 2016:75)[7]

2.3 Research methodology

2.3.1 Data sources: the main sources of data used for this research were the primary and secondary data sources. With the primary source, the data was collected from the original source of information. The primary sources were homes observed, workshops, meetings, parties, funerals, and the church (through observation, pictures, interviews, and discussions). As for the secondary sources, the data used was a review of other people's work on the topic, through journals, websites, books, articles, magazines, and newspapers, among many others.

2.3.2 Data collection methods: Data collection methods were focused on different techniques, which could further be divided into:

1) Primary data collection methods: the methods employed here were:

Workshops: Workshops were organised, and a good number of women in and around the city of Bamenda were invited to come share their experiences. During the workshops, women were encouraged to speak using the most common language (Pidgin) for a better understanding for all. Cardboards were used in small groups by these women to write down pertinent observations and experiences, not leaving out suggestions for a way forward. Some speakers also gave talks at some point, and the ladies were given the chance to respond through questions and evaluation. The workshop participants were also divided into groups after the presentations to answer questions, give an overview of the entire workshop session, and give their feedback through short presentations by different group representatives.

[7] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308915548_Research_Design [accessed Nov 25 2019]

WhatsApp: This research was conducted during a period when the people of Bamenda in Cameroon were going through a political crisis. At this time, movements were prohibited at some points, but the research could not be suspended due to the time limit. Respondents were therefore more comfortable, at that point, having the discussion through WhatsApp rather than taking the risk of going out for meetings. Secondly, information shared on WhatsApp can be saved for future references compared to open discussions that might not be completely recalled if not recorded. Moreover, some people are more comfortable sharing their information through text, where they will have no eye contact with the interviewer. In addition to that, with the rise in the use of social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook, many women are comfortable with the WhatsApp groups created to share their experiences and are already used to using WhatsApp as one of the main means of communication. It is very important to note that since the research ran through the period of Covid-19, when movements were restricted to avoid personal contact with other people, WhatsApp became so useful since the research could not be put to a complete standstill due to the pandemic.

Observation: This method of data collection could be considered strong in validity because the researcher has the chance to collect a depth of information in regard to a particular behavior. In this dissertation, apart from other methods of observation, participant observation was highly used, where I spent more time with the research participants, while taking part in their different activities and observing them. A family hosted me for a couple of months to make the observation process easier.

Conversations: I had deep conversations with some individuals who shared their experiences about the researched topic. These conversations were mostly carried out in face-to-face settings, permitting me to seek new ideas and ask a wide range of questions. One advantage of this method is that it gave room for the individuals who took part, to raise issues that I may not have thought of. These conversations were also had through other means, such as Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp.

Facebook: With the common usage of social media these days and considering the nature of the research topic (having so much to do with women's personal lives), it was of paramount importance to include Facebook as one of the main sources of data collection. Nowadays, many women prefer Facebook to express themselves, as they can easily hide their identities when they don't want to be known. Believing that they are not identified, they get to share a lot of intimate information that they would otherwise not share if they were to face the people, they are seeking advice from.

2) Secondary data collection methods: This refers to data that has been collected by someone or group of people other than me or any other secondary user. These sources give insights into the current stage of the research and give the researcher an idea of any research gaps that could be filled. This

dissertation exploited many books, articles, journals, websites, and newspapers, just to name a few, as secondary sources. These will be seen in the literature review and other chapters ahead.

2.4 Methods of data analysis

This part answers the basic questions that were raised in the problem statement. It gives a detailed analysis of the situation going on regarding gender inequality in West Cameroon, with the home as the basic starting point. The experiences of the various participants at different levels are analysed here to give the reader a clear picture of what the current situation is like. The method used to analyse these results is the qualitative method. It reveals the targeted audience's range of behaviour with reference to particular topics or issues, and the results, as earlier mentioned, are descriptive

2.5 Time frame and response rate

The research lasted for about five and a half years, from January 2018 to August 2023. During this period, workshops were organised which served to gather many participants at the same time. Observations were made each time I went to the field too, and I had the opportunity to meet many of the respondents one-on-one and to spend some time living with one family for effective observation. The response rate was quite encouraging, as most of the women I contacted to speak with were very willing to talk and share their experiences. Moreover, there was a high response rate during the workshops, as most of the women felt it was a great opportunity for them to meet and share their plight in an environment that had little or no limitations especially in terms of class and language.

2.6 Reflections on the methodology

It is important to mention that this study was carried out within a particular geographical context, which, like many other areas, needed a method(s) that would aid in understanding this area better. To accomplish this, I employed multiple methods, which helped me get to know my area of study better. In other words, where there were any complexities within the community, multiple methods helped in having an in-depth understanding or interpretation of everything. Moreover, it has been noted that it's complicated to study a place and therefore advisable to use different methods (see Berg, Dale & Kramvig, 2013 cited in Amungsen, 2013); this includes getting to know the place by being there and asking questions. When different methods are used, one can have a better understanding of how the inhabitants are connected to their environment and how they shape it. The researcher can also create places through his or her descriptions and the analyses (Berg, Dale & Kramvig, 2013 cited in Amungsen, 2013). Therefore, self-reflection in both fieldwork and analysis processes have been of

paramount importance to me. To be sure of my interpretations of the outcome, I had to also discuss my understanding with some informants, especially those on the ground. Furthermore, to ensure that my interpretations were in line with the actual results, I took into consideration how my analyses matched those of similar studies. This research relied fully on different qualitative methods. On the one hand, this data collection method says little or nothing about statistical significance, and hence, it can be difficult to make a generalisation about the result obtained. On the other hand, it is a method that gives in-depth information about the areas to be studied. When using qualitative methods like interviews, for example, there is an opportunity for direct contact with the participants, which gives the researcher the chance to elaborate on some questions where necessary. It also gives a deeper understanding of the data collected than a broader one, as in the case of a quantitative method. Moreover, in my opinion, not all research should be limited to numbers, as some, like this research, have to do more with deep listening and reading, which have no connection with numbers.

Chapter 3: THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK, LITERATURE REVIEW AND THE HISTORICAL POINT OF VIEW

Language is an integral part of this work, but this is not just linguistics in general but specifically sociolinguistics. This chapter will give an insight into how this research is connected to sociolinguistics for a better understanding of how a people's language could be used against them. It is also in this chapter that we will get some historical views (specific to this research) of how language became a thing to be used against women. What other language or languages were in competition with Cameroon Pidgin and other indigenous languages such that one had to be prioritised over the other? I will also delve into the different existing pieces of literature in connection with this work to get a clearer picture of how this dissertation will simply add to existing knowledge. Moreover, in this chapter, the theoretical framework or approach applied in this research will also be presented.

3.1 The place of sociolinguistics in this work

As this research focuses on the marginalisation of women and the factors responsible for it, such as their social background, it will be very important to be informed about their educational background and how it is connected to their language choices. Considering the fact that it might not be feasible to study an entire society to give a 100 percent report, working with individuals is the main focus. Moreover, everyone is unique in their choices and usage of language, and as individuals, we are much more moulded by experience (see Hudson, 1996:11). Talking about social class, which is also an important part of this dissertation, implies the position of the speaker in society, which is determined by the level of education, profession, and parental background, among others. Education, on the other hand, is a sociolinguistic factor that equally influences the language of the speaker and causes variation in the use of language of an individual. It is noticed that when someone is formally educated, he or she uses the standard form of a language compared to an uneducated person (from a Western point of view), who is bound to use unusual spellings, code switching, borrowings, and pidgin words when speaking (especially for languages that are mostly acquired through formal education) (see Mercer, 2002:185). In terms of ethnicity, it creates an important impact on someone's language and influences the process of variation. Corson (1993:101) opined that the non-standard language of socially marginalised people is still unjustly used as a mirror to view their potential for success and to determine their worth as human beings. Wolfram (2007:82) also made the point that ethnic varieties may serve a full range of symbolic social roles and functions, from making relations of social dominance and subordination to constructing and negotiating individual and group identities. Before we go ahead, it

is necessary to mention that scholars like Labov and Bourdieu (though their work was largely based on Western societies), among many others, have contributed greatly to the understanding of class and gender performances and practices. These practices involve, among many others, language, body movements, and dressing. Looking at it from the angle of language, of particular interest is Labov's school of thought that language is used in terms of writing and speaking, differently depending on the individual as well as the situation in which this individual finds himself or herself (see Gordon 2017). Moreover, Labov promoted the idea that language should be studied from a realistic perspective where aspects such as socioeconomic classes (an important reality of a speaker's day-to-day life) would not be ignored. As Eckert & Rickford (2001:2) put it, Labov demonstrated that the use of sociolinguistic variables is socioeconomically stratified, and each speaker's stylistic range covers a continuous subset of use within the socioeconomic matrix. In the chapters ahead, it will be clearer to us how Labov's contribution to class and gender performances and practices also helped in understanding how the women's (in Bamenda) choice of language practices either contributed to their relegation or helped them out of marginalisation at certain points.

Bamenda is a multilingual society in which, inasmuch as the language(s) of individuals are judged based on their educational backgrounds, these individuals still adapt their language to fit certain circumstances or a specific audience. This is one of the reasons for my interest in Gerard Van Herk's definition of sociolinguistics—as the study of the relationship between language and society—but that study can take very different forms depending on who is doing it and what they are interested in finding (Van Herk, 2012:6). Following this definition, the aspect of gender could be introduced here, where language is classified depending on who (gender) is speaking. Considering the fact that this research is interested in finding out how judging a speaker by his or her language leads to marginalisation, it will be important to hear how women of different age groups and educational background have been marginalised due to their choice of language—and this will be seen through some of the interviews granted by these women. Talking about education, David Block opined that education is mostly cited as an index of class in research and many other studies. To him, there are often connections made between one's educational level, occupation, and income, which all lead to a particular class position on a scale (Block, 2013:61). However, it is interesting how he also pointed out the importance of separating cultural capital from class capital, as they are sometimes very independent of each other depending on the individual. In this effect, Block has it that there are many cases in which people who have postgraduate degrees might not earn as much money as others who have a very low academic qualification, yet they work in skilled jobs that are highly needed, consequently making more money (Ibid.). It is important to mention that Block's opinion in this area can be confirmed by this research,

as some women spoken to could attest to being respected in their community not because of their level of education but because they are involved in businesses that give them financial advantage. It is for this reason that Block highlighted that a lack of academic capital could give an individual lower status and prestige in society while placing on them a greater status and prestige in the economic class in which they socialize. According to Block, in a society, there are three different areas: economic, social, and cultural capitals, in which individuals experience unequal power relations. They all facilitate and hinder interactions with other people in different communities of practice with which these individuals interact throughout their lives. To add that, he mentioned that identities are connected to different demographic categories such as nationality, migration, ethnicity, social class, race, language, and gender (Block 2013:67). With all the above connected to sociolinguistics, it is even more interesting how Janet Holmes (2008:2) sees sociolinguistics from the angle of that discipline, which is concerned with the relationship between the language and the context in which it is used. While Archibald & O'Grady (2016: 170 & 520) on their part said that "the study of language in social contexts, termed sociolinguistics, focusses on the relationship between linguistic behaviour and social situations, roles, and functions." A sociolinguistic study aims at analysing the connection between language and the context in which it is being used by looking at the behaviour depicted by the language, the role it plays, its functions, and the situation in which it is being spoken. Before we forge ahead, it should be made known that Holme's and Archibal & O'Grady's definitions are brought in at this point so we can all see how they are strongly related to Labov's theory of variation. Going back to Holmes, we can also have a look at what she thinks about linguistic choice. According to her, people's linguistic choices will be influenced by one, more, or all the following components:

a) **The participants:** who is speaking, and to whom are they speaking?
b) **The setting or social context of the interaction:** where are they speaking?
c) **The topic:** what is being talked about?
d) **The function:** why are they speaking?

These four components are social factors, believed by Holmes (2008) to be the social forces or features of the language that influence speakers to speak in particular ways. An example is how a parent (e.g., a mother) could be more relaxed in passing a message to her daughter than she would be to her son, especially when they have grown to a certain age, like 18 years old, for example (Holmes 2008: 9). Holmes went further to say that there are also dimensions that influence people's choice of language, which are as follows:

A social distance scale, of which this is concerned with the relationship between the participants. It could either be an intimate one with a high level of solidarity or a distant relationship with a low level of solidarity; a status scale, which is also about the relationship but in terms of superior with a high status and subordinate with a low status; and a formality scale, relating to the setting or type of interaction. It could be a formal setting with a high level of formality or an informal setting with a low level of formality and referential and affective function scales that are related to the reason or topic of interaction. It is either high information content with low affective content or low information content with high affective content (Holmes 2008:10). She presented the above in a horizontal and vertical scale measurement, representing two features, which were high and low. According to her, the scales determine the reason for the difference in the use of language. As suggested by the scale, individuals with intimate relationships, not necessarily sexual relationships, would use a different set of languages compared to those who were considered to have a distant relationship. This could also be applied to people with different statuses, purposes, formalities, or topics of interaction. She emphasised the fact that sometimes a discussion could convey information and affection at the same time, but one function is often dominant. This therefore implies that a presenter at a conference, for example, will be more concerned with passing on information, while on the other hand, an individual who is more concerned with expressing feelings often has very little information to communicate (see Holmes, 2008). When Holmes' opinion on language choices, the relationship involved in the communication process, and the conditions surrounding a particular speaker are taken into consideration, there are more reasons to think these factors would have been necessary to consider while judging women in Bamenda based on their speech patterns. As we forge ahead, we will come across typical cases of women who might not talk much in public, not because they do not belong to a language group but simply because their social and educational capital do not measure up to what society deems to be the “standard.” That notwithstanding, when these women are given the chance to express themselves irrespective of their background, they speak so eloquently in a way that might even amaze their listeners.

3.2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical approach will be based on vicarious writing research, as this work is largely based on telling people’s stories in different forms. According to Junker (2020), acting vicariously means acting on behalf of someone else (as a substitute). Vicarious writing is expressed in terms like "I am writing on behalf of Y" or "in the name of Z" or, in Stein's words (cited in Junker 2020), “I am going to write it for you.” It is the act of a writer writing in place of, or on the authority of, and on behalf of another. In this case, Junker called the 'other' a ‘principal’—a term he adapted from Erving Goffman’s

sociological model of "footing." Goffman, in his sociological model, as cited in Junker (2020:326), defined a principal as "someone whose position is established by the words that are spoken or written, someone whose beliefs have been told, someone who has committed himself to what the words say." Junker therefore defines vicarious writing in a more general sense as a relationship between authorised writers, or those who authorise themselves to write, and principals and signatories who are written about. The relationship can be a matter of actual writing practices that take different forms, including co-writing, ghostwriting, and the transcribing of oral documents. Moreover, it is important to mention that the relationship involves power relations acted out between the writer and the signatory. These power differentials, which are along lines like racial and gender differences, social stratification and geopolitical location, structure (determine), vicarious writing on a spectrum from voluntary collaboration to violent coercion. As we move ahead, the vicarious writing approach becomes even more important for this work, as a large part of this dissertation is based on either me writing on behalf of someone or an authorised person writing on behalf of another person on social media and other mediums. Hence, considering how personal some of the stories told here are, a greater part of the story owners would obviously not want to be exposed—and since vicarious writing is largely used in situations where the 'principal' might not be able to speak or write for themselves, then it is safer to use this approach. Furthermore, the 'principal' might not be in the position to write or speak for themselves for so many reasons, among which are: they might not be courageous enough to talk about their stories, might not be ready (maybe still traumatised by the happenings) to talk about their own stories and experiences. Sometimes, language barriers could be the reason for the use of vicarious writing, where the storyteller might wish to reach a wider audience but is limited by language. In that case, the authorised representative is responsible for spreading this story in a language of wider communication. Just to mention that as we come across some of the interviews conducted in Pidgin, for example, the aspect of language could be confirmed as the 'principal's' story might have been limited to just Pidgin speakers, except for the fact that it has been translated to English here—a way of reaching both speakers and non-speakers of Cameroon Pidgin.

3.3 Literature Review

The topic of gender and language has been handled from different angles by different scholars, giving one an idea of the influence of language on gender inequality. Gender issues have been handled, ranging from the influence of the home on gender disparities in society and vice versa to the influence of formal education on gender inequality and the steps taken by individuals or groups to curb what they consider to be gender inequalities.

a) Women-only Groups

One of the ways women in particular have resorted to taking part when it comes to seeking solutions to their gender issues is by joining groups. In these groups, they can express themselves more, open up to one another, and give solutions to their supposed problems. It is very necessary to mention that this practice of women depending on women-only groups for support on social needs is not very new, as it also dates as far back as the early 1970s. According to Schubert Walker, as cited in Brody's work (1987:3), groups provide a unique opportunity for participants to assess themselves, express their feelings, and get feedback. The writer went further to say women groups eliminate the unconscious sexism that is present in mixed groups and provide a supportive environment in which participants can discover and experience the commonalities of being a woman. Allen (1970) outlined four stages that characterised the development of women's consciousness-raising groups, as follows:

1) **Opening up:** involves revealing inner feelings and personal experiences, and it fosters an atmosphere of intimacy and trust. Due to group norms such as nonjudgmental acceptance and respect for feelings, members are encouraged to disclose a lot about themselves.
2) **Sharing:** the discussion is taken from the individual level to a group level. The members recognise their commonalities among themselves, cooperate, support, and help one another solve problems.
3) **Analysing:** at this stage, they strive to combine subjective feelings and thinking with objective analysis, thus directing the women to investigate the role of women in society.
4) **Abstracting:** group members examine institutions and determine how they can work together to change society (pages 4-5).

Women's groups, like any other mixed group, usually have goals that are not so different from each other. Like mixed groups, female groups aim at boosting self-confidence, promoting self-respect, improving interpersonal relationships, resolving personal problems, and promoting open communication, among many other things. However, women's groups value the exploration of the complexity and realities of being female. Female groups encourage the members to discover the things they share in common, to explore their roles, to explore and address stereotypes, and to build supportive relationships with one another. Compared to mixed groups, female groups value emotional support more than personal problem-solving (Kravetz, Marecek & Finn, 1983; Shorr & Jason, 1982). At that time, the rise in women's only groups was also a result of the fact that many women felt the need to talk to women leaders who could understand their problems better. There had been some questioning by women about whether male therapists could understand and accept a woman's feeling

without judging her; they thought that male therapists promoted sexual stereotyped behaviour and minimised women's issues (Barret, Berg, Eaton & Pomeroy, 1974) and disregarded the impact of social determinants on the problems women faced (Klein, 1976). However, it is worth mentioning that the above-mentioned will also be questionable at one point, as some women have testified to preferring to deal with men in professional matters than with their fellow women. According to others, the presence of male therapists hinders women's freedom to accept, express, and work through the feelings of anxiety women express towards men. This has also promoted the rise in online female-only groups where women feel the need to express themselves, saying all that they would have otherwise not been able to say in a mixed group. Lane, Abigail, & Gooch (2016:106) opined that people are attracted to online support groups because they offer anonymity; they tend to expose their problems online more than face-to-face because they believe they cannot easily be judged. Online support seekers also use the internet to find people who have similar problems and perceive the need for support. The social roles that individuals play in society are something they learn throughout their lives, and for some people, it gets increasingly complicated and somehow confusing. Individuals choose the roles they want to play and derive images of themselves through reflections of how other members of society see them, compared to how they want to be seen. In the process of exercising their roles in ways that will also suit societal expectations, they run into difficulties and sometimes face conflicts and unexpected changes. In moments like these, individuals start looking for support mechanisms, which is how many women found themselves in consciousness-raising groups (CR). In the process of offering help, consciousness-raising groups have challenged some assumptions that had been made about gender roles. Through challenging some of these assumptions and conducting some research, many women have been able to see how untrue these assumptions have been. Through this, CR groups make their members aware of the external causes of their stress and make them feel empowered to change their environment (see Kirsh, 1974).

Gender role sharing and conforming to it have had some effects on women in the past years, such that some of the problems they face stem from these "accepted" disparities. Some of these problems include low self-esteem, depression, and sexual dysfunction. CR emerged at a time when many women were expressing role-related problems and confusion, and at a time when the female role had become more of a problem than satisfying. It has been noted that consciousness-raising groups have had a lot of positive effects from the time they were introduced until now. Because of these groups, women have learnt to drive, have better jobs, express themselves both in public and in private, go to school, leave bad jobs, and have bad marriages, among many other things (see Kirsh, 1974). Other research has also confirmed that with the coming up of these groups, women's passiveness in things around them has

reduced, and their quest for knowledge has increased (see Keetley & Pettegrew 2005:250). Now, they have a greater feeling of connection and love for other women (see Steiner, 2020). Women have also become ambitious and experienced an increase in self-esteem and confidence (see Del, 1981:160). It has also been noted that the more members of these groups received negative reactions from the people around them, such as their spouses and other close ones, the more they had the urge to try harder. Some of these new behaviours include being able to speak in mixed groups, speaking in a louder tone, and being able to speak confidently without always sounding like they are asking questions. This type of manifestation of change is something that can easily be tried within the safe confines of support groups (see Kirsh, 1974: 51). Another positive side of these groups is that some women have testified to being able to speak in groups, exploring and finding out whether they speak differently with women and men. The way people speak determines the reaction they get from their audience, and CR groups have been able to create awareness for their members to know how they act and speak, which has helped them effect changes for better understanding by the listeners. It should be mentioned here that these old sources dating as far back as the 1970s are very relevant for this research. This is because, even if some practices have changed in recent times, it is important for us to have an idea of how women in the past handled their gender problems. This also acts as a reminder that this research is equally interested in the disparities between the old and new generations and how they handle their gender grievances, such that old sources as such cannot be completely ignored.

b) The role of religion in gender inequality

Moving to the next session, let us look at the role religion plays when it comes to gender inequality. Does it act as a liberator for women, or does it rather help compound the situation? Religion and colonialism, as written by many writers, also have a great role to play as far as gender roles are concerned. Introducing Christianity and Western education was critical to the stratification of colonial society along both class and gender lines. The fact that females were initially disadvantaged when it came to the educational system is arguably the main determinant of women's inferiority and lack of access to resources during the colonial period and even in the contemporary period. It was very effective in Yoruba land because Christianity and Western education were inseparable because they were the monopoly of Christian missionaries, so the school was the church and the church was the school (Oyewumi, 1997:128). This is not different with the case of Cameroon, as one study shows that religion came and took the power that was allocated to African women (Pui-Lan & Donaldson, 2002); another study shows that the coming of religion gave women some level of autonomy and created some disparities in African homes as their men felt their powers were limited (see Raines & Maguire, 2001). According to Nkwi (2018:157), the Basel Mission introduced Christianity to the Northwest

Region of Cameroon, and after a slow but steady growth, other churches such as the Catholic and Baptist were introduced, and they became the strongest and most important institutions in the region. Since then, Christianity has become central in the lives of the people and one of their most important features. Even traditional rulers, who were the custodians of traditional religions, became identified with Christianity (Jindra, 2005) through the destruction of their authorities by the European colonisers and missionaries. Some historians, for example (Ndi, 2005; Nkwi, 2015), as well as missionaries like Booth 1973, cited in Nyamnjoh 2018:160, made mention of the fact that Christianity greatly transformed the people and region, as well as being transformed by the region. Awoh (2012: 411) opines that with the introduction of Christianity in this region, traditional rulers provided grounds on which church buildings and missionary activities flourished and planted their roots deep in the villages, but it became a paradox when rural wives started running from their homes to seek refuge in the churches, which in turn threatened the authority of the traditional rulers. According to him, by offering refuge for these runaway wives and welcoming women who had fled the typical traditional male power or authority, the missionaries had begun sowing among the Christian community the seed of their own destruction. Nkwi, on his part, looked at the concept of cannibalism from another direction. According to him, while colonisers referred to their colonies as cannibals, implying they fed on human flesh, he looked at cannibalism from the angle of the colonisers, trying to eat up their African colonies by completely destroying their traditions and old ways of doing things and instilling in them completely new ways. Nkwi therefore concentrated his paper on the Bamenda Grassfielders, who refused to completely be eaten up by Western Christianity and rather cannibalised Western Christianity (Nkwi 2018). From a socio-political point of view, the Bamenda Grassfield is organised around Fondoms, with Fons as the head of these Fondoms. These Fons, before the arrival of the Western missionaries, had absolute power over their people and were even seen by their people as divine. The palaces of these traditional rulers were always flooded by so many women, with some of them having as many as 100 wives. With the coming of the missionaries and colonisers, the traditional rulers were castigated for having so many wives, as it was something considered bad and unacceptable according to the new religion that they came to introduce. Nkwi also noted that the missionaries referred to polygamy as social tyranny and even reported back in Europe that they were Fons who had as many as 700 wives (Nyamnjoh 2018;164-165). Christianity, as it was introduced, appealed to so many women, and it introduced the doctrine of ‘one man’ ‘one wife’. The sacrament of matrimony was also taught, where a wife and husband are bound together forever in sickness or in health, in poverty or in riches till death separates them. Apart from the spiritual aspect of it, marriage had a material dimension, which was shown in the new and appealing outfits of the couple during their marriage ceremony. The Christian

doctrine, with its material aspect, acted as an incentive for women to flee their palaces from marital structures that they considered restricting (Ndi, 2005:54-56). During that time, the royal women had also come to believe that the Fons were their spiritual leaders because they performed quasi-spiritual activities and were considered to be the only gods by their women. This changed when the then new Christian doctrine stressed just one all-powerful, omnipotent God who had no competitor. This posed a lot of problems to the people at that time because the new doctrine of an omnipotent God became more attractive to the women and changed their former belief that the Fon was all-powerful and unquestionable. Hence, if the former belief had enabled the Fon to 'cannibalise' them and accumulate as many wives as possible to satisfy his royal appetite, Christianity and its doctrine of individual freedom gave the women the power to stay from the Fon and, as a result, related to and treated the Fon and his Fondom as predators (Nyamnjoh 2018;176). These missionaries also worked with some locally trained individuals who had had the opportunity to travel out of the region and returned with this training and orders to spread the word and new doctrines to the Grassfielders. These returnees, with their new ways of dressing and doctrine, did not only introduce Christianity but also something deeper, such as new romantic aspects that the women had never experienced in the palace. These returnees represented 'romantic love' to the royal women, which was not just new but also attractive; they introduced 'love of newness'. What Cole & Thomas (2009:4–10) said about the impossibility of understanding sex or intimacy without understanding the ideologies of emotional attachment (and those claims to love, which were also claims to modernity), seemed to be connected to what was happening between the Fon's wives and the new arrivals who came with their new doctrines. He concluded by saying the missionaries and colonisers cannibalised them by imposing their new style on them and changing the way their society was constructed in so many ways.

Christianity cannibalised their Christians or metaphorically ate them up through their dogma and practices, and one of these was in the way they changed their women. It also cannibalised their minds and changed the way they started seeing things. Their women started questioning their authority, and some even fled (especially from the palace), as earlier mentioned, which is something they would not have ever known if new foreign doctrines were not brought in (Nyamnjoh 2018:190).

Francis B. Nyamnjoh, on his part, looked at the topic of cannibalism from the angle of relationships. According to him, cannibalism is an essentially negative indulgence and practice that reduces the humanity of both the eater and the eaten and therefore should be rationally opposed for the decency of 'cultured' and 'civilised' beings (Nyamnjoh, 2018:1). This came at a point where he also saw cannibalism to be something far beyond just consuming human meat and urges that cannibalism should be understood or studied in its fullness; otherwise, we run the risk of losing food, family, friends, or

enemies (see Travis-Henikoff, 2008:243). Very important to take note of is the fact that no one has the monopoly of cannibalism and cannibalisation, that no single person, culture, or group of people can have the final benefit when it comes to the game of cannibalism, and that as eaters and the eaten, either we all survive the game or we perish together (Nyamnjoh, 2018:4). According to his definition of cannibalism, that has to do with people trying to take advantage of others in relationships for their own selfish reasons. Each one has the potential to manipulate others for their personal gains. This is the reason why Nyamnjoh argued that cannibalism is practiced by all and sundry to a certain extent through social interactions and relationships. Whether it is done in love or in hate, cannibalism shows up at every moment or at every attempt of dominance and has been there from time immemorial; hence, we can all be considered 'descendants of cannibals' (Travis-Heniloff 2008:93). Nyamnjoh questions the meaning of cannibalism, which is limited to human flesh, and thinks that literally killing a person to feed on their resources and opportunities after their death is cannibalism, whether we use their flesh for a meal or not. It also means to feed on someone's life chances is the same as eating up their flesh—in both cases, one is drained, diminished, and cannibalized. In the same way, to reduce an individual to a degradable, shameful, acute, and passive level of dependency and powerlessness—to a bare existence stripped of self-worth, personhood, and agency by another's claim of entitlement to power, rights, resources, and a host of others in a given context—amounts to cannibalism. He demonstrated his idea by using film producer Harvey Weinstein as an example of someone who allegedly reduced the dignity of many women who came for fame in Hollywood (Nyamnjoh 2018:5-6). Using women as an example here links us to the many cases of women having to give in to men's sexual advances to gain access to certain benefits. Sometimes, they are forced to give in to their pride and are therefore cannibalised in the process. Relegating women to the back, women targeting fellow women for selfish reasons, manipulating in-laws, and taking advantage of them just because they feel others must submit under their authority are all different ways of cannibalism, which is not different from eating their flesh. This is because cannibalism takes the form of freezing the humanity of others to a non-existent level, so we can eat up their life opportunities without feeling guilty. Therefore, reducing others, no matter who they are, to ridiculous defensiveness and to a fate that could be worse than death is nothing short of cannibalism. With cannibalism, killing someone instantly might not be the only form of extraction, as dying slowly and equally goes a long way to satisfy cannibals for a longer period (Ibid.). It is because of this that Claude Levi-Strauss (2016) argued that in one way or another, we are all cannibals, regardless of our claims to be modern and no matter how the humans we consume get into our bodies.

c) The role of colonialism in gender inequality.

Apart from religion, colonialism brought a lot of changes in different areas as so many Cameroonian values were changed. Mikell (1997:3) mentioned that African female subordination takes complicated forms grounded in a typical traditional African culture that Africans have generated throughout their history. She, however, thinks that these gender relationships were exaggerated by colonial, Western, and hegemonic contacts. Since culture is not a stagnate or static thing, she thinks a new series of asymmetry and inequality have arisen that politicians and laypersons alike sometimes present some aspects as customary when they are actually distortions of African reality. Longo (2018:279) mentioned that in the British colonial period, male chiefs lost their sovereignty while increasing their powers over the people. It was particularly noted, according to the writer, that while the male chiefs invested more power in the Yoruba community of Nigeria, the female chiefs were stripped of power; hence, due to a lack of recognition, their formal positions soon became weakened. There is therefore no gainsaying that while some people believe that colonial masters gave some powers to women, a host of others, on the other hand, think women were rather stripped of all their rights with the introduction of colonialism.

3.4 Women and silencing —History of the situation

Language is a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings through the use of gestures, marks, or signs, having understood meanings: audible, articulate, meaningful sound as produced by the action of the vocal organs. The way they are being pronounced and the different techniques in which they are combined, used, and understood by a particular community and established by being used over a long period of time (Martin, 1981). Silence, which is another way of communicating, is when a comment mentioned is completely absent or an expressed concern is omitted. In the past years, the concept of silence as a language has received little attention, yet it is one of the most powerful means of communication. Talking about silence, it is worth noting that it can be voluntary or involuntary, but in either way, the message intended to be passed can be very loud, depending on the situation promoting the silence. As opined by some writers, in precolonial times, many African countries, including Cameroon, had well-organised economic, political, social, and communicative systems. When these countries were invaded, transformed, and controlled by their colonisers, their cultures and languages were consumed and reduced to an inferior position (Serequeberhand, 2000:1, Ngefac, 2016:2). These societies were already multilingual before the invasion of colonisers, so colonialism only made them more complex linguistically with the introduction of colonial languages. In most cases, if not all, these colonial languages must be learnt through formal education, and those who have not received this

formal education are disadvantaged as they are forced to be silent whenever these languages are used. Due to the reshaping of these societies, like in the case of Cameroon, many people tend to undervalue so many things that have their contextual reality in favour of Western constructs. They believe at that point that colonial languages are the only media through which individuals can have effective communication and are even ready to abandon their own identities to be identified with anyone or anything that strongly links them to the western world. They were expected to let go of their Africanness, yet they would not be accepted as Europeans, like in the case of Algeria, as elaborated by Falola & Sanchez (2014).

Despite so many years of alien rule, the invasion of Europeans into Africa still has a great impact. They used to have an essence of Africanness before colonisation, which was later contaminated or threatened in its pristine beauty by foreign influence. Yet Westernised Africans renounced the moment they embraced the culture of the Western world or any other foreign influence and identity they considered better than that of Africa (Mwakikagile 2019). These are some of the reasons why, even in postcolonial times, most, if not all, African countries are not referred to in relation to their linguistic heritage, such as "Pidginphone," "Babankiphone," "Bantuphone," or "Swahiliphone." On the contrary, they are still identified as "Anglophone," "Lusophone," or "Francophone" (see Anchimbe, 2007:9). Anchimbe also mentioned that the proliferation of languages during colonisation was also accompanied by the proliferation of identities (though on a second-class basis). The French mission civilisatrice, which was the mission by the French to convert all their colonial subjects into French people, as seen in such phrases as "nos ancêtres les Gaulois"[8] sung by African colonial subjects, refused them the right to maintain their original African (Linguistic) identity (Ibid.). It imposed the French identity and referred to them as French overseas citizens (France outre mer), which neither fitted their linguistic heritage nor racial origin.

This research therefore aims at finding out how women in general and older women in particular are victims of this reshaping and stereotypes in West Cameroon. Most of these women are multilingual; they have critical voices of their own, are independent, and can express themselves in the languages they are grounded in. Due to the sociocultural norms of West Cameroon, most of these women could not get formally educated in the 'accepted' language(s), which in most cases is English. They are therefore forced to be silent or are being silenced by those who were privileged to get this education and have a mastery of the colonial language(s) (Hogan-Brun and O'Rourke, 2019:413). They seem to be hard-pressed on every side and sometimes resort to being silent. So many women have shared their

[8] English translation: "Our ancestors the Gauls"

concern about not having someone to share their problems with, as even women they thought they could depend on turn against them, especially when they have the upper hand in terms of education. Women therefore prefer settings where they are allowed to flow in their best language(s) and can make their voices heard instead of being taken advantage of because of their involuntary silence. Their children have equally made use of these stereotypes by creating more languages or codes that can be used to rob their mothers of their critical voices and make them physically present but linguistically absent. The present generation has the advantage of globalisation, where most parents no longer go with the ideology of educating just men, and these disparities sometimes cause a lot of misunderstanding in some homes. Apart from educational reasons, the silencing of women is embedded in the customs and traditions such that women are expected to speak less and listen more, no matter how they feel. According to Nyengele (2004.33), African women theologians agree with Riphenburg (1997: 33-49) that African cultures are generally operated to the advantage of men who are trained and socialized to dominate family relations and structures. There is a state of unbalanced power relations that exist as male members of the family assume prestigious and privileged positions in matrilineal societies. In one of her articles, "Women's Status and Cultural Expression, Changing Gender Relations and Structural Adjustment in Zimbabwe," Riphenburg pointed out the existence of unequal gender relations and the effect they have on women's health, education, cultural expression, and control of sexuality. She ascertained that the traditional structure of the Zimbabwean family makes it difficult for the women to get the authority and resources they need during periods of economic crises. Gender imbalance does not end at the family level, as it is greatly experienced at the political level and in other spheres. Political debate and public speech are generally seen as genres for men; hence, there are bound to be differences in the way male and female speakers partake in public speaking. One of the ways in which male dominance is achieved in language use is to silence the dominated group (see Atanga, 2010: 57). Using the word silence does not, however, mean that women are silent everywhere or that they do not have the ability to use a language. The traditional linguistic activities in which women take part, such as gossip, diaries, and letters, are all either private or not meant for public consumption but cannot be minimized. Cameron (2006) therefore notes that silence is the absence of women's voices in areas such as religious activities, legal discourse, poetry, science, and political spheres. Women are plainly refused from speaking either by social taboos, restrictions, or some customary practices. Cameron also notes that women are either silent because of economic dependence, practical and psychological barriers, or illiteracy. Even if women can speak when they decide to, the conditions imposed on them by society may make it a very difficult choice to make. For example, being silent could mean that the individual is being careful, for fear of being ridiculed,

attacked, or even ignored. This is one of the main reasons why most women who lack this formal education either prefer to stay away from gatherings where it seems their ability to communicate will be tested by using a particular language or may prefer to stay quiet when they find themselves in these gatherings. Some researchers have shown that it is more common for these women to avoid women because of the level of competition women usually have among themselves. They will always feel challenged when a fellow woman can do what they cannot do, and worst of all, when they feel mocked (Fisher, 2017:15). Subjecting women to the background seems to have been a burning need for a long time, especially in the African context, where culture was and is still used to support these intentions. Christine Obbo (1976: 371-389) confirmed this when he wrote that the desire to control women has always been an integral part of male success in African societies. It seems that when you can keep your wife or a woman under your complete control, you can confidently talk about succeeding. Very important to note is the fact that over the years, many African women writers have been correcting this notion of black African permissible aggressive dominance through creative writing (see Smith & Ce, 2015:10). Anything that could act as a tool to exploit and marginalise women in the past was used, and some, though they might be considered archaic, are still in use in some parts of Africa. For example, witchcraft, which is mostly an accusation that ends up tarnishing the image of the accused, is one of the biggest tools that were used for the purpose of silencing women and relegating them.

Talking about witchcraft, according to Spence (2017:58), "both the historical witch hunts of the 16th to 18th centuries and the contemporary witchcraft accusations and persecutions of the 21st century are an attempt to marginalise women in order to preserve patriarchal norms." Spence (2017:59) went further to say the link between women and evil was promoted throughout the 16th and 18th centuries by early modern demonologists. Demonologists believed that women possessed specific attributes, which meant they were more easily disposed toward witches. Even when it comes to wealth in most parts of Africa, the distribution of wealth was and is highly gendered to the extent that women in some parts are even considered part of a man's property (Uchem, 2001:64). How, then, can someone who is classified as belonging to another person have the right to speak or make decisions? In Nnobi, a town in Anambra State, South-East Nigeria, for example, immovable property included food trees and land, while movable properties were made up of agricultural produce, domestic animals and food, household goods, textiles, and human labour, especially women's productive and reproductive powers, including the sexual services they offer. With the possession of so much material wealth, there was a possibility of converting it into prestige and power through the acquisition of title(s), ownership of more wives, and more labour power. For men to be considered rich, it implies they were in possession of so many houses, many wives, and many daughters. Having many wives was already enough reason to earn

respect and keep acquiring more, while having many daughters implied the man would be able to give them out for marriage in the future and make more money through the bride price. Wealth for women included livestock such as fowl and dogs, rich yields in farms and gardens, many wealthy, influential sons, and many daughters who would bring in in-laws and gifts (see Semley, 2017: 117-123). According to Obed Mfum-Mensah, a Ghanaian scholar, most of the girls in their village community who attended school during their days never went beyond standard seven, what was also known then as middle school form four. Even for the schoolgirls who graduated from middle school, it was a challenge for them to make it. Around the 1960s and 1970s, many parents had mixed feelings about girls' school enrolment, and despite the global efforts to promote girls' education that began after the 1990 Jomtien World Education Conference and the Ghanaian Government's 1995 Full Compulsory Universal Education initiative, girls' education in their village is still below the national average (see Mfum-Mensah, 2018:94). Scholars like Mukudi (2002) ascertained that some of the reasons for limiting girl school enrolment included poverty, long distances to attend school, a lack of menstrual hygiene management, a lack of educational facilities, and a lack of toilet facilities in schools. Cultural factors such as uneven power relations that lead to sexual harassment, early or teenage pregnancies, and the practice of early marriages also contribute highly to girls' low enrolment in school. However, there seems to be a dilemma at certain points as women get confused as to what society wants. The cultural norms and beliefs have influenced the choices of who deserves to be educated; some women, despite all these, still got the education, some of the educated, and some ones are getting backlash for getting educated more than they deserve. This is because it is believed some men do not want to get associated with over-educated women who might end up challenging them. In colonial Kenya, for example, formal education was seen as a pollutant that might affect a wide range of cultural beliefs. Educated women were therefore considered to be 'prostitutes' and badly behaved. Even as late as the 1950s and 1960s, many African men preferred to marry women with little or no literacy skills for fear of them being too wise and 'wayward'. Marrying Western-educated and professional women referred to as acada (coined from the English word academic) women by the Igbo of Nigeria was often seen as taking a bad risk, as such women had passed the age considered normal for marriage and reproduction and could also be headstrong (Shanguhyia & Falola, 2018:188). At the same time, some men prefer educated women for reasons such as meeting up with their [men] class, thinking differently, and being able to educate their children. A friend once mentioned he was looking for a wife to settle down with, and when asked what qualities he needed in a woman, his first response was that she should be educated. His justification was that he needed a woman he could be proud of, someone he could present

to his friends without any fear of embarrassment, and someone he could discuss his business with and trust that she could understand.

To show that this might not be completely different from what happens in some parts of North Africa, Serreli confirmed some of the aforementioned in her doctorate thesis (2016:221) when she mentioned that young Siwans (Egypt) who are highly educated and spent their university years in an Egyptian city might prefer to marry a girl who is also from the city because they believe she will behave differently with her husband and her children and will have a different approach when it comes to housework. In the same light, some of the young Siwans said they prefer educated girls because they will be able to give a better education to their children. The main factors involved here are urbanity and education, which are connected to having good manners and a better approach to life. Some women become a shadow of themselves as they feel little or no control over how their lives should be; some get educated for the sake of being picked by a better husband, not even for their own interests, and have no say in the decisions made over their future. It becomes a problem when you can't find a husband at a certain age, depending on the community in which one finds

herself. Yet, the mentality of a woman being part of her father's "property" has highly influenced the possibility of her getting married at the 'required' age and to the person she wants. The expensive dowry some families or kindred receive for their daughters really gives the impression that they are goods on sale. Apart from the predominance of endogamy, there are other reasons for the low rate of marriages between Siwans and Bedouins, as mentioned by Serreli. According to the Siwans, getting married to a lady from Bedouin is more expensive due to the dowry, which is higher than that of the Siwans, and there are a number of other requirements that the Siwans and Egyptians do not have, which makes it less complicated for them.

This culture has led to women seeing themselves as properties and working hard towards being approved by society and eligible for marriage. They will do anything to stay married or protect the men in their lives, even at the detriment of their own blood. It has now been transferred even to the way they treat their daughters and handle their daughters' worries. They put shame and what society will say before the worries of their own daughters. I have read cases of women whose daughters were raped by their own husbands (stepfathers or fathers), yet they preferred to cover up their husbands in order not to lose their marriages. It seems to be a trend that many young and old women have suffered from sexual abuse yet never had the courage to tell someone because their own mothers threatened them or convinced them not to talk about it. For some women, the shame of being raped by their own fathers or stepfathers was too much to bear; hence, they could not expose it for fear of being shamed

by society. Others never had the opportunity to talk about it or a platform where they could freely open up and make their cases known. To make this clearer, let me use Priscilla's[9] story that was shared on a Facebook page. Apparently, this is supposed to be the true-life story of one of the page's followers, written on behalf of the victim by the admin of the page. It is important to note that this story and others that would be told in this research cannot be conclusive as the readers cannot match a face to the stories since they were presented in the form of "hide my ID" or like a reported speech. However, though it might just be a symbolic story, I still find it very important for this research as it is not completely different from what other women on the ground (during this research) shared. Moreover, stories like these are shared on social media as a way of creating awareness; hence, even if it turns out it wasn't real, a powerful lesson must have been taught, with many women learning from it just by sharing it on social media.

So apparently, Priscilla, a lady from Zambia, started being sexually abused by her own father at the age of five, with her mother being fully aware of it. Her own biological father, who was also a polygamist, will make this child touch his private part every time he finishes having sex with her mother when she is barely 5 years old. By the time she got to 6 years old, the father had already started sleeping with her, and by 11 years old, she had already gotten used to sleeping with her father. Priscilla's mother, who did not want to leave the luxurious life she was having in her husband's house (here we see an aspect of greed coming in, preventing women from protecting other women), brainwashed her daughter, saying that is exactly how all parents show love to their children in their homes. At about the age of 12, neighbours who had been aware of the abuse started gossiping about the topic. This pushed Priscilla's uncle to come and take her away, and the poor child was so happy she was finally saved. Her joy was cut short the very next day, when her father showed up at her uncle's place, extremely angry. After a long talk with the father, she was told by the uncle that it was a family issue and she unfortunately had to go back home with her father (once again, a situation of family covering abuse cases in the name of "family matter"). This shattered the young girl so much that she almost committed suicide. The abuse became so bad that she was like a wife to her father, who would abuse her at any time he wanted. Due to his work, Priscilla's father travelled more often but always took her along. It came to a point where he got her an apartment in the city where he got his new work contract. She was locked in that apartment for a year and got raped on a daily basis by the father, even when she was on her period. At one point, she had to stop school because she got pregnant, and her father asked her to get any young man, sleep with him, and pin the pregnancy on

[9] Pseudonym for privacy's sake

him. Her father subsequently took her to live with one of his wives, and she thought things would get better for her. Unfortunately, it was the same, as the father would rape her each time her stepmother went to work at night. This stepmother one day found blood stains on the bed, but sadly enough, she rather blamed Priscilla for always allowing her father to bring prostitutes into the bedroom when she was away—making the stepmother send her away. Despite all her explanations, she was not listened to, making her attempt suicide again. Going by her story, her misery continued and even got worse as her son was born looking exactly like her father. Therefore, to cover the shame in the community, the father decided to officially make her, his wife with the knowledge of the family. Again, her sadness wasn't just linked to the father, as her 8-month-old daughter was also raped by her cousin. Priscilla then suffered from depression and low self-esteem for some time until the day she attended a program organised by the women's rights movement. She and her four kids (from her father) were taken in by strangers, and things started getting better for her. She then became an advocate and published a book, "Stolen Childhood." She also embarked on saving young girls experiencing sexual abuse from family members and realised that most of them were raped by their own fathers and not even relatives. Till date, she has not completely healed from the trauma, and even though she subsequently got married to a caring man from a European country, she could not stand the horror of bringing forth more children into the world and resorted to taking off her womb. According to Priscilla, the children she had with her father are already shattered for her to bring more children into a world she considered a horror. It is worth mentioning that when she succeeded in running away from her father, he could not have access to her again and later died of depression. Her lesson to all mothers like hers who trade their children's happiness for a good life is that they are equally considered rapists for watching their husbands or male relatives rape their children while they stay mute. Priscilla lamented the fact that she had gone through abuse for years and people knew about it yet said nothing. She was even shocked when her neighbours came for her book launch and told her, "Sorry, we knew about the abuse when you were 7 years old. Sorry, we did nothing." She therefore thinks the neighbours who watched and did nothing are also rapists, and to her, the community failed her; Zambia failed her. To her, she might be living a good life now, but nothing will ever mend her broken heart, and she therefore considers herself "walking but dead."[10]

The most alarming part, according to the above story, is not just the fact that this lady was raped by her father for most of her life but the fact that her own mother knew about it yet could not stand up for her daughter. This particular aspect of the story is part of the reason why it is relevant for this research.

[10] https://www.facebook.com/1653156514941886/posts/2325161614408036

It comes in to answer the question of how much women can protect other women, how mothers can respect daughters, and vice versa. This goes back to the core of the research, which seeks to find out the role women play in limiting or promoting their own marginalisation—something they constantly complain about. Pricilla's mother, as read in the story, feared facing her husband and did not want to lose the luxurious life she was experiencing in her home. She had to go as far as manipulating the daughter to believe that being raped by her own father was a normal trend and the best way for her father to show her affection. The poor girl at the time had no choice but to succumb to her father to the extent that she had all her kids with her father.

Now, this is the story of a woman who apparently grew up as a sex slave to her father, thought she could depend on her own mother, yet was disappointed. What can be expected of a woman with this upbringing? How will she be expected to have some self-confidence and withstand gender discrimination in society? If her own mother could not stand for her and protect her, yet choose luxury and marriage over her daughter's happiness, how will she believe in women's protection for fellow women? The questions are many yet difficult to answer as many women are going through or have gone through the same ordeal yet are not courageous enough to speak out and are lamenting their trauma.

The next story was seen on a platform on Instagram. This one was a video where a woman could be seen pulling and scolding her little daughter, who could probably be about two years old. Though it can still not be one hundred percent verified (even though it was a video), the story is still relevant here as it is aimed at creating awareness of how a mother (who is expected by many to protect her children) shows some signs of carelessness and disregard for her daughter. The question is, if the little girl cannot be protected at home, then what will become of her when she is left to face society on her own?

So according to the story that followed the video, this little girl was raped, and instead of her mother trying to fight for her, she got her beaten. The child obviously did not understand what was going on, but she obviously felt the pain of being raped at that tender age and being beaten by her own mother after that. She will certainly grow to understand what took place on that particular day, but the question is, how will she view her mother? How will she believe that mothers are supposed to protect their daughters, and what type of mindset will she develop when it comes to how women are supposed to be treated in society? How come her mother did not deem it necessary to report her daughter's rapist to the police but rather got her beaten? Watching the video, I was personally shocked at how the mother confidently explained how her two-year-old daughter is to be blamed for being raped. The screenshots

below were taken from the page on Instagram where this story was posted. The screenshots were accompanied by the video.

Figure set 1: Screenshots from Instagram (a woman beating her 2-year-old daughter for being raped)[11].

How degrading can it be for a woman to call her own daughter (a two-year-old) "*ashawo,*" meaning a prostitute, because she was raped? Instead of standing for her child, she beats and blames her for always going to sit with the old man and pushing him to rape her. In other words, she considered that her two-year-old daughter was the one who seduced the man; hence, she should be punished for doing that while the man goes free. She got her little tender girl beaten to the extent that she almost lost an eye for being raped. Then one is left wondering what type of society is being built when the foundation of the home is faulty? How will this child learn to value herself and other women around her when, at that age, she was beaten and blamed for being abused? Reading stories like this makes one confirm why it is important to check the home, its foundation, and upbringing to be able to understand why

[11]Instagram account by an anonymous Nigerian female user. Accessed on the 12th of March 2020: now deleted.

some behavioural patterns are consistent in a given society. This is a child who might end up being traumatised for the rest of her life, she might end up joining the group of women who have confessed to hating, not trusting, and being afraid of men because of the experiences they had when they were helpless. Another question that comes to mind is, why will women even want to speak up or have the courage to speak up about their rape or abuse cases when they will be blamed even by their own family for being at fault? They can't even talk about this because so many stereotypes have been attached to rape victims while the rapists go scot-free, with no accusations, no blame, and even sometimes being hailed for being brave. The rapist is even sometimes defended for being pushed to the wall by their rape victims, either through their dressing, action, or placing themselves in a compromising position that gave the rapists no option but to rape. The most common defensive line used by many to defend this is usually, "He is human too and could fall for any temptation." However, according to one interviewee, inasmuch as there is no justification for rape, parents should not ignore their role in calling their children's attention to being careful and conscious of their bodies. By this, she explained that women or the rapped are the victims; hence, you are only in control of yourself and not the other person. She further explained that just because there is no justification for rape, it does not mean that women should care less about themselves and put themselves in any compromising situation. This is because if you are being raped, whether you could avoid it or not; the most society can say or do is to call for justice for your sake. The rapist could be apprehended, but you are the one who has been raped and might be traumatised for the rest of your life. Hence, why not play your part in avoiding the situation as much as you can, as an adult, and in the case of little children, mind the person to whom you entrust your children?

Looking at the above cases, it is worth saying that discrimination against women has been present for a long time—promoted and maintained by cultures in Cameroon. The culture had succeeded a long time ago to brainwash women and even make most of them not see themselves as the victims but to accept whatever condition or situation in which they found themselves, such that they started seeing any woman who thought otherwise as being a threat to the culture. The subsequent chapters will elaborate on how this culture of brainwashing has lived for such a long time and is affecting the current-day society such that even those who complain about the suppression of women take part directly or indirectly in suppressing the same people (women) they are fighting for.

It is also beneficial to mention that the culture of covering up rape cases, especially within the family sphere, is more common than even social media cases could depict. In this regard, Tracy (2005), talking about abuse, says that many families maintain the strictest code of silence when they discover that a family member is being abused by another family member, especially if the abuse is sexually

connected. Covering up sexual abuse cases or staying silent, according to Tracy, may be because incestuous sexual abuse has more severe legal and social repercussions than other forms of abuse. Some of the reasons why this silence is being maintained, as he puts it, are: Family members often find it hard to believe that a fellow family member could commit such a terrible crime. The abuser, in some cases, has so much power that other family members fear what could happen if he or she is exposed for committing a crime as such. For these reasons, families put so much pressure on victims to shut up and be quiet when intrafamilial sexual abuse is concern. Looking at this from another angle, O'Brien (2009:295-296) narrated the topic of abuse of women through honour killings. Honour killing is indeed a big topic on its own when it comes to gender inequality, but it is equally important to at least mention it here because it speaks volumes about how much some women can be unsafe in their own homes. Therefore, according to O'Brien, honour killings are very common in the Arab world, where women are systematically murdered by their male relatives in connection with shame and disgrace brought by the women to their families. This is to say a man's honour is tied to his female relatives, and this honour code encompasses virginity before marriage, chastity, and fidelity after marriage, strictly for women. When women go against this code, they are subject to punishment for it, and worst of all, if the violation is made public, the male relatives have to act fast to restore the social status of the family in the eyes of the community. It is important to note that just suspecting a woman of infidelity is enough grounds for murder. She went ahead to explain that when a woman is raped, she could be beaten, isolated, or killed by her own family if they cannot arrange a marriage between the rapist and the rape victim. Worst of all, women who are raped by family members are murdered to cover up the shame involved in incest and restore the family's honor. Family reputation is such an important thing that the killing of a woman in case of any violation is done by either her own father or brother. It even gets to the point where, when a sexually inactive girl is seen with males or boyfriends who are non-relatives, they are also killed, as it is considered immoral. O'Brien also noted that honour killings constitute a large percentage of femicide in some Islamic countries and often goes unpunished. As a matter of fact, the criminal justice system is rather sympathetic towards the perpetrators, and in some countries, the penal code even has specific provisions for honour killings that exempt the male perpetrators from being penalised or give them a very limited amount of penalty. The justification is usually in an attempt to link sexual transgression of women with family honour (O'Brien 2009:296). This goes to show that when some of these women bring up their cases on social media, it might sound exaggerated, as someone who has never experienced it might hardly understand, but it is as real as it sounds and can get even worse. Some families will sacrifice a woman's happiness and wellbeing for just anything, so long as their family name is protected.

Chapter 4: WOMEN AND ACTIVISM IN BAMENDA – A WORKSHOP

Despite the common saying that women fight more against themselves and the fact that this research is trying to find out how true that could be, there are still so many women working hard in different areas and domains to protect fellow women. In this chapter, we will look at how women in Bamenda are involved in different programs of activism and how much effort they put in to protect women, especially the vulnerable ones. I will also give feedback on the workshop organised by myself with the aim of reaching out to more women at a time and reaching out to some of these women activists in Bamenda. In addition to that, the difficulties these activists face in the field and the backlash they get from other women when trying to do their job will be discussed.

4.1 Activism in Bamenda and Beyond

Considering the level at which information flow and communication have been made easier these days, many women are getting increasingly informed on matters concerning their welfare. Women are fighting more for their rights as they grow in experience and exposure, and more women are finding reasons to fight or stand in the gap for other women. With all this influence, activism has become a very common phenomenon, and both women and men use different strategies to fight for the rights of women or educate them on their rights. Women in Bamenda use different ways to practice this activism, among which are:

Supporting other women: Women support fellow women by standing in the gap for women who are victims or survivors but do not have the means to fight for themselves.

Raising their voices: Women are raising their voices for women's rights and gender equality through spreading awareness, talking to friends and family, or even engaging themselves with different organisations that are in connection with fighting for women's rights.

Taking part in the discussion: Women are taking part in discussions on topics pertaining to other women on different platforms. Social media is one of the biggest platforms used by women to share their stories and equally lift or support the voices of those who do the same.

Giving and supporting: I have observed, especially on social media, that women support other women in need. This is not just in terms of the discussions, as mentioned above, but also through financial and material support. Women also use these opportunities to help victims break the cycle of violence and to encourage other women to speak out when in the same situation.

Fully participating: Many women who wish to raise their voices do not succumb to the ideology that women are not supposed to participate in public life. They get themselves involved in these 'restricted' areas, especially in areas like politics, and even participate in elections. It is worth saying that this pushful attitude of some women has influenced the government in Cameroon as a whole to make amendments in some of the laws governing elections in connection to gender balance.

Educating others: youth activists around the world are stepping up for gender equality. By empowering young advocates and educating them about women's rights, they believe they can ensure a better future for all. This is also done through workshops, seminars, and conferences, both online and offline, and more commonly through the media these days. So many women have testified that they have learnt a lot from online teachings and also empowered themselves through these teachings (see Quigg, 2015:22). Support for women could also come through the simple act of encouraging other women to follow their dreams of getting an adequate education, especially in areas that have to do with empowering girls and teaching them about their rights as humans. From this research, it has been noticed that this is exactly what many women are doing nowadays. Education also extends to sharing experiences and women telling their stories out there. This implies that when some of these women come out to tell their stories to the public, even by hiding their identities, they also take part in the teaching process by creating awareness of what some women go through and what can be done to prevent it if, and when possible. During this process, the listeners are also expected to amplify the voices of those who share these stories by sharing their stories on their different pages for other audiences to learn and through the solutions some of them propose.

Talking to Mrs. Juddy Abong (fieldwork January 28, 2019), a retired delegate of the Women Empowerment Centre in Bamenda, Cameroon, she worked at this centre for more than 10 years, where she realised many women are lacking both in skills and education. They had so many educational programs organised for women, and a lot of women have been trained and educated in different domains. Visiting even the suburbs, she realised that a great number of women do not even know their rights; they do not even have the means to empower themselves, especially economically. This makes them rely mostly on their husbands and their farm work for those who own lands. After seeing this, she started a personal project to empower women through organising workshops where women were taught about their basic rights and empowered with initiatives to help them financially. One example of the economic projects she mentioned was providing chicks to some of the women to begin a poultry business. According to her, the women were very grateful for this initiative, as most of them could feed themselves from the outcome of the business. On the other hand, she faced some setbacks, like always having to convince some women to attend these programs. In trying to find out some of the

reasons why some women had very cold feet towards this, she discovered some of them were being discouraged by their husbands not to attend such programs. Some men told their wives not to listen to women, who usually come to impact them with "wrong" teachings. They even referred to her as a free woman and made their women understand that she had nothing good to offer them. In her understanding, she thought the men were afraid of the fact that their women would be educated, especially on their rights, and would be able to stand against the many societal ills they were facing from their husbands and families. Being a divorced lady, most of these men used it as a reason to discourage their wives, telling them that a woman who could not keep her marriage is not a good influence. To her, this was not strange, as it was the kind of backlash she got when she was appointed the delegate, where many people condemned the fact that a divorcee was appointed a delegate. According to them, you cannot be placed in a position to handle family and marital problems when you are not even married. All these rather acted as a steppingstone for her, as she was determined to prove them wrong. She did her work diligently, such that she maintained the position for about 10 years. Mrs. Abong's case is just an example of the setbacks most activists face in the hands of society. Some of them, while trying to help women, have been accused of being the reason for many broken homes and are also accused of teaching or introducing a foreign doctrine to the women. Some of these activists have indicated that they are feminists and are bound to see that women's rights are being respected, while others have distanced themselves from feminism, saying they are humanists and simply protecting everyone's rights.

4.1.1 Activism through Feminism

Talking about feminism, it is worth noting that there has been so much controversy in the very recent past as different definitions are given to it. Using Facebook, for example, and going through comments and posts, I have noticed so much diversity in opinions about feminism in Africa. While some think that feminism is a failed concept that has come to destroy the idea of a family, others are of the opinion that feminism was introduced with good intentions, but unfortunately, many women have misinterpreted the initial concept and are now using it for the wrong purpose. Oyewumi (2003) noted that feminism is currently an ideology, if not a social movement, and is subject to many qualifications. Scholars, according to her, therefore, distinguish between black feminism, third-world feminism, African feminism, Western feminism, and white feminism. She focused her work on the contentious relationship between feminism and African women. African women and feminism are not on good terms because, despite the adjectives used to describe feminism, it is Western feminism that unavoidably dominates, even when it is clearly the subject under consideration. This type of feminism usually travels without any qualification but with a lot of baggage (see Oyewumi, 2003:1). With

different ideas like this as to what feminism is all about, it is safe to say the distinction between African feminism and Western feminism cannot be ignored. Tamale (2020:40-41) made her own distinction quite clear when she said the priorities and preoccupations of African feminists cannot be the same as those of Western feminists. To her, this is so obvious because, apart from the fact that race is a deeply constitutive element of gender, the African continent occupies a separate cultural, social, economic, and geopolitical landscape from the West. Talking about deviating from the initial intention, some women explained that feminism was initially meant to empower women and protect them from the many societal ills that they are facing, such as female genital mutilation (FGM), subjecting widows to demeaning conditions, and entitlement to land, among many others. Danpullo (2008:90) noted that FGM has a serious health problem for girls and women. This is because the practice is usually performed with very basic instruments under very little or no anaesthesia, which inflicts a lot of pain on the women and can cause severe medical complications. The use of the same instruments on more than one person can also spread HIV and AIDS, and it permanently damages the genital organs. It can also have long-term physical and emotional effects on women, as it may restrict their ability to play an equal role in society. According to some women, these should be some of the issues feminists should be fighting for instead of reducing everything about women to men. Women have a lot to fight for and defend one another, especially as the degrading conditions they go through in society are directly or indirectly backed by custom and tradition. It is worth noting that in most areas of Cameroon, women are the ones who control the farming, yet they do not own lands. As pointed out by Fonjong (2012: 141), women, especially in rural areas, are physically in possession of the lands they occupy and farm on and going by the legislative provision as concerns the ownership of land, they do not own these lands. When these women farm on these lands and yet cannot boast of owning them, it becomes a problem when the real owners, who in most cases are usually their husbands, are no longer alive. The loss of a partner creates a very difficult situation for the woman. This is the same as a double tragedy for her, especially in the context where she assumes the position of head of the family with either little or no resources to support her (see Fonchingong, 2013:91). According to Lynda, an activist in Bamenda, when women are going through these conditions, these are the areas where they need support from fellow women, especially through playing the role of activists instead of concentrating on teaching women how to overpower their husbands back at home. She goes further to say that fighting for the rights of women does not mean trying to take over the role of men; it simply means advocating for women who are not in the position to fight for themselves when discriminated against or made to go through inhumane conditions. Fighting men for her is like chasing the shadows because, according to her, some of these barbaric conditions are being inflicted by women on others. Why then

will she concentrate on blaming a man when women do not even value themselves? Coming from a cultural background where widows are always maltreated, especially when the husband just dies, she realised that those who 'punish' the widows and force them not to shower for days and expect them to sit on the same spot, not being able to move around freely until after the burial are always the women (see Nyongkah, 2018:57). Yet, many women have taken feminism as a means to fight men and take over power. Tati (Ibid.) found out that in Balikumbat, a village in the Northwest Region of Cameroon, widowhood rituals were ways to uphold justice and vengeance for the dead. In most cases, the wife was accused of killing her husband or being responsible for his death, even in cases where it was proven that he died of an illness. Women were believed to either kill their husbands to inherit properties or free themselves from a marriage of misery. They were expected to go through this process to prove themselves not guilty, and if they died in the process, it was considered proof of being guilty. The accusations, according to Nyongkah, were usually not founded, as in most cases it was a strategy used by greedy in-laws to appropriate the property left behind by the deceased. They believed that ancestorhood was to be achieved only if all the rules associated with widowhood were strictly followed. During the process, the widow was made to sit on a bare floor close to the corps with an open palm stretched on her laps. During the burial, she was asked to swear her innocence on the corpse, which was considered a way of invoking the spirit of her dead husband to fight for vengeance. Immediately after the burial, the widow was taken to the stream, bathed, and dressed in "quashi" , a traditional attire made of plantain leaves just to cover her genitals (nakedness in front). She was therefore placed in one special corner of the house prepared for her, in a smoky kitchen in which she had to sleep on plantain leaves together with the elderly widows. She was offered a split calabash, from which she was to eat and drink, and was not permitted to wash her hands before and after meals. She was also highly restricted, secluded, and excluded. A widow was not supposed to take part in certain conversations and was to cry at the top of her voice for eight days. She had to sit on the floor with her legs stretched out, her two big toes close to each other, and her hands open on her laps to indicate the openness and purity of her heart. Even her movement was limited, and it had to be with the elderly widows. On the third day, she was taken to the stream, and her head, eyebrows, armpits, and private parts were shaved. She was bathed and rubbed with palm oil, and the "quashi" she wore was buried by the stream, and she was dressed in a new one. After returning, a bed of eleven bamboos was made, on which she slept for three months. She was only bathed once every eight days by the elderly widows in a particular stream. After three months, the elderly widows, family members, and friends assembled in the compound of the deceased. The widow was then taken to the river for the second ritual and shaved again. While at the stream, some incantations were made, and she was rubbed

with a mixture of palm oil and some herbs and dressed in a black sackcloth, which was to be worn for nine months. After nine months, the last ritual was conducted to mark the end of widowhood. The widow was then pronounced free and could remarry or be inherited by her in-laws. It is worth noting that it was forbidden for a widow to become pregnant during the period of mourning as it was considered a taboo that needed another purification (see Nyongkah, 2018: 57-58). The above example is just one of so many cases that take place or took place in some villages in this region and other regions in Cameroon too, where women were or are subjected to very degrading conditions just because their husbands died. What cannot go unnoticed is the fact that those at the forefront of these activities are women, and not just women, but women who have gone through the same condition. Instead of fighting to see how this could be eradicated, they tried by all means to see that the culture and traditions in regard to that were strictly followed and implemented. Talking to Silvia Babila, a native of this village, she expressed her disappointment in the way women will find joy (as she puts it) in making other women suffer. She suggested that it seems that the elderly widows were just there to make sure every widow has a taste of what they went through. It seems like they were afraid that if the practices were aborted, so many widows would not know and experience the pains they went through; hence, they were bent on seeing it continue in the name of saving the culture. Talking about the experience she had when her dad died, she felt like it was the worst moment in their lives, as their mother was made to go through terrible conditions and was even suspected of killing her own husband. To her, it is thanks to the fact that her brothers were grownups and could fight for them that her father's family did not take all the properties he left behind.

Coming back to the topic of feminism, it is important to mention that some opinions (as seen in the different theories like Nego feminism and motherism, among others) hold that the African idea of family is something that cannot go hand in hand with feminism or, better yet, has to be tweaked to suit the African perspective. Cameroon, being a part of this, believes in the institution of the family, where the man is always seen as the head or leader of the family while the woman is seen as one of his subjects (see Bitrus, 2017). But feminism is believed by many to be a movement governed by the idea of overthrowing men and pushing forward the idea of women leading and some even subjecting men to their authority, which, to many, is the reason for so many divorces recently. Talking to an activist (interview February 15, 2019) who identifies herself as an African feminist, she explained that society is simply misquoting feminists or wrongfully defining the concepts of feminism in order to suit their narratives and maintain the patriarchal system in society, which is making things difficult for feminists to do their job as activists. According to her, what even saddens her more is the way women are kicking against feminism even more than men. She believes that society has conditioned women to be satisfied

with subjective positions, such that anything contrary to that is seen as rebellion according to them. On the other hand, she does not deny the fact that Cameroonian society is fashioned towards the family. In this regard, she explained that the concept of feminism even differs depending on the society in which it is practiced; hence, feminism in Cameroon is quite different from feminism in Germany, for example. Explaining feminism in Cameroon, she pointed out that there are different types of feminists in Cameroon, and the most interesting thing about them is that none of them are meant to fight against men or against the Cameroonian idea of the family. Talking about the different forms of feminism, she pointed out that feminism is not inimical to men but simply challenges them to be aware of those aspects of women's subjugation that are different from the general oppression of all African people. Among the different theories of feminism are: Nego-feminism, which is a term that was coined by Nnameka (1998: 371) and was defined by her as 'the feminism of negotiation, accommodation, and compromise; no ego feminism'. This is according to the belief that most African cultures have a style of negotiation and compromise when it comes to reaching an agreement. There is also the rule of give and take here, as it is believed that for women to succeed, they must bring the men to the table and also compromise a lot of things to gain their freedoms. Moreover, it will work when the woman is able to go around patriarchal line mines or, better yet, be able to use the culture and practices of negotiation to probe the patriarchy for their own benefit. Acholonu (1995) writes that the theory of African feminism must be anchored on the matrix of motherhood, which is an important aspect of African metaphysics and has been the basis of the survival and unity of blacks through the ages. According to her, no matter what role Africa plays in the global perspective, it cannot change its position as the mother continent of humanity, nor is it a coincidence that motherhood has always been the main focus of African art, African culture, African psychology, African literature, its oral traditions, and empirical philosophy. Motherism is therefore Africa's alternative to Western feminism, and motherism denotes motherhood, which is also connected to nature and nurture. Stiwanism, which is an acronym for Social Transformation Including Women in Africa, as pointed out by Nayar (2008: 135), was coined by Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:207-241) to counter the opposition she encountered while using the word feminism. She had been advocating for the word stiwanism instead of feminism to bypass all the concerns that are being raised whenever feminism is mentioned in Africa. The emphasis is on social equality while not ignoring the culture of most African societies. With womanism, men are considered partners rather than foes or competitors. All the above forms of feminism share a commonality in that they all incorporate gender inclusion, collaboration, and accommodation to ensure that both men and women contribute (even if not equally) to improving the conditions of women. This therefore means that women's problems are not just men, because they are not opponents but rather partners. It seems

men are simply enjoying a patriarchal system that was put in place a long time ago. Women can also be their own problem, beginning with their mothers at home or with themselves as mothers, as seen in some cases in this work where some women fail to train their children, whether male or female, on the importance of respecting one another despite their differences. There is rather a concentration on teaching a girl child that she is second to a man, and it is natural for her to be subdued by any man she comes across, starting from her brothers at home. Mary-Ann mentioned in her interview (interview March 20, 2020) that the backlash against women who try to defend other women is getting out of hand. According to her, being a feminist is not the same as being gay or lesbian, but it is rather unfortunate that many Cameroonians have connected this and will run down anyone who calls herself a feminist or who speaks for the interests of women. She concluded that before these individuals go about scrutinising to see if those who consider themselves feminists or those who, according to them, act or talk like feminists plan to or are married, they should get themselves informed on what it means to take the feminists' stance and should be aware of the fact that feminism is not a synonym for LGBT.

On the other hand, still on social media and from discussions with other women (not leaving out men), many have expressed their worries about how much women have misinterpreted and taken the word feminism out of context. To them, some women are practicing feminism in a way that gives the impression that they are out to fight for the position of men. Many women have missed the main point of feminism, which should be women standing in the gap for others, and they discriminate among themselves even in the process of opposing inequality. African American feminists, for example, pointed out that they considered it hypocrisy and dishonesty when white feminists advocate for unconditional love and unity amongst women, even as they practice their race and class privileges on the backs of non-white women (Oyewumi, 1997:4). According to Nancy, a resident of Bamenda (interview February 28, 2020), many of these women who go about calling themselves feminists and are comparing or competing with men are getting it all wrong. Many of them deceive others in public yet are very submissive to their husbands, and the gullible ones ignorantly follow them. Others have also taken these radical steps into their matrimonial homes, rubbing shoulders with their husbands and giving them the impression that they can do better than them or can do without them. All of these are happening because, as earlier mentioned, feminism in the US, for example, cannot be the same as feminism in Cameroon because these are two different societies with different contexts. Hence, with the Cameroonian ideology about marriage, the radical type of feminism some women want to practice cannot be supported because their men will not be able to stand the competition. This is exactly why most of these women with this mindset hardly find it easy in their homes. On another note, the women who say something else in public yet practice another in their homes do so because they know what it

means to be married in Cameroon as well as the position of the man in a family home. Moreover, they do not want to lose their marriages because they value their homes, value being married, and cannot stand the backlash that comes with a divorce. According to her, she and some 'reasonable' women have known all these things and will not fall prey to all these deceptions.

"We know all these things; we cannot be deceived by some women who know what is right yet choose to do it the wrong way. They cannot come and push us to lose our homes foolishly while theirs remain intact. I am not saying women should not fight for other women; I am just saying we have a lot to adjust, even among ourselves, women before thinking about what the men are doing or not doing. Women should stop misplacing priorities."

Nancy

According to her, some women have copied from the West without being cautious about how to apply it in their own communities. This, however, does not cancel the fact that many educated people in Cameroon try to balance the conflicting forces between Western ideas on feminism and Cameroonian ideas on culture, trying to achieve public involvement for themselves yet still being able to support the rights of the state to make autonomous decisions (see Mikell, 1997:2). Mikell explained that the struggle for African women to shape their destiny has always been a sensitive one because their leaders see it as an external influence and therefore always respond to the idea with some reservations. However, most educated African women have always been careful as they hear their politicians grumble that they are being influenced by external pressure and think they are being forced to rephrase and verbally pattern their goals according to Western economic, political, and gender models rather than according to their own culture. The women are now dealing with the dilemma of how to come to a consensus among themselves on how to successfully respond to the persistent gender hierarchy in ways that will personally liberate them yet be politically acceptable or have a positive impact. Tamale (2020:42-43) therefore has it that if we look at some examples like Queen Eyleuka of Ethiopia, Queen Lobamba of Kuba (Congo), Princess Nang Oma of Bululi (Uganda), Queen Nzinga of Angola, and Queen Rangita of Madagascar, among many others, we will realise that so many legendary women helped change their societies even before the colonial masters ever showed up. But it seems the term feminism is the main reason for the controversy, as not only traditionalists are tarnishing it by claiming it is a product of the West, but it is also rejected by some African scholars and activists due to its Western origins and the fact that non-whites have been excluded from its theoretical framework. This, according to Tamale, is the reason why alternative indigenous variants such as womanism, stiwanism, motherism, femalism, and nego-feminism, which are deeply rooted in African cultures and histories,

have been devised to refer to Afro-feminism. Hence, if African women are to successfully challenge their subordination, such that much can be changed yet they are politically accepted, they must carefully develop homemade concepts that address particular political economies and cultural realities people encounter, as well as their traditional worldview (Tamale, 2020:43).

4.1.2 Online Activism

Activism, as seen in most of the cases presented in this work, is easier to carry out online, easier to reach a wider population, and easier for people to get themselves connected to it either by supporting it or benefiting from it themselves. Considering also how practical it is for people to get help from online sources without being shamed, contrary to face-to-face situations where they get to be seen, more people get to these online platforms than offline.

Apart from using these platforms as a means to seek solutions to individual problems, many people have seized the opportunity as a means of telling others their own stories so they could learn from them, advising others, and equally learning from the experiences of others, as noted in some of the interviews. According to some commentators, they have made good relationships through social media platforms. Women in particular have confessed to getting closer to some friends they have today, simply because of the comments they used to make on certain platforms whenever a case was presented. Talking to a number of these members (women), I came to realise through interviews with them (carried out on Messenger) that they all have different reasons why they join these platforms and different reasons why they keep holding onto the membership. Some of them think it is a wrong idea for anyone to bring their problems to social media to seek help[12].

"I personally cannot bring my problems to social media to seek advice because I don't believe in it. There are moments I read cases just for the pleasure of it, but I have learnt a lot on these platforms because a lot of people correct their lives just by reading others' experiences. Comparing online and offline counselling, talking to someone you cannot see face-to-face most of the time is easier considering the fact that you would not be judged, turned down, or mocked.

Nella (interviewee)

To me, I have both negative and positive ways of looking at social media counselling. Social media counselling is good because it is easily accessible, convenient, affordable, and more. Negatively, some people may find it difficult to put complex thoughts and emotions into written words. Some people

[12] Stage names have been used for all the women interviewed

think bringing their cases to social media will expose them and are equally afraid of insults. I have also gotten help from social media counselling indirectly, meaning from someone else's case. I also feel very very relieved when I read the cases. I have learnt and I'm still learning a lot from social media. It is changing society in so many ways, making couples know how to handle their marital issues and also helping youths know when they are in love or lust, etc. Social media counselling is better in terms of accessibility, convenience, affordability, and more. For example, it is difficult for some people to pay for private counselling, so going on social media will be so affordable for them.

Meline

I will give social media a 50/50 percent chance for it to be effective. Because he or she who advises you isn't the one passing through the problem you are going through, and the fact that people react differently to situations. So, you can't really tell if it is necessary to seek help there or not.

Yvey

I think social media counselling is one of the best methods of counselling that exist in the 21st Century. It has helped a lot of people come out of their situations. It is fast, it reduces cost and time too, and it is equally reliable, and counselling one person is like counselling the whole community as there is no limitation to who reads what is written. Personally, I haven't sought help from social media, but I have learnt a lot. When I read some cases on social media, I feel so relieved because some of the cases tend to be either what I myself have gone through or I am going through, or even someone I know. It is equally opening my mind to some life-related issues and how one can react when faced with them. It can be so relieving at times; you know? Talking about its impact, I will say it is a big yes. I strongly believe it is impacting lives out there positively, especially in relationship matters. You see most young girls now believe in themselves and are no longer allowing their rights to be trampled upon by men in the name of marriage. More so, women's empowerment is the order of the day, all thanks to these platforms. We see online businesses here and there, which go a long way towards reducing poverty in our society, thereby stepping up our living standards, which in the long run can only give a good image to society. The difference with live counselling or face-to-face is that you see exactly the person's reactions and know how to place your words, and more details can be given. With social media, on the other hand, there are certain things that might be left out in the course of writing that, in one way or another, might hinder the counselling. Live counselling is somehow limited because you get to counsel just the person concerned, while with social media or public counselling, while counselling one person, so many people get to learn from it.

4.2 Workshop

As women open up more when they are in the midst of other women, they equally share very intimate information with other women as they feel a sense of belonging, or better yet, they believe they can be better understood by people who have the same experiences as themselves. This is exactly what happened during the workshop(s) I organised during this research. These groups of women brought together and shared their experiences while expecting to learn from each other. During this research, I thought of ways that I could reach out to activists as well as several women from different walks of life and different levels of education to get their different ideologies when it comes to the topic of gender inequality. One of the best methods to do this was to organise a seminar or workshop, which is a common practice as activists usually use this method to meet other activists and reach out to so many women at the same time. The first workshop registered about 58 participants, consisting of women from different social groups, villages, and walks of life. During this workshop, the language of communication was Pidgin, and the aim was to be able to reach out to everyone and give everyone the chance to express themselves. The women were expected to give their opinions on this topic, laying emphasis on their past educational lives, the effects of their past lives on their present homes, and how it has also fashioned their relationships at home with their parents and children, especially their daughters. It was also an opportunity to hear firsthand from these women if what they experienced in their early days is something they will want to pass onto their children now or if they had something they will want to correct or rather reinforce in their kids these days. Worthy of note is that the workshop was equally open to young girls who also have opinions about the experiences they have had. They were also encouraged to tell us about their experiences at home with their educated or uneducated mothers, the things they have learnt from their mothers, and what they think they could change in their own lives depending on what their mothers went through in the past. One of the aims of this workshop was also to bring both the old and new generations together to get their different perspectives on life. One could observe that there were quite some differences in the level of thinking, not just because of the different levels of education or exposure but also because of the differences triggered by generational gaps. The main topic was about women against other women and the relationships among women, ranging from society to the home and back to society.

We had to go back to the topic that society is a patriarchal one and has always pushed forward with the ideology that men deserve more. Like Manjoh (2018:60) noted, a man is the head of the family in Cameroon, and all orders and decisions come from him. He even has a special seat, bowl, and even

cutlery in the house that no one is allowed to use. The topics in the workshop moved more into the discussion of how women would rather fight one another than stand for one another. The different ways in which these attitudes are observed were also mentioned, and it was observed that the method today is quite different from what the mothers experienced in the past. In order to get this information, the workshop was organised in such a way that women discussed their experiences in groups and shared them with the rest of the participants using cardboard. The workshop also had about five presenters who facilitated the process with different topics that were relevant for the research. According to some presenters, the issue of gender inequality stems from society's ideology about what is expected of men and women. These practices have eaten deep into society such that they have been transferred to almost every area of life and to very little things we might not have looked at. The photo below shows the workshop situation during presentations

Photo 1: One of the workshop presentations.

Talking about the origin of all these and some very small things that encourage male dominance in society, the women pointed out the fact that languages are one of the biggest influencers when it comes to gender inequality. They analysed the different languages, including English, and pointed out how men are addressed. According to them, there is a way in which the English language uplifts men and gives them the upper hand. Among many words, they looked at a few examples, such as chairman, kingdom, and chiefdom. They also looked at words like 'Mrs.' which is used to refer to a woman, but

it is simply an ‘s’ added to the men’s word Mr. and always implied that she is connected to a man as the next name that always (specifically for the case of this community) follows is the husband’s name. Back in society, the culture of Cameroon of making men superior is being enforced in many ways. In Bamenda, where this research was being carried out, it is believed that a woman is not supposed to eat gizzards. “There are many widespread beliefs in Cameroon in general that women and children should not eat the gizzard of a chicken, lest they become thieves. Also, in Cameroon, the eating of eggs by women and children is only a recent practice” (Mbunwe-Samba, 1994:109). Many homes have special serving dishes and chairs for fathers, and anyone who is seen using these dishes or sitting on these chairs is considered disrespectful and can even sometimes be punished for doing this. In many homes, as indicated by these women, after cooking, the father is the first person in the house who is supposed to be served, and if the quantity of food is small, it must be ensured he has enough to eat first. However, it is worth noting that some individuals have interpreted this in another way. During a chat with a sister, she mentioned that ensuring that her father had the first and best part of the meal at home was because they knew their father worked so hard to put food on the table. Hence, he needed to be well fed and well-treated to have the strength and encouragement to keep taking care of his family. On the other hand, families where the fathers did not care about their living conditions might have had another perspective about this, but whatever the case, it was and still is the custom to ensure that fathers come first. This discrimination is also enforced by the different Cameroonian languages, as the women gave some of the following examples: Tikebeng or Bobe[13] These are words that do not have a corresponding meaning for women, meaning only men are meant to be in positions like this, which is why women who are in charge of their homes and take care of everything, or single mothers, are not accorded any special titles as such. One of the examples they gave as a corresponding word for the aforementioned words is Luwain (meaning mother of child), which does not even have the same meaning as Tikebeng and rather implies that women are always attached to the kids while men are attached to the home in general, including even the building. They went ahead to say that when observing words like this, they concluded that more importance is attached to a male child in the Bamenda community, and they are made to think that they are always superior to women. To them, this implies women are always being relegated to the back, even with the use of language, and made to feel inferior when being referred to. In their opinion, a change of language is one of the main factors that can go a long way towards minimising the level of gender inequality, as it will boost some confidence in women and make them

[13] A word meaning head of the house in the =Babanki and Kom languages in the NW Region of Cameroon=

feel uplifted. This was further explained as they said that the words you use on someone go a long way towards impacting their lives, as they will always hold on to those words.

One of the important topics that the participants discussed during their group presentations was the issue of formal education. They were interested to know who was educated, who was not, and their different reasons. Their different reasons for not getting a formal education ranged from the lack of finances to the father's biassed mind about gender education, or they were asked to stay at home in order to act as a babysitter to their younger ones, not forgetting a particular lady who said she was discouraged by the sister not to go to school because she did not see the importance of going to school. As a result of the above points, some of them expressed their disappointment at not being able to read or write today, finding it difficult to communicate with their educated children, especially through messaging, which is common these days. In addition to this, many of them thought it was because of their lack of education that they could not get good jobs. Moreover, using the seminar as an example, they felt it would have been different if they were formally educated because they would have been able to take down notes for future use and not just sit and listen during the seminar. Formal education to them acts as one of the most important tools of empowerment, as it gives one the ability to get good jobs and be self-dependent, increases one's standard of living, and gives one a certain level of discipline while enjoying the respect that comes along with education. Moreover, there is a higher possibility of discovering new things when one is educated. The participants went further to say that as much as many women missed the opportunity to get empowered, a handful of other women had this chance. According to them, some women come from a good family background with good opportunities, which directly gave them the privilege to get what they wanted or desired; some were supported by other family members who were better placed; and it is also important to note that a woman's level of exposure to new things depends on her husband's influence on her. This means that some men highly discourage their women from participating in women's empowerment programs, while others greatly encourage their wives to take these steps and make a great difference. Other women pushed their way forward because they were so ambitious, not caring much about what society or tradition says about women and exposure, and they either met people who admired their pushful spirits and decided to lend a helping hand. A good number of them got exposed to so many opportunities and benefitted from organisations fighting for women, while others were lucky to be in the position to benefit from government regulations on pushing women ahead (see Vubo, 2008). They went on to say that apart from illiteracy and poverty being the reasons for some women's lack of empowerment, a lack of information and negligence are also a big deal as some women highly neglect what can uplift them. Lack of self-esteem, according to them, is also a big factor, as many women

prefer to stay in the confines of their homes rather than go out there and receive or share ideas with others. As a result, they never get information on new opportunities, or even when they do, they never see themselves worthy to take part. Another important point raised by the participants was that some women are naturally too lazy to go out and grab new opportunities; they seem content with their present situation and have never made any effort to change anything in their lives. In this regard, they explained that it is true that many women have missed the opportunity at an early age, but that should not limit them from making progress; they could still push themselves and achieve what they could not achieve in the past. In this light, they will be able to encourage their own children to take bold steps in life, as it is difficult to teach someone else what you do not believe in. It is worth noting that inasmuch as they value education and the benefits that come with it, they never fail to note that being educated does not mean being totally exempted from the discrimination women face. On the contrary, educated women have noted that when you are highly educated, you need to stand firm and be able to face whatever comes your way. This is because the more educated you become as a woman, the more provocative society sees you. You have become a threat to so many men, both educated and uneducated. While the educated men start feeling challenged and fear the unknown, the uneducated men feel uncomfortable and inferior (see Kagoda, 2015:74). This is still linked to the fact that society has been groomed to know that being overly educated is not necessary for women because they are meant to always be under a man; hence, men should be the ones pursuing education to higher levels. As such, being educated as a woman does not mean you will escape all these attacks; it rather isolates some women because of the ideology society has instilled in individuals about being educated, especially highly educated women. At every given opportunity, they are seen as arrogant and tagged as rude, disrespectful, and rebellious, while in some areas, they are even referred to as “the women with the long pen.” Of course, not every woman, whether educated or not, is able to withstand being tagged with derogatory terms like the ones mentioned. This therefore implies that the difference comes into play and is seen in how the formally educated women can defend themselves in the face of these attacks, although defending themselves is not even seen as something positive by society. This is because they would have been expected to swallow whatever comes their way, as opposed to the less or non-educated ones, who, because they are lacking in this area, in most cases already suffer from complex issues and are not equipped with the knowledge of self-defense.

Photo 2: Vivid discussion in the middle of the workshop.

Addressing the topic of women against other women, the participants (as seen in photo 2) tried to identify the similarities and differences between what happened in the past (the old generation) and what is happening now (the young generation). According to them, contrary to what people think, women in the past had no rivalry; the situation was not so different, just that the acts are more exposed these days. Women are more exposed these days; they are getting increasingly educated (whether formally or informally) and have also learnt to stand up for themselves. While sharing their different experiences, they recounted that back in their days, very few women had the opportunity to be educated

because society was more concentrated on sending women into marriages. They pointed out the fact that what promoted this was the common mentality that the people had: that a woman has no permanent place and needs to wait for a man who will come and get married to her to take over the parents' responsibilities. Hence, educating them was like a complete loss, as another man or family would come to reap the benefits. As a result of this, most families were more focused on training a girl child on how to take care of a home and stay submissive to men. Due to this mentality, most of them were sent into marriages at a very young age and had little or nothing to say about it. Ndjassue opines that another factor keeping girls from receiving formal education is early marriages that are planned by their parents, who in most cases are usually poor and 'uneducated' so that they can receive a bride price or some money from the future husband. According to the parents, it also gives them the chance to transfer the financial responsibility of taking care of their young daughter(s), who are nothing more than children themselves, usually about twelve or thirteen years old, to the man they marry her to. She thinks that they are subjecting their daughters to slavery and a life of extreme suffering and maltreatment by their husbands (Ndjassue 2014). Their parents' main concern was that their daughters should get married since it is a big disgrace when your daughter stays at home without getting married (Mbaku, 2005:157). To these women, during their early days of marriage, you were measured on how good you were as a housewife by observing how much you could cook, clean, train kids, and keep your mouth shut even in the midst of any kind of storm. According to them, the worst thing that could happen to any woman is to get married and not be able to bear kids. Your in-laws will make your life a living hell and will even go as far as getting another wife for your husband. Putting all these conditions together, women knew that their job as housewives was more concerned with taking care of their homes and complaining less. They felt that women were being unfair to themselves after evaluating how difficult it was to complain, even to your own mother, about what you were going through in your marriage. Mothers will advise their daughters to stay mute using the phrase "*na only head zinc di cover all house*," a pidgin phrase that is translated as "only the roof covers every house." This means every home has a problem, and until you are exposed to the problems of that family, you will never know what is happening. This was a common way of making women shut their mouths and keep all their marital problems to themselves. These women felt that if the case had been different and their mothers could listen to them, they would have felt supported in many areas and shared more of the worries that were kept secret. According to them, their mothers were more concerned about their family names and what people would say about the kind of training they gave their girls. Families with many girls usually warn their daughters who get married first to put up the best behaviour because their successful marriages will act as a reference to other families who will be coming for their sisters'

hand in marriage. On the contrary, when your marriage failed or had many negative vibes about it circulating in the quarter, it was attributed to your family, and many other families will fear getting their sons involved as they will always have neighbours to give them the negative vibes. They made mention of the fact that in most cases, the people who carried these negative vibes around were mostly women whenever they sat in their small gossip groups, discouraging other women who had brothers or sons who were ready for marriage from going to certain families. What they could not fail to notice was the fact that most of these women who gave these bad reports were also going through terrible crises in their own marital homes, and everything still boiled down to the idea that 'the roof was covering their troubles'; hence, everyone was bound to learn how to keep their problems to themselves. According to the testimony of one participant, her case was different because her mother was supportive. To her, she had a very bad and failed marriage and was expected by her husband to take care of her kids all by herself. Considering how much she needed to put in to feed and clothe her kids, she would not have made it if her mother was not supportive. There were times when she had no choice but to go keep her older children with her mother in the village so she can have less work at home and concentrate on getting money for the family. This was one of those few cases of women whose marital problems, because of their intensity, were known to many around her.

Going by this mentality of 'keep your problem to yourself', many of these women went through so much pain in their marital homes, ranging from domestic violence, negligence, and adultery to all sorts of home and even environmental abuse. They recounted their experience of taking care of their homes all by themselves, from feeding to everything concerning their kids. Some of them mentioned that they had husbands who were workers and made good salaries but did not see any need to take care of their families. They were therefore forced to stand in the gap, so to give their kids the best. What made it sad, according to them, was how much some of these husbands disregarded them, and they ended up earning little or no respect from the community around them. According to them, very few people, if there were at all any, knew that they were fully responsible for the things at home; hence, despite all these struggles, their husbands took the accolades for them. One thing that was so alarming and that contributed to all the distress they faced in their homes was the aspect of their husbands keeping many women outside. This was the point where they connected all their distress to other women, who were supposed to be their support system. Their stories showed that either their husbands signed polygamy or, even when they signed monogamy, it never stopped them from having a relationship with other women. These women outside were the ones enjoying all that their husbands worked for; some of them even had kids for their husbands, or in situations where there were no kids involved, they would convince these men to take care of their siblings or other family members. In addition to that, some of

these women outside were so bent on destroying their homes that they even used fetish methods to keep their husbands. In that case, the husband starts behaving funny at home, hating his wife and sometimes even his kids, and wanting to spend less time at home and more time with their concubines. The most painful part for some of them was that most of the families of these husbands knew about these outside relationships but either supported them or said nothing to stop them. During an interview with one of the participants, her story was a pathetic one about how her late husband used to bring these women into their matrimonial home. According to her, there were days when she would come back and meet the husband on their marital bed with other women, and there was nothing she could do. Some of these women even had kids with their husbands, and she was even expected to take care of these kids. What was so stressful to her was the fact that her in-laws, especially her mother-in-law, hated her so much that when she reported these cases to her [mother-in-law], she would rather insult her and use the concubines to provoke her. Coming from a society where you are expected to stay married no matter what and from a family where she had lost her parents, she had no choice but to put up with all of these. She felt humiliated and disgraced, but she could not leave. Her mother-in-law's hatred for her intensified to the point that even in later days, when the husband died, her mother-in-law still used one of the husband's concubines and her kids to provoke her and even vowed that she and her kids would never find happiness in life. In cases like this, one can see how a woman's sorrow is being initiated by other women while leaving her with little or no opportunity to complain. Apart from these cases of having different women outside, a typical situation was that of men being allowed to sign polygamous marriages if that was what they preferred. Many men did this too and had more than one wife. The danger of these, as expressed by the women, was that most, if not all, of these families never had peace. Considering the idea that a woman's problem is another woman and the fact that, where emotions are concerned, jealousy is inevitable, it was difficult to find two or more women married to the same man and live in peace. Each one wanted to get all the attention and love and get her children to the best schools so that they could be better than her co-wife's own. These fights were sometimes transferred to the children, who would end up hating their half-siblings and stepmothers and would spend most of their time fighting (see Nkwi, 2015:328-329). These practices, according to these women, have been the cause of so many broken homes, and many people have lost their lives because they were part of a polygamous home. To them, this could be stopped if women stopped accepting to get married as second wives. Some of them held on to the ideology that if you want to avoid problems with a fellow woman, then you should avoid her husband, for there is no way you intend to get married to someone's husband and expect her to be happy about it.

Speaking from the perspective of the younger generation, the women expressed the fact that it is not so different, especially when it comes to the betrayal they receive from fellow women. What makes it different is the fact that it is more exposed these days, especially due to the improvements in technology, and a kind of shift in what people consider to be morally upright or wrong. By this, they meant that these days, women seem to care less in such a way that your husband's concubine(s) might see no reason to hide; they show off their ability to be able to win the hearts of married men and give little or no relevance to what society thinks. This is contrary to the past, when many mothers might have suspected that their husbands were cheating on them, but the concubines did not have the courage to show themselves except in extreme cases like one of the cases mentioned in the work. This was so because, as earlier mentioned, many people cared about their family name and the consequences of their actions for the future of their other family members. People cared so much about how society might judge morality; hence, they preferred to keep their actions discreet. That is why it was common for mothers to meet their stepchildren only at a later stage or after the death of their husbands. They confirmed this by recounting a common statement that:

"In most cases, we only get to know the cheating husbands when they die because all the children that they had with their mistresses will show up during their funerals."

These women were also peculiar about the fact that these practices are well elaborated, even by the media and especially in African movies. To them, the topic of 'side chicks' (a typical Cameroonian term for a mistress or concubine)[14] is very common in movies these days. This shows it is becoming even more rampant than one could imagine, and in most of these movies, the story never ends well.

An example that was given was a Nigerian movie with the title "The Clash of Marriage," where a mistress, after getting pregnant, moved into the man's house and vowed to make the wife very uncomfortable, especially because the wife had been trying for so many years to get pregnant to no avail. Analysing this movie, the participants noted that the wife's case was even worse because she could not get pregnant. Her mother-in-law, whom she expected more support from because she had faced the same problems during the early days of her marriage, was her worst nightmare and provoked her at all levels. She was very happy when the mistress showed up with the pregnancy. This could have been avoided if the mistress had not given in to the advances of the man.

However, in some cases, as mentioned by one of the interviewees (interview January 17, 2019), some of the mistresses have no idea that the men are married; they do not reveal their marital status or

[14] It is necessary to use this term at this point as a typical Cameroonian will easily identify with and understand the

intentionally lie about it. When some of these mistresses discover this, they end the relationship at once, while others continue, claiming that they have already gone so deep into the relationship that they cannot give up. This is to say that in as much as some women fight other women by destroying their homes, so many women out there still protect their fellow women by turning down the advances of married men or ending the relationship immediately they discover that the men are married—and to her, turning down a married man because you are avoiding helping him hurt his wife should be considered activism too. She explained this better by quoting the Nigerian movie "between" as an example. The movie reveals the character of a woman who, after getting married to four different men and divorcing them, decided to live a life of no commitment, where she dates just for fun and makes sure she does not have any sentiments or emotions attached to it. She had been betrayed by men in so many instances that she finally gave up all hope of ever finding true love. Considering the fact that she was just out for fun, she ensured that no personal information about her and her fun partner was shared (she was not interested in knowing the relationship status of whoever she met). As a result of this, she met one of her fun mates, and it happened that she had more interest in him, such that they met more frequently, and due to their frequent meetings, she found herself falling for this man. On the other hand, she was a marriage counsellor and had a particular client who complained about the husband's loss of interest in their marriage and his bad treatment of her. She therefore encouraged the lady during one of their counselling sessions to convince her husband to come along during the next counselling session. On arriving there, it turned out that her client's husband is the same man she has fallen in love with, and she was having hopes of finding true love again after a long time. It was so much pain for her to face or bear, and she could not believe all that she had been trying to build had been destroyed with the discovery of who the man was and his relationship status. At this point, she had the choice of pretending like nothing happened and going on with the extramarital relationship, considering the fact that they were both in love with each other and she had finally found love, yet she decided to give up and save the other woman's relationship. She therefore took it upon herself to help the other woman regain her husband's love to restore her home, and good enough, she succeeded in reuniting the couple and stayed away from their relationship. This movie is a typical example of what is going on, where one could see that the mistress was innocent in this case yet chose not to be selfish when she discovered the truth. It goes a long way to show that many women still stand up for one another out there and will do anything to see that their fellow women are happy because they understand better what a woman might be facing both emotionally and physically. Bringing up a movie as an example at this particular point is simply to explain the fact that movies are usually a reflection of what is going on in a particular society. Moreover, this movie supports the topic of mistresses that the women had during the

workshop. It will be very paramount to show examples like this; as the women thought, the practice of dating married men is one of those very relevant topics to be discussed whenever the marginalisation of women is being discussed. It is reflecting what individuals have been brought up to believe; it is usually meant to pass out a particular message and sensitise viewers to things they think could be changed or better managed.

At the same time, the women were also interested in the private lives of these actors. They, like many others, wondered how much impact these movies have on the lives of those who act in them. These things become questionable, especially when some of these actors speak up about their private lives. It's worth noting that at one point, many of these celebrities came out to say how much domestic violence they have been enduring. One could read into the cases that they have been concealing it for a long time because they keep thinking of what society that looks up to them will think. It is the usual worry that "the world will think I am weak; my fans will wonder what kind of example I am setting out there." This was just a way for these women to emphasise the point that many women who suffer from domestic violence and conceal it are simply because they are more concerned about what people will say or think than their safety. For instance, a very recent case came up where one of the Nigerian actresses, called Chacha, took to her social media platform and told her fans that she was tired of her marriage and could no longer stand the domestic violence. From the comments, I could see that most of her fans were surprised, as they have always seen her marriage as one of the most perfect unions. They understood that she had been acting up to give this impression until she could no longer take it. What attracted so much attention was the message she got from one of her older colleagues in the movie industry, who was not happy that she had to leave her marital home.

As a senior colleague, she first expressed her disappointment in the junior colleague for bringing out her marriage problems to be "dissected" by the public. Her advice to her was the same thing most mothers will tell their daughters to do—urging them to keep their marital problems to themselves, pray, and look for a better way of making it work rather than complaining. Chinwe Owoh (the senior colleague) was very clear on the point that all those clapping for Chacha and praising her for exposing her marital problems will obviously mock her later in her life. Hence, she urged her to rather pray over it and seek better ways to handle the problem. She even questioned and wondered if those encouraging Chacha to leave her marriage have all left theirs—or is it that they do not have problems in their own marriages? To her, women of her age used to have problems in their own homes but are grateful today that they held onto them. Her message to this young actress attracted diverse responses from fans, as usual. From my observation, many people applauded her for making that point (a complete proof that the younger generation is still holding tight to the teachings and upbringing of their parents). On the

other hand, a handful of commentators thought she was being insensitive to the complaints of a young lady who might have been going through a lot. According to some, she cannot be bashing her for bringing her private life to social media, yet she could not even make a difference by advising her privately.

To express how people felt about the whole situation, commenter one was very keen on the fact that the senior colleague's advice was a typical example of women who encourage other women to die in unions in the name of being married. The second commentator, using more sarcasm, accused those who were supporting the lady to leave her marriage of plans to snatch her husband after they separated. Meanwhile, the third commentator, on her part, felt that it was okay for her to cry on social media as it acts as a way of creating awareness, not to stay silent and die simply because of the desire to stay married. To her, speaking out could also be a way of healing from the trauma experienced in marriage. This commenter was very categorical about the fact that marriage is not a must, especially when the man is a silent killer.

Some people, as seen in the comment below, stated that these were two different generations with different experiences. They felt like it was not appropriate for the older colleague to compare the younger generation, commonly known in Cameroon as the 'Android' generation[15], to hers, which was not very advanced in the past. For some of them, the older generation was either not courageous enough to face their fears or did not have the platforms to express their disappointments in comparison with the younger generation, which has many different platforms like social media and the like. Hence, if people do share their good moments on social media, they should not be blamed for sharing the sad ones too. She went further to question the point that this older lady did not complain when this couple were posting pictures of their happy days. This is because, according to her, the same social media that is being used to spread the good sides of a relationship will also be used to spread the other side. Moreover, she thinks that if this lady was unhappy and was being abused in her marriage, then she did the right thing to walk away. And even if she was happy and still decided to leave, then that is fine too, as life is all about choices, and hers should be respected too. This ended with the commenter questioning the senior colleague's choice to address her colleague on social media instead of advising her behind the scenes: "Why then 'rant' about her using the same social media you are using to give her a message?" This story is relevant for this work because, as some of the participants insisted, actors and actresses in certain movies are like activists too. If their aim is to discourage a certain line of

[15]A term that was used by the president of the republic in one of his speeches some years back

thinking, then they are activists, even if it will not be considered directly. Hence, picking on an actress' personal life is like saying that even the activists themselves face these problems—a reason why they might be so passionate about fighting against the vices.

Coming back to the outcome of the workshop, the women also pointed out that apart from women in this present generation being so bold and courageous to openly commit adultery, another reason is due to globalization. Talking about globalisation, they explained that in the past, due to the less freedom they had, they could barely question their husbands when it came to so many family issues. In the same way, even the concubines or mistresses had little or no choice but to follow the trend. The husbands dictated the course of the relationship and what was to be exposed, and women in those days, though not completely different now, were not trained to question the decisions of their men. This also explains why, to gain the full attention of the men and be able to dictate to them what is to be done, some of these women used fetish methods, as earlier mentioned. This is somehow different from the present situation, where globalisation has given women the privileges they enjoy. They equally get educated; a good number can make decisions on their own; some have travelled and gained different experiences and are applying them to their daily lives. With all these opportunities, so many women have been freed from the issue of forced or early marriages. Women can freely decide to whom and when they want to get married, and many now even question the decisions of the men in their lives. With all of these, some women, even when dating married men, do not want to be treated like a secret because they feel like they deserve to be flaunted too. Today, even without using fetish methods, women give conditions to men and tell them how they want their relationship to go. This exposes everything, as some men are caught between their wives and their concubines. During the time of the mothers, there were no mobile phones, computers, or social media. Even though letter writing was a common practice, many of them could not even read or had little or no access to their husbands' private lives. Hence, their men could successfully hide their relationships from them because they did not have all these means to read secret messages or get the information. Amid these, one participant recounted how she almost lost her first child during pregnancy because of a letter her husband wrote saying terrible things about her, and yet he gave her this letter to take to his family, where she needed to cover a great distance. Though she could read, she did not open this letter because of the threats she had received from her husband. The letter contained information about how his family should not believe her when she says anything, especially if she complains about being maltreated or about having a baby. She should be kept there and not allowed to leave. According to her, that was complete wickedness because she was already nine months pregnant and had just a few days to have the baby. The good news is that, as she got into labour, she was successfully taken to the hospital where she had her baby. Her reason

for bringing this up was just to emphasise how many restrictions women had in the past. She carried a letter that could have led to the death of her baby but had no idea, and she was also not allowed to question her husband. She felt that the situation would be different with women of today, with their exposure, many activists to stand for them, and a relative level of freedom. This implies that if she had the mind of some of the younger women nowadays, she could ask some questions or even secretly read the letter. The younger ladies responded to the aforementioned story by saying that their case might not have been so different (since it is possible that most women will fear opening a letter they have been warned not to), but at least they would have had a 40% chance of unveiling the husband's bad plans. Emphasising why they think some women would have still fallen for a tricky plan as such, they added that even with the introduction of different means of communication such as telephones to unveil all of these, so many women blame other women who go through their husband's phones for whatever reasons, and they always back it up with the statement 'what you do not know does not kill you'. With the coming of all these new technologies and social media, women get to discover many things about the people they deal with. Many of these women gave their testimonies about discovering through text messages, WhatsApp, Facebook, and other social media platforms that their husbands were cheating on them. These have saved them from so many embarrassments, and according to some, they strongly believe that discovering these secrets saved them from many deadly diseases. As shown in the screenshot below, the lady discovered that her husband has been cheating on her with another lady after lying to the lady that she died five years ago. This is just one of so many cases where the women have been able to uncover their husbands' tricks and lies.

Fingure 2: Screenshot from Delly's Matchups on Facebook (a lady uncovers her cheating husband)[16].

So, apart from some of the mistresses wanting to be exposed, many women get to know when their husbands cheat and sometimes even know the women who are betraying them (sisters code not respected). Some of the women said that it is thanks to Facebook and other social media platforms that

[16] https://www.facebook.com/DellysMatchupsRe Accessed on April 3rd, 2019

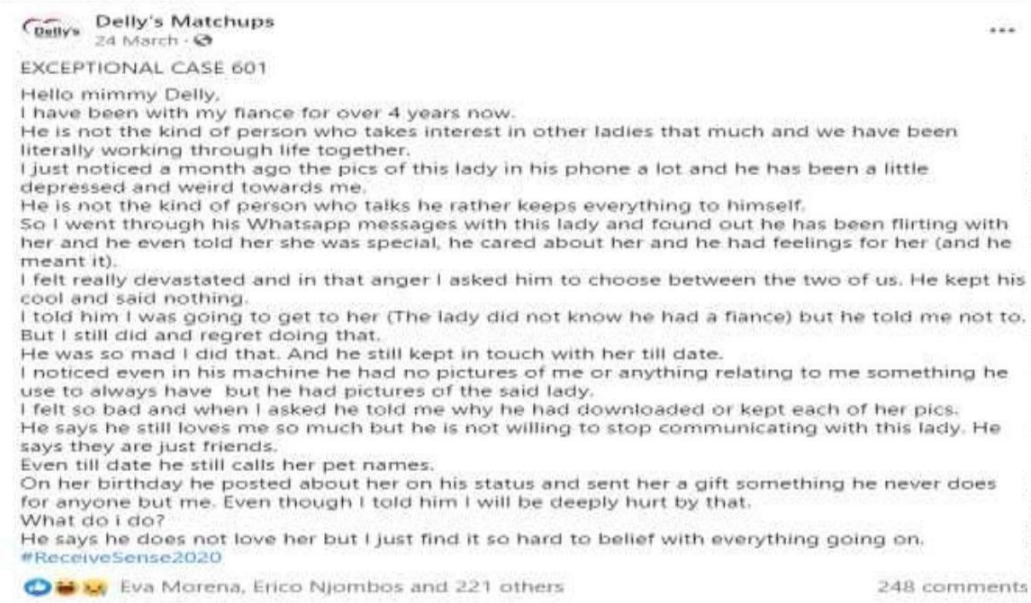
they have been able to know that some of the women they considered sisters or friends are the same women backstabbing them. Many have discovered, especially through phones, that their husbands are sleeping with their own sisters, friends, colleagues, housemates, or even, in extreme cases, some women have given testimonies of discovering that their own mothers are sleeping with their sons-in-law. Despite the fact that a handful of women prefer to anonymously go to counsellors to seek solutions to their family problems, many of them get encouraged to face their husbands and talk with them, ask questions, and demand answers—something that would not have been common during the days of their parents. On the flip side, since many women get both formally and informally educated these days, make informed choices about their future, and are free to question the happenings around them, these women felt like it was working both in a positive and negative sense. Positive in the sense that they no longer act in the dark and can easily identify abuse and get away from it. In terms of its negative side, they emphasised that getting married is still very important in the Bamenda tradition, whether people accept it or not. And this is not exclusive to Bamenda or Cameroon (see Asante & Mazama, 2009:409); hence, men or society seem to be afraid of educated, independent women; they think they are too exposed or too informed to be submissive to a man (Kicha 2012:32). On the other hand, some respondents equally thought that some women have used education (formal education in particular) to their own disadvantage and think they can rub shoulders with men, and as a result, many women have ended up not getting married or finally getting married at a later age. By this, what do we mean? Considering how much competition we have seen between men and women when it comes to occupying positions in areas like work, business, politics, and other leadership positions, it seems more like women who have the chance to be in these positions are not much appreciated by both men and their fellow women. Which implies that once a woman chooses the path of education and keeps going higher, there is predominantly a mindset that she is trying hard to play the role of a man. That notwithstanding, since it is not so common to get to these leadership positions (though much better compared to the past), a handful of women think they must prove themselves to be better than men; immediately, they get themselves formally educated. This is also promoted by the mindset some people hold that women need men in their lives, mostly for financial reasons and equally because they are not educated enough to take care of themselves. Hence, some of these educated women subscribe to that ideology by thinking that once they are educated, getting married might not be a priority as they themselves could be regarded as 'men'. For example, Isaac Lamba's work on post-war education in Malawi has it that educated women in Malawi within a certain period, say from 1945 to around 1960, served as models to be emulated by other women. However, the choice of two highly educated spinsters to study girls' education played out as a frightening factor in a society that still believed in

marriage, which, according to some, could not go hand in hand with high education. At that time, it felt to some Malawians that they had to choose between low education for marriage and high education for spinsterhood (Lamba, 2010:132). This case in Malawi confirms what was discussed during the workshop and the ideology the older women had about educated women. This is to say that highly educated women are already prejudiced, and then being educated and trying to act or compete with a man only makes it worse (especially for the women who are actually interested in getting married after all). Like in the case of Malawi, they also confirmed that, in Bamenda, it might not have been so common so many years ago to see highly educated women, but the fear of being a woman and being highly formally educated is not a new phenomenon.

Therefore, these practices, as mentioned above, according to them [workshop participants], are some of the factors that have increased the rate of concubines or mistresses and the extent to which these mistresses will go or do anything to make themselves known and keep these men all to themselves. In the past, as they mentioned, they got connected to their husbands (by family members or family friends) at a very tender age; hence, very few women stayed single. This is contrary to today, where women make these decisions by themselves. Many of them reject suitors when they are still very young and give excuses like wanting to build their career or complete their education before settling down. At some point in their lives, these suitors start dropping, and they gradually get older. When they get into an age of 'loneliness' and due to societal pressure, which cannot completely be ignored when it comes to marriage (see Accilien, 2008:57), they start feeling the need to have a man in their life. That is exactly the point where they do not care which man comes around, and even married men are not spared. When they successfully get these men, they will do just about anything to keep them, which is why they [mistresses] start competing and trying to challenge their wives at home. Still talking about how much change the introduction of new technology has brought to the present generation, the participants were so keen on the fact that during the old days, women whose husbands decided to hide their extramarital activities from them had to put in so much effort to discover them, if at all they had any clue. This is contrary to today, as many of these men use social media for these activities. Social media has made it possible for people to even have online relationships, such that people date and carry out sexual activities for long periods of time without ever meeting their partners physically. It makes it easier for men to come across and date many women at the same time. Now, many women, as earlier mentioned, have more access to their husband's personal items, such as phones and computers, and are also connected to them on social media. According to them, though many men have also devised strategies to hide this information from their spouses, many women have been able to uncover their husband's secrets through these devices. What they said was more like confirmation

of what we have been seeing on social media these days, and since social media relationships were also one of the topics discussed during the workshop, let us have a look at some of the cases that had been on social media. One important thing to note is that a greater percentage of these women, especially the young ones who attended this workshop, belong to at least one of these social media groups or pages. On Facebook (and confirmed by the women in the workshop), we have had testimonies of women who suspected that their husbands were cheating on them and did everything possible to get proof, which they finally had. What I noticed is that most of these proofs (according to them), going by the stories they told (though I cannot independently verify all these), were gotten through WhatsApp or Facebook. What I also observed is that in many instances, when these women uncover these secrets, they still need to come to social media and hide their identities (commonly known as "hide my ID") to seek advice on what to do. Many of them do not even have the courage to face their spouses after discovering them; some even find it easier to attack the mistress than talk to their husbands, while according to some, after confronting their husbands, they either got them beaten, asked for a divorce, or even blamed them for sneaking into their privacy. All this is just an indication that there are more ways for women in this younger generation to know when their husbands are cheating on them. The screenshot below indicates how helpful some women claim going through their partner's phones can be to them—just to ensure that you are not being cheated on. Whatever is done with the information after discovering it is left for the woman to decide.

Figure 3: Screenshot from Delly's Matchups (lady uncovers her cheating fiancé)[17]



[17] https://www.facebook.com/DellysMatchupsRe Accessed on March 24th, 2019.

Now, because many women did not talk much about their challenges in the past (at least as per what most of the old women interviewed said) and because a lot was not exposed as mentioned above, many still have the impression that the marriages of their parents lasted longer than modern-day marriages. This has also been one of the main topics of discussion on social media, as each time a problem comes up on social media, one can read comments like; *"Marriage these days is a scam; women just look for the least complaint to leave their marital homes, contrary to the past, where parents were very patient and understood what it meant to be married."* On one of the platforms discussing related topics, a post was made to get the opinions of others, and the reactions were as follows:

Figure 4: Facebook screenshot[18]

Going through comments in response to the above post, the first commenter had the opinion that marriages these days are not working because many people have reduced marriage to taking beautiful photos and posting on social media just to give the impression of a happy marriage without taking time to work on themselves to make it work. According to the second commentator, the reason why marriages are failing more these days in comparison to the past is because, in the past, when husbands cheated, wives understood that there were so many women out there and they should feel lucky for being married and concentrate on taking care of their children. To him, women these days just want a fairy tale life and have no respect for men. The third person thought that in the days of their grandparents, women endured so much pain in their marriages. Then, divorce was not an option, as it was seen as a taboo for anyone to leave their marriage. Hence, the fact that a high percentage of marriages lasted for a long time does not mean that they were happy. The commenter balanced it with the point that, with this new generation, people are driven by instant gratification and are not willing

[18] https://www.facebook.com/groups/1954927878161846. Accessed on 20th February 2020

to make a relationship work. They are always ready to call it quits at the first sign of trouble. To the fourth commentator, contrary to popular opinion that marriages in the past were not motivated by materialism; it is the same today. The difference is in what is considered material demand compared to the past. Moreover, divorcing in those days was considered a terrible thing, in contrast to today. As concerns modern-day marriage, according to the commentator, the reason why it is not lasting is the lack of respect for each other and the fact that people take advice from their friends without knowing their motives. Whenever couples have a fight, they rush to their families and friends to tell the story, not bearing in mind that you can get over a fight, but your family will still think ill of your spouse. In addition to that, this generation depends so much on social media and either copies from the relationships that are being exposed on social media or gets disappointed when they feel like theirs do not measure up to what couple A or B is portraying on social media. These different opinions were all geared towards cancelling the idea that modern-day women are not as marriage-inclined and respectful as the women of the older generation.

Going back to the women in the workshop now on the topic of education, they made an important point that though many of them did not have the opportunity to be sponsored by their parents, some of them had the luck of getting married to men who decided to sponsor them, some had to struggle on their own to get themselves sponsored, and some stayed uneducated. In all of these, they all trained their kids differently, not leaving out the basic societal rules and guidelines. In this regard, what they meant is that the younger generation is not just a reflection of globalisation but also an embodiment of what they also got from their different parents or caretakers. A lot of them, after having the opportunity to get educated, brought up their children with the mindset that freedom is all that matters, and everyone is entitled to it. A handful of others, without this formal education, still did not want their daughters to go through what they went through; hence, they did everything to ensure that they got educated, and besides, according to them, not being formally educated does not mean that they lack wisdom. Educating their children was also a way of enriching them with the ability to become more vocal about their social, personal, political, and economic challenges, as well as about their newly developed vision of African feminism. And some authors call this “an African-feminist approach to public and private life” (Mikell 1997:3). On the other hand, we had those sets of women who, whether educated or not, were strong believers in the culture that holds to the fact that women will always need men to be heard. This point was supported by some of the young women, who added that their mothers were educated at least to a reasonable level but will stop at nothing to tell them that getting married is the best thing any woman can achieve; hence, staying single might make you lose a lot of opportunities. This, according to them, indirectly meant that not having a man in your life made you incomplete, but

what baffled them was the fact that they did not hear their mothers or parents give this same advice to their brothers. Talking about brothers, the participants had a heated discussion on the practices of giving training to their children depending on their gender. It was centred around the fact that most of the women who said their parents refused to get them educated mentioned that their brothers, whether younger or older, did not have these same challenges they got educated because they were men, and even some of these women, as elder sisters, had to stay home to take care of younger brothers who ended up going to school before them or at the same time with them. On the other hand, the younger generation felt this was ironic because, despite these complaints, their mothers were not behaving any differently. They treated their sons differently and gave them the impression that, as men, they deserved to be treated better in society, had little or nothing to do with house chores, and should always aim at getting women who can be subdued and give them all the respect they deserve (Allan, 1997:201). The main question was, how then were they [mothers] expecting to make changes to the things they complained about when they were practicing the same and even worse? This is also another centre of attraction on social media as people try to find solutions to the existing gender disparities. As seen in the image below, this is an example of some of the questions asked due to the observed differences in the treatment men and women get, beginning right from their homes. While men are thought to be the head of the family and should work hard in the future to maintain the family, women's training is centred around doing everything to keep a man (Kiamba 2009: 97). In most cases, men therefore grow up with the mindset that all they need is to be successful in the future in order to get what they want. They are not taught about the necessity of treating the opposite sex equally, nor are they taught to share in the house chores, which can also act as a way of training them. It is important to mention that questions like these are relevant—they have a way of sparking and provoking many individuals to share their diverse opinions on topics like these.

Figure set 5: Screenshot from Facebook and comments[19]

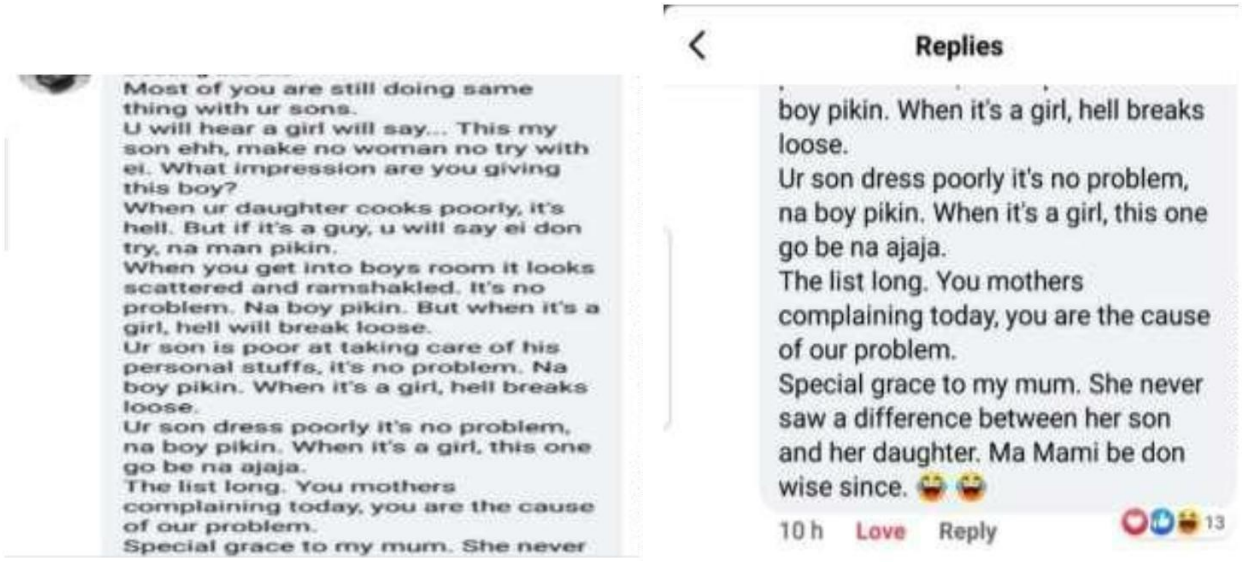


Figure set 6: Comments under figure set 5[20]

Looking at figure 6 (comments under figure set 5), coming from a man, he made an important point, which is what many people have complained about. According to him, the trend still continues even in this modern time because most of the women complaining about the treatments that they got from their parents are not doing anything different these days. The same way their mothers complained about how they were not well treated while growing up, were hindered from going to school, and their brothers had more, yet did not make any difference in the process of bringing up their own kids, is the same way the women in this generation are behaving. The statements women make in the presence of

[19] https://www.facebook.com/noella.banks.10 Accessed on 21st April 2020.

[20] https://www.facebook.com/noella.banks.10 Accessed on 21st April 2020

their very young sons, like “no woman should dare with this, my son,” make him question what impression the women think they are giving their sons about women when they make ‘protective’ statements like this. Why do mothers always make it a big deal when their daughters do not cook well yet will make excuses for their sons such as “he tried, it is a boy”? Or what about situations where mothers make excuses for the poor attitude their sons put up when it comes to taking care of their belongings, keeping their surroundings in order, or dressing well, yet might ‘crucify’ their daughters for making the same mistakes? To him, the women are their own problem and should adjust if they wish to see a change. He felt privileged that his mother did not follow that path and treated all her sons the same way she treated her daughters. This, according to him, has given him a sense of responsibility, and he will always live to understand that women are as important as men.

To conclude, it is worth mentioning that the workshop stood out as one of the most effective means of data collection for this research, as it could bring many women together at the same time to share their opinions. Therefore, despite having diverse opinions and cases, their experiences were quite similar, making them bond better. It is for this reason that a follow-up workshop was organised again three years later, in 2022. We can observe from this chapter that activism has improved and keeps improving when it comes to matters pertaining to women. It is no longer a case of a few people fighting for women, but rather, many women are piquing interest in defending women’s rights. This is to say that while it seems like women might be standing in the way of other women, it is still the same women who will mostly stand up for fellow women through different areas of activism. It is even getting better and easier as the internet is spreading to different parts of the world like wildfire. This is one of the reasons why some activists are limited just to social media platforms, yet from the different testimonies given, they seem to be impacting many lives. It is true that the stories and cases handled by online activists cannot be completely vouched for compared to real-life interviews, because one can barely tell how authentic they are, but still, they do not sound like anything completely different or short of what the women I met face-to-face shared with me.

As for the workshop, I came to realise it was getting even more common for these workshops and seminars to be organised by different organisations and individuals. It seems to have been an effective means of activism too, as many of these participants still expressed their desires to have more of such programs.

Chapter 5: SOCIAL MEDIA

This chapter is intended to show how women make use of social media nowadays to share their problems. These problems could be those that they had been keeping for so long without having the courage to address them. With the widespread use of social media and the common use of vicarious writing, it is now common for activists and other social media influencers to write on their behalf on different social media platforms. This chapter will therefore show how women use the opportunity to marginalise other women through their stories and the judgement they pass on them. It will also be clear that, inasmuch as women complain much about being wrongly judged by fellow women on social media, they still rely so much on women for the support they need—either socially, economically, or morally, among many others.

When we talk about social media, one could say its usage is relatively new, or better still, it was very limited before. Even when it was introduced, many people, including those in Cameroon, had very limited access to it, so most of them were only confined to their environment. This is not to negate the fact that even till date, many people, especially women (since the focus is on women), both young and old, cannot afford the internet to take part in the online campaigns or cannot even operate the different social media platforms to state their plight. This could be one of the reasons why it is important to use empirical data to back up the Facebook sources. Their social and marital problems could be shared among friends, family, or small female groups in which they found themselves. Many of them joined these groups or associations to empower themselves, not just socially but also economically. It is in these groups that many women were able to raise money to start small-scale businesses that could sustain them and their families (see Takougang & Amin 2018:184). This is quite a different case now because the usage of social media is widely spread and a lot of women are making use of it, especially on Facebook and WhatsApp. They use these social media platforms to break some gender barriers and create public space for themselves (see Munyi, Mwambari, & Ylönen, 2020). As a result of this, there is a lot of exchange among women on social media, and women have a better opportunity to teach and learn from each other. They now speak out more, contrary to the past, when they had very limited opportunities to meet the people they trusted or were not quite sure of the outcome of sharing about their personal lives with the people around them (Stewart, 2020: 356). The point is that social media seems to be a vast world on its own, and many people have used it to build or destroy so many things. When these women come to these platforms, they feel secure, especially due to the fact that in many of the cases, they hide their identities and spill out their problems freely with the aim of getting advice from followers of the said page without being identified, something that might otherwise be difficult if they had to reveal their identities (Abidi, 2018:61). In most cases, the decision to stay anonymous is

driven by so many fears, among which are the society in which they find themselves, what is normal for them, and what is considered appropriate or inappropriate for women (Keengwe, 2013:316). It could also be because society expects them to be silent and solve their problems inside their homes without involving a third party, and another reason could be that their concerns could be taken back to their families, which is dangerous because they could be used against them. In addition to that, they want to avoid the shaming that comes even from the people they share their problems with, and finally, as Graham (2017) opines, people tend to get little or no judgement from people that do not readily know them. Staying anonymous also helps individuals avoid influencing the advice they will get from the people they are opening up to. In this regard, someone's advice to you could be highly influenced by the fact that he or she knows you or is close to you, and then you end up not getting the genuine responses you would have loved to get. During this period, there is therefore freedom of speech, to a point where even those coming up with advice do it with little or no restriction because they have no idea who is behind the problem.

With so much control over what women should say or whether they should even talk at all, women find themselves in many cases talking or sharing their experiences as if they are 'stealing' a chance to make themselves heard. As a result, women frequently engage in gossip to make themselves heard or learn from one another. Gossip, as defined by Jones (1980), is a way of talking among women in their roles as women, intimate in style, personal and domestic in topic and setting, a female cultural event that emanates from and maintains the restrictions of the female role but also gives the comfort of validation. Though her use of the term gossip as a type of women's language was more specific as opposed to the term 'gossip' in its general meaning (as widely used). She mentioned anthropologist Gluckman's (1963:308 & 312) thesis on gossip. According to Gluckman, gossip is a general interest in the doings, virtues, and vices of others and has a social function in perpetuating the unity, morals, and values of social groups. Gossip can also be very important, as it is considered a genre of informal communication (Paine, 1967:278). Women's gossip therefore kindles the unity, values, and morals of women as a social group and enables the informal communication network that transmits their values and concerns. Tripp (1964) on her part, presents the description of gossip in terms of a sociolinguistic framework in which 'verbal behaviour is studied in terms of the relations between the setting, the participants, the topic, the functions of an interaction, the form, and the values held by the participants about each of these' (Ervin-Tripp, 1964:192). Looking at the above-mentioned point, it is worth mentioning that women's gossip always takes into consideration the place, who is involved, what is worth gossiping about, and how important the topic is to the gossipers. Considering how some cultures expect women to be silent, obey more, and complain less, women become very conscious of what they

say, to whom they tell their story, and how they tell these stories. Ervin-Tripp's explanation of this framework can be seen as follows:

I. Setting

She used setting both in the specific sense of time and place and in the more general sense of cultural situation and norms (Ervin-Tripp, 1964; 193). The cultural and physical settings of gossip, according to her, are the same as those of women's lives, which are made up of restrictions. In concrete terms, physical places such as the supermarket, hairdressers, and house (areas associated with the female role both at home and outside). There are also dominions within larger areas involving men, such as women's toilets or cloakrooms, the cluster of women in the corridor, or even tearooms. The time they use to gossip is usually snatched from work time, and work activities such as children, a telephone, or a cooking pot usually interrupt these moments.

II. Participants.

In terms of the participants, gossip is basically a talk between or among women in their common role as women. It is a language of intimacy, as described by Rubin: "This intimacy arises from the solidarity and identity of women as members of a particular social group with common experiences" (Rubin, 1972:1513). These common experiences not only give gossip its topic and style but also make gossip an important element of the female subculture. Women, like members of any suppressed groups, are verbal persons, talking because that is the only form of expression they are permitted to use, and the powerless ones must settle for talk (see Millet, 1971:61, cited by Jones, 1980). Inasmuch as gossip may be discredited by men as trivial, it is also seen as a threat. Talking about a threat, we mean situations where women have been stopped from talking together by ridicule, interruption, physical constraint, and even by statute (Oakley 1972:10), and the fear of gossip and its rebellious power has been connected to witchcraft (Gluckman, 1963: 314).

This explains why, with modern technology and the widespread use of social media, women see social media as a safe ground where they can express themselves without being interrupted, especially when they go anonymous. Gossip, also seen as a language of female secrets, is one of women's strengths, and like all other strengths, it is also knocked off and attacked (see Jones, 1980:195).

III. Topic.

Women have a special kind of occupation, and their training as wives, girlfriends, and mothers is reflected in their gossip topics. They are expected to have a great deal of knowledge in their field in terms of housework (cooking, cleaning, interior decoration, among others), child rearing, and the wifely role (sexuality, appearance, etc.). No matter the topic, the theme of gossip in most cases is always centred around personal experience; it is characterised by details of the speakers' lives and those around them.

IV. Formal features.

Gossip is not just about sharing information but is also characterised by the quest to ask questions and be informed about the significance of the things happening around them and how they feel about them. Reciprocity also forms the pattern of discourse as each piece of information shared is contemplated instead of being argued, as the contributors in turn share their own experience with the picture at hand.

V. Functions.

Gossip is divided by Jones into four functional categories: house talk, scandal, bitching, and chatting.

a) House talk: With this, there is an exchange of information and resources connected with the female role as an occupation. This is usually centred around house tasks such as recipes, household hints, and dressing styles. It extends to practical discussions like how to get a husband, raise kids, and maintain marriage. It is an informal but very effective means of training females to fit into their roles. It also plays other roles in meeting emotional needs for support and recognition and can be more intimate. It can therefore extend and be merged with other categories of gossip, such as complaints (bitching) or more intimate self-disclosure (chatting). This is the means by which women complain to one another about what they are going through, especially in their marriages, and seek advice from each other.

b) Scandal: Women's gossip in many cases is dismissed as a spiteful scandal and is marked by and considered judging of the behaviour of others, especially that of women. In most cases, this judgement is usually on the morals of women on domestic issues. Women mostly see the 'misbehavior' of other women, especially on sexual issues, as an attack on the integrity of all women and therefore find the need to control it and put it on check. Jones therefore thinks that this judgmental attitude of women might be harmful to other women, but the fault is not in the female maliciousness but rather in the sexist moral code enforced by society, which women play the role of enforcing but not created by them. This implies that the women are just following what society has or is creating, especially in terms of the expectations of women's behavior. Apart from the above-mentioned, there also seems to

be some level of entertainment value for women when they hear how their fellow women live, maybe to get an idea of what is happening outside their own restricted areas. There is a level of satisfaction derived by women when they get to know what is happening in the lives of other women. They sometimes tend to be comforted when they know someone somewhere is going through the same situation or going through a better situation that they can learn from, or better yet, is in a more challenging situation than theirs.

c) Bitching: As a scandal, it is centred around women's dissatisfaction with each other, and men are not threatened but do not feel comfortable about it. This is the unconcealed expression of women's anger against their restricted role and the inferior position they have been pushed to. It is usually unconcealed yet expressed in private and to other women only. Bitching is private and based on personal experiences or specific complaints that women make in their different groups. During bitching, women rarely expect to change or see a change but simply want to express their anger in an environment where it will be well understood. This is one of the reasons why women use social media a lot these days, as it seems to be a safe ground for them to carry out their bitching with little or no restrictions.

d) Chatting: This is the most intimate form of gossip, which involves mutual self-disclosure. This is the moment when women use the opportunity to turn their learnt skills of nurturing others to their own advantage. They talk to one another, expecting some kind of emotional resolution or comfort, and they share their various feelings by alternating and recounting the experiences in which their feelings are ingrained. They use different methods, such as non-verbal, verbal, signs, and facial expressions, among others, in such dialogues. This gives them a level of emotional reality and comfort that they cannot find with men (Chesler 1972:268). Jones ends by pointing out that gossip is a primary part of women's everyday lives, and studying gossip is actually studying the concerns and values that women have, which is the key to the female subculture (Jones, 1980: 197). Looking at Jones' opinion on women and experience sharing in the form of gossiping, it is worth saying that the quest for women to create groups to speak to people who will understand them better had been there long ago. The difference comes in where they were bound to always have physical meetings because they did not have the luxury of social media then. At this point, old sources are relevant for this work because it is what happened in the past and still interestingly what is happening now. The same terms and topics are involved, and this shows that the meaning of gossip has not changed just because years have gone by. The content might change each time, but it still falls under the same topic classifications. These days, participants do not have to know all the members personally, but many have benefited from anonymous stories and advice. Following the interactions on social media, it has been realised that many women find it easier

to talk to strangers either anonymously or with their true identities concerning their personal problems than talking to people close to them or relatives. Many women have shared the bad experiences they have had when it comes to confiding in their siblings or close friends. This is especially in terms of these siblings or friends spreading their secrets to other family members or friends without their permission. Hence, they are afraid of making the same mistake again. Some are even afraid of facing their family members for fear of what their reactions to their problems will be and prefer to talk to people who are not physically there with them; hence, they might react differently to their problems. Below is a screenshot of some of the posts gotten from Facebook platforms where women seek help, which could be considered bitching, as explained above.

Figure7: Screenshots from Eve's corner on Facebook (a member needs help)[21]

From the above post, one can deduce that the women sometimes address other women on these platforms as sisters or consider them family and therefore trust their judgements. When this problem was posted, there was so much controversy: those who believed in confronting the mother-in-law, those who thought it was better to let the husband confront his mother, and those who thought it was better for this lady to ignore this mother-in-law who had decided to be an intruder in her son's house. This is how diverse information from social media can be, with people from different backgrounds and different upbringings coming together to give a solution to a particular problem. Some of the

[21] https://www.facebook.com/groups/1954927878161846 Accessed on 20th October 2018.

individuals who bring their problems to social media to seek advice are usually open to this diversity and are always ready to select from the many opinions what suits them best, while others do not find it normal that other members bash at them whether they are at fault or not. With this diversity in women's groups, one can observe the different characteristics that women possess when it comes to handling fellow women's problems: the language they use among themselves, how much they defend each other, how empathetic they can be, and how much bashing they receive or give each other, among many others.

It is worth mentioning that women's relationships with their fellow women on social media and any other medium can be seen from two angles: how much they support themselves and how much they contribute to bring down one another. To get more information on this, I joined so many women's groups on Facebook, and all these groups are either African groups, especially with countries like Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya, or solely for Cameroonian women (especially from the English-speaking regions) in order to limit my scope. Following my observation, especially on many Facebook groups for women, I have realised that, apart from depending on group members for advice, many women have seen these groups as a place where they can run to even when they need financial or material help of any type. Many women have been supported by other women to feed their families, get capital for businesses, get employment, get lawyers to defend them, sponsor their kids, get a place to stay, and even help to leave abusive marriages or homes. As a result of these positive outcomes, many women have been flooding many of these groups, seeking material, financial, and moral help so they can get out of their bad conditions and make their lives better. This could mean that no matter the situation, women have been dependent on one another for a long time and still depend on one another because they still believe they can better understand their situation than men will. Many women going through financial difficulties, especially the married ones who get little or no support from their men, always believe that the first group of people they can run to for help are women. They believe that as fellow women, they can be better understood than running to a man who might be treating his own wife even worse or sees nothing wrong in not taking care of your family. Coming to cry for financial and other material assistance on Facebook these days is also as common as coming to pour out your emotional problems and seek comfort. With their identities hidden, many women have been able to get help from fellow women, and this has helped them improve their livelihood. A few examples for better understanding can be seen in Figure 7. This is a 'sister' writing to a female-only group, asking for a financial assistant to take care of her family, get her husband's medication, and start a small business. She is coming to this group because she believes her fellow women, mostly addressed as

'sisters', will be able to help her. At least she had seen other women presenting their cases there and getting help.

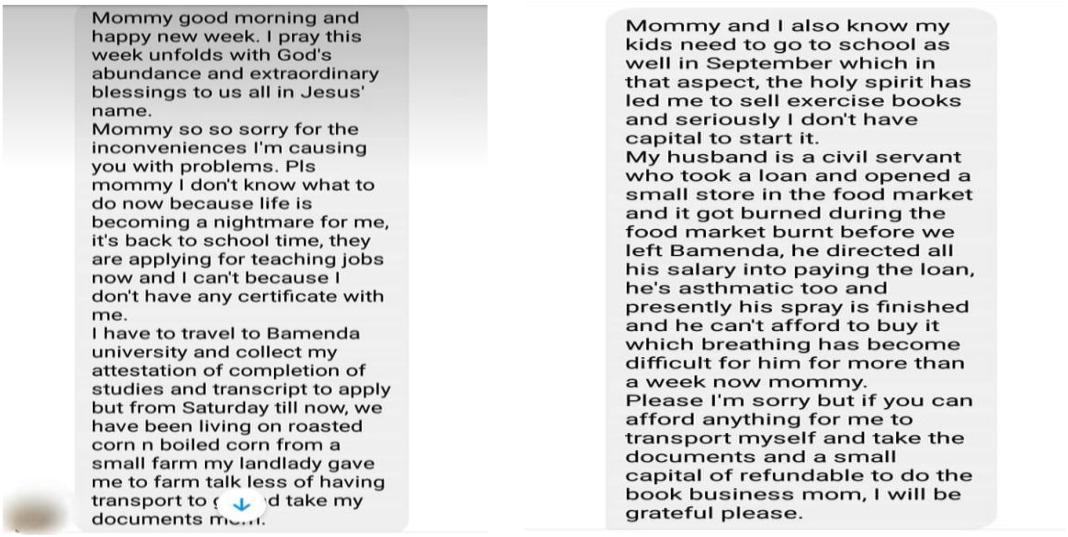


Figure 8: Screenshot from First Ladies group on Facebook (a member needs help)[22]

Despite the fights and the misunderstandings, as proven by so many cases in this research, women's support for one another cannot be minimized. In many cases, groups have been formed by women solely to take care of the needs of other women who cannot afford them, and most of the time, the members keep aside their differences and help as fast as possible when the need arises. After the women presented their cases, they got help from the women in the group (the children's school fees and house rent were paid). However, apart from needy women showing up on their own, some of these group leaders, who sometimes also double as women activists, as seen in Figure 8, sort out and give chances for women in need to show up depending on the category they choose. Sometimes they could choose to help single mothers, widows, or even divorced women who can barely meet their needs.

[22] https://www.facebook.com/groups/799641063430419 Accessed on 25th August 2020

Figure 9: Screenshot from First Ladies group on Facebook[23]

Sometimes, the women in need might just need some comforting words and shared experiences to be able to handle a certain situation at some point. For example, a woman who might be going through a divorce process might not feel comfortable going to a man for advice because men's experiences in regard to divorce might be quite different from those of women. Hence, they prefer to go to a women's social or therapy group to get the advice they need to handle the situation.

Figure 10: Screenshop from First Ladies group on Facebook (seeking emotional support in divorce case)[24]

When this story in Figure 10 was posted, many members gave some comforting words, which I am sure might have given the lady some relief to some extent. A handful of the commentators were themselves divorced and gave advice based on their experiences, which, of course, could be a great

[23] https://www.facebook.com/groups/799641063430419 Accessed on 1st Sept 2020

[24] https://www.facebook.com/groups/799641063430419 Accessed on 12th Nov 2020

relief for the poster to know that she was not alone. However, one of the commentators seen in Figure 11 was more interested in telling the lady to pray instead of divorcing. She could not understand why she was opting for a divorce instead of holding fast to her marriage. The comment could not only be interpreted from the angle of her thinking that only the woman needs to go down on her knees for prayers when it comes to marriage, as many believe (see Omartian 2003). It could also be interpreted from the angle of trying to help a fellow woman not lose what is so important, what God has blessed, or what is or was meant to be. She simply expressed her upbringing in words—where she was brought up to know that once you get into the institution of marriage, you do not have to get out and you have to stick to prayers to make it work, no matter the storm. In this regard, she was therefore trying to help a fellow sister see things in this light and make sure she does not make the mistake of giving up and end up breaking 'God's ordained' institution. This ties, for example, with what was analysed by Wangila (2010:311): that during the initiation of young girls into womanhood in the Kikuyu community in Kenya, it is used as a socialisation process of female subordination. This is because the child is being taught, among other things, how to relate to her spouse and other members of the community within the ideology of male dominance. Keeping their purity and virginity is being emphasised too, and they are made to understand that losing it before the right time is taboo, and that applies to women only. According to her, during these initiation rites, girls are also taught to desire early marriage, to be submissive to their husbands or face physical discipline (hence promoting wife battering), to persevere no matter the situation, and to be good homemakers.

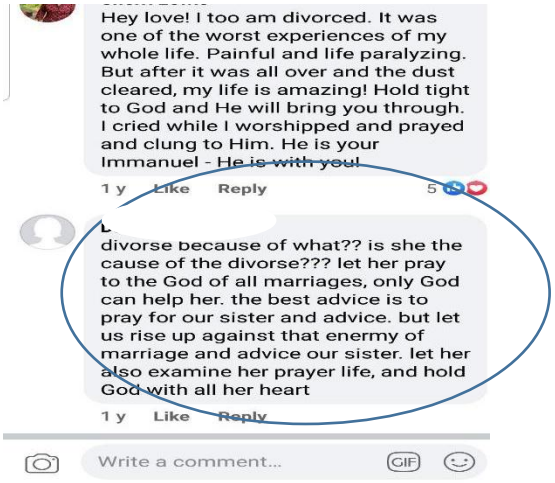


Figure 11: Follow up comment under figure 9 (members' advice)[25]

It is important to mention that this belief of depending on fellow women for support is not limited to Cameroon blogs or platforms, as similar things are experienced in the Nigerian groups and blogs where

[25] https://www.facebook.com/groups/799641063430419. Accessed on 12th Nov 2020

I am a member too. Women have always known that they are supposed to act as a support system for one another, which explains why it is a call for concern when they act otherwise. Credit still goes to social media for making it possible, as the number of cases that have received help might not have been possible without this medium. There is also easy follow-up on cases when presented, and the victims also have easy access to people who can help them out of their conditions. Many women have lost their lives due to domestic violence and other terrible conditions, simply because they never had somewhere to run to for help. In some countries like Cameroon, where the legal system does not do much to prevent or curb domestic violence, some of the women bear this for a long time, and some only depend on this online support from mostly other women to get out of these situations (see Mougoué 2019:195). When they know that reporting the case to legal authorities might not change anything, they prefer to seek help from people who can help them flee from it.

The following case from Chika[26] is one of those very violent cases that some of these pages receive. She got married to her husband, who was based in South Africa, and had to meet him there. Ever since she arrived in South Africa, it has been from one domestic violence case to another, even when she was pregnant. The husband even got her beaten to the point of bleeding while she was pregnant. The most frustrating thing, according to Chika, is the fact that she cannot even escape from that condition, as she has nowhere to run to and has not been associating with her fellow Nigerians. Something about Chika's case got many of the readers wondering—she mentioned that her mother visited her when she had the baby and even experienced how violent her husband was. At this point, the question asked is, how will a mother come and see her daughter in such a condition and yet do nothing to take her out of it? If Chika was recounting this story at this time, it implies her mother had returned to Nigeria and left her to continue living in an abusive home. This is to tell us that she could depend more on social media strangers than on her mother. Writing to the owner of this page at this stage was because she believed she could get her help from the followers. Inasmuch as Chika's story, like many other Facebook stories, cannot be completely verified, it is not short of what some women have confessed to facing or going through in their homes. These cases only pass through the owners of these platforms to reach other women, as cases like this are posted to reach out to more people in terms of support. It is also to let other victims know they can always ask for help, and it is also a way of making other women who are going through similar situations know that they can always speak up rather than silently die in such situations.

[26]Probably stage name

However, this work is focused on gender inequality or the marginalisation of women by other women; hence, the negative effects or reactions women get from other women will be taken more into consideration to back up some of the claims made. One gets common statements these days like "a woman's problem is another woman" or "women, we are our own problem." After taking a closer look into these statements and taking into consideration my own environment and personal experiences, I matched the statements to the cases we received on these different platforms, and some observations were made. It is also worth noting that society in which these women find themselves have 'worshiped' men for so long such that men do no longer need to fight hard to be at the leading position, as women have been brainwashed to think that they will always come second to a man, they can do nothing on their own except with the support of a man, they have little or no respect in society when they are not married, it is their responsibility to work hard, pray fervently and make their marriages work, if the home is in disorder, then it is their fault, if their husbands do not love them, then they are not doing something right and even sometimes made to feel like being a woman is a disadvantage just to name a few. With this mindset, women bring their problems (especially relationship matters) for solutions and exercise an attitude of shifting blame. On the part of the people with the problems, it was observed that women make excuses for their abusive husbands; they blame themselves for being the cause of their husband's negative behaviour towards them. In one of the many cases, one of the posters brought up a case as follows:

"Dear sisters, please, I need your advice. For some time now, my husband has not been supportive at home again. I struggle to make some cash and take care of everything in my house, from paying bills to feeding. Even before he pays the children's school fees, either the children must have complained so much or after the children have been driven from school, and in most cases, I will always be the one to complete the fees. It has been weighing on me so much, and I started complaining, but each time I talk about it, either he beats me up or we get into a heated argument, after which he will leave the house and only come back the next day. A few days ago, he left as usual without giving me any cash to cook, and this time I decided I would not cook as usual and rather took my kids to the restaurant. When he came back, he was very angry that I did not make supper for him, and I told him straight that it was because he did not leave me with any money to cook. It angered him, and he got me seriously beaten in front of our kids and even told me to leave his house because he is tired of the marriage. I know I really provoked him. I should not have reminded him that he did not leave me with

cash; actually, he is a good man, and I really love him. Please, sisters, help me. I am confused and don't know what to do. I don't want to lose my husband, please."[27]

The above case is a case of pure violence, where one would have expected the poster to be seeking help on how to save herself from it, yet she was blaming herself for being the cause of her husband's violent attitude and wants to do everything to stay married.

In the case of unfaithful partners, some of these posters blame other women for pushing their men to cheat on them. There are many instances where women came up with complaints about their husbands not being faithful, yet they did not have the courage to confront their husbands about it, but they could attack the mistress, who in many cases had no idea the men they were dating were married men. Then many questions come to mind, like: how could one have the courage to go and attack a stranger but be unable to face her own husband at home, who owes her faithfulness? Could it be that these married women find it easier to blame the other women just because they are afraid of risking their marriages if they directly face their husbands? Could it be that it is a resulting effect of the mentality of doing everything to be married and stay married that society has instilled in women?

On the part of the readers, I read so many women blaming posters for causing their husbands to behave badly towards them. These posters bring these problems to women-only platforms expecting a level of understanding from fellow women, but what they sometimes get is scorn, backlash, and blame. Women are being told by other women to stay quiet and keep their homes; they are being told to be grateful; they even have husbands, while others are still hoping to find theirs. In many instances where women complained about their husbands being cheats and showing them little or no respect, there were comments like "Focus on yourself; maybe it is because you don't dress well; try to find out what the other woman is giving him that you are not giving him." "Pray hard for your marriage and don't complain too much." "Never try to check your husband's phone because what you do not know does not kill you." "I am sure it is because you are not submissive; the Bible says women should submit to their husbands." "Now that you have discovered that he cheats, don't attack him; just be good and take good care of him. Put him down and tell him to forgive you for any wrong you have done and tell him you want to be a better wife." "It is a woman's responsibility to pray for her home and make her marriage work, so instead of complaining, try to see where you went wrong." "No matter how much he cheats, he will always come back to you because you are the woman in the house; do not leave your marriage for anything." These are just a few of the many blames women receive from other women

[27] https://www.facebook.com/groups/1954927878161846. Accessed on 10th September 2018

when they try to complain about not getting the best from their husbands. Some go as far as quoting their parents and saying they had the best marriage because no matter what their husbands did, they stayed faithful and never complained, but these days, women complain a lot because of comparison and because of the introduction of concepts such as feminism. Comments like this trigger one to think about the reproduction of what some parents went through, and it boils down to the ideology that individuals reproduce just what they were fed with. It is therefore possible that because someone's mother went through abuse of any type from her husband and never complained, she might have passed on the same doctrine to her daughter, making her understand that staying married is the ultimate goal, and you therefore need to persevere in order to keep your home. With these different home trainings that are being reflected here, one can observe a chain pattern that will be difficult to break: society builds individuals on what is considered right or wrong with respect to women and their relationship to men. This doctrine is taken into the home, where it is reinforced and still reflected back into society by different individuals from different homes. However, considering the fact that the world is a global place now, society still plays a big role in moulding up its members but can't influence what they copy from other societies. In this regard, individuals learn new ways of interpreting and doing things and introduce them in their small circles or homes, which sometimes make them different from other members of the same society. Taking us back to the idea of educating a girl child, many societies still hold on to the ideology that training a girl child is not as important as training a male child (see Kiptoo, 2013:14–15), while others have learnt from other parts of the world that every child should have equal rights to education. As a result of the just mentioned point, some people are now open to new ideas and new things. Some families, though still part of society, follow the general rules yet apply new things that they deem necessary. When this is done, the ideology of women being meant just for the kitchen is not shared by every home. While others keep holding on to the fact that a woman has no place in society, some individuals, because of these different home doctrines, bring in new ideas about how much rights a woman has too. They do so by encouraging other women to stand up for their rights and hold on to what belongs to them, encouraging them to educate themselves even if someone else cannot do it for them. This is exactly what is reflected when these individuals meet on these different social media platforms; the advice they give is a mixture of what society upholds and what their various homes have indoctrinated them with. This is a typical milieu where we experience conflicts of ideas; while others hold strongly to the idea of a woman's place being under the man, others push forward the idea of change and equal rights. It seems difficult to completely get out of the usual expectations from women, as the traditional belief of men being superior is highly ingrained in people's minds. Medie (2020:16) opined that during the war in Liberia between 1989 and 2003, many women lost their

spouses, which forced them to become the primary breadwinners of their families. However, even though the conflict pushed many women into non-traditional roles, it did not shift or change the ideology about a woman's place in society. In a nutshell, no matter how women became independent and integrated into other important sectors of the community, such as politics, the superiority of men still prevailed. With this conflicting ideology even among women themselves, it becomes common to see women who were meant to stand for one another spend their time rather than fighting among themselves. One group of people sees others as rebellious and a set of confused individuals being destroyed by the concept of feminism, while the other group sees others as a group of 'uncivilised' individuals who have refused to go with the change of time and have decided to make themselves slaves to men, or better still value marriage more than they value their own lives. This is usually confirmed through the exchanges made through comments and posts on social media. With conflicts like these, the goal of women coming together to help one another is being questioned, and some people hold that women seem to destroy themselves more than they can build. In Hooks (2000:43) opinion, women were taught to believe that they were "natural" enemies and that they would never have solidarity between them because women cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another. She believes that though women have learnt these lessons very well, they must unlearn them if they are to build a sustained feminist movement. Women must therefore learn to live and work in solidarity and must learn the true meaning and value of sisterhood.

There seems to be a trend now, as observed in the different groups. On these different social media platforms, we have the posters who are seeking advice; we have the owners or administrators of the different pages (who sometimes handle and counsel some of these cases without bringing them to the public); and then we have the audience or followers of these individuals who own the pages. What happens is that when these posters bring up problems, there are those groups of members who spend more time insulting than counselling these people, then others who believe hitting the nail or being straight will make the posters learn from their mistakes faster, and another group who go against any idea or comment that is against what they believe. A good example is a situation where a poster brings up a story about dating a married man and being confused on whether to let go or to hold on to him. While the group of people who think that standing for other women also means not dating married men will be so hard on this poster, some will be advising her to let the man go, others will be cursing her for betraying a sister, and others will be really hard on her with insults and advice at the same time. Then we also have the group of individuals who use the opportunity to attack the commentators who are against the idea of dating a married man. Then common comments will be like:

"All those holier than thou who are insulting this lady just because she has decided to open up should stop judging. They are here pretending to be very good people, while the evil they do is worse than this."

Member one

"You people should leave her alone; it is her choice. Let her do what makes her happy. If the married man did not approach her, she wouldn't have been dating him; we should rather blame the man."

Member two

Going by opposing comments like these, it is easier to say some women find themselves in a great dilemma, not knowing exactly what it means to stand for a woman.

The conflict among women has also gotten to the point where it feels like being a woman is a crime, such that many women, when given the least chance to be at the top, tend to react like men. The question is, why will they not think it is a crime to accept their sexuality when it is associated with silence, complaints, nagging, confusion, indecision, and, at the same time, being expected to be the sole solution finder for every problem? It is in this regard that writers like Chimakonam & Du Toit (2018) emphasised that "there is nothing bad about being a woman, nor is there anything particularly bad about some of the spaces women are known to occupy traditionally. What should be an issue is twofold: the disrespectful way some chauvinists legislate that women must be confined to specific spaces, which they also caricature as for weaklings, and the acceptance of women's freedom, not only to venture into other spaces as they please, but specifically the freedom to think for themselves and reach informed decisions on matters that concern them and society." All these come in an effort to sell the idea that women are too emotional to control themselves and talk less about trying to control others (especially when the topic of leadership comes up). This idea of women being emotional has been bought by many, including women themselves, such that they do not even trust their fellow women to be able to make decisions for themselves. They hold on to the ideology that if there is a problem in any relationship, women should be questioned about what exactly they did to provoke the situation. These blames are not just limited to social problems but also in areas that are supposed to be natural, like childbearing. This is just as Uchem (2001:92) said: in the Igbo culture in Nigeria, the case of infertility is always blamed on women. Even if the man is impotent, he will not take the blame. Women even turn to questioning the position of other women these days, such that they have the tendency to

demonstrate a level of lack of pride in womanhood. Even though we have many women speaking up now because of the availability of anonymous platforms, many women have made mention of not having the courage to even face other women anonymously with their problems due to fear of backlash. They can't stand the blame and insults that their fellow women will give them even though they are the victims; hence, many of them have resulted in sharing their problems with individuals on online platforms whom they trust (by getting into their inboxes) to reduce the level of embarrassment they may receive. The photo below illustrates one of the cases where instead of fellow women thinking of how to save a sister from a situation of domestic violence, some of them spent their time blaming her and asking her to stop seeking sympathy.

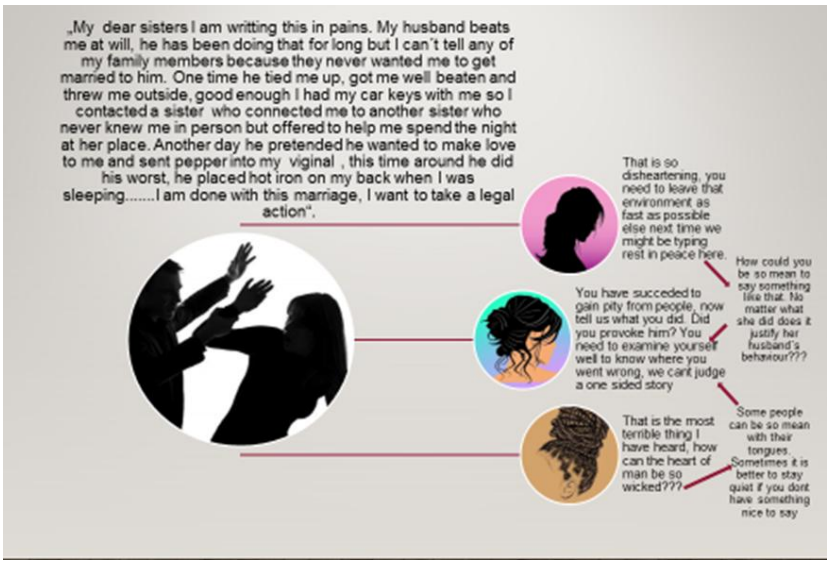


Figure 12: Illustration created on basis of a Facebook post and comments[28]

Looking at the above case, one is left wondering if everything is all about home training or societal doctrines, especially as questions start popping up from some members about whether some women just want to mislead others or if they actually practice what they say. In this regard, some people are of the opinion that some women do not advise other women based on their own experiences or what they can bear. They simply say some things to make themselves look 'better' as some people will put it. The example case above is one of those cases where questions were asked if there is any woman who can stand the level of domestic violence reported in the case, and many commentators held the opinion that no one deserves that kind of treatment even if they were at fault.

[28] Everything has been paraphrased after reading the story and this illustration created

Following one of the TEDx talks on YouTube, "Can we use TV to fight poverty?" by Eliana La Ferrara[29]. It was interesting to see some statistics presented of women in different African countries justifying reasons for husbands to beat their wives. The chart below explains this:

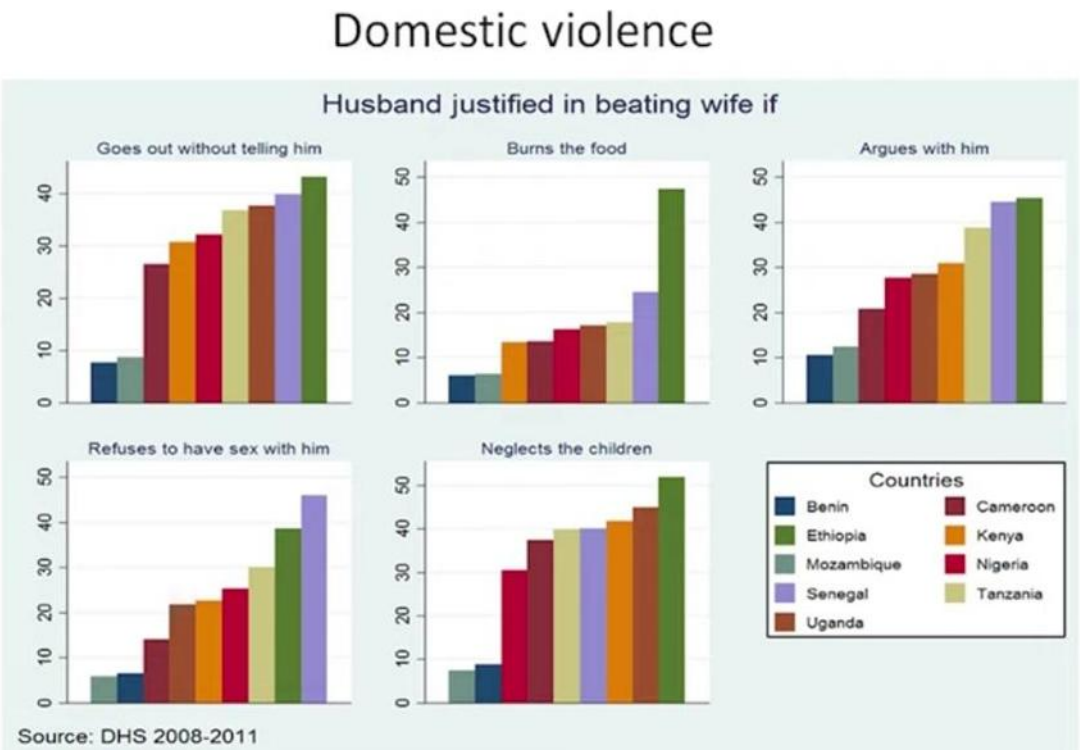


Figure 13: Screenshot from Eliana La Ferrara's TEDx on YouTube[30]

According to the chart (Figure 13), 50% of women from Ethiopia think it is okay for a husband to beat his wife if she goes out without telling him, while about 28% of women in Cameroon, which is the main focus of the research, think it is okay for husbands to get their wives beaten if they go out without informing them. About 38% of Cameroonian women think it is fine for wives to be beaten by their husbands if they neglect the children. It is ironic to see that the same group of people that many organisations and individuals have been fighting for, trying to take them out of life-threatening situations such as domestic violence, are the same people giving reasons to defend domestic violence. This seems to make it difficult for those women who complain about going through domestic violence to share their experiences, as their fellow women will blame them for being the cause of their

[29](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mCv5U5LRG4&tfheature=share&fbclid=IwAR3id5Z8cgB8IUV0Gg777pu9R5FkrweghQNLJeAHUeNQ6XWfOl7nLCsGLsI. Accessed on 5 January 2021

[30] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mCv5U5LRG4&thfeature=share&fbclid=IwAR3id5Z8cgB8IUV0Gg777pu9R5FkrweghQNLJeAHUeNQ6XWfOl7nLCsGLsI. Accessed on 5 January 2021

situations. They will even tell them to their faces that it is okay to be beaten by your spouse, and when activists try to defend the victims, they receive backlash (accused of destroying homes) from women like the abovementioned—it becomes difficult for them [activists] to carry on smoothly. With this direct or indirect promotion of domestic violence, the number of casualties keeps increasing, as we hear almost on a daily basis that spouses in general and women in particular are being murdered by their partners. It is worth noting that in most of these cases, it was not just a one-time occurrence that led to this. Most of these women had been enduring domestic violence before it came to this point. Sometime around early July 2020, a young woman in Yaounde, the capital city of Cameroon, lost her life after struggling with 3rd degree burns inflicted on her by her husband. The woman had fled her matrimonial home due to conjugal violence and was living on her own when her husband showed up one day, poured petrol on her, and set her on fire[31]. Most of these women who have gone through domestic violence for a long time are always more concerned about what society will say if they leave their homes than their safety. The same society that will force you, through the ideology they push forward (marriage being the test of a good character), to stay in an abusive marriage will blame you for not walking away at your funeral or at the mention of your death or will even blame you for pushing your husband to commit murder. Some screenshots of comments from the abovementioned case just confirm the level of confusion into which society puts women—where one is caught between quitting and saving her life or staying to make it work by force, of which you will still be blamed in the end for trying hard to hold on. Now, let us look at some of the comments on the screenshots below, which are not the least different from the comments people make on a daily basis when something like this happens. So, according to the first comment in Figure 13, marriage is not a matter of do or die; hence, if it is not working, one should move out. This comment, at this time, does not even take into consideration what is stated in the story: that the woman had moved out of the abusive home. Since it is a normal phenomenon to blame the victim, even in a subtle way, the comment still had to be made anyway. The next comment on Figure 14 is even more assuming, as the commenter used the opportunity to warn girls who love material things. The replies that followed this comment all wondered how the case was connected to being materialistic, and how does being materialistic justify someone being brutally murdered like that? But again, it might not be so strange to see comments like this at a time when someone has lost their life due to domestic violence. The last comment on Figure 16 shows someone who claims that, inasmuch as he or she does not support the act, "some women are

[31] https://mimimefoinfos.com/man-hands-himself-to-police-after-burning-wife-to-death-in-yaounde/?fbclid=IwAR0skbStVCY877fzRp97qzhOVmTJqchk35B0KZxoEBbyMqAduTPWxoh9BEs. Accessed on July 6th 2020

really a problem to most men." When one looks at a comment like this, it tells us that staying in an abusive relationship just because you are concerned about society's opinion doesn't change anything, as accusing messages will still be sent for your family to read after your demise. See an example of the comments below:

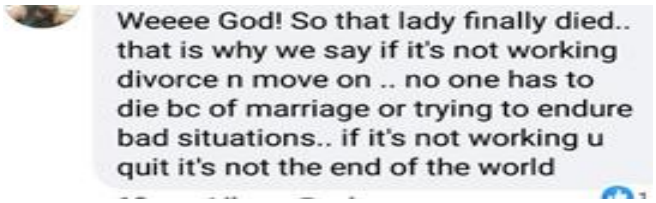


Figure 14: Comment under the domestic violence post[32]

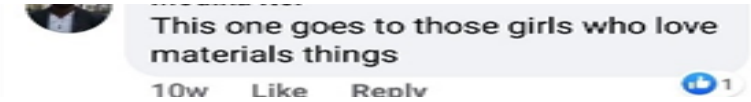


Figure 15: Comment under the domestic violence post.

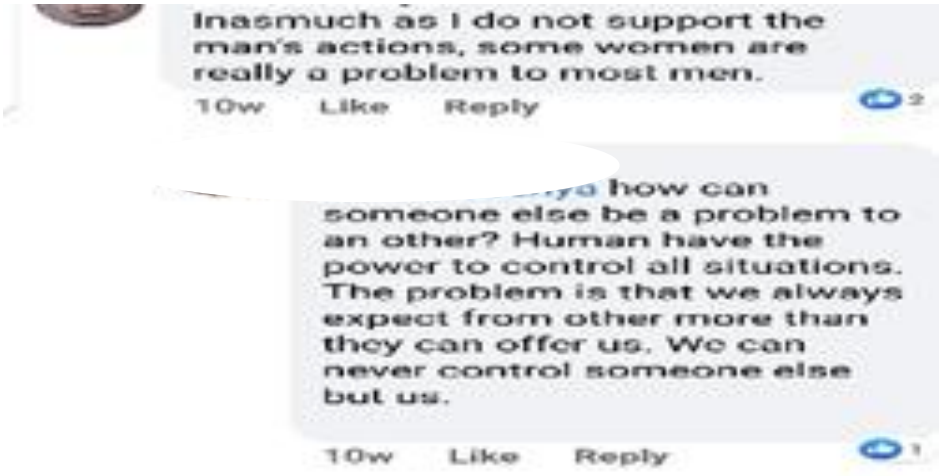


Figure 16: Comment following the domestic violence post.

Some of these women go through this because even when they report these violent cases to the authorities in charge, little or nothing is done about it, and it ends up only provoking their men to be more violent and causing their family and close friends to blame them for exposing their homes (see DeLancey, Mbuh, & Delancey, 2010:393). The rate at which women suffer conjugal violence in

[32] https://www.facebook.com/MimiMefoInfo: Accessed on July 6th 2020

Cameroon per region is alarming and is shown below, as provided by the National Institute of Statistics in Cameroon[33].

Centre Region (64%).

West Region (55%).

East Region (53%).

South Region (52%).

Northwest Region (48%).

Littoral Region (47%).

North Region (44%).

Southwest Region (41%).

Far North Region (27%)

Adamawa Region (26%).

Another area where one could observe and ask questions in women-women relationships is the area of standing for or defending fellow women by turning down advances from married men. This is a widely discussed topic on social media, and while others hold strongly to the fact that marriage is supposed to be a one-man, one-woman thing, hence anyone who defiles this is an intruder, others still believe that some women were not meant to get married but should be given the choice to date the married men. As a result of the aforementioned, one has read many stories on Facebook of women who are not willing to let go of married men or who have used fetish means of making married men stay with them. When one wonders how this affects women, especially the ones whose husbands cheat on them, it goes back to the fact that in many of the stories and cases read by women seeking advice, the women complain of their husbands not taking care of them, not spending time with their kids, being violent to them, and rather treating a mistress better than them. When taking this into consideration, one can therefore say that, as a woman, if you accept a married man to give you give more attention than he gives to his wife and kids, then you are destroying a fellow woman's home and indirectly or even directly betraying her. Stories of women losing their lives while trying to make their marriages work

[33]http://lashaking.info/2020/07/10/rates-at-which-women-suffer-conjugal-violence-in-cameroon-per-region/accessed on September 16th 2020

are one of the many reasons why many people do not find dating a married man healthy. On the other hand, some of these women who date these married men still do not see any problem in their actions. Many have vowed to always date a married man so long as he keeps coming to them; some even openly provoke the married women, telling them it is their lack of style, inability to have a child, and lack of manners, among many other reasons, that have caused their husbands to look outside. They therefore stand in a better position to take care of these men than their wives can; hence, instead of the wives to keep on complaining, they should either upgrade themselves or simply appreciate whatever their husbands give them. Some writers have even used this to warn women against fighting their husband's mistresses. They pass on advice like, it is disgraceful and classless to fight your husband's mistress, so better face your husband, who owes you an explanation, and not a woman who might not have the true story about your marriage. More to that, it might turn against you if she rather inflicts pain on you and gives you scars that you will live to regret for the rest of your life (see Bassey 2016). It is worth noting that these women who choose to stand up for other women by creating or joining platforms with the aim of counselling women are not left out of the attack. They receive attacks from married women (accusing them of destroying homes) or even single women (accusing them of trying to ruin their chances of getting men who can take care of them, like married men). Cases have been followed where; in trying to solve a problem, advocates of women's rights have been accused of trying to destroy homes by telling women to leave abusive marriages instead of telling them to stay and pray hard. They have been accused of feminism, especially as feminism has been interpreted by many in society as being something negative and seen as an attempt by women to make themselves 'men' or be compared to men (see Eze, 2016:7). Yet this does not go without mentioning that some writers have emphasised the difference between men and women, which, to them, should be respected and accepted. This is also to promote the idea that when men and women can identify and accept their differences, it is easier to live in a healthy and loving environment than to live in constant disagreement. In this light, Grey (2012:19) mentioned that very few people are able to grow in love, yet it does happen. When men and women accept and respect the differences between them, then love has the chance to grow. He went ahead to say that when we understand the hidden differences of the opposite sex, the love in our hearts can then be successfully given, for love is magical and can last if we are able to remember our differences. These Facebook advocates have also been accused of being rebellious and trying to change God's initial plan for marriage, which is that a woman is supposed to always be under a man. In most cases, they [accusers] use religion to back up their claims (see Ukagba, Des-Obi & Nwankwor, 2010:319). Worthy of note is the fact that, though not everyone is a Christian, they always have something to back up their claims. The non-Christians claim that African tradition states that a man is

the stronger being and should always lead, implying a woman is supposed to be silent. This ideology is equally demonstrated in some African literature, like that of Chinua Achebe, and one can therefore say that it is no surprise when women read these literatures and have to apply them in their day-to-day interactions. Some writers criticized some of the literature exposed to society for promoting male dominance. Smith & Ce (2015:9) pointed this out when they mentioned Chinua Achebe, who is known as the father of African literature and renowned for his historical Africa novels, yet consistently sidelines the place of postcolonial women to focus on postcolonial manhood. Achebe portrayed this dominance through Okonkwo, the male character he used in "Things Fall Apart," who opined that "no matter how prosperous a man is, if he is unable to rule his women and his children, and especially his woman, he is not really a man." This criticism is also extended to African cinema, as some critics are not satisfied with the way women are being portrayed in African movies. An example is Bayo Olupohunda, a writer and an educator based in Lagos, Nigeria. He expresses his concerns about how Nigerian movies have been negatively portraying women and how women suffer from violence in these movies. He thinks that Nollywood movies are dominated by scenes of extreme violence and misogyny against women. Either women are labelled as witches, sluts, or tramps, always ready to use their sexuality for their own greedy gains, or they are being raped or assaulted[34].

Christians, on their part, back up their claims with the Bible claiming that women were asked to be silent and a man is the head of the family. On one social media platform where a problem of domestic violence was presented, a group of women observed that the victim had been too quiet and slow to act, which is exactly why the husband had been taking her for granted. She was therefore advised to either take her husband to court or quit the marriage before she got killed. In one of those discussion sessions, there was a commenter who was very noticeable due to her comments. She was noted attacking any comment that advocated for a divorce. According to her, marriage is for better or for worse, and women should learn to solve their problems through prayer and being quiet. She was so bitter with the owner of the platform for advocating for a divorce and called her a rebellious feminist who was surely not satisfied with her own marriage and was out to destroy other women's marriages.

"Marriage is not a bed of roses, and women should learn to keep their mouths shut when their husbands are talking; you can't be advocating for a divorce even when the Bible is against divorce.

[34] https://secure.avaaz.org/community_petitions/en/Stop_the_Violence_Against_Nigerian_Women_in_Nollywood_Movies/

The Bible says women should submit to their husbands as they do to the Lord, for the husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. Ephesians 5:22-23"

(angry commentator)

With this, it becomes questionable if the problem of women being discriminated against can ever be solved when the same women that are being fought for, see nothing wrong in the way they or other women are being treated. This now goes back to society and home, where they come from the doctrine they have been given, especially as one can clearly see her quoting the Bible, where she claims to get her facts from. She has therefore been made to understand that anyone who does not go according to these standards is going against the will of God and should therefore not be listened to. Some of these women advocating for women in different relationships have given up, some because of threats, and others could just not stand the stress involved in trying to stand up for women. As of the time I started this research, there was a Cameroonian blogger (name withheld for privacy reasons) who was in the hospital and seriously sick. She had been working tirelessly to save so many relationships for a long time. According to her reports as well as feedback from some of her followers, she had succeeded in reuniting couples who had fallen apart, handling cases of infidelity, and addressing women who were bent on destroying other women's homes by dating their husbands and having kids with them, either in secret or publicly. This blogger suddenly fell seriously sick at one point, and going by some Facebook comments, her life was under threat. Rumours had it that some people started showing up anonymously, telling her friends she would not make it out of her sick bed and was being paid in her own coins for destroying their lives. By destroying their lives, they meant exposing them and asking them to leave married men alone, uncovering their secrets of having kids with other men other than their husbands, and telling married men to leave their mistresses and concentrate on their homes. It is worth saying that this lady was allegedly bringing so much change and putting a smile on the faces of so many women, especially married women, who had been going through a lot in their homes and needed someone to intervene for them (according to the testimonies she posted on her platform). Going by these speculations, it was therefore surprising to see how far some women could go to bring her down simply because she decided to advocate for other women, and it is rather unfortunate that she finally died, leaving so many women devastated. This is just an example of some of the things some women go through when trying to stand up for their fellow women. One would have expected rebellion just from men when it comes to women fighting for their rights, but strangely enough, a good number of women rebel against these women advocates even more than men will. Another advocate mentioned during an interview I had with her that she had had stories of women convincing other women not to follow or listen to her and calling her a loose woman who is either frustrated with her home and has

taken to Facebook as a place to hide her shame and fight back. She faces situations like this on an everyday basis, where many of these women use fake profiles to attack her, telling her to stop misleading other women and concentrate on her own life. However, being a determined individual, she has promised never to give up and that she has come to stay and will change the narratives that have been going on in society about women's place being at the back.

When going through these different testimonies from these advocates, one question that comes to mind is: are people also attacked for wanting to stand up for the rights of women? It seems like, apart from the gender inequality chronicles we get on a daily basis, a handful of people are satisfied with the status quo, such that they directly and indirectly fight whoever is trying to change the situation. If not, how come most of these women advocates, especially those on online platforms, complain of being bashed for choosing to stand for women? Even some of them, who only do their activism offline, complain about being insulted as being loose, and they hear stories of women receiving warnings from their husbands not to listen to them. With all these threats, it takes someone very strong and determined to continue fighting for the rights of women, as many have given up along the line. But still, as others are giving up, a handful of others have promised to hold on until they achieve their goals, and new ones are joining the trend on a regular basis.

Chapter 6: HOUSEHOLD EXPERIENCES AND OBSERVATION

A central aspect of my research is its multiple moorings in everyday life. Hence, this chapter will focus on what actually happened in the field during the research, especially in terms of household experiences. It is important to have an idea of how women's marginalisation of other women is being practiced in households, and this is subsequently carried to other areas of their lives either intentionally or unintentionally. This chapter will also include some testimonies from women expressing themselves in different ways about their relationships with their sisters or other female family members. It will also zoom into the observation that was made in a family in Bamenda, and I must mention that I consider it my central source of data collection, especially in the area of the participant's observation in this work. One reason why this source of data seems to be very relevant is because of how authentic it could be. This is an observation carried out while actively taking part in the lives of the observed family, getting to see their events unfold naturally. One could say the difference between this observation and social media research is the limitation of being able to be sure about the authenticity of the stories read on social media. On the other hand, it is true that anyone could write just anything and post it, but these cases on social media were not the least different from what was observed on the ground, which gave the impression that, even if any of the stories were made up, they would still help a number of people read them. Going to do family-based research was also a way of getting to know where the individuals we interact with on social media and other gatherings come from. Inasmuch as social media itself influences its users, their home experiences being expressed through their posts and comments cannot be minimised.

This part of the observed home experiences will be explained under different areas of the family, such as education, marriage, and home interaction, for a better understanding. Still connected to the family observation made, we will get into the discussion of witchcraft as a means or excuse used to marginalise women, where ideas will be drawn from different researchers pertaining to the topic. In this effect, the chapter will be divided into two parts; the first part will talk generally about home upbringing, with some experiences from Facebook sources used to explain how these individuals relate to themselves at home. The second part will focus more on the home experience, and I will share details of some important observations I made during my stay with the family.

In this chapter, it will also be important to observe women's choice of language. That is, what language(s) they use in communicating both at home and when they decide to share their experiences on social media with others. In the case of the home (especially as observed in the family that hosted me), one will observe that Pidgin was the main language of communication as it is one of the most comfortable languages that most people in this community can use.

Moreover, Pidgin needs no formal education for one to acquire it as opposed to English, where most of those who speak it have gone through a form of education in order to be able to use it properly. Even when we look at most of the ladies who shared their experiences or stories on social media and Facebook in particular, we will notice that they used English, which is usually a way of indicating that having access to social media means one could read and write. However, it can be noticed that sometimes the English used is usually characterised by slangs from Pidgin and some Cameroonian local languages, which is typical of Cameroonian English when used in not very formal settings. I realised mixing these languages or even using Pidgin is also becoming rampant as speakers feel a sense of belonging using it in mixing languages and enlarging their communicative repertoire.

Looking at all these from the angle of women who share their problems on social media, it was noticed that most of them in this section (chapter) are all connected to the topic of women accepting just anything in their marital homes just to stay married. This is so because the two main Facebook cases here are all about women who came to report cases of their daughters who were sexually abused by their own husbands (i.e., the husbands of the women), yet they were in a fix and could barely choose the right steps to take. In one of the cases, as will be seen ahead, it was not so clear if the woman would have chosen her marriage over her daughter's life because the abuser ended up committing suicide. As for the second case, the woman involved made it very clear that she is scared to lose her marriage, which was interpreted by readers as her choosing marriage over her daughter's safety. They (women) come forward with issues on social media because they believe in the counsel of the public, or sometimes because they cannot afford to pay for private counselling. Hence, they will have to depend on getting diverse opinions to be able to choose what suits their problem(s) best. This implies that their problems are sometimes directed either to the public through the owners of these different platforms or sometimes meant for the owners only, in cases of private counselling. Sending the problems or stories to the public comes with being prepared to receive different reactions from individuals that one has little or no control over. This is to say that some of the replies will come across as being mean and inconsiderate in some cases, and in many cases, the posters of these cases receive the reactions from the public with a lot of disappointment.

It is common to see feedback in the form of complaints coming from the posters who, because their identities were hidden from the onset, could only show their disappointments by sending another post to the platform indicating how disappointed or how insulted they felt. However, in many instances, I observed some of these page owners advising the posters to always be ready for the different kinds of replies they could get from the public, as it is difficult to control the reactions that will come from hundreds or thousands of people, and they could only regulate cases of outright rudeness. Apart from that, they cannot stop people from being objective with their points, considering how different individuals will obviously have diverse opinions and ideas. Moreover, if anyone is not comfortable with different opinions and how they are being presented, then it is better to opt for a private counselling session, where you get to talk one-on-one with a counsellor. It was also observed that some of these women sending their problems to social media would have loved to have private counselling or at least get to talk to someone on a one-on-one basis to get advice on their problems. This is because, from experience, when I make comments on some posts, for example, and the poster (though with a hidden identity) finds it interesting, she gets into my inbox to reveal her identity and have a one-on-one talk with me. Hence, it gives me the impression that going public initially was just a lack of money to pay for private counselling or simply an issue of not being aware that they could contact someone for free counselling. In a nutshell, many people also use social media to solve their relationship problems because it could be more affordable. Just so that we do not lose track of why all the aforementioned is important for this work, it is worth drawing us back to the fact that the focus of the research is to find out how women react to problems being faced by fellow women in order to weigh how much women contribute to their own marginalization. That being said, let us get into the household experiences from the next section to see what difference it makes.

6.1 Home upbringing and relationships.

It is a common practice for society to set the basic rules through its customs, laws, and moral guidelines. One thing about this is that many of these rules are not written or officially stated anywhere, yet people follow them without questioning, and they conveniently pass them down from one generation to another. For example, something as basic as which hand is supposed to be used in holding a drinking cup in my community. This is not officially written anywhere. Yet, it is believed that it is total disrespect for someone to hold a cup with a left hand while drinking from it, especially when a child does it among elders. Back home, it is now the responsibility of parents to make sure that children learn this aspect of society and take it very seriously. I remember the first time I learnt of this custom

or tradition; it was a surprise to me because I had no clue before. It just happened that I was drinking water with my left hand when my mother told me never to hold a cup with my left hand, especially not in the presence of elderly people. Since then, it has become a serious lesson to me, and under no circumstances will I repeat this act—especially in the presence of elders back in Cameroon. This is just a single example, but it can be used to illustrate how many other rules and customs of a certain community are passed down from one generation to the next. Let me also mention that finding it interesting that these customs might not be written yet are highly respected is not to imply that everything must be written to make them relevant. This is simply because it is also common to hear someone ask the question "Where is it written?" when being reminded of certain customs and traditions. On the other hand, when some individuals get these moral guidelines from society, they could have a unique way of passing them on to their children, either by adding their own personal views to them or by taking away something they do not agree with. This is so because it is not everything that society passes on to its members that everyone agrees with or practices. Some people find some of the rules too harsh or too lenient and will therefore want to do some checks when passing them on to their children. Hence, both society and the home have an influence on each other, which, in this case, cannot be ignored as it will be the main basis for our discussion. To make the above assertion clearer, let us narrow it to the case of Cameroon. When we look at the situation in Bamenda, where this study is focused, many parents did not deem it necessary to educate their female children. From the way this tradition was highly practiced, it indicates it was connected to the customs and traditions of the people when it comes to training their children (Tembon. 1999:214). Despite this widely practiced tradition, not everyone bought the idea, which is why we still have a handful of old women who were privileged to be educated by their families.

Even taking the case of the family that was observed (to be analysed in this chapter), I realised that the father (from his interview) did not educate his children based on their gender. He was very intentional about educating all his children, at least to a level of being able to read and write, and his main limitation was the lack of finance. He did what he could and ensured that he did not succumb to the mentality of preserving female children just for marriage—as a matter of fact, he was one of the few parents I came across during my research who was so relaxed and gave no pressure to his daughters when it came to marriage. This is an indication that the children from these homes will have a different approach to life, which is quite different from others in society, due to the training they get at home. When I look at other cases like Helene's (interview on April 15, 2020), for example, I notice that she will have a completely different view of this as her own father's interest is centred on ensuring that she gets married as fast as possible. Following her story, there was a time she insisted on going to

school, but her father told her that women do not need education; what they need are husbands who will take care of them and even help the family take care of some financial responsibilities.

The circle therefore continues as people take from society, maybe add something new to it, or possibly take out what they do not agree with and pass it on to their children, who in turn pass it on to society. Looking at it from the perspective of the home, it has been observed that in many cases, a child's first contact is his or her parents and other family members or caretakers. Hence, whatever is passed on to them at that very tender age before they get into society is very important. It is for this reason that this research will rather focus on the impact of the home on society; to have a look at how much impact the home has on society too, and to see how what was taken from society has been worked on and then sent back into society. Sometimes this same learnt doctrine is sent back to society as something new through the children we bring up. This is because, though they [home and society] depend on each other, they can be treated as separate entities because it is possible for someone not to belong to one yet still be part of the larger community. Just so we may understand better, we have individuals who have never been to school like most of the old women we mentioned in this work, yet they know what is required of them by society and can influence their homes with the demands of the people. We also have cases of children who, at a very tender age, lost their homes and grew up in the streets. This group of children, known as street children, do not know what it means to be influenced by the home, but they are still part of society in one way or another and follow some of the norms of society in which they live. If at one point they find a home like many of them do at one point in their lives, they might be fashioned to go by the rules of the said home, but the impact they will also have on the home due to their experience as street children and the exposure they have had in society cannot be minimised.

Finding it of interest to know the impact of the home on society in terms of gender inequality, this study is meant to start looking at the relationships of individuals, especially women at home. This therefore means that it will portray home as having more influence on society, as confirmed by some writers like Kitchen (1961). She opined so many years ago that more people are beginning to recognise the fact that the preparation of African youth for a constructive role in a changing society must begin in the home: that is to say, increasing social pressure on women to become help-mates to husbands, assuming positions of influence, and growing recognition by political leaders on how important it is to have the female votes too. New opportunities for girls to go to school, which consequently postpones their age of marriage and opens new doors for better opportunities, will be of paramount importance for the home (Kitchen 1961:83). It will therefore be important to find out how mothers and daughters relate to one another and how sisters relate to their fellow sisters. There have been a handful of cases too (though not all have been mentioned in this research) where women attest to the fact that their best

friends are their sisters because they were brought up to be so united and ended up not being able to trust an outsider as much as they could trust their sisters. In situations like this, one can imagine a scenario where these women will do everything to defend their sisters in every circumstance. The meaning of women standing for women is somehow being applied here. In a discussion with one of these ladies, she recounted how, coming from a home where she was thought to value herself and her sisters so much, she cannot stand anyone maltreating her sisters; she will fight for them to the very end. This doctrine has therefore made her aware of the value of standing up for women in general, because according to her, every woman deserves the best. She emphasised on the point that that does not mean she will ignore a man when in a situation of need but simply has to limit herself in this particular case to women because she understands better what it means for one to be treated simply based on the fact that she is a woman.

As I forge ahead with the different examples, it will become clearer how much influence parents do have in these different relationships and the diverse outcomes depending on the situation. This therefore implies that parents' relationships have a big role to play in the lives of their children, and the children might end up attracting the same relationships (like those of their parents) in their lives. Like Ambert (1997:20) mentioned, the quality of relationship a couple has, determines the kind of parenting they will carry out on their children and will have a great impact on their children's development. In a nutshell, when parents do not have a warm relationship between the both of them, they might put in little or no time to meet the needs of their children, in contrast to when parents do live in a peaceful union. For example, Sylvie (interview, March 17, 2020) mentioned that she has grown to love unconditionally because she learnt from her parents that love comes without conditions. She can't remember ever seeing her parents quarrel or fight in the presence of their children; their problems were always hidden from their kids, and they always reminded them of how important it is to love freely and receive love in return. Because of this, she does not think she can bear any relationship where there is no love; she cannot stand any man who will not treat her the way her father treated her mother, and with this abundant love, she has learnt to share love easily. Elaborating on sharing love, she opined that love embodies a lot of things, and that also includes not hurting others. She cannot stand the pain; she does not see herself impacting it on another person. This gradually took us into the discussion of loving and standing for other women, and according to Sylvie, her worst moment is when she is backlashed or insulted; hence, she cannot do the same to other women. She equally knows that going close to a married man is just another way of hurting a woman and destroying a home, so she will not go that low to cause harm or havoc in someone's home. Being someone who has grown up in a peaceful home, she knows what it means to always have a great time at home with

family, sharing all the good and bad moments without having the fear of an intruder coming to destroy what they have built. Apart from that, she was brought up to know that being morally upright is the best thing that can happen to anyone, and being a Christian, she has always known that not following the commandments of the Lord can lead one to losing a lot of valuable things (Deuteronomy 28:15). With these in mind, she has always worked to have a good relationship with God, her parents, society, and herself, and this is what she intends to pass on to her children. Listening to Sylvie recount her upbringing, it was very clear to me that this has had an impact on her adulthood and determines the way she reacts to unfolding events around her.

After having a general overview of why the study will focus on the home as mentioned above, it is important to get into these different levels of relationships at home, beginning with relationships among sisters or women living in the same home. These different relationships among sisters are not isolated from their upbringing; hence, the effects of how they were raised will be spotted in their different relationships. That having been said, it should be noted that some women have indicated their lack of interest in sharing personal things with their sisters at home because of the kind of relationship they have. They do not share such a close bond as siblings should and feel like, and their upbringing has played a great role in this. Many of such women said that they never experienced their parents sharing love as couples should. They were always in constant fear of what would happen next and never had the time to learn what it meant to love and to be loved. Talking to Mildred in an interview (March 17th, 2020), it was interesting to find out how she connects with her sisters at home, the bond they share, and how much she knows about her sisters. According to Mildred, she has two brothers and a sister, and strangely enough, she is closer to her brothers than her sister. Mildred thinks that her sister from childhood was treated by the parents like the favourite child, and Mildred has always been the one to receive all the blame in the family. Her parents never trained them to know that sisters are supposed to stand for one another. On the contrary, she was always expected to be the understanding one and should accept all her sister's flaws, yet she should be responsible enough not to make mistakes. This attitude from their parents made her have such a distant relationship with her sister to date. It seriously affected their bond, and to date, she has no knowledge of her sister. Defending one another is not part of their responsibility, and she even thinks sometimes that her sister could freely sabotage her if given the chance.

Considering Mildred's case, it becomes more obvious how much impact upbringing has on individuals. The fact that she kept mentioning their childhood and the role their parents played is a big indication that it left a mark in her life that cannot easily be forgotten. At the time when their parents thought they were protecting one and making the other responsible, they had no idea they were planting a seed

of discord among their children. One thing is that I did not get to talk with Mildred about her relationship with other women outside of her family. Yet, looking at her testimony it will not be surprising if it turns out that Mildred and her sister do not value the need to stand in protection of other women. One might be expecting too much from them at this point, when it is so clear that they have learnt more about standing against each other than standing for one another.

Notwithstanding that, it is also important to mention that people have different personalities, and sometimes even home training has very little influence on them. Some people just grow to be different and distant from their siblings, making it difficult for them to trust one another. They sometimes grow distant and, at times, even hate or put on a careless attitude concerning the feelings of others.

Some cases on Facebook will best describe the scenarios explained above. For instance, going by some of the cases posted by women seeking possible solutions, a lady came up with a case complaining how she has been betrayed by her sister who slept with her boyfriend, and she thinks things will never be the same between both of them. Yet she was still dating the said boyfriend at the time of her complaint and even had a child with him. The followers of that platform were touched by these declarations, and some analyses were made. First, it was difficult to comprehend how a woman will not only set out to betray another woman but will also betray even her own sister to the extent of sleeping with her boyfriend, and not just once. On the other hand, this sister apologised to her sister, who was very hurt, but people could not understand how her sister found it so difficult to forgive her but could forgive her boyfriend, who even raped her sister from the beginning. And she was even hoping to get married to this same guy, who seemed to be the main betraying person here. Many women believed she was simply desperate, was just interested in fulfilling the title of Mrs. by getting married and did not care much about her sister's feelings. The situation was further analysed as a scenario of two sisters who did not have each other's back and did not sound like they could fight for each other. A similar case was brought up where a lady was lamenting that her husband had been snatched by her aunt and was even pregnant for him. When the husband learnt that the story had been exposed on that platform (Facebook), he contacted the owner of the platform to inform her that he is no longer in love with his wife but his aunt-in-law and even wants a divorce. Most of the members were still trying to come to terms with all these messages when the aunt herself showed up with her own part of the story. When many people were expecting that she would deny all the allegations, she rather admitted everything and was so proud to say it was because of her niece's foolishness and pride that she could not keep her husband. She claimed that she played a better role in the niece's house and has now gained the love of her husband. She said both of them were now in love, and nothing could stop them. This was one of the most shocking stories received on the platform at that time, as many people interpreted the case as

a total betrayal of a woman by her own flesh and blood (aunt). The lady in question was devastated and sounded very suicidal, but her aunt (who was like the only mother she had at that point, as she was an orphan) never cared what her niece was going through.

In these types of cases, though not verified, women were triggered to ask questions of trust—like how would one trust even her own sisters when they show traits of betrayal like this? Another woman in her own case (figure 16) lamented about how devastated she was after losing her husband. She had believed her sister over her husband and filed for divorce, and she did not know how to turn the hands of time after discovering that her sister lied against her husband.

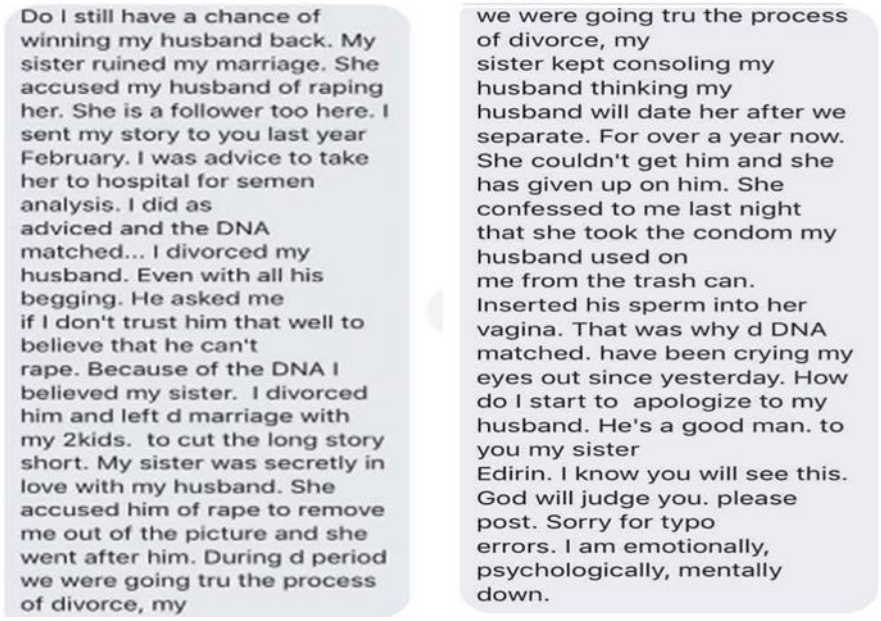


Figure 17: Screenshot from Eve's corner on Facebook (A member regrets falling for her sister's lies)[35]

One of the things that drew so much attention to this case was not just the fact that it was her own sister who decided to betray her with the aim of taking over her husband, but also the fact that the said sister was part of the platform meant to fight for women and handle issues concerning women. If she still had the courage, even as a sister, to destroy her sister's home, then why would the sister trust her in other situations? She brought the case to a social media platform where she believed she could get help, but this is also an indication that it seems to be easier to seek solutions from a social media platform these days than confiding in a family member.

Putting all the above cases together, one could therefore say that there might be a need to bring up children to grow up confident and able to trust the people around them. This could be achieved by

[35] https://www.facebook.com/groups/1954927878161846: Accessed on 15th June 2021

making them feel safe at home or in the family, by giving them the impression that they are highly loved and will not be blamed for things that go wrong around them or for those things that are not within their control. Women should not be ignored in the process of providing this safety, as it has been observed that many women are vulnerable and will need to protect themselves when the need arises (see DeLancey Mbuh, & Delancey 2010:393). Talking about vulnerability, we are looking at situations of domestic violence, rape cases, and maltreatment of widows, among many others. Now, when all these are connected to the number of abuse cases coming up these days, one would observe that many of the victims hid their stories from everyone, including their own mothers and sisters. This could be an indication that their environment never gave them the freedom and trust to be able to speak out without being judged. Wouldn't it be easier for a mother, or at least the primary carer, to understand the daughter's abuse case and fight for her? It seems not to be the case, as some of these victims even confessed to being told by their mothers to maintain the stories as secrets. We had many stories (many mentioned in this work too) of girls who grew up being abused by neighbours, close ones, and even their own relatives at home for a long time, but they never had the courage to speak up, probably because they were not given the chance to speak out. Their immediate environment did not make them feel comfortable sharing their worries, and in most cases, the uncomfortable situations were only noticed after something terrible had happened. One would have thought that this is purely a Cameroonian problem and should not be generalised until we start coming across similar, if not the same, situations in other parts of Africa and the world (see Medie 2020:22). For example, some cases from Zambia seen on Facebook also show that some of the social problems in connection with gender plaguing Cameroon might not be unique to Cameroon or to Bamenda in particular. Women are being accused of being victims or blamed for exposing their perpetrators, and they are also brought up to think that speaking out in the midst of abuse, especially sexual abuse, rather puts you to shame and makes you vulnerable. When they have these terrible experiences, they resort to keeping them to themselves while going through the consequences all by themselves. Even when they decide to speak up, they are being blamed for pushing their abusers to the wall through inappropriate behaviours or even treated like outcasts in cases where their abusers are apprehended or punished. Below is one of such cases from Zambia, which further underlines this point and shows how women are abused and yet expected to stay mute in order to protect their abusers[36]. This minimises the fact that covering up their acts gives the abusers the go-ahead to even abuse more victims.

[36]https://www.facebook.com/buumbamalamboofficialpage/photos/a.1764486647142205/2679318375659023/

As the story goes, this lady (the victim) was continuously being raped by her father from the age of 13. The first time she discovered she was bleeding (menstruating), which she did not know by then what it was, her father took advantage of the fact that no one else except him and his daughter were at home and raped her after lying to her that that would be the treatment for her bleeding. The first time he raped her, he threatened the young girl not to tell anyone; otherwise, she would start rotting. It is alleged that this abuse went on for a long time, and her mother noticed some changes in the girl and realised how reserved she had become, yet she assumed it was simply connected to mood swings. It finally came to a point where she became pregnant, and everyone in the family, including her father (the abuser), insulted and cursed her. But when no one was around, he told the daughter to just point to any of her schoolmates and accuse them of being responsible for her pregnancy. Now, during their family meeting, this 13-year-old could not stand the threats coming from others and had to put up some courage to point out her father as the one responsible for her pregnancy. This came as a shock to many, and her brothers and other family members got the father beaten. One of her uncles even threatened to take the father (the abuser) to the police the following day, but unfortunately, he was found dead in the morning, indicating that he committed suicide. This pushed some family members to start pointing accusing fingers at the little girl, blaming her for causing her father to commit suicide. The poor little girl is being accused by her own family members of being the cause of her father's death just because, at one point, she could no longer take the threats and had to speak out. Many families like this one will even suggest that cases like this should be handled only at family level, so that the father or whichever family member was involved will not be exposed. The mother herself is broken and caught in the situation of losing a husband (who could not bear his shame), comforting her depressed young daughter, and facing the family's anger demonstrated by accusing her baby girl. On the other hand, one wonders what the mother would have done if the husband did not die. Would she have allowed her husband (the rapist) to be reported to the police, or would she have asked for the case to be handled at the family level in order to protect her husband? This came to mind considering how many women have been brought up to value staying married over being happy or protecting their loved ones. In this regard, when such things come up, they think about their marriages first and the shame that exposing them will bring to them. The story that follows, this time in Nigeria, is a similar case as the above. The woman in the story was in total confusion, as her husband had warned her to stay quiet or lose her marriage after she discovered what was going on in her house. It is alleged that her five-year-old daughter was raped by her brother-in-law, and her mother-in-law stopped her from involving the police because, according to her, it is a family issue, and the rapist will be punished traditionally (a statement that is not completely strange as it is common to hear this coming from families). The core of the

problem is that her husband, who happens to be the father of the little girl who has been raped, is using their marriage to threaten and influence her decision. He asked her to choose between reporting the case to the police and their marriage, and this kept her in a dilemma.

As a response, many women commenting under this post were rather confused and wondered why it should have even been a question to think about for the lady whose daughter was raped. How could she be contemplating what to do after the rape of her 5-year-old daughter, just because she thought her marriage was at stake? When the empirical data in this work is taken into consideration, one could say it is no longer a secret that many women have been made to understand that it is their duty to make their marriages work because they need marriage more than their male counterparts. The problem now comes when a woman will have to contemplate between staying with her husband, who wants to cover up his brother's rape crime, and protecting her daughter by reporting the case to the police. Among the many comments that kept questioning the woman's integrity and a few that advised her to ignore the whole thing and focus on treating her daughter, one of the comments, as seen below, triggered many under this post:

"It is not everything that must be exposed; some things are better when resolved in the family. If you report your brother-in-law to the police, you might be the one to apologise later for exposing the family to the public, and you will finally gain hatred from your in-laws too. If I were you, I would listen to my husband and forget about the police; this might be the last chance for you to save your marriage, and if you lose it, you might regret it for the rest of your life. Just let your brother-in-law apologise and let the matter be resolved within the family; don't listen to these ladies telling you to better report and leave your home; he might have been pushed by the devil and just needs prayers."

The replies under the above comment were not so pleasant, as so many women felt frustrated and insulted her. Many had the impression that her comment was a clear indication of what society, and the home have groomed women into. What else could one say when she was clearly more concerned about the woman's marriage than her daughter's wellbeing? The question that came to mind was, would this woman even think of protecting her daughter if she finds herself in an environment surrounded by about five other women who think or reason in the same way as her? That is, will she not be completely heartless if all her friends are women who believe in doing whatever it takes to save marriage? Many people who are more concerned about protecting their family name and image hardly ask themselves questions about the possibility of the rapist raping other children.

To get firsthand information, not necessarily through interviews but also through my own observation, I had to look for a family in Bamenda to spend time with them. The aim was also to go beyond just

passively meeting them for interviews to spending months with them in the same house. The goal was to get a family with many women staying under the same roof so that it would be easier for me to observe them for some months. The observation was aimed at helping me explain some of the experiences that some families have, especially families with many girls or women, as the focus of the study is on women. Another aim of staying with a family on the ground was also to find out, through participant observation, the relationship between mothers who never had the opportunity to get a formal education and their children, who might have had the chance to have this education. It is believed that education, whether formal or informal, exposes people to different opportunities, experiences, and ideas (see Gualco, 2014). This is one of the reasons why it seems to be one of the foundations of this dissertation, as it has been proven through the cases that those who had the opportunity to be educated stood a better chance of fighting for themselves. Talking about the past, it should be noted that informal education is something that cannot be minimised, especially in Cameroon. As Blakemore and Cooksey (20017) put it, education includes both the formal and informal processes of learning. They went ahead to say that in some parts of East and West Africa, Koranic education has existed for so many years, and it still accounts for an important part of educational provision in the Muslim areas of the continent. According to them, some secret societies, such as the Poro and Bundo societies of West Africa, also made provision for a type of formal education. But all through pre-colonial Africa, the most important educational processes were informal and made up the everyday life of the growing child. Although it was informal, that does not mean that it was done in a haphazard, casual manner. It is also considered by many that, in many ways, the local community and family are, to this day, the most important educators of the young.

Before and even after the introduction of formal education, people surely had a way of getting themselves informed or of gaining knowledge about what was necessary. In this regard, most of the mothers back then still had knowledge to pass on to their children. In a nutshell, indigenous knowledge has always been an important heritage and continues to be not everything can be taught in schools, as many might assume. There are so many women out there who might not have gone to school and have grown far beyond school age, or even young women who still do not have the opportunity nowadays to take part in formal education yet still make use of indigenous knowledge. There are other things in society that are relevant for their existence, apart from being formally educated. Unfortunately, as Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019:1) opined, indigenous knowledge, which is a product of the environment and would be ideal to form the foundation upon which the formal education system of any society should be built, has been incessantly and intentionally relegated to a rather inferior position. However, indigenous knowledge has always been an important aspect of many societies and has been used for

quite a while to sustain human life and that of the environment in Africa, even before colonialism. From time immemorial, many African societies used indigenous knowledge to advance their needs and aspirations. This implies that indigenous knowledge has been quite enduring and dynamic in such a way that it has survived the test of time and continues to stand strong (see Mawere 2014:5). This is to say that women in this society under study (Bamenda) were not blank, as one might assume that due to the lack of formal education, they had little or nothing to offer, but on the contrary, they impacted the knowledge that was important for themselves and their families at the time. One of the differences might have been that while formal education introduced other subjects and topics that were not limited to the Bamenda community and needed formal procedures for one to take part in, informal education was characterised by teachings on the immediate environment and matters pertaining to culture. This could be one of the reasons why some scholars have said the introduction of pedagogy came along with Africans abandoning their immediate environment to study more about foreign affairs. As Nafukho, Amutabi & Otunga (2005:29) have it, the creative and innovative traditions in Africa have been masked by historical misrepresentation by outsiders, as well as concealed domestically and internationally for reasons of pedagogy and policy. They noted that from an early age, students in Africa learn about the major European inventions but will rarely learn about grassroots or higher-level inventions and innovations developed by either individuals, institutions, or communities within Africa. This therefore means that the system of education became predominant in society, and education was more from an outsider's perspective than that of the people (see Asimeng-Boahene & Mensah, 2018:2). For example, the European system of education at that time encouraged the idea of patriarchy, as women were trained more towards domestic affairs while men were educated, so that they could pick up jobs to pay their taxes too (see Tamale 2020). However, patriarchy has had and still has its own setbacks when it comes to the progress of women and how much they can be developed. Yet, fortunately or unfortunately, patriarchy is an integral part of many African societies. This is supported by Bruey (2021:63), who mentioned that patriarchy represents a significant hurdle to women's progress and development. She added that patriarchy, as a way of doing things, dominates in the areas of norms, customs, and values across many sub-Saharan African societies. It is deeply rooted in most African settings in such a way that it cannot be separated from their culture. Bruey therefore thinks that the system and structures of patriarchy have worked for quite a long time in favour of men who have benefitted strongly from having privileged positions. Therefore, many African cultures have an inherent higher status for men because society values men and boy children more than women and girl children.

Empirically, one of the advantages of formal education, which is also an advantage of globalisation, is the chance to compare with other societies to see what could be modified when need be. People keep comparing the past—the days of our great-grandparents—to the present society, claiming they were very happy and coped with whatever conditions. But the question is, how many other societies were they exposed to that could help them make a comparison? As a result of this, they had no choice but to go by the norms and pass the same ideas on to their children, especially by making their daughters know that they are responsible for all the success and failures in their homes; hence, they need to be extra careful with the decisions they make. Things are now different, as women are becoming more globalised and either questioning or ignoring some societal rules. Yet, this education has been there for a long time and is so deeply rooted that one won't expect it to be easily changed. Countries like Cameroon, for example, are still a patriarchal society (Atanga, 2010: 63), so it is difficult to completely wipe off what has been taught for quite a while. This is exactly why, no matter how women from these societies get educated, they still hold on strongly to many of these societal beliefs, which always make them feel like there is a consequence to almost everything a woman does—yet they do not see the same consequences for men. For example, during the interviews and observations, I realised that no matter how educated some women are (with many African women falling under this category too), they will hardly take it off their minds that 'it is more grievous and shameful for a woman to cheat compared to a man, and it comes with harsh consequences for women'. They also believe that being overeducated might be detrimental to a woman because she might not have a man of her standards. But education is a means of empowerment for a man. At the same time, they also believe that being less educated or not educated at all is one of the most terrible things that could happen to a woman, as most men these days will prefer women who can support them, at least morally, which comes with a level of education and intelligence, according to them. Yet, even if a man is not educated, so long as he is rich, he is an ideal man for a woman to settle with. Moreover, these women still bear in mind that being too financially independent as a woman might push men away from them, as it seems women's lives have been limited to having a man in their lives. On the other hand, they strongly believe that getting married these days without being financially independent might render you less important to a man, as you might have nothing to offer and will be too dependent on him. Most of these women mentioned above, whether educated or not, still believe that not having a man (boyfriend or husband) in your life is considered one of the biggest failures (see Bruey, 2021:84). Hence, you should try, no matter what it takes, to keep a man in your life.

With all these pressures mentioned above, many women have tended to mix being attached to a man with being loved. This is exactly why it is common for a woman to recount all the terrible treatments

she is getting from a man but still thinks she loves him or cannot do without him. This can be connected to the following case on Facebook: It is just one of those many cases that shows how some women have been made to believe that being married and staying married is the safest thing to do, no matter the condition in which you find yourself as a woman. See how a woman can sacrifice her daughter's wellbeing just to maintain her position as a married woman. This is a typical explanation of some of the experiences individuals have in their homes, which might directly or indirectly affect the way they react to other things in the outside world. According to the story, a young lady catches her husband sexually abusing their daughter twice, yet she feels like she is responsible for his actions. Apparently, the first time she caught her husband sexually abusing their 4-year-old daughter, he apologised and promised never to do it again. She accepted his apology because she was scared to leave her marriage and was also afraid that their friends and relatives would not believe her if she told them, so she resorted to staying quiet. Unfortunately, she still caught him the very next week doing the same thing to their daughter, but this time, he was rather angry at her and blamed her for causing it. At this point, she was caught between two terrible situations: either losing her marriage or staying in the marriage and exposing her daughter to her husband for another possible rape incident. In all of this, she feared losing her marriage, as she considered it very important for her.

The focus in the above case is not just the rape but also the fact that this lady finds it very difficult to leave a man who has been raping his own four-year-old daughter. She is so concerned about leaving a man she claims to love and the wellbeing of a helpless little girl living in danger in her own parent's home. She minimises the fact that her husband is not remorseful for his act but rather gives excuses for his act and is likely to do that repeatedly. His excuse is even in the form of blame, where his wife is being blamed for pushing him to sexually assault their own child at that age by not giving him what he wanted (sexual satisfaction). That simply means as long as she keeps refusing, he will keep getting pleasure from their daughter, and one cannot even tell if he will stop when she chooses or decides to do what he wants. Yet that is the least of her problems, as she feels so attached to her husband. How can we then connect this case to the preceding observations? It could be seen from two angles; the first point is that this lady's upbringing on the importance of getting married and ensuring staying married might have influenced her fears here, especially as one can clearly read her mentioning that she fears losing her marriage. The second point is from the angle of the abused baby girl, who will grow up with the trauma of being raped by her father and might end up either being used to abuse by men or becoming very bitter towards men (not a strange phenomenon as many women are accused these days of being bitter towards men—yet, one might not know the experiences they have had until they speak out). When the case was posted, most of the comments that followed opined that the man does not

deserve her; she needs to protect her daughter by leaving the man, but from what the activist who posted the story mentioned, she had proposed that to her, but she did not yield to the proposal. Below are different reactions from readers, expressing their feelings towards the lady's reaction and giving proposals or advice.

Commenter one:

The commenter analysed how risky it could be for the little girl to be left at home alone with her father. This is obvious because if he could abuse her while his wife was just within reach (at home), then imagine how much more he can do when he is alone with the little girl at home. According to the admin of the page, who doubles as the activist, she pointed these things out to the young lady, who was adamant about them because of how much she seemed to be attached to her husband.

Commenter two:

This one focused on the point that women are so focused on marriage that they would sacrifice anything for it, even their loved ones. She went ahead to advise that marriage is just a marriage union, but the little girl who was abused will have to live with the scar for the rest of her life. She questioned the mother for putting her marriage first and being afraid to lose it without considering the baby's life, as her abusive father might even intensify the abuse into something more dangerous. In her opinion, it is important to put our children's safety first before our marriages, as they might end up hating us for not protecting them when we have the chance to do so.

Commenter three:

In the third comment, the writer is of the opinion that the said lady's reaction is simply as a result of the brainwash she has had, which implies that marriage is the most needed thing in a woman's life. To her, this is the reason why some beautiful and educated women allow themselves to be used just to prove to the world that they have a man in their lives. It was obvious to her that the woman had clearly chosen her marriage over her child; otherwise, she would have left him the very first time it happened and reported the case to their family members.

It seems from cases like the one above that many people care more about what society will say or how they will be seen when faced with certain conditions than their wellbeing or that of their children. One of these ladies' reasons for sticking to a paedophile might not just be because she claims to be so

attached to her husband, but simply because she fears what society will say. From every indication, she was afraid of being helped because it could lead to her losing her marriage—this is because she even refused to disclose her location. It is difficult to comprehend how someone will come to seek help yet refuse to provide information about herself that will lead to her help. This implies that even the little girl at the age of four who is being forced to stay in that toxic environment with an abusive father cannot be helped, as the mother does not want to reveal any information that will help her.

Commenter four:

This one advised Bana Mervis[37] to put her daughter first, as any mother's first instinct should be to protect her daughter. She thought that Mervis should leave the marriage, as there is more to life than marriage, and she made it clear that the lady was married to a paedophile, and staying there would put her daughter's life in more danger. She finds the whole scenario wrong, as even the man could not play the role of a father protecting his child and could only advise the lady to run away.

Commenter five:

Moving to the next comment, the author thinks that this is how society has conditioned us to think as women. To her, people will surely judge her for leaving, blame the little girl for pushing the father to sexually assault her, or blame the wife for probably not showing him attention, and they will end up seeing nothing wrong with the man. She sees this as a cultural problem that should be addressed by women standing to fight together, as many women know what they would like to do but need support from others.

Commenter six and seven:

These two opined that what people will say should not matter, and she has to leave because her daughter's life is more important.

These are some of the incidents that give the impression that the world is no longer safe for the girl child, as most of the abuse cases we have come across are being committed against women or female children. On the other hand, one starts wondering: if society has conditioned women not to even freely talk when being abused, then what more of the men who have been conditioned to always be strong and made to understand that strong men do not cry or talk much? Hence, it is very possible that there

[37]pseudonym

are so many out there who have been abused too, yet do not have the courage to speak out, as they were conditioned to always be 'strong'—this could be an aside, yet a very important point to consider.

Commenter eight:

She thinks that the world is no longer a safe place for a girl child if a man can put down his pants to get sexual satisfaction from his own daughter, who is a minor. She even thinks the man might have been abusing the daughter for so long until the day his wife caught him. She concluded by saying that this action of his is psychologically killing the child, and as such, she needs to be helped as fast as possible.

One would think that most of these parents who cover up abuse within the family might think they are protecting the image of the family, but the fact is that their children might grow up to be very bitter individuals. These are some of the things that make us think that people do not learn from their past experiences or from what they hear or observe. Many people today are so bitter with secrets that it takes them so many years to reveal, and many of them are cases of abuse, having been traumatised for so long. We hear about these cases, we read about them, and we even give counsel. In worst-case scenarios, some of the readers and advisers are even victims of these circumstances, yet we fail to correct them when the opportunity comes. This woman might be looking just at the present situation now, not having an idea or ignoring how much her daughter will be traumatised when she grows to understand what happened to her and can tell her own story. The aforementioned point was my own analysis made regarding the post, as can also be seen in the screenshot below. I was keen on the child's future, as her mother might not yet understand the consequences of her decision today. It is rather unfortunate that we keep building a bitter society yet complain about the way society has fashioned us to think or behave; hence, we continue reproducing the same kind of society we complain about. Then one is left wondering: How then can we address or adjust the problem of some women always fighting against other women instead of standing for them? — when many of them who do that suffer from one trauma or the other (in regard to a bad treatment they got from a fellow woman).

Figure 18: Screenshot of my comment under the preceding case[38]

After looking at the above case, it is so obvious that home upbringing plays a big role in the lives of individuals and interferes so much in their daily decisions. For example, because I was made to understand that being single is tantamount to having bad behaviour, I try my utmost best to prove to the world that I am not a bad girl by ensuring that I get married at all costs. After getting married, I still have to work hard to stay married, no matter the situation, so that I can also prove to society and those watching me that I am good enough to maintain my marriage. This is part of the reason why participant observation in the family, which will be analysed below, was necessary; it was important to observe this firsthand in order to match the testimonies that people have been giving to reality. It was also observed during my research that sometimes just listening to people's testimonies during interviews might make one think they exaggerate. On the contrary, experience through participant observation has made me understand that many people rather do not give details of their actual conditions during interviews. What one gets to see on the ground is even deeper than they could explain to a third party.

6.2 Family Observation

The family that hosted me is based in Bamenda, Cameroon, and is very essential for this work, especially in the area of home upbringing. It is a family made up of nineteen (19) people (father, mother, eight kids, and nine grandchildren). At the time of the research, those present were the parents, four kids, and five grandchildren. My observation of the family was classified into different areas as follows:

[38] https://www.facebook.com/buumbamalamboofficialpage: Accessed on April 8th 2021

1) Education

The parents were both not formally educated to a high level (details about it will be given as we move ahead), and among all the children, just two were formally educated beyond the ordinary level, and all the grandchildren of school age were going to school, and the oldest was a university graduate. According to the mother, she only had the chance to complete her elementary education and never had anyone to further her education because her father could not afford it. Immediately after completing her primary school studies, she got married and started her own family. As for the father, he was so interested in going to school to at least know how to read and write, but unfortunately for him, his level of education was so limited due to a lack of finances. At an early age, he struggled to get some finances, with which he started sponsoring his education until he could no longer continue; then his uncle supported him in class seven (the then last class of primary schools in Cameroon), and then he finally got his First School Leaving Certificate (F.L.C.). When he eventually got married, he made a promise to himself to ensure that all his kids go to school, at least to a point where they would be able to read and write. He started with the first daughter, who went to school until her fourth year in secondary school, when she became pregnant and had to drop out of school for two years (as the father punished her to stay and take care of her child). After two years, she was sent back to school by her uncle but dropped out again after her first attempt to write the General Certificate of Education (GCE) was not successful. Since then, to date, she has been into business in order to be able to support her children's education. As for his second child, he educated him through the secondary level of technical education, and then he could no longer continue. At that point, he got him registered as an apprentice to learn electronics out of school, which he did and later opened his own workshop, until a few years ago (as of the time of this research), when he got a job offer and started working for the Cameroon Baptist Convention. The third child equally went to school until he got to the level of Form 2 in secondary school and voluntarily dropped out of school because he was not interested in studying. The father could afford to sponsor his fourth daughter just until she got her F.L.C., and then she later joined her uncle, who trained her as a tailor. As for the fifth son, he was able to go to school until he got his Advanced Level Certificate. The sixth child could only be sponsored until F.L.C. His seventh child had the opportunity to get to the level of a Teachers' Training College with the support of her father, uncle, brother, and herself. For the last daughter, according to the father, she came at the point when the finances were really limited, and she could also be sponsored only until the level of F.L.C.

Now, according to the custom of the Babanki people, which is the village of this family, a child born out of wedlock is considered the child of the lady's father, except in some cases when the man responsible for the pregnancy takes full responsibility or has a cordial relationship with the lady's

family. Even with that, there are some rituals that must be conducted on the day of their marriage ceremony before the child or children fully become his. Due to this reason, the father decided to take full responsibility for his first daughter's first child. Partly because he never knew who was responsible for the pregnancy and also because, traditionally, the child belongs to him. The first granddaughter therefore bears his name and is considered his last child. He also put in some effort to see that she got her education, especially in primary school, and her [granddaughter] mother had also been of great support until she got her first degree at the university. As for the other grandchildren, he only supported them when he could, and their respective mothers or fathers played important roles in sponsoring them too. In terms of education, his family had been struggling with the little they had, while getting support occasionally from some relatives. According to 'Pa' (as he was fondly called), meaning papa, even though many people believed in the past that formal education should be limited to male children, he saw things differently as he believed that everyone, male or female, deserved to have at least a certain level of basic education. That has been the basis of his household, as he never believed in treating children according to gender lines, which, according to him, is one of the main reasons why his family is united, and they all respect each other for who they are. With this mindset, his children were free to make their own choices and were never forced to do anything against their will.

2) Marriage

One of the main areas, which is considered very important in Bamenda culture, is marriage. Marriage is something considered sacred and a big blessing, such that when a lady is not married, people start making assumptions like either she does not have a good character, comes from a bad family, or has spiritual issues. Sometimes she might even be made to feel ugly, giving her the impression that you cannot be beautiful yet not married. In Ghana, for example, as Spence (2007) mentioned in her work, women are placed in particular roles, among which is taking care of the home. In this regard, women who do not satisfy gender stereotypes, for example, those unable to have children, those who don't get married, or widows, become particularly vulnerable to witchcraft accusations. This, to her, is just another way to keep women in these stereotyped roles while making them feel guilty for their own predicaments (see Spence 2017:71). In the home where I lived, there were four daughters who were all of marriageable age, but none of them were married.

Contrary to what society will expect, Pa did not find this an issue because he believed marriage is not supposed to be forced; if it does not come your way, then it was not meant to be. He cannot push his daughters to get into something with which they won't feel comfortable, just because of what people will say. All his daughters, except one, have at least two children each, and these are the grandchildren

he is considering today, like his children, and not just grandchildren. His home is open for all his children to come in at any time, no matter how small, and he will never force his daughters to settle with someone just because they got pregnant for that person. Pa recounted that among all his daughters, he knew they all wished to get married, but only one showed so much effort and tried hard. It seems marriage was not meant for her because of the numerous disappointments she had experienced. All he could do was encourage them and not push them.

Another question in mind was, with all these grown-up children at home, who takes care of the basic needs of the home? I therefore realised that in terms of taking care of the house, especially when it comes to feeding, it is the mother's responsibility as she feeds the family from the petty business she does. According to the father, when he finally went on retirement, his retirement benefits could not take care of his health and feed the family, so his wife took over and has been doing so for a very long time now. During my stay with the family, I observed a family where everyone has equal chances of expressing themselves, a good level of interaction at home, and, to an extent, some level of respect for everyone's space. Since the aim of the research and family of choice was to observe how families relate at home, which could be the possible reasons for their actions in society, the family seemed to be the best choice considering the number of women who were living under the same roof with very limited space. It was a house with three bedrooms and a parlour for eleven people at the time, not forgetting the fact that more than seven other family members were out and could visit at any time for the holidays. Among the eleven people living in the house, six (excluding the mother) were women at least eighteen years old. It was therefore interesting to observe how these siblings and their daughters (that is, Pa's children and grandchildren) live in a very limited space yet show a level of unity and contentment. I barely got complaints about their living conditions and rather heard them say on different occasions that a house is never too small for people to share. Four of these women shared a single, small room yet respected their space. Everyone at home had their own different businesses they were involved in, so they will leave the house every day and return in the evening when the actual family bonding time takes place. From my observations made during this research, formal education has always been one of the many reasons why disparities are created, as the uneducated ones might always feel inferior while the educated ones feel superior (regarding the community of research). In many cases, this usually leads to a lot of disagreements or differences in opinions that sometimes even lead to many people being at loggerheads. On the contrary, I noticed this was not the case with this family, despite the different levels of their education. They ranged from those who had very limited education, as mentioned above, to those who were more advanced in their education. Even among the less educated ones, some had a higher level of understanding, something that could be seen clearly in

their communication and interaction skills, yet none of them ever used education as a basis to ridicule the others, as has been observed in some gatherings where the educated ones could easily be picked out following the interactions (see Warnock, 1990:84). Their main language of communication at home was Pidgin, a language that cuts across every level and gives everyone the opportunity to be able to communicate freely. During an interview session with the family, the mother was so excited to say that her relationship with her children, especially her daughters and granddaughters, is one of the best she can boast about. Even though she had a very basic education, she did not see any need for unnecessary disagreements with her children, even though most of them are more advanced in education than her. She freely talks, makes mistakes, and has never felt restricted from saying anything in her house just because she is not good at the language. On the contrary, because of the change in times, her younger grandchildren, whether going to school or not, communicate more in the English language, contrary to the past, when her children used Pidgin at home as their main language. These days, most parents prefer their children learn English as their first language and can later learn Pidgin when they get older. This has pushed her to occasionally speak in English to her grandchildren, and it is sometimes fun as her children and grandchildren make fun of some of the mistakes she makes. To her, they do not ridicule her but simply find some of the things she says funny, which she also finds funny since she knows she was never equipped for that, and she is only trying her best to communicate like others. Each time she makes some of these statements, it gives room for some laughter at home, while some correct her, still in a funny manner, or they simply laugh, ignore, and move on. This gives them an opportunity to have more fun together as a family, as they all laugh hard at these mistakes and do not make any big deal out of them. It is also an important moment for them, as they use these moments to even bond more, and everyone shows their own abilities. I took part in some of these moments, where I observed that the mother was usually the scapegoat of this fun time. Even some of those laughing at her and giving some examples of her grammatical mistakes were equally making serious mistakes in the process, but they felt some level of confidence that they were better than their mother. Maybe because they had more chances of exposure to the English language. Some of the words they found funny (which was also an opportunity used for a better time together) included memories of their mother calling jewelry ‘injuries’, and this brought a lot of laughter even from her part. Pa was recounting a day his wife was telling him ‘Geography’ had been done on the head of one of their relatives, and he could not comprehend how geography could be done on someone’s head. It was not until after serious thinking and actions from his wife that he understood that she meant echography instead of geography. On one occasion, during those days she had decided to speak in English to her grandchildren, she could be heard telling one of them, “Give papa’s keyses,” and when she was

questioned why ‘keyses’, her response was that it’s because there are many, and when something is more than one, you have to add an ‘s’. According to one of the daughters, she could not hold herself one day when her mother kept insisting that she should test her sister. When she tried asking, why test her? She kept insisting that it was better to ‘test’ her since she was not picking up her calls; that is when she understood she meant to say text. They all laughed at the fact that ‘mami’ (as mother in Bamenda is fondly called) usually ‘sells’ (literally means disgrace) them to neighbours each time she wants to bathe the grandchildren, as she will shout on top of her voice, “Boy(s) come and bef (bathe).” One evening, when we were all having fun on this topic and giving some of the examples, Pa (father) mentioned that Mami had started these mistakes long ago, especially when she just came from the village and used to try to translate everything directly from their local language, Babanki, to English. At one point, she was told in the local language that someone is suffering from catarrh, and since catarrh, in Babanki, is called ‘brerh’, which also sounds like the word dog when translated to Babanki, she translated it to another person as ‘she has a dog in the head’.

In a comic way, it was analysed that how will Mami even improve when a neighbour, who is her close friend, is not even better? If the neighbour can ask the children to ‘intivate’ her credit instead of ‘activate’, then who is going to help the other? This is one of the points that got me to reflect on how much someone’s company can influence him or her. In other words, even if you are not educated and you get yourself associated with educated people or get yourself more exposed, your level of understanding will still be better than that of someone who never wants to be associated with people above their levels of education. This explains why there are many women who, though not educated, have gained so much experience and can express themselves in better ways. But the question is: how many women can have the courage to do so? This is one of the reasons for this research—as we get deeper into understanding how formal education or the lack of it promotes the marginalisation of women. Coming back to the examples concerning Mami’s grammatical errors, it was further analysed that despite Mami’s drinking habit, she still calls alcohol ‘ocohol’, and a bottle as ‘botrel’—this was connected to her drinking habit because, according to them, she had been referring to those words long enough to have known better. On other points, the children said they could not imagine that for the length of time that their mother had owned a phone, she still could not place a call except with the help of her grandchildren, and she did not even know how to end a phone call. She then asked her children how they expected anything contrary from her when she never had the opportunity to get educated like them. When this was mentioned, the children and grandchildren asked Pa why he could not continue sponsoring the wife after they got married, and in a very carefree and nonchalant way, his response was:

"Ah be get persen for sponsor me for skol before na some another person ah for sponsor?

(Did I have someone to sponsor me? Talk less about me sponsoring another person)"?

Looking at language from another perspective, the children were always concerned about how their mother reacted to things at home, and they often told her to stop asking too many questions, even when not necessary. It did not stop her from asking questions whenever she wanted to. But it seems as if she was always ready for the children's reaction, as it sometimes came unanimously, and the most she could do was to smile and stay quiet. Moreover, more attention was paid to what she did, while very little attention was paid to their father and grandfather, who in most cases joined the children to correct, laugh, or mimic their mother. On one occasion, the grandchildren were so concerned about their grandmother's eating habit and expressed it like this:

"Mami, why are you eating like that? Look at the way Pa is eating; look at the way Na (referring to me) and Char are eating, though they are eating with their hands like you; their fingers are very clean; and they eat with style. On your part, you are just using all your fingers to eat, and your whole plate is messed up. Don't you know that your eating habit says a lot about you? Can you imagine sitting among outsiders and eating like that? Please, Mami, try to adjust and eat like a civilised woman."

What I found amazing was the fact that she did not even offer a word and continued eating just like before without even showing any iota of anger for being corrected like that—something that still indicated the issue of women silencing, where some women have been brought up to know that they should be strong enough to take bashing from every angle and use silence as their major tool. Hence, inasmuch as the above scenario could be interpreted as her not being bothered by what her children say, it does not cancel the fact that it is another form of women silencing. In the process of correcting his wife, Pa boasted of his ability to speak in good English, even though he too only ended at the primary school level. He expressed how good he is at communicating with others, and sometimes, many people even think he has reached an advanced level of education. Talking to Mami during an interview (April 14th, 2020), I was interested to know how she also relates with friends, neighbours, or meeting members, as she belongs to some meetings. According to her, she does not have too many friends and hardly even has time to sit with her neighbours as she goes to her business place very early in the morning. and comes back late at night. She only has time on Sundays to spend with her children and grandchildren and to attend a few meetings. Whenever she has the opportunity to spend time with neighbours or attend meetings, she only minds her business and leaves when the time comes. She hardly indulges in anything that will cause her any problems and rarely talks, except when necessary. From her response here and following some of the observations I made, one could tell she does not

have the self-confidence to interact with people outside her family circle, and even when she is there, like on some of the occasions I attended with her, she doesn't even talk much, if at all she talks. Even during this interview with her, it was obvious that she did not want to talk much or felt like she did not have much to say, such that her husband kept interrupting to help her answer some questions, of which she did not find any problem with the interruption. It could be clearly observed that she has a different character when at home with her kids from when she is out there in the midst of other people, whether they are people close to her or not. In one of my chats with one of their neighbours, she was insisting that Mami's problem was not just the fact that she did not go to school. According to her, there are many mothers, including her own mother, who did not even attend primary school, unlike Mami (who even completed her basic education), but who reason far better than Mami. The point she tried to make through gossip was that being able to reason in a better way is not limited to those who are educated, because mothers also had some home training that could guide them in so many ways. She went as far as wondering how possible it could be for someone like Mami to have gone to school up to that level, but she was very dormant in the quarter and always behaved as if she needed to be taught everything. Emphasising her points, she recounted a scenario as below:

"Can you imagine that despite the fact that she completed her elementary level of education, she could not recognise her own certificate some years later, such that she took her F.L.C. and burnt it without knowing what it was? As if that were not enough, she stayed at home for nine months with her daughter without knowing that she was pregnant, even to the point where she was in labour. 'Mami' was running all over the place looking for medication when a neighbour came in and discovered she was in labour."

According to her, if someone can be that careless about her own things, then what doctrine will she pass on to her own children? The discussion continued to a point where so many things were said about the children that, in the paragraphs ahead, we will see how they react to gossip as such.

That notwithstanding, I observed a family with high family bonding, as everyone has rights to everything. Their relationship with their parents is so unique, and there is a level of trust among themselves. When talking to the father, he mentioned in so many instances that he does not differentiate between his children and his grandchildren. To him, they should be treated equally, and it could be clearly seen from the way they interacted with each other. The grandchildren had grown to see their mothers as their sisters and their grandmother as their mother. It is important to note that during this time I spent with the family, and even through observation from afar, there was no spirit of rivalry observed between the children and their mothers—they rather displayed a spirit of love, and they were

good at defending one another. Considering how much neighbours can gossip, I wanted to know from this family how they could cope with gossip situations like that and how their family bonding was not affected by what they said. According to the family, despite the fact that people must always talk, even about things they know nothing about, if your neighbours say so many things about you which are real, then you must have given them the information. For that reason, their family matters stay within them, and they don't discuss family matters with friends, no matter how they are being provoked to do so. This therefore limits what their neighbours could say, and they could only gossip based on assumptions and not facts. They mentioned that some of these gossips had reached them but meant nothing to them because most of what they heard did not affect them in any way. They were brought up to put more energy into what concerned their family and to give little relevance to gossip, and this has been the best way for them so far.

When it comes to house chores, there is an automatic division of labour that is respected by everyone involved without complaining. Housework is one of the important aspects of home training that also brings up the argument about parents assigning housework following gender lines. Female children are usually trained to be kitchen-orientated, while male children might help in cleaning the house if at all they do it (see Arbache, Kolev & Filipiak, 2010:11, Adeagbo, 2018:43). But I observed in this home that house chores are not assigned, but the children just find themselves practicing division of labour, and a particular duty automatically becomes someone's own after being performed for a long time. I therefore understood that the boys in the house might not be taking part in house chores, not because they were brought up with the mentality that men do not have to do chores, but rather because the house had always been populated with many grandchildren being able to do most of the work and the guys being able to escape from it. Contrary to this case, there are situations where individuals cannot share the same space with their siblings after attaining a certain age because they cannot successfully share responsibilities without quarrels. On this, a friend once told me her story about moving into their family compound with her children. To her, she will never make the mistake she made some years ago: to pack into her father's house with her children with the aim of saving some money. Her experience was terrible because every responsibility in the house was pushed on her, and she found herself taking care of her children and the whole family. Every other person in the house seemed to have relaxed while looking up to her for survival, and on the days when she could not afford it, her children would sleep without having something to eat. She could barely make enough money to survive, talking less about taking care of the whole family. This attitude of the other family members really drained her until she finally decided to pack out. To date, she still has the impression that most of her siblings still expect her to support them, even though they also have their own sources of income.

This situation is quite different from that of the family that hosted me, as it seems everyone at home was responsible for their personal needs. I realised that individuals bought their needs like bath soap, toiletries, and other basic needs, but everyone depended on the mother (Mami) for feeding. They all had at least a small business to take care of their needs and take care of their kids from their incomes. In this case, no one depended on another person to provide for all; hence, I could not get the kind of complaints I got from the aforementioned story. Everyone had his or her own private corner where they kept their personal stuff, and they all respected these boundaries such that you could not get any arguments about trespassing or someone accusing the other of taking what belonged to another person.

Coming back to the children, an interview with them (20 April 2020) further explained some points that were observed as one of the daughters reiterated the fact that after realising she could not go to school due to lack of finance, she concentrated on other things that could give her some income, and that is how she had been coping. At one point, she decided to go back to school because she had always loved to be educated. But she still could not take it to the end because she could not afford to meet up and because she felt she was being mocked each time she went to class. Talking about being mocked, she said that, after registering in an adult school, or what is called an evening school in Cameroon, she was placed in a class where most of the people had already studied to a higher level than her. She could not concentrate because some of the reactions of these classmates made her feel like she was backward and might never make it. She then finally gave up when she could no longer take the mockery. One could deduce that she had issues with her self-esteem, and she felt like keeping the company of those who were more educated than herself was detrimental to her mental health. Talking about friends, she said she does not have any close friends, does not belong to any meetings, and spends time with her family if she is not in the market doing her business. She said she is the opposite of her older sister, who has so many friends and is always attending functions with her friends. For her, she believes it can be difficult to find a friend who is on the same level as her, and she prefers to avoid some of the trouble and gossip that comes with keeping friends around. On relationship matters, she said she has three children, with each one having his or her own father. One child is presently with the father; another one is living with a family friend; and one is living with her in their family compound. Talking about her relationship life, she would have loved to get married but had never been lucky with the men that came her way. She recounted one of her relationships, which was almost leading to marriage as they were already cohabiting. But the relationship was destroyed by the man's family members. The man's mother and sisters hated her so much that everything about her irritated them, not leaving out the fact that the man found himself in a big mess and could not take care of anything. Putting all these challenges together, she could no longer bear it, so she decided to move out. At that time, she was

already pregnant for him, but the hatred from his family grew even stronger, even though they abandoned their son and brother when he was in prison, and she was the only one who stood by him. Even her baby was rejected and was only accepted when she gave up on the relationship and decided to hand over the child to the man and his family.

Apart from their relationship among themselves, I took into consideration how much influence society can also have on their home. Therefore, it was important to know how the members of this family interacted with friends and how much influence their interaction could have on their home. During this interview with the children and grandchildren, the grandchildren mentioned that they do have some friends and classmates that they interact with. But they emphasised the fact that they do not allow themselves to be influenced by what is said to them or about them. On the contrary, they let their home training influence their relationship with their friends and thought of what they shared about their family with them. This, according to them, has made the friends respect their boundaries in terms of what they say concerning their family because they do not have enough information about their family, and whatever their friends or whoever has something to say about them can only be said as gossip and stays behind them.

Regarding how they (grandchildren) relate to their mothers, they found their relationship with their mothers very interesting, as they relate to them like sisters and not even like their parents. Their mothers are very jovial with them and, in many cases, even play with them when they are free. They can only differ with their mothers because they come from different generations, and they will always remind their parents that whatever was done in the past should stay in the past and that they are in modern days now where things are done differently (and the good thing is, most of the time, this information is passed on jokingly). Apart from that, they do not at any time feel like they are better off than their mothers because they have gotten a more formal education. On the contrary, they are open to learning from their mothers, who sometimes reason even better than them, despite the disparity in their levels of education. Their interaction with their mothers does not only end at home, as they also communicate on Facebook without any fear of being checked or controlled. When I talk about being checked, I mean a situation where a mother might have to monitor the activities of her children to be informed about their every move on social media. For example, there was this young lady who took part in one of the workshops I organised in Bamenda and talked about her relationship with her mother in connection to social media. According to her, the last thing she will do is be friends with her mother on Facebook, and when I tried finding out the reason, she said because she feels like her mother will become a ‘monitoring spirit’. She needs to freely interact on Facebook without having the feeling of being monitored. But if she is friends with her mother, she will want to follow up on everything she

does and might even try to control her, so it is better she avoids it. When she said this, another lady confirmed that she is facing the consequences of accepting her mother's friend request on Facebook and only knew the consequences when her mother asked her one day, "What are you always doing on Facebook? Each time I come online, I see your comments and always read through them." She felt like unfriending the mother so she could feel free to do whatever she wanted and react to posts without being questioned. This is contrary to the children's opinion in the above case, where the children said they have no problem being friends with their mothers on Facebook and do interact with them in comment sections. They even find it interesting when their mothers attack them for only liking their pictures on Facebook and not commenting on them. They even go as far as telling them that each time they see their photos, they should make comments like "sweet mother" and "you look beautiful." During those moments, it gives them another opportunity to talk and laugh about social matters, which keeps increasing their bond. Not to wonder how this could help; it is obvious that a better relationship with one's mother gives room for better things to be achieved. Growing up with their mothers and bonding like this gives them better options and ways to interact with their siblings at home. This could only mean that their mothers do not directly or indirectly force them to stay in their shells by creating an unnecessary distance between them, like in some cases I came across while in the field.

Talking about how outsiders and neighbours see this family, it is worth noting that many outsiders do not find so many things in this family normal, and it was of greater advantage to stay with them to witness these things firsthand. Even while staying there, I had a few people who tried to know how this family relates at home. Many people wanted to know why a woman over forty, even if not married, would still be staying in her father's house with her own children. Someone said:

"I honestly do not find it normal that Mabel[39] is still in their house after having all her kids under her father's roof. Why can't she go get an apartment of her own so she can be independent and even support the parents? How can a woman as old as that be sharing a very small space with children?"

Another one came asking,

"Does it mean neither Mabel nor any of her sisters have ever been married before?"

While others made comments like:

[39]pseudonym

"People are actually wondering if this could be a curse or not. It is really strange that out of a family of eight children, with the youngest being about twenty-nine years old (as of the time of the research), only one person is married."

Getting some of these questions and complaints from the neighbours and other observers, even as a stranger in that home, I could only imagine what the actual family members were going through, though they mentioned in many instances not caring about it. The above questions only re-emphasised the ideology society has on marriage, where every woman is supposed to own a husband or leave the parents' house at a certain age. This ideology is also common in many other societies in Cameroon; it becomes a stigma when a lady is single at that expected age, to the extent that some women would even prefer to get married and divorce than stay single all their lives. It is even a common phenomenon to refer to a single man just as "single" and to a single lady as a "prostitute" (see Biri, 2020:219, Kammoun, 2011:203, Bruey, 2021). With all these issues going on in their neighbourhood and society, I understood that the father's love for his children had given them the strength to face what society had in store for them, and this saved them from making some mistakes they would have regretted, especially in terms of marriage. On the other hand, this home training and circumstances made it difficult for some of them to interact with the outside world, and low self-esteem is one of the biggest setbacks. It was observed that despite the good relationships they build at home, little or nothing was said about building their self-esteem. One would have expected teachings like these to come either from school, home, or even from peers. But it seems as if they had some limitations, as most of them only had very basic education (which highly influences the way they see themselves). Their mother, who would have been one of the key people at home to teach them these values, was and is rather struggling with her own self-esteem, making it difficult for her to pass on what she does not have. This makes some of them very timid and pulls them back from others, giving them little or no chance to learn from their peers. It occurred to me that education influenced this to a greater extent, because the grandchildren who had better opportunities for education seemed not to suffer from this lack of self-esteem as much as their parents. They could freely interact, and from their discussions, you could tell they had a good level of confidence when dealing with friends. It could also be observed in the way the eldest daughter communicated, as she had a good level of confidence too, and one could easily tell that even though she dropped out of school at one point, her level of education still played a great role in the way she carries herself today. Although her father always accused her of making friends only with women who behave and think like her, women who cannot help her improve in any way, she still pushes her way to get involved in so many activities. She told me that whenever she has any opportunity to get out of the house, she does not waste it because she likes to meet new people and

make new experiences. Even in church, she takes part in women's groups, as well as in other church activities, because she believes it will make her improve. It is because of her willingness to be involved in different activities that one of the neighbours once said,

"From the way Mabel communicates, you can tell she is so intelligent and would have been in a better position if she had completed her education. On the other hand, I think she has so much confidence that she talks a lot, even with people who are far more educated, and ends up embarrassing herself on so many occasions."

It was now questionable to me whether self-confidence was meant to be something positive or negative. I would have expected this neighbour to applaud her for having that level of self-confidence despite her environment, yet it seems she would have preferred that she talk less when she is with people. This is not a completely strange ideology, as during my talks with people, I kept getting the impression from them that people with little or no formal education should be given less chance to talk or should avoid talking much in public. The neighbour's opinion about Mabel's communicative level brings to my mind, one of the ladies I interviewed, who recounted that,

"I dropped out of school just after completing my primary education because my parents could not sponsor me further. I was sent by my father to a very far city to go and work as a housekeeper, of which I am glad for the good and bad experiences I had. When I later returned to Bamenda, I decided to join so many youth groups and interact with many people because I knew how helpful it could be for me. One thing I realised is that I had very low self-esteem and felt really bad each time I said something among people, especially in English when some of them laughed at me. It weighed me down; I was always emotionally beaten and was almost giving up, but I will not minimise how much it made me strong, as I felt really challenged. I knew I could read, write, and speak like others, but my only limitation was my financial situation. I was self-employed and had a lot of people depending on me, but still, I made up my mind and went back to school, and with the support of some family members, I succeeded in getting my ordinary and advanced level certificates" (interview 20th January 2019).

Her testimony made me understand that though society might sometimes weigh us down, it contributes highly to some of the goals we achieve when we start interacting with others and allowing ourselves to be challenged. People might always have an opinion about our communication styles, but that willingness to be challenged plays a big role here, as seen in the above case.

Coming to the aspect of respect, it is worth mentioning that it is such a big deal as it seems to be one of those topics addressed in so many homes. This is why some writers have it that most African

traditions are so keen on respect for elders (see Daramola, 2018), and this respect could also be connected to the company of friends we keep. When we connect with respect to the company of friends one keeps, it is because it is very normal for parents to decide who their children interact with, especially when they are still very young, and their parents advise them on the friends to keep as they get older. Parents are usually so concerned about their children's friends as they believe that one's friends are of great influence on them—this also means there is a strong belief in the Bible verse that says, 'Bad company corrupts good character' (1st Corinthians 15:33), especially for Christians. It is worth noting that these checks on friends seem to last longer for girl children than for boys, as more attention and care is given to a girl child, always avoiding situations where they will jeopardise their future. This aspect was also discussed in my unpublished master thesis, where reports from high school children showed that the girls were controlled more both at home and in school in contrast to their male counterparts (Bih 2017). One of the reasons for this overprotectiveness of girl children could be because society has made it in such a way that women suffer more from the consequences of what society considers moral decadence. For example, in Bamenda, when a girl gets pregnant out of wedlock while schooling, she is sent out of school by the school authorities and sometimes even punished by her parents to stop schooling. As if that is not enough, she faces the stigma of schoolgirl pregnancy while the boy comfortably continues his schooling (National Research Council and Committee on Population 2005:537). Apart from that, she automatically reduces her chances of getting married, while a man can have about four kids with different women but face little or no problems when it comes to getting married. In the same way, Bruey (2021:89) pointed out that wedlock children are also gender-differentiated in all aspects of their social and cultural lives in the Mbu community in Cameroon. Discriminatory practices, according to her, start from the conception of pregnancy, where the girl is being blamed for being careless. Blaming takes different forms of punishment placed on the girl as she becomes a victim of an unwed and unwanted pregnancy. When this even happens at her young age, in most cases, she loses the chance of continuing her education, either because she will be dismissed from school or she will have to withdraw due to shaming from her schoolmates. On the other hand, the boy continues his schooling or learning a trade without any shame, deterrence, or hindrance. Bruey also mentions that many women and girls have had setbacks caused by out-of-wedlock pregnancies in this community. This is because the period lost while taking care of the baby creates a big gap in the girl's life, a time that would have been used to move forward or achieve other things. In worst case scenarios, even some families deny giving these girls a second chance to go back to school out of anger and disappointment. In other situations, they are even sent out of their parents' homes, for bringing shame to the family, which further causes more mess and frustration in their lives. To avoid these pressures,

parents tend to become so hard on their daughters, thereby indirectly fostering society's discriminatory nature in handling social matters like these ones. This has highly influenced the control parents have over their children's relationships, especially when they reach an age considered ready for dating. A boy at the age of eighteen will be considered mature enough, while a girl at that same age will be shamed and considered 'spoiled' if found with a boyfriend (see Archer, Hollingworth & Mendick 2010:73). It is therefore not common practice for children to bring home their boyfriends or girlfriends, as it is not even accepted by many parents. Many parents have admitted knowing that their children had boyfriends or girlfriends only when they came back home pregnant or when someone came to them reporting that their son got her pregnant. Many children fear the reaction of their parents if they come home with a partner to introduce them, except when they are already coming for marriage, and as a result, they always prefer to hide this from home and have meeting points in other areas where their families, especially parents, will have no idea. It is also believed that keeping your boyfriend or other friends away from your parents is seen as a sign of respect; hence, this is how respect for elders could be connected to the friends you keep and how much regard you have for your parents' choices of friends you should keep.

Now, coming back to the home, something contrary was observed in this family, as there was a certain level of freedom. I was caught between connecting this with modern times or attributing it to the father's openness with his kids. This confusion was because I was told the father only saw most of the fathers of his grandchildren when they were born, as they started coming home to see their children. On the other hand, it seems the father would not have had an issue even if these men were brought home to be introduced, as per what was observed during my stay with the family. The house was open to everyone; I even learnt the youngest daughter's boyfriend and father to her kids had even moved in at one point and was staying with the family, something many neighbours found abnormal and talked about for a long time. It is believed in many traditions in Bamenda that a woman is supposed to move into the house of a man and not the other way around; talk less about a boyfriend moving into his girlfriend's family compound. This is also one of the reasons why women are sometimes excluded from property inheritance, as they will 'obviously' one day leave their parents' house to their husband's house (see Timmoneri, 2019.). During my stay there, two of the daughters had their boyfriends visiting at any time, and they were even very free to move in and out of the house like family members and discuss with the father of the house freely. One of the daughters told me she had already made the boyfriend understand that she couldn't get married to him because he was jobless and lazy, and she had also made her father aware of it; hence, the father is neither expecting nor pushing her to do it. Yet he always received this boyfriend like a member of the family and would discuss it with him like any

of his sons. This is contrary to so many cases where, just to show the world that his daughters can get married too and even benefit from the bride price that should be paid, the father would have been pushing the daughter to accept this suitor against her wish. Even on her part, if she were to go by the societal norms, where age and single motherhood are a 'determinant' for marriage, she would have just rushed into getting married to this said boyfriend, considering the fact that she was approaching forty and a single mother of three children. Not caring much about that and choosing to still take her time, despite the societal pressure, was, for me, a sign that their upbringing in a relaxed atmosphere had given them a strong standing.

When I keep talking about family and societal pressure, this is because it has played a very big role in the lives of so many people I observed—even individuals who were just having a casual discussion with me at a time when my research was not even at play. For instance, in a discussion with one lady more than a decade ago, she made me understand how much effect parents' pressure might have on their children's future. According to her story, some years ago, she was dating a man who was very abusive, both verbally and physically. When this man asked for her hand in marriage, she did not want to accept to marry him because she knew the marriage would not work. When her mother learnt of this, she convinced her to get married to him, reminding her that she is getting old and might not find a man if she gets older. She finally gave in to her mother's pressure and advice and got married to this man, and unfortunately, the marriage was less than seven months old when she separated from this man. She felt like if her mother had given her the time to make a better choice, she would not have fallen for this. But her mother was more concerned about what society would say or think if she turned down this proposal and later remained single. The issue of getting married late or not getting married at all is therefore not taken lightly, such that when any woman faces this situation, either society concludes that it is because of her bad attitude or because she has been bewitched. This is also seen in the Mbu community in Cameroon, where single ladies are given derogatory terms like 'kware', which means 'prostitute', as it is considered their fault for not being married (Bruey 2021:84). Talking about witchcraft, I realised during my stay with this family, through discussions with some extended family members and friends of the family, that that was what many people were assuming. Since it was difficult for them to comprehend the fact that in a certain family, none of the women were married or had even been in relationships that could be considered serious or lasted long, they resorted to attributing the situation to witchcraft. On one occasion, an extended family member of this family told me that she had learnt long ago that the father and grandfather of that home had been cursed many years ago by a family member. The reason for this was because, so many years ago, the father was living with the daughter of one of his cousins in his house, and when her suitor came, he gave her out

for marriage and collected her bride price without the knowledge of the cousin's parents. As a result, the girl's mother, who was very disappointed with the situation, cursed him and said that none of his (i.e., Pa's) daughters will ever get married. When we take the aforementioned into consideration, we could come to the realisation that the influence of witchcraft and spirit possession in Cameroon is something that cannot be ignored. Ter Haar (1992:117) noted that many believe that there is evil in the world, and it can manifest itself in the form of spirits taking control of the body and mind of a human being. Such beliefs, according to Ter Harr, are common in Africa and even among non-Africans. Therefore, belief in the possibility of possession by spirits, considered good or bad, is commonplace in many societies. In the case of this family, it is not different, as witchcraft seems to have had a great influence on the family as suggested by the people who gossiped about this, and this is exactly why it was such a call for concern for this extended family member. To confirm what the other family member said in relation to the curse and the situation of the children at home, another close family friend contacted me, telling me she had just discovered something shocking about the family. She lives with one of the granddaughters of this family in a different city, and according to her, one day during one of their intensive prayer sessions, the young girl started manifesting like she was possessed by a spirit. At one point, a spirit started talking through her and promised to destroy her family, and according to the spirit, her grandfather had crossed territory he was not supposed to cross; hence, his whole family would suffer the consequences. None of his daughters or granddaughters will ever get married; they will keep having children out of wedlock, while their own children will also grow to follow the same trend. As a family friend, she was concerned about the family situation and wanted to help by getting them connected to her pastor, who could pray and break the curses. To her, she thought it was a sensitive issue that needed to be handled with care, which is why she was taking it slowly. Firstly, she encouraged them to attend a prayer session organised by her pastor in Bamenda, where the family is based. But she expressed her disappointment about the fact that none of the people she invited took the situation seriously, as they did not even show up. When she even later tried to convince the eldest (Mabel) to make an appointment with this pastor for a deliverance session, she did not deem it necessary, and her only concern raised was that she did not want a pastor who would preach to her and tell her to stop drinking alcohol. This got her really thinking, as she also considered it ignorance and was also wondering if it is the same spirit that has made them blindfolded to the fact that they need help. According to her, she would have rather expected Mabel to be the one going around seeking help from men of God to deliver her family from whatever bondage they were in. For sure, it is common practice to see women in this community moving from one church to another depending on how satisfied they are, looking for solutions to their marital problems, and mostly in terms of marital delay

or barrenness. It is therefore common practice to see women rushing to any place that is considered a place of worship and healing, as they believe they will get a solution to their problem. One thing about this is that it seems not to be limited to Cameroon or Bamenda, as one reads similar stories in other parts of Africa. For example, Ori-Oki, which is a Yoruba word for mountain or hill, is found in south-western Nigeria. It is of great importance to the history, political development, and socio-economic life of the people. It is an open place of worship that is open to everyone, irrespective of their religious background or denominational affiliation. A lot of people attend Ori-Oki prayer mountain for solutions to their problems like sickness, barrenness, and drug addiction, just to name a few (Yaovi, Nwosu, Alamu, Odeh & Mohammed, 2018). With this common practice, one will therefore expect that any woman who has attained a certain age yet is not married should rather rush to places like this. Yet Mable's case was different, which is what the concerned family friend (Liza) could not understand. When she said all these things, it also got me wondering if that could be the reason for their calmness amid a situation like this. Despite how one wants to pretend about it, despite how one wants to ignore what people say or think, despite the interviews conducted and the observations made, personally, I come from this same society and cannot deny the effects that getting married late or not getting married at all can have on someone's sanity due to the values society places on it. When it gets to the extent of being above forty without a husband or at least a fiancé to show, the effects could even be intense and influence one's composure. Therefore, seeing someone or a group of people, as in this case, seeming to be so composed and not quite moved by the situation got me thinking. This could even be connected to being able to financially support basic needs in the house. When taking into consideration the observation I made when it comes to contributing to the home, especially in terms of food and other necessities, where it was realised that everyone at home, from the oldest to the youngest, depended on the mother to provide these things, I was taken aback by the fact that adults could be so comfortable eating whatever was available just because they considered themselves not financially viable to take care of their own feeding. For example, on one occasion at home, I literally had to force everyone to contribute something, even if it meant just 100frs (0.15 euros), so that we could cook something better and more delicious. I must confess it was not an easy thing to do, as some people needed me to insist and persist before they could adhere to the decision, but it was worth doing it, as everyone later enjoyed the outcome. Now looking at this, I was left wondering, after the discussion with the family member and family friend (Liza)[40], if the spirit they were all talking about could be the reason for this carefree behavior. Would it be possible that, apart from being stopped or delayed from getting married, the

[40]Stage name.

spirit equally puts them in a condition where they become adults yet stay in the position of children that should be taken care of by their parents? It seems more like time stands still and they remain the same, following the same routine with no changes or developments. They all complain about what they do for a living and how the salary or proceeds they receive amount to nothing, yet they seem to be doing little or nothing to change the situation or take a step ahead. It seems like they felt no stress or pressure being jobless, as it seemed they had been trapped and couldn't make out the difference, or had no urge to do better.

The point mentioned above could be connected to a Beninese psychiatrist, Ahyi's (1997) observation on the connection between an individual's mental state and witchcraft. He opined that Muslims believe that there are two main types of spirits: devils and genies, identified as forces of evil and good. Believers (whether Muslims or Christians) see all events as a result of the actions of a specific spirit. According to them, these spirits must be driven out by ceremonial rituals. This means that evil spirits could cause all sorts of ill luck on individuals. Ahyi also mentioned that Christians (Catholics, protestants, and Pentecostals) also have a strong belief that there are evil spirits that drive people mad. In many cases, they claim to identify the sources of illness or bad happenings as a conflict between two parties at the office or elsewhere (which still implies that one party must have involved an evil spirit). Ahyi went further to say that Africans believe that nothing happens by accident; hence, the hidden causes should be known in order to handle the problem. Which is contrary to the Western model, where it is believed that it is the individual's own mistake, so he or she has to make the effort to bear the consequences of his or her mistakes while depending on drugs prescribed by doctors. Since these people believe that illnesses and other bad happenings are caused by bad spirits, they also believe that good spirits can help them cast out these bad spirits. The good spirits could either be traditional healers or men of God for those who are Christians. This is in connection to what Liza in the observed family meant when she brought a man of God who could help them cast out the demons. Ahyi therefore realised that, as a psychiatrist, their method of healing is quite different from that of the traditional healers. According to him, traditional healers heal relationships while healing bodies. The traditional healers believe that sickness is related to one's relationship, so it should be handled from that angle, while doctors like psychiatrists, using the Western model of healing, believe in working on the individual who is sick through drugs prescribed and other therapists. It is worth noting that at one point, they [psychiatrists] started imitating the traditional healers and trying hard to heal their patients through the power of relationships. They admit their patients into the hospital with selected family members, and it gives a level of hope to both the patients and the family members. They also frequently watch the interaction between a patient and a relative and ask questions. Where necessary, they bring

in family members so that they can see the progress or regression of their patients and help in the treatment. This goes a long way toward showing the power of relationships in this African society and how they are being used to solve problems in different areas. The above points confirm the belief some African societies have that if one is stuck in a bad situation, it must be because of someone or a group of people he or she is related to or connected to. Which is what was believed of the family I lived with, as the whole scenario was seen by some outsiders as witchcraft caused by a family member.

From this research, it was intriguing to find out that women seem to have been more affected by this witchcraft belief. It is very common to say that a lady is not married or unable to bear children because of a witch, but that is hardly the case when men are concerned. It was observed that people could easily make statements like,

"I wonder who has bewitched this lady that she is still single at this age."

But when it comes to a man, the common comments could be,

"Why is he not married at this age? I think we need to look for a good wife for him; I am sure women have been disappointing him a lot."

With observations made on social media in connection with this, it was noticed that these beliefs are also highly promoted on social media. For example, on a Facebook page where matchups are being done, an open matchup post was made for people to indicate their ages and where they come from, just in case someone could pick up an interest in them. Going through the comments, first, it was noticed that women were the ones who were mostly commenting under the post, and very few even openly indicated that they were searching for a partner. Most of them showed interest in this through indirect comments and an attempt to mask their desires with a joke. The fact that men hardly commented on such posts was a kind of confirmation of the belief that women are the ones who are supposed to be desperate for marriage. But at the same time, women will be seen as 'cheap' and 'desperate' if they openly indicate their interest in getting married. One of the comments that got my attention and attracted many replies was from a lady who indicated that she was 37 years old, and another lady immediately came under her comment, proving to be so shocked and causing many people to criticise her reaction to this lady's request. Her use of shocking emojis and the question she asked brought her serious backlash from fellow commentators:

"😳😳😳😳 37 and single 🤦🏽‍♀️🤦🏽‍♀️🤦🏽‍♀️🤦🏽‍♀️ sis, what happened???? Just thinking aloud, biko."

Many people did not find it normal that a woman will question another woman for not being married at a certain age. Yet, her comment simply proves that many people in Cameroon still think that it is either a woman's fault not to be married at a certain age or that there must be an evil force holding her back. Ezenwanyi (2020) noted that culturally, in many African societies, singlehood or spinsterhood is not a celebrated state. This means there is nothing admirable about being single in such an environment. More often than not, such societies give little or no respect to single women because they have no 'backing', and it is presumed that husbands are the ones to provide this backing for their wives. She went further to say that whether unmarried or divorced, single women are quickly judged to be of no-good morals, untamed, uncultured, easy virtues, ill-mannered, disrespectful, and threats to the peaceful coexistence of families. In Bamenda, for instance, many people see single women as women with no 'value', especially as no man has paid any bride price or asked for their hand in marriage. For example, a disagreement between a married and unmarried woman will always be judged in favour of the married woman, and the unmarried woman takes the most part of the blame. She is reminded at every little opportunity of her singlehood and accused of being arrogant, uncontrolled, and disrespectful since she has no husband. At some point, people think she acts the way she does because of her loneliness and frustration. Eziwanyi went further to say that, in the same way, a married woman with no child will be blamed for misfortunes, crises, and troubles in the family, especially in polygamous settings. Her rights and privileges as a wife are not given to her, and she becomes careful with everyone and everything, as the people around her will not spare her the least chance they have to remind her of her state of 'awaiting motherhood' and barrenness. These discriminatory practices sum up to too many pressures, which manifest in different ways and cause disparities, rivalry, unfair treatments, and inequality amongst women.

Some women feel pressure in circumstances like the ones mentioned above, which is one of the reasons why it was not so different with the observed family. All the gossip around was more concerned about the women who were not married, yet they said nothing about the men, of whom, out of four, just one was married. Even at the mention of witchcraft, it seems the witch who was presumed to be responsible for their situation (holding the women captive by 'depriving' them from getting married and equally attacking the men at the level of their finances), was assumed to be a 'she'. This got me thinking, as it has been very common to either hear that women have been attacked by witchcraft or that they are the witches who attack others. One is therefore left pondering if there is a connection between witchcraft and women. Could witchcraft by any means be used to marginalise women, either by accusing them of being witches or by bewitching them to hinder them from progressing? Some statements from some respondents pushed forward this ideology—as in one of my discussions with a respondent (Yvette

interview April 15, 2020), she pondered the point that it seems all the witches of the families are usually from the father's side of the family and are mostly their sisters. Yvette went further to analyse the fact that since some women love fighting against their fellow women and most in-law problems are usually between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law or sisters-in-law, she has the impression that when some of these mothers-in-law or sisters-in-law fail to separate their sons or brothers from their wives, they resort to witchcraft. Since everyone always wants to win, they ensure that they will stop at nothing to see that homes are destroyed, hence the constant complaints from individuals about their paternal family members. Common statements like "my father's sister is a witch; I do not want to have anything to do with her" can be heard among members of this society. The thing about all this is that when statements like these are used, the stigma remains for a long time, and some of these women spend the rest of their lives being seen and treated as witches, which, in many cases, limits them from actively taking part in either family or village activities. Just so that it may be clear, it is important to address the topic of accusing women of being witches because even the one considered to be the cause of misfortune in the host family was considered to be a woman who in turn vowed to make just women suffer more from her witchcraft.

On the above note, some writers have had diverse opinions about the relationship between witchcraft and the marginalisation of women, and one of them is Spence (2017:57). According to her, the historical assessment of witchcraft can be linked to Europe because the basis of witchcraft accusations in Ghana and Papua New Guinea is strongly linked to Christianity, which also provides the source of the witchcraft trials in Europe. She further puts it that even though there were male victims of the witchcraft trials held in the 16th and 18th centuries in these countries; it cannot be denied that women were the main targets of witchcraft accusations. The history of witchcraft is basically the history of women (Karlsen 1987). Macfarlane (1970) noted that in England too, more than ninety percent (90%) of those formally accused of witchcraft were women, and this particular period was a time of major social change when the witch hunts occurred. At that time, existing social structures, relationships, and beliefs (potentially also women's and men's roles) were undergoing transformation. All the above prompted persecution for witchcraft (Hester 1992). Spence therefore opined that both the historical witch hunt of the 16th to 18th centuries and the contemporary witchcraft accusations and persecutions of the 21st century are attempts to marginalise women to maintain patriarchal norms (Spence 2017:58). The link between women and witchcraft was promoted by demonologists in the past, who believed that women owned certain attributes that indicated that they were more easily disposed to be witches. Some observed that "women were credulous and thus easily deceived; they had an overdeveloped sense of curiosity—they have, since Eve, had a greater capacity to fall, a greater tendency for wrath,

and a greater appetite for revenge; they have slipping tongues and are full of words" (Sharpe 2001). The premise behind the relationship between witchcraft and women was constructed on three prepositions:

First, there is the assumption that women were weaker than men both intellectually and psychologically, thus more likely to commit sin. As Clark explained, 'they were gullible and impressionable, had inordinate affections and appetites—were resentful of authority, and were not easy to discipline. They were also feeble in mind and unstable in their behaviour, inherently imperfect creatures from whom evil and depravity were only to be expected" (Clark 2001:56). Secondly, it was considered that women were the preferred targets of the devil due to their weakness. This ideology was highlighted in the work of one of the renowned early Christian theologians, Tertullian, who pointed out that Eve's original sin extended to all women, disreputably referring to women as the 'devil's gateway' (Tertullian 2012). Thirdly, it was assumed that the exhibited characteristics of witchcraft, such as vanity, vindictiveness, curiosity, pride, and talkativeness, were deemed to be predominantly in women (Clark 2001:56). In Ghana, the status of women differs depending on the ethnic group. For example, in the northern ethnic groups like Dogomba, Mamprusi, and Gonja, among others, not leaving out patriarchal tribes such as the Ewes, women were noticeably subordinate to men within their social relationships (Adinkrah 2004:331). On the other hand, within matrilineal tribes such as the Akan-speaking groups (Kwahu, Ahanta, Bono, and Ashanti, just to name a few), women enjoy a marginally higher social status as a result of the matrilineal nature of their culture. While this might seem to suggest that women can automatically inherit properties, women do not have the religio-cultural right of inheritance in Ghana—daughters can inherit but not women (wives). When daughters get married and relocate to their husband's place, tradition demands that only men be appointed as legal custodians of family property. As Amenga-Etego (2013) further explains, women in matrilineal societies 'do not have the right to inheritance. Either it is passed on from father to sister's son, known in Akan as wofa (mother's brother), or daughters to their abusua panin (senior male elder), as a result of the culture pertaining to inheritance'. Thus, as Adinkra (2004:331) puts it, even in matrilineal societies, patriarchal systems remain dominant, which could be one of the reasons why witchcraft is mostly attributed to women. One witchcraft belief that is common to all groups in Ghana is the belief that women are more susceptible to witchcraft due to the ideology that they are weaker in every aspect (Adinkra 2004:325-356). The view that is held by most of the members of society is that women play a subordinate role with respect to their male counterparts in all areas of their social life, with cultural expectations that 'women should demonstrate respect, passivity, obedience, submissiveness, and acquiescence towards men, especially in relation to their husbands' wishes and demands (Amoah

2004: 80-86). However, there is a belief that witchcraft can be used for good or bad reasons depending on the character of the person using it, which means that the user could either have good or bad intentions. In Ghana, precisely, traditionally, when witchcraft is considered good, it is connected to a man, and when it is seen as evil or bad, it is connected to a woman (Dolvo 2007:69). Still in Ghanaian society, women have very rigid roles that are usually attributed to family and procreation. Women who do not therefore fit into these gender stereotypes, such as being unable to have children, widows, or being unmarried, become liable to witchcraft accusations (Akrong 2007:54). In this way, witchcraft is therefore used as a tool to enforce the marginalisation of women into roles that are traditionally reserved for them, actively discouraging them from attempting to even cross the 'boundaries' into traditional male roles (Spence 2017:71).

How then is the attribution of witchcraft to women, especially older women in Ghana, being demonstrated? First, it should be clear that this is relevant to this work because it is another common way of gender marginalisation, and it is not only done by men to women, as one would have thought. Now, to make these accusations even more serious and concrete, witch camps have been built in the northern part of Ghana, and usually, witches are traditionally punished by being banished from their communities (that is, if at all they survive the hash attacks by their community members). There are about seven camps in Northern Ghana, and this happens to be one of the poorest regions with very low education and literacy standards (ActionAid, 2010 cited in Spence 2017). In Kukuo camp, there are 137 alleged witches with 172 children and grandchildren. This camp does not have males, and 66 percent are 70 years of age and older. Ghani-Tindang camp, on the other hand, has both sexes, and there are 273 alleged witches and wizards, 173 (80%) of whom are women and 42 (19.6%) are men. In terms of age, 72 percent are 70 years and older, with 23 children and grandchildren of the alleged witches and wizards. Meanwhile, the Nabuli camp has 140 women alleged to be witches with no children, and it is known to be the newest and fastest-growing camp (CEDAW Committee cited in Spence 2017:72). Those living in these camps have very poor living conditions made up mostly of thatched wooden huts and limited food and water supplies (Whitaker, 2012). After observing that these camps are simply places used to push women to areas where they will feel guilty and be silent, Action Aid put forward the point that 'the witch camps are effectively women's prisons where inmates have neither been given any trial nor the right to appeal but have been given life sentences (in Spence 2021: 73). Going through the above contributions, especially by Spence, it is easier to understand why the witch, as mentioned in the case of my host family in Bamenda, was or is considered to be a woman. Since women are seen as being the gullible and wicked ones, as shown even in the Ghanaian case, it was surely difficult for these people to imagine that it was a man who had bewitched Pa's daughters.

Secondly, considering the fact that since the alleged witch's punishment or curse placed on the children was related to marriage, they believed only women would be so marriage-inclined to punish another woman with it.

3) Having Kids Out of Wedlock

Apart from witchcraft as a way of discriminating against women, another area where women are being marginalised and treated differently from their male counterparts both at home and in society is when it comes to having children out of wedlock. Men who have children out of wedlock face very little backlash compared to women in the same situation. Even just being single as a woman in Cameroonian society is quite questionable, and assumptions are usually made that single women are very free and could be considered prostitutes as they are sexually open to any man who comes their way (Mbaku 2005:158). In a situation like this, it could imply that a woman's character will be questioned even more when she becomes a single mother as society sees her as irresponsible (see Bruey, 2021:84). This is also what women from the observed family go through. They all had their children out of wedlock, and the person with the least number of children had two. It had been raising eyebrows, but this did not seem to be an issue with them at all. Meaning that despite all the side talks when they each had their first children, or at least when the eldest sister had her own children, they did not refrain from having more children when they wanted to. Moreover, since they were not married, most customs and traditions of the Northwest region and other parts of Cameroon demand that a man gets married to a lady before claiming rights over the child(ren) they have together (see Nsamenang, 1992:85). Coming from Babanki, a village in the Northwest Region of Cameroon, they would be expected to adhere to this tradition. According to the tradition of this village, which is not exclusive to Babanki, if a lady has a child out of wedlock, the child belongs to her parents. During their marriage process, the father of her child born out of wedlock is expected to carry out some traditional rites in order to have the child traditionally handed over to him as his child (see Bruey, 2021:89). If, for some reasons, they end up not getting married, any other man coming to get married to the lady has the right to decide whether to take over the child(ren) or not. If he decides to adopt the child(ren), he will also be expected to conduct these traditional rites on the day of their traditional marriage. Without any of these traditional rites, the child(ren) will remain with the lady's family and will be treated like her father's child(ren). This is also applied to name-bearing; as a child out of wedlock, in so many cases, she bears the maternal grandfather's name and not her father's name. It is also important to mention that this tradition seems to be common in many other cultures in the northwest region of Cameroon. Fubah (2014:32) noted that in Bambui (a village in the Northwest region of Cameroon), for example, the birth of a child is accompanied by many traditional religious rituals and ceremonies between the two families of the

child's parents. It is therefore believed that a woman must be traditionally married before giving birth to children to ensure that the rituals and ceremonies are conducted by both families. When babies are born out of wedlock, the rituals and ceremonies are usually low-key, especially in cases where the child's father is known but not accepted by the lady's family. In Bambui in particular, such rituals are connected to the fact that the man is not known to the ancestors of the woman, meaning that he did not formally ask for the woman's hand in marriage, which could enable her family to carry out the rituals to introduce the couple to the woman's ancestors. To Fobah, instead of the usual festive ritual and celebrations following the birth of a child, in this case, it is rather marred by an atmosphere of hate, confusion, and neglect of the baby's mother if she supports the father of her baby and his family. On the other hand, if she is in support of her family's decision to reject the baby's father, she will receive total support from her family too, and the baby will be registered as one of her siblings rather than in the name of the baby's father and taken care of by the child's grandparents. In this case, all the ceremonies to be performed will be performed at the woman's parent's house instead of the child's father's house or his parents' compound and taken care of by the grandparents. It was really a different scenario from what was observed in this family, where it seems the father was more flexible and not so bent on following his customs and traditions concerning children born out of wedlock. This is because, apart from his first grandchild, the other grandchildren all born out of wedlock bear any name; it could be their father's name so far as he has decided to take responsibility over his child or it could be his (grandfather) name if the father of the child does not show up or does not insist on taking up his responsibility for the child.

4) Interaction among home dwellers.

With all the respect and freedom of speech and interaction I observed, there was another side of the coin, in my opinion. I also observed a level of laissez-faire that was different from what one would have expected from a typical Northwest home, where it is believed that respect is the first sign of a good upbringing. I have come across several families where there is a reasonable level of freedom of speech, yet the boundaries are set and made very clear. In this case study, it is true that everyone at home was brought up to feel free, relax, and express their minds when and where necessary, but it seems as if some boundaries were not respected. The children sometimes had no boundary in the way they responded to their parents and grandparents, even though in most cases it either ended as a joke or did not escalate into misunderstanding. It might have been better if they had a certain level of restraint in their interactions with their parents and grandparents. As earlier mentioned, most parents control their children's relationships at least to a certain extent, and some even decide when their children should have visitors. In this case under observation, the children's carefree relationship with

their parents seemed to have affected even the way their friends behaved whenever they visited. There was a level of little or no limit to their hours of visit or their topics of discussion. This had gotten to a point where it seemed not to have been fully embraced by them [the children]. I say so because one of the daughters mentioned one time that she does not like the way one of her friends usually comes in and discusses just anything in the presence of her parents. Sometimes she felt so embarrassed and would usually resort to pulling the friend out. This is one of the reasons why it occurred to me that their friends were simply observing and following the way they related to their parents. It might be safe to say that what is tolerated in a child might stick around for so long unless the child decides to shake it off at some point. During an interview with one respondent, Sylvia[41], in connection with this topic of respect and upbringing, she emphasised the point that she is fully responsible for the future of her children, and it starts from the day she gave birth. In her opinion, the things we fail to do at an early stage of the lives of our kids might be difficult to correct when they are already old. Hence, if you intend to discipline your child, do so when they are still very young so that they will not depart from it, and as Proverbs (22:6) says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." At one point, she might not have full control over her child's life and reactions at old age, but she is happy she is playing her role now as a parent, and it will obviously have a positive effect in the future. Comparing this to the case study, it could be seen how the above quote and testimony from Sylvia are working. The effects of the laissez-faire upbringing seem to be so obvious in the interaction between the children and their parents. It seems they were brought up with no spirit of fear for their parents due to their very close relationship, such that at old age, the parents are the ones who now face the difficulties and are unable to impact any discipline. They seemed to find it difficult to ask for help from their children, and sometimes they even acted like they were afraid of correcting their children. This was obvious when the father needed money for his medications but had the courage to ask only from his granddaughter, he constantly talked about not being able to collect money from his children to get even his medications. It finally made them resort to using indirect methods or languages in passing out information or corrections to their children, something that an average parent will be able to do without any qualms. The language of communication became something like:

> *"You are asking me to share my fruits with you; don't you know you are the one who is supposed to be feeding me now?" "Mo cannot even think of buying some basic things in the*

[41]Fictitious name.

house when coming back from work; I wonder what kind of job she is doing that one cannot see the income."

"Vugho di only complain palava money like Bamilike woman[42], ah no know de kind business weh e di do."

(Vugho keeps complaining about lack of money like a Bamilike woman; I wonder what kind of business she does.).

On one of the occasions, the parents were so disappointed with one of their sons, who had a job but could not help them with any needs even occasionally. While grumbling, the son was at home, but they did not have the courage to face him, and so they had to pass through me to get the message through to him. To do this, Mami therefore called me and said,

"Ma you fit imagine say we di cook for kitchen and wata di flow for all side but Colins nofit buy common paper for 3000frs so dat we go fit fix the roof? E fine so"?

(Ma, can you imagine that we cook in the kitchen and water is flowing everywhere, but Colins cannot buy just paper for 3000frs so that we can fix the roof? Is that something good?)

When they said this to me, I realised they knew I could be the one to take this message to him and make him act, and secondly, he might act fast out of shame because his behaviour has been reported to a visitor. Looking at all these observations, it was evident that with their carefree way of responding to their parents, it seemed difficult for them to play their role as parents in that area of discipline in order to put a stop to it, such that I started wondering if they [the parents] actually felt bad about it or never took it seriously. All they could say in such situations was:

"E dey like wona don weigh me, ah, just be na wona age mate for dis house, weh any man di talk for me anyhow."

(It seems like you guys have seen me as your age mate, such that you talk to me with no respect.)

In a nutshell, I would say the observation I made was that of a family that will get into normal arguments like any other family will but will never have a prolonged argument or misunderstanding as their upbringing will not allow them to do so. Yet respect for boundaries (especially in terms of

[42]A common saying in the community to mean someone, works money but does not want to spend it.

privacy among the children) was very paramount to them, which could be one of the reasons why they could hardly have prolonged misunderstandings. Moreover, their main goal was to protect one another and not fall into the trap of adhering to gossip from outsiders concerning their family affairs. In the area of women-to-women relationships, it was not so typical of them to fight against one another as might be expected in cases where many women live under the same roof. They had mastered the art of respecting boundaries well, which is one of the reasons for their seldom fighting or quarrels. Again, it was discovered that despite facing most of the conditions that could be used as a way of ridiculing them in their community, the women did not give in to the societal pressure. They were very strong and held on to whatever came their way, of which it was obvious that this was possible because of little or no pressure from their parents. This still goes to reiterate the importance of the role parents choose to play in the lives of their children at home—it could either break them or mend them. Moreover, if they are not bothered at home, the chances of not being bothered by the outside world could also be high.

Chapter 7: WOMEN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH IN-LAWS

In Cameroon, many women spend a reasonable amount of time with their in-laws. If we must get a better understanding of their different areas of marginalisation, then this chapter will play a big role. If we look at the case of Bamenda, for example, a good number of women, especially in the suburbs, attested that after their marriages, they moved in to live with their in-laws; while some stayed there for as long as they were married, others stayed for a reasonable period before moving out with their husbands. With this practice, it is normal that they can hardly avoid spending time with their in-laws. This chapter will therefore address how these relationships or close connections with in-laws, especially the female in-laws (like mothers, sisters, aunties, and cousins), affect the women who are married into these families. The chapter also includes screenshots from chats or interviews conducted with participants, which explain first-hand what some women go through and, in some cases, how they try to address the situations. Here we have different cases, ranging from interviews carried out on WhatsApp to live interviews and Facebook testimonies or stories. It will also be important to make a close observation of the language(s) used in this chapter, as the chapter also explains, using the different cases, why a certain choice is made and by whom in terms of language. Pidgin is an important language used in this chapter, as it is widely used by members of society who are of different classes and levels. In addition to that, the chapter is intended to find out if the experiences the women had with their in-laws were in any way directly or indirectly connected to the level of education, which might have equally influenced their choice of language(s). As will be seen from the interviews ahead, this is because the women who granted interviews in Pidgin stipulated that either their level of formal education was very low, or they were not educated at all—yet they could still be fluent in Pidgin. On the other hand, the lone mother who granted an interview in English also indicated that she had the opportunity to have been educated by her husband; hence, she preferred to use English during her interview.

Family and kinship play a big role when it comes to maintaining the values of the culture of the Bamenda people, not just in Bamenda. It has been observed and opined by some writers that, in most cases, women are the main actors when it comes to passing these values on to the different members of the family and to new members introduced into the family, especially through marriage and other initiation means. With this responsibility, mothers have always been the key actors when it comes to welcoming new members into the family, for example, a daughter-in-law or son-in-law into the family. In the process of teaching these values, they stand a better chance of determining who easily learns and accepts these new home values and who does not easily fit into these new roles (see Saibu, 2018:3-20). From the different conversations and discussions, I had, most of the respondents thought that

many mothers use sentiments and sometimes emotions to teach these values to the new members. As a result, it has been noticed that once someone gets married, for instance, into a family, if he or she is liked by the mother-in-law, there will likely be an assumption that this individual is good at everything they do, that she or he is the right person for the family, and that they can easily learn the values of the said family. Once this feeling of love is shown by the mother, it becomes very easy for other members of the family to be influenced to love this new family member as well. If the reverse is the case, other family members easily follow suit to show dislike for this new member, depending on what the mother said or says (see O'reilly, 2010: 84). There is therefore no gainsay here that this is another area where women are assumed to be in power, especially in their homes. Following the different cases used in this work, it might seem like mothers apply different ways of receiving daughters-in-law from how they would receive sons-in-law. One would have thought that they are all strangers and should be treated as such, but it seems much is being expected from daughters-in-law as opposed to sons-in-law. This point is summarised in a post made on one of the Facebook pages called Relationships and Dating, whose audience is predominantly from Nigeria, Cameroon, Kenya, Zambia, Ghana, and maybe other countries that might not have been noticed. The poster was worried about the way families receive their sons-in-law compared to their daughters-in-law. In his opinion, when a married woman takes her husband to their home for a visit, he will be well received. Immediately after all the pleasantries, everyone will run around to make sure he is well fed and well taken care of. No one will expect him to take part in any house chores or do anything because he is considered a special guest. On the other hand, when a married man takes his wife to his family, immediately after all the greetings and pleasantries exchange, his family will start observing his wife to see if she would join in the kitchen to help in the cooking. She will be expected to even take over the cooking and serve everyone with a broad smile. After the cooking, they will observe to see if she will clear the table, wash the dishes, and clean the kitchen. No one gives her any special treatment as it will normally be given to guests. On the contrary, if she does not do all that is expected of her, her mother-in-law will start beefing with her and might even become hostile towards her. Her sisters-in-law will start grumbling and might sometimes become outright rude to her. She will be called for a family meeting where her home training will be questioned and her "wife material length" measured. She will be called mannerless, lazy, and all sorts of derogatory names. Her husband [their son or brother] will be chastised for not controlling and disciplining his wife well, and with this, she will leave her in-law's house feeling very sad and physically and emotionally drained. What was meant to be a happy visit will finally turn out to be hard labour filled with misery and regrets. The poster opines that what is so annoying for him is the fact that it is always women who lead when it comes to making another woman's life miserable.

According to him, women are still the ones who will make excuses for men who treat their women very badly and are always the gatekeepers of patriarchy. He therefore wonders why a woman cannot visit her in-laws and be treated nicely for the few hours or days that she will be there, just as sons-in-law are treated. According to him, this has caused most married women to prefer spending holidays with their own families than with their in-laws. He recounted a story that he read where a lady was complaining that her mother was sweeping and her brother's wife did not go to take the broom from her, i.e., she did not assist her. It is worth noting that the person who was complaining was also present with her other sibling, yet she felt it was the duty of her brother's wife to go and help their mother. Another complainer was a lady, complaining that her sister-in-law came visiting while she was in the kitchen yet did not help. The question (as directed by the commentators) was, who was actually cooking for them before her sister-in-law came, and would she have complained in the same way if it was her husband or her sister's husband who came visiting? The poster therefore concludes by expressing his hate for double standards and the tradition that enslaves women.

The post clearly narrates a situation where more is expected from a daughter-in-law than from a son-in-law. This might just be someone's opinion on Facebook, but it does not sound so different from the different conversations I have had with women in regard to this topic. Apart from gathering information for research purposes, many friends and acquaintances have complained about their brother's wife being lazy, snobbish, and not outgoing just because when she visits their home, she either does not help in house chores, cook for them, join in some of their gossip, or 'worship' their mothers the way they would have expected.

It implies that their expectations of what a sister-in-law should be are for someone who should do all it takes to prove to them that she deserves their brother. This is also triggered by the mentality that society has instilled in the people, which seems like a man is doing a woman a favour by getting married to her. Hence, if she 'luckily' finds someone who is willing to get married to her, she is supposed to be grateful and do everything it takes to keep this man, and this usually includes pleasing her in-laws. As mentioned in the text above, these expectations come from fellow women to women—meaning they use those measures to judge the kind of woman who is married to their brother and make a lot of assumptions about her depending on the conclusion they finally draw. On the flipside, men visiting their in-laws might face different challenges, but nothing close to what women will face. One will hardly hear complaints coming from in-laws about their brothers-in-law or sons-in-law not helping with house chores. Like one respondent to an interview mentioned (interview May 20, 2020), you can get complaints about brothers-in-law or sons-in-law who do not support financially or do not freely give gifts to their in-laws. Even when these complaints come up, according to this individual, the in-

laws will hardly complain to their brother-in-law directly. It will mostly come in the form of gossip and small talk, and these expectations usually even come up just at the advanced stage of their sister's or daughter's relationship with the said man. This is contrary to how much they will expect from their brother's wife just at an initial stage of their relationship. Moreover, just to lay more emphasis on women being the main observers of who is good or bad to join their family, it is important to say there are also cases of brothers-in-law or fathers-in-law expecting so much from their sisters-in-law, especially in terms of part-taking in house chores and playing the main housekeeper even during short visits, but it is not as rampant as the case of women expecting much from a woman who is about to be married into their family. The case above is therefore just one of many where the "rivalry" between women and family at the level of in-laws has been observed, and according to Mari, one of the interviewees, she has the impression that this has become so much a part of women that it seems they sometimes do these things naturally. There is a possibility that this is also promoted by the ideology that, when a woman gets married, she is automatically under the control of her husband and his relatives. She is expected to accord the same respect she has for her husband to all his relatives. Which could be the reason why they feel entitled and think it is their right to have her work for them. This belief was confirmed by Steyn & Uys (1983:347) when they reported on the changing position of black women in South Africa. They mentioned that in traditional tribal societies, the woman has a subordinate status to that of a man. Before she gets married, she is under the control of her male relatives, and when she gets married, the responsibility is transferred to her husband and his kin. No matter what happens, the woman will still prefer to get married because, as Steyn & Uys mentioned, women only attain adulthood and become members of their community when they get married and have children. Moreover, when it comes to internal family relationships, her submissive nature is strongly emphasised as she relates to her in-laws. Due to patrilocal residence, the woman usually has closer contact to her in-laws than the man is expected to have with his in-law. Hence, her behaviour towards her in-laws is more strictly prescribed than that of her husband towards his. Therefore, there are so-called avoidance rules for the woman with regards to her in-laws, especially her father-in-law, and she is under obligation to respect the instructions her mother-in-law gives (Ibid., 348). I guess this should be one of the reasons why she is expected to integrate very fast and start taking part in house chores directly on her first visit. Back in the field, after talking to a number of individuals, as will be seen below, I discovered that most of the women who complained about their in-laws pointed out their mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law as their main problems. This suggested that women seem to fight one another more than they could ever fight men. This seems to be another trend, as one would have expected women to have more issues with men who seemed to be their "rivals," but on the contrary,

men seem to have enjoyed the privileged position in society for so long that they no longer stress about getting these privileges of superiority. They now sit and observe women fighting themselves, and some even go to the extent of defending the men while making their fellow women appear as the main problem in some controversial cases. The issue of women being against women seems to be reoccurring when it comes to the issue of in-laws. Many women have expressed their disappointment that, at a point when they would have expected their mothers-in-law or sisters-in-law to understand them better, they seemed to be their biggest problem. According to one of the respondents, expecting more understanding from her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law is simply because she believes her mother-in-law, who is also a daughter-in-law to another person, must have had her own experiences and knows what it means to leave your family and join a new family. According to her, if the mother-in-law was not treated well by her own mother-in-law when she got married, then it was an opportunity for her to treat her own daughter-in-law with love because she had experienced what it means to be hated, and it was obviously not a good feeling. On the other hand, if her mother-in-law was well received and treated well by her own in-laws, then she ought to treat her own daughter(s)-in-law well too. In a nutshell, there was no excuse for her mother-in-law to treat her with so much contempt, not even after she tried her best to be the best daughter-in-law she could be and was also struggling to maintain the best relationship with her in-laws.

The photo below is a screenshot of one of the WhatsApp chats that I had with one of the respondents.

Figure 19: WhatsApp interview with Miriam.

Following the chat in Figure 19, Miriam[43] had been married just for a year, yet her relationship with her in-laws was not the best. From the moment she was introduced to her in-laws, she observed that her father-in-law was supportive but could not say the same for her mother-in-law. She even started wondering whether her mother-in-law was naturally reserved or did not like her at all; hence, she resorted to visiting them just when necessary. Miriam is one of the respondents who indicated that her in-laws, especially her mother-in-law, disliked her from the first day she set her eyes on her. The only person she got support from was her father-in-law (who sometimes also behaved strangely since he listened more to his wife's judgement), but the rest of the family members saw her as an intruder and never welcomed the fact that their brother got married to her. She realised that her husband was the breadwinner of the family; hence, the whole family depended on him. As a result, they thought her presence in the family was a threat to their livelihood, and there was a risk of them not benefiting from their brother like before, as he might divert his expenses to his wife.

[43]Stage name

This impression made her in-laws develop a strong feeling of hatred for her, such that on their wedding day, her mother-in-law left the ceremonial ground earlier than she was expected to without notifying anyone. This indicates that she started feeling humiliated and not welcomed right from the day of her wedding, which made it difficult for her to relate to her new family (in-laws). According to her, rumours had it that her in-laws complained to whoever cared to listen that she did not like visiting them because her family was richer and better than theirs. They even went to the extent of saying that they cannot imagine their brother getting married to a woman they are not sure can bear him children (meaning they had the ability to predict ahead of time that their brother's wife might be barren). This further strained the relationship she had with them and made her distant, paying them visits only if necessary. As of the time of the interview, her mother-in-law had no idea where she lived and even refused to pay her a visit when she was admitted to the hospital. The above example is a typical indication of what some women go through at the hands of their in-laws, mostly mothers-in-law. One thing about this example, which is almost the same thing most of the women say, is that they have no idea what they have done to be hated so much by their mothers or sisters-in-law.

Talking to another lady (interview January 31, 2019), whose story is also symbolic of what many women might be facing in Bamenda, she recounted her story and experience with her mother-in-law. According to her, her mother-in-law would do anything to make sure her sons were fine, even if it meant getting their wives beaten. Beginning with her mother-in-law's own experience, she said that the mother-in-law herself had a bad experience when she got married. At the age of 17, one of the Fon's wives in her village came to their home to ask for her hand in marriage for one of her sons. When she was taken to this palace expecting to meet her young groom, she was disappointed when the Fon (the father of the supposed husband), who was 58 years old at the time, rather took her as one of his many wives. It is important to note that before the coming of the colonial masters and missionaries in Cameroon, the Fons were seen as all powerful, even as demi-gods, and were not questioned. Because of this power they had, the Fons had the right to have as many women as they could keep (Nkwi 2018:164). Therefore, being very young, she spent her whole time in her husband's house, not feeling loved or cared for, as her husband had so many wives to satisfy and was equally too old to take good care of a very young wife. As a result, she built a very close relationship with her sons and promised herself to do all she could to give them the best life and to never watch them suffer or go through any type of stress. According to this lady (interviewee), her mother-in-law is actually fulfilling the promise she made to herself as she ensures all her sons are financially okay, and because of this, she also takes care of the wives and children of her sons to an extent. Some of the sons have taken advantage of their mother's support and love to report every action of their wives to their mother, who in turn gives them

strict warnings to stop stressing her kids. She had the feeling that among all the sons of her mother-in-law, her husband was the laziest and, as such, more attached to his mother because he will always need both financial and emotional support. One of the incidents she said she cannot forget in a hurry is a fight she had with her husband during one of her pregnancies. After the fight, her husband locked her out of the house, and it was late at night. Some hours later, his mother returned and heard her banging at the door from the other side, and according to what she heard, her mother-in-law's first statement was, "I know she must have stressed my son up; that is why he locked her out." When her husband heard his mother's voice outside, he opened the door and started crying, which provoked his mother to start fighting with her daughter-in-law. In so much confusion, she held tight to her mother-in-law, telling her to kill her if that would make her happy, and the mother-in-law changed the story and told her sons that her daughter-in-law fought with her. She then took her son to her own apartment to spend the night with her, and he spent the whole night insulting his wife to the hearing of everyone in the compound. She instigated the son to punish her for her bad behaviour and insisted that she must apologise. This strained their relationship a lot, and they [the interviewee and mother-in-law] even stopped communicating with each other for a while. Since she was pregnant and the mother-in-law had always been the one taking care of her needs, she was advised by the other wives in the compound (commonly known in Cameroon as 'mbanya' which literally means co-wives) to apologise to her mother-in-law so that she could supply her needs. She refused for some time but finally gave in and apologised after so much pressure. She therefore went further to say this was the least she was expecting from her mother-in-law, looking at the fact that she knew and had experienced what it meant to receive little care from the person you are married to. Moreover, she could not imagine that her mother-in-law used her past marriage experience just to protect her own children but completely forgot that wives always have emotional needs like those she once had. Secondly, she expected a woman who will do anything to protect her kids to be more sensitive when it comes to pregnant women because she obviously knows what it means to be pregnant. On the contrary, all her concentration was on her son at that moment, forgetting the fact that the same pregnant woman she was fighting with was carrying her grandchild.

One will realise that these same experiences of how women navigate through life with their in-laws are also shared on social media platforms. In one of such posts on Facebook, one lady brought up a problem she is facing with her in-laws and lamented how much she thinks her mother-in-law hates her. Reading through the numerous opinions that came up, one comment stood out where the adviser was telling the lady to relax, concentrate on her husband, and forget about her in-laws because what she is facing is biblical, and it seems women will always face that situation. She went further to quote

the Bible verse, which says, “For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law” (Matthew 10:35). In her opinion, this Bible verse is a clear proof that the problems between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law are backed up by the Bible and are therefore normal. Hence, the two parties must always find a way to deal with it. However, replying to her comment, several people felt that she had misinterpreted that section of the Bible and asked her some questions like, how come that verse is applicable only when it comes to the point of in-laws? Why is the fight against mother and daughter or son and father not as rampant as that of in-laws, though they are all mentioned in that verse? On the contrary, many mothers will complain and create problems with their daughters-in-law while protecting their own daughters, and many women can spend their whole time complaining about their mothers-in-law but will never see anything wrong with their own mothers.

To understand the topic from another angle, I had an interview with one lady called Dora (Interview February 1, 2019) and asked her about her relationship with her in-laws. According to her response, she had barely ever had any support from her in-laws, and none of them seemed to care if she was part of the family. She even expressed her anger at how disrespectful they can be towards her whenever they meet. On another occasion, I then decided to ask her about her relationship with her brother’s wife, and according to her, her brother’s wife does not want to get close to them; she just assumes that she is not liked and lives according to this assumption. Whenever she has an occasion or something that she needs support for, she does not tell them yet expects them to show up, and to make matters worse, she has never been a part of any of their family functions. She concluded by saying that she willfully isolates herself, keeps the kids away from them, and blames them for not showing her love. Getting a two-sided story from the same person, I wondered if part of the problem with or about in-laws could be a matter of stereotypes. Could it be that society, with its numerous in-law problems, has made many people think that there can never be a good relationship between a daughter-in-law and her in-laws, thereby making them sometimes assume a problem and act accordingly? If not, how can the same person who complained about her in-laws not supporting her in any way or relating to her and her children not think that her brother’s wife could be feeling the same? On the contrary, she [sister-in-law/interviewee] thinks she [the brother's wife] is the one distancing herself from them, yet she cannot reason that she [the brother's wife] could simply be feeling the same way she [the interviewee] feels about her in-laws.

Another school of thought holds that most men grow up being so attached to their mothers and receiving a lot of care and concern that it becomes difficult for the mothers to stop controlling them even when they are grownups (Cancian, 1990:73). Mothers seem to do everything to make sure their

sons are comfortable and will stop at nothing to see that this continues. They become so attached to their children that when someone else comes into their lives, they feel so threatened and sometimes even unconsciously start acting jealous. That is why, according to one interviewee (interview March 20, 2020, Bamenda), the jealousy might be very intensified and directed more towards daughters-in-law in the Cameroon context because the cultures make them understand that when a woman gets married, she joins the husband's family, and her own family has little or no control over her again. In this situation, mothers-in-law respect their boundaries, know very well that their daughters have left their families, and can only receive orders from their husbands or his family. They now concentrate all their control on their son's wife, who has come to join their family, and depend completely on them. However, from another perspective, she said she will still not fail to say that there is a level of discrimination that should be aborted before the institution of family is destroyed by these family problems. In her opinion, if a lady joins a man's family, as custom demands, she has become a member of that family; why then should the family not treat her as their own? Under normal circumstances, mothers-in-law should be grateful that a new daughter has joined them and should treat them with respect. In many instances, when these women get married into these families, they take over the responsibilities that some married and unmarried daughters left behind. Some of them are even expected to abandon their personal lives and dedicate their full time taking care of their in-laws, yet they are not expected to complain. She recounted the story of her family, where her uncle's wife left the city and joined the in-laws in the village to take care of them as they were old and all their children had grown out of the house. She was amazed at how much work and effort this lady put in to ensure that her [interviewee] grandparents were well taken care of. What she did not find funny was the complaints she kept getting from her grandparents, uncles, and aunties about this lady. To her, it seems they never appreciated anything she did or expected her to be a superwoman because the least mistake she made could go a long way towards cancelling the good things she had been doing. She saw a woman who barely had time for herself and her kids but was being insulted and accused of being too lazy and self-centred. "There was so much control over what she did or did not do, and almost everyone in the family expected her to satisfy them in one way or another before she could be appreciated. At one point, she could no longer take it and had to 'rebel' by leaving the in-law's place back to her home in the city, which I totally understood her, but that was the point in her life when she got the highest persecution". Complaints came from different angles, from her in-laws showing how unsatisfied they were, and she was told how selfish she was. "What I do not understand is, how will people accuse someone of being lazy and not helpful yet get angry when she decides to move? What did they expect her to stay in the village doing when they did not find her useful?"

Looking at another case, this idea of mothers being so attached to their sons was also expressed by one of the correspondents during a WhatsApp interview. According to her own story, her relationship with her mother-in-law and one of her sisters-in-law was not the best. The other two sisters-in-law were more cooperative and sometimes comforted her when their mother treated her badly. She observed that the brothers-in-law and father-in-law were different and made her feel welcomed into their family. On the other hand, her mother-in-law had a problem with almost everything she did, ranging from cooking to cleaning, and was complaining that she could not even organise the house well. According to her, she could feel a very high level of comparison, jealousy, and hatred from her mother-in-law, and even after trying hard to get close to her, she was not interested in connecting with her to get to know her better and therefore always acted in a biased way towards her. In the beginning, she did not see the need to complain to her husband about how badly his mother and sister treated her because she felt it might lead to an increase in hatred, malice, competition, and even make her husband more confused as to whom to believe or trust. Despite all this, the situation got worse, as they will always accuse her of stopping their son and brother from taking care of them. The slang they made whenever she was around and the level to which the mother instigated her daughters to treat her badly were becoming so unbearable that she had to pluck up the courage to talk to them and warned them against treating other women badly, as they, as women, might also face the same situation in the hands of other family members. When there was still no change in their behaviour, she resorted to telling the husband, who was caught between sticking with the family and his wife. At the end, he finally resorted to stopping to update his family about his activities with his wife. Looking at this deeply, she analysed that these mothers and their daughters were so close to their son and brother that when he introduced his wife to them, they were afraid of losing their position in their brother's life and thought treating his new wife badly would subdue her and make them superior to her. She added that women generally want attention, and when they cannot get it, they look for whom to blame. This was exactly the case with her in-laws, who accused her of taking away their brother's or son's attention from them. Her mother-in-law will bitterly complain that she can barely see her son again, contrary to the time when he was not yet married and used to spend more time with them. Moreover, the tradition of taking care of one's parents and siblings, practiced by many Cameroonians, could not be ignored in this case. They expected constant financial support from their son or brother, and when he could not meet up with their demands, the wife was blamed and accused of discouraging her husband from taking care of them and keeping all his money to herself. The mother's constant complaining attitude about not being able to see her son as often as she wanted made her assume that her mother-in-law's behaviour might be highly influenced by the usual strong bond between a mother and her son. Sadly, she had little or no

idea or never cared about the effects of her behaviour on her son's relationship with his wife. She then went further to say ignorance also has a big role to play, as many people have never been taught the importance of relating well with in-laws, and very few people get to read books on relationship matters and the effects of outsiders (be they family members or not) intruding in the relationships of others. People simply copy or cultivate bad behaviours when it comes to their relationships with in-laws. What I also observed is that most of the women I spoke to in the past and during the research who are seriously affected by these treatments from in-laws are the ones who did not have the opportunity to get a formal education. I am not saying that the ones with formal education were exempted from these treatments, but some of them find it easier to fight for their rights after being educated and exposed to many things around them. This observation was in line with the following interviews, as seen below:

In the first interview, I talked to Mama Mbom Seraphine[44] who recounted her story to me, beginning from her early primary school days until now. First, her education was stopped at the primary level simply because someone saw her in the village and thought she would be good for her brother as a wife. Though her mother tried to fight the idea, her father's decision was the most important; hence, she finally got married at the age of 17. Shortly after her marriage, she joined her husband in the city and became pregnant. When her husband discovered she was pregnant, he sent her back to the village to live with his family. That period was a sad one for Mama Seraphine, who went through all sorts of degrading treatment from her inlaws. She could barely afford something to eat, and even when her husband sent food items meant for the baby, her in-laws would take everything away from her, leaving the new-born baby with little or nothing to eat. It was as bad as the in-laws not even permitting her own family members to come and visit her with food. This treatment continued for so long to the extent that whenever her husband visited, from the city, his family would hold him and stop him from going to see his child or spend time with his wife. This was possible because it was a large family compound with many apartments, so one could easily visit and stay in one apartment without necessarily going to the others. Hence, his family ensured he was always distracted until his return to the city. At first, her father-in-law either did not bother about the bad treatment she was getting or was a part of the people giving her this treatment until he was advised against his behaviour by some people who knew Mama Seraphine in the city. They recounted to her father-in-law how much effort she had been putting in since the time she got married to make sure that she and her husband always had something to eat. Hearing this, the father-in-law felt guilty and tried to talk his children out of their bad behaviour too. But they did not yield to his advice. From that moment on, her father-in-law started defending her but

[44]Fictitious name

still stood on the point that she was not allowed to visit her family compound, which was just about an hour or less away from her in-law's compound. When Mama Seraphine finally went back to the city, she continued receiving degrading treatments from her husband, who did not care even about the wellbeing of their kids. She had to intensify her business to be able to keep up with feeding and provide for the needs of her children. At one point, her husband left the family, abandoned the children with her, and started living with his mistress. This move made her understand that she was completely in charge of her children's wellbeing. Good enough, the children were able to advance in education and became independent, such that the older ones started supporting the younger ones and ensuring that their mother was well taken care of too. Note should be taken that after so many years of Ma Seraphine's husband abandoning her with the kids, he was reported at the social welfare in Cameroon by their children and at the palace in their village, but he refused to show up on either occasion and only showed up so many years later when the Fon in their village gave him an ultimatum. Arriving at the palace, he started insisting on wanting a divorce, which was rejected by the village head. Despite that, they continued to live apart until his death, and Mama Seraphine joined her children to do his burial.

Interview with Mama Seraphine on January 15, 2019

Interviewer: Ah say ye; ah wan ask about ya skul and ya maret life. You be go skul?

Interviewee: Yes, ah be go skul

Interviewer: For which age?

Interviewee: Age of 9 years

Interviewer: Why you be go skul na for da age?

Interviewee: Ah be go skul becos ma parents dem be ter me say make ah shidong for house di hold ma simol sista wey e be still dey simol.

Interviewer: Okay, so you be get to hold ye make e big fest before you go skul?

Interviewee: .... Before ah go school

Interviewer: You be get broda?

Interviewee: Ah be get ma follow back wey e be, be na boy. Na instead ye dey fest put am for skul.

Interviewer: Why dey fest put na instead ya followback for skul?

Interviewee: Dem say na boy suppose for go skul make girl shidong for house di helep.

Interviewer: Okay, so time wey you go skul for 9 years you complete which time?

Interviewee: No, ah enta skul for nine years make de seven years just complete at the age of Sixteen years.

Interviewer: Okay, and after you complete waiti happen?

Interviewee: As wey ah just complete so, ah come marret, ah make one year marret at the age of Seventeen.

Interviewer: You be marret na which kind marret, na you be go see ya man bring am or na how?

Interviewee: No, na some ye big sista be say e don see me ah correct for ye small broda for marret am.

Interviewer: E take you go gi am for yi?

Interviewee: Yes, e just ter pa dem say e go cam take me go gi for ye broda, then pa start for gree then mami deny, they over argue den dem joh gree.

Interviewer: Den time weh you go for ye house waiti happun mami?

Interviewee: As ha ah be go for ye house soteh ah just go, as ha ah go get belle den ah born e send me back for village. So when ah be cam back for village, den as ah deh dey, ah deh for da compound they di treat me very badly because time weh e be deh town e go send piking e chop da e broda dem go take am chop, milk…, they go take savon weh dem gi am say make ah wash piking e tin dem dey dem go take am for me. Den after dem nodi fest even gree sef say make ma pipo dem, ma family pipo dem cam gi me chop…. make dem look me.

Interviewer: Okay, then you say time weh e be di cam too they no di gree too say make e see you or you be di see ye you and ye di talk, you nodi ter ye di tin dem?

Interviewee: No na say when e commot for town cam, da e step moda dem, because e moda sef sef be don die since, dey go say make e no come shidong with me, make e only shidong with dem make dem di story dem. So, when e even wan turn back for town e nogo even ter me sef say e di go ye back for town.

Interviewer: Okay, den waiti cam last happun? Ya fada-in-law too be deh? Waiti be happun?

Interviewee: Ma fada-in-law be deh too, den dey di join follow. So as how ah be deh village some people dem commot for town, dey cam tell ye how time weh ah be go marret so, ah begin struggle for sell some tin before sh (check this word in another copy) di make am we di chop, say as how dey don cam do this kind tin, e di hear for e pikin dem so make e know say na bad tin e di do am. So de fada-in-law be say e hand no deh deh.

Interviewer: Okay so e be start support you da time?

Interviewee: Da time ma fada-in-law too be di support, na only sa yah nofit go for we compound.

Interviewer: Okay. Den so after that waiti be happun?

Interviewee: ... After dat, I be stay, stay den I come turn back for town…. because time weh ah don stay ah come turn back for town only with struggle deh

Interviewer: Okay…so as you then…so you be go…. den waiti happun for you and ye as you and ye be di stay?

Interviewee: Me and ye be di stay, e be di treat me very badly...na only me ah be di struggle sell before ah di feed pikin dem. After weh pikin dem be don big now, they start go skul na only me ah di sponsor, so alas e jus come lef we run go ye now leave me now with da pikin dem all.

Interviewer: woside e leave wona run go?

Interviewe: E jus leave am go remain with some woman

Interviewe: Den so since da time e since da time wona nova be together again

Interviewee: No, we nobe don be together because dey be don call ye for allover, call ye for social welfare, call ye for palace for village e di only deny for come).

Interviewer: Okay. So, but wona nobi divorce?

Interviewee: No…some one-time dem be take ye for palace go with ye, e say e want make dem divorce da Fon deny say e no want ye da kind tin. So, I bidi stay ma side weh ma pikin dem, ye too ye side.

Interviewer: Okay. So na why Fon be deny say make dem no divorce?

Interviewee: Fon be say e no kom for di divide na marret, e want for di join am na join am. But e say e no like am, e still go ye back for woside e be dey.

Interviewer: Then na waiti be di happun wit wona pikin dem, e be di take care for pikin dem?

Interviewee: E be deny ye say e nogo take care for no one pikin, na me one I be di struggle, di manage den di sponsor ma pikin dem.

Interviewer: Okay, so waiti kam last happun, e mean say till today so wona nova ever kam back together, woside e deh?

Interviewee: No, we no be even kam back together again because alast as ah be waka sponsor da pikin dem they commot. The first one commot go den start struggle now di helep me with e follow-back dem, after the man remain only for de house den e kam die ye for dey.

Interviewer: Ohh! Den de man e family na how dem dey with you now?

Interviewee: No, de man e family as how weh e die all we gather with pikin dem, we go burry ye, So, de man e family wo just be together now. Dey di ter me say da broda be ova get bad fashion weh dem nobe di gree da kind tin. Na now weh dem di talk weh ye too don die.

Interviewer: Okay. Den da ye broda dem weh dem be di do you da tin dem so with da moda- inlaw dem, woside they deh?

Interviewee: All da pipo dem be don die die all.

Interviewer: Oh!. So now for de family na who dem remain?

Interviewee: Na ye step dem remain now.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay mami…, olrite tank you very much ohh.

Interviewee. Tank you.

English translation of Mama Seraphine's interview.

Interviewer: Okay, I wish to ask about your school and married life. Did you go to school?
Interviewee: Yes, I went to school.

Interviewer: At what age?

Interviewee: At the age of 9.

Interviewer: Why did you go to school at that age?

Interviewee: I went to school at that time because I was told by my parents to stay home and take care of my kid sister, who was still young.

Interviewer: Okay, so you had to stay with her at home so that she grows up first before you can go to school?

Interviewee: …Before I go to school.

Interviewer: Did you have a brother?

Interviewee: I had my kid brother, who was rather sent to school before me.

Interviewer: Why did they rather send your kid brother first to school?

Interviewee: They said boys are the ones to go to school, while the girls sit at home and help.

Interviewer: Okay, so at what age did you complete your studies after going to school at the age of nine?

Interviewee: I went to school at the age of nine, spent seven years, and completed it at the age of

sixteen.

Interviewer: Okay, so what happened after your completion?

Interviewee: After completing, I stayed for one year and then got married at the age of seventeen.

Interviewer: How did you get married? Are you the one who brought your husband and introduced him to your family, or how did it happen?

Interviewee: No, it was one of his elder sisters who said I was fit to get married to her brother.

Interviewer: Did she take you to his place?

Interviewee: Yes, she told my father that she would take me to her brother; my father accepted, but my mother was against. They argued a lot about it, and she finally accepted.

Interviewer: Then, when you went to his house, what happened, Mam?

Interviewee: When I went to his house, I became pregnant, had the baby, and he sent me back to the village. So, while I was in their family compound in the village, they treated me very badly. Whenever he sends something from the city for the baby, his brothers will withhold it from me; they will use or eat everything, even soap meant for washing the baby's clothes. His family did not even permit my people, my family to come and give me food or check on me.

Interviewer: Okay. So, during his visits, was he not allowed to see you, or did you keep all this from him whenever you met?

Interviewee: No. The thing was that whenever he came from the city, his stepmothers, who were in charge since he had lost his own mother, would stop him from seeing me. They will make him stay with them until his return, and he never even told me when he was returning to the city.

Interviewer: Okay, so what finally happened? Was your father-in-law around, too? what happened?

Interviewee: My father-in-law was around too, and he was following what the others said. Some

people came to the village from the city and told him that since I got married, I had been struggling to do business so the family could have something to eat. They told him that listening to his children and treating me this way was very bad. My father-in- law then told his children that he was no longer part of the bad treatment they were giving me.

Interviewer: Okay, so did he start defending you from that time?

Interviewee: From that time on, my father-in-law started defending me, but I still could not go to our family compound.

Interviewer: Okay. So, what happened later?

Interviewee: …… After that, I stayed for some time and went back to the city because after staying,

I went back to the city and continued with the struggle.

Interviewer: Okay… So what happened between both of you when you went back and started living together?

Interviewee: He treated me badly when we were living together; I was the only one struggling to do business in order to feed the kids. When the children started going to school, I was still the one sponsoring them until he finally…, he decided to leave and abandoned all our kids with me.

Interviewer: Where did he go after abandoning you people?

Interviewee: He left us and went and was staying with one lady.

Interviewer: So since then, he... since then, you have not been together again?

Interviewee: No, we have never been together again because he was summoned all over social welfare, the Fon's palace, and he kept refusing to show up.

Interviewer: Okay. But did you guys not have a divorce?

Interviewee: No…at one point he was summoned to the palace, and he said he wanted a divorce, but the Fon refused that he doesn't want anything like that. So I started living on my own with my kids, and he was living on his own too. Interviewer: Okay. So why did the Fon refuse his divorce proposal?

Interviewee: The Fon said he did not come to separate marriages; rather, he came to put them together, but he still refused and went back to where he was living.

Interviewer: Then what happened to your children? Was he taking care of the children?

Interviewee: He refused to take care of our children, so I was the only one struggling, managing and sponsoring my children.

Interviewer: Okay, so what finally happened? Does it mean that, to date, you people have never come back together? Where is he now?

Interviewee: No, we did not even come back together again because I finally struggled and sponsored my children, and they left home. The first one left and started struggling and helping me to take care of his younger ones. The man stayed only in that lady's house and finally died.

Interviewer: OH! Then how does the man´s family relate to you now?

Interviewee: When he died, we all gathered to bury him, so we were together with his family. They told me that their brother had a very bad attitude, which they were not in agreement with. It's actually now they are saying all these, after his death.

Interviewer: Okay. Then where are all those his brothers and mothers-in-law who were treating you badly?

Interviewee: All those people had died.

Interviewer: OH! So now, who are those left in his family?

Interviewee: Only his half siblings are still alive.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay, mam…, alright, thank you very much.

Interviewee: Thank you.

Looking at the above case, one can observe that the lady's limited education somehow might have contributed to the bad treatment she was getting (though this is not conclusive). Her in-laws knew that she did not know her rights or did not have anyone to back her up, so they could treat her in whatever way they deemed necessary. Her case was even worse compared to other stories I listened to, because she did not only get this bad treatment from her in-laws but from her husband too. She was married yet was fully responsible for her children's upkeep and education, while her husband put up a nonchalant attitude towards family matters. His bad treatment for her was also motivated by the fact that he had a concubine who knew very well that he was married and had children who needed his attention yet decided to stand in the way. According to her (personal communication 15th January 2019), things were never getting better; she also went through a lot of domestic violence and was even beaten at one point by her husband's mistress in church. Her children never at any point felt like they had a father because he was never there for them and did not even have a good relationship with them. It got to a point where whenever they heard or saw their father coming, they would all go into the room and even sometimes pretend like they were already sleeping just to avoid having any contact with him. This attitude pushed the children to be self-dependent at a very early stage in their lives, and they had to struggle to fend for themselves. She wondered about the lesson her children could take into society when they did not even have a picture of a good family and had never felt the warmth and love of a father. At one point, it seems her husband became tired of the family because, as she mentioned, he permanently moved out of the house and joined his mistress, where he lived until his death. She recounted how the whole experience was a trauma to her, and whenever she thinks of it, she has this feeling of anger and wishes that things were different. She wished her father had rather sent her to further her education after her primary level; that would have given her a solid ground in so many areas. If she had been educated, she could express herself better, she could get a better job, and she would not have to go through all the stress she went through just to ensure her children were fine. Her in-laws might have had at least a level of respect for her. To her, if given the chance, she will never repeat the same mistake her parents made by forcing their child into an early marriage without giving her education. She is grateful that almost all her children have been educated and can defend themselves in any situation. Her advice for the younger generation is that they should never get married to any man against their will and should do whatever it takes to get themselves educated at least to a

reasonable level because education is one of the biggest weapons someone can own. She also thinks that if women can stand for each other, then the world will be a better place. According to her, things would have been different if her stress ended with her in-laws; it would have been different if her husband's concubine did not accept to be a home breaker in the first place. If women tell married men to concentrate on their homes, so many men will not have any reason to maltreat their wives. But when women conveniently accept and encourage married men when they make advances, then they are directly or indirectly fighting a fellow woman. She could not believe that her stepmothers-in-law were the people who caused her problems in her marital home. If they had advised their son as mothers should do, he might have reconsidered his actions. On the contrary, they always created problems whenever he came around during her stay in the village with them, discouraged him from talking with her, and even ensured that whatever he brought for her and the children was not handed over to her. She ended by saying that if parents must make a change, they should educate their children in general and stop the ideology of women being a 'property'. It is the mindset of considering women as 'property' that has made many of them go through terrible treatments in their marriages. When a family considers a child as one of their many 'properties', it is usually because they anticipate receiving the bride price when they are at a marriageable age. Some families even exaggerate the amount demanded for their daughters, and that actually gives the impression they are being sold. Some men, after paying this bride price, also have the impression of owning property and think they could treat the women as they wish (see Johnson-Freese, 2019). In Mama Seraphina's case, she remembered her husband did not even complete the bride price that was demanded from him by her parents, yet he would boast at home, telling her that she was now his property and there was nothing she could do about it. One of the factors that triggered his behaviour was the fact that he knew that she did not have so many brothers or family members who could defend her. When she could no longer take this maltreatment, she had to move away from the city where the husband was living, and that is how she became independent from him. Hence, she will advise young women not to endure and die, when the violence becomes too much and it seems nothing can stop it; they should move to a safe place and protect themselves.

When we look at Mama Rebecca Chi's[45] own case below, we will realise that her case is not so different from Mama Seraphina's case. Mama Rebecca went to school and only ended in class two (primary school) because there was no one to continue sponsoring her. She was therefore forced to get married to one old man after dropping out of school. She was in the marriage for about 10 years, but according to her, she did not have any feeling of a married woman because she was completely on her

[45]Stage name

own. No one in her husband's family related to her well, not even her husband, who seemed to have little or no interest in her. She then decided at one point to leave the marriage (though not divorced as per tradition) and started living on her own. Since then, she has been trying on her own to make ends meet through her small-scale businesses and farm work that she engages herself in.

Interview 5th January 2019 With Mama Rebecca Chi.

Interviewer: Mami I want to ask you some kwesion dem concerning ya skol and marret life.

Interviewee: De tin weh e deh na say ah be wake up so person for send me to school no be deh. Den dem just see pa say make ah go marret ye, ah go shidon for deh too eh no waka, den ah commot me.

Interviewer: Okay mami. You be going to school for which age?

Interviewee: Ah be… na we be start da school for CBC, but man for pay school fees make ah go nobe deh.

Interviewer: Okay, mami, for which age? Weh you be deh how old?

Interviewee: Weh ah be deh da time..ah think ah be deh na 6 years yee.

Interviewer: Okay, mami, okay. So you be go school for 6 years. You finish the skol na when mami?

Interviewee: Ah no finish am, ah be go reach only for class two den way for continue e no deh.

Interviewer: School fees, nobe deh?.

Interviewee: Ehemmm! person for pay no be deh.

Interviewer: Okay, mami. You marry for which age?

Interviewee: Ah be maret for 18 years.

Interviewer: Okay, mami. How you be meet'op ya masa?

Interviewee: Ah be meet up ye de marry nobe waka and no man no be deh weh e for fit for helep me even de man. So ah just remain for deh, ah suffer for 10 years before ah commot for deh.

Weh ah be get accident for ma foot den ah commot, ah kam stay for Bamenda.

Interviewer: Okay, mami. How ya relationship with ya in-law dem be deh?

Interviewee: No, me and dem no be even deh, ah nofit talk, say me and dem be deh fine because no man nobe take care for me, no man nobe get time for me. Den ah be commot for deh, ah kam stay for Bamenda here, ah want make na market family man too for support me no deh, even person weh ah fit take something for ye no deh, so ah just enter market I di borrow den I di sell before I manage ma life kam reach for here so.

Interviewer: Okay. So dem no be di maltreat you in any way, the in-law dem nobe di do no bad tin or dem nobe just get ya time?

Interviewee: They nobe get ma time because even e mami be say e nobe want me so all da tin be be so, ah nobe fit talk say ah dong marret some man because ah nobe feel anything for marret.

Interviewer: Okay mami. Okay, mami, tank you very much. Interviewee: Haahahha…na so de life de ya ma pikin.

Interviewer: Haha... okay, mami.

Interviewee: eheh.

English translation of Mama Rebecca's interview.

Interviewer: Mother, I would like to ask you some questions about your education and marriage life.

Interviewee: The thing is that when I grew up, there was no one to send me to school, so my family saw one old man and sent me to get married to him. When I went there, the marriage was not successful, so I left after some time.

Interviewer: Okay mam. At what age did you go to school?

Interviewee: I... we are the ones who started the primary school in CBC, but there was no one to pay

my fees so I could complete my studies. Interviewer: Okay, mam, at what age? How old were you? Interviewee: I was at that time... I think I was 6 years old.

Interviewer: Okay, mother, okay. So you went to school at the age of 6. Mam, when did you complete the school?

Interviewee: I didn't complete it; I went only up to class two, and there was no way to continue.

Interviewer: Was there no school fee?

Interviewee: Ehemmm, there was no one to pay.

Interviewer: Okay, mam. At what age did you get married?

Interviewee: I got married at the age of 18.

Interviewer: Okay, mother. How did you meet your husband?

Interviewee: I met him and we got married; things did not work out, and there was no one to help me; Even the man couldn't help, so I stayed there for 10 years suffering and finally left when I had an accident. That is when I came to Bamenda and settled there.

Interviewer: Okay mam. How was your relationship with your in-laws?

Interviewee: No, we were not even together; I can't say we had a good relationship because none of them took care of me; none cared about me. When I left and came to Bamenda, I wanted to start a business, but there was no family member to help not even someone I could take something from. So, I just went to the market and started borrowing business things to sell before I could manage my life till this point.

Interviewer: Okay. So, the in-laws were not maltreating you, they did nothing bad to you, or they just did not care about you?

Interviewee: They did not care about me because even his mother said she did not want me. With all of these, I could not say I was married because I did not feel anything in marriage.

Interviewer: Okay, mother. Okay, mother, thank you very much.

Interviewee: Hahahaha…that is life, my child.

Interviewer: Haha…okay, mother.

Interviewee: Yes.

In Mama Rebecca's case, it did not take her long to leave the marriage, contrary to Mama Seraphina, who stayed for a very long time before leaving. As mentioned in the interview, she could not consider herself married because her in-laws, especially her mother-in-law, disliked her. Her mother-in-law was never in agreement with the marriage; hence, she was treated like a nobody, frustrating her life and making her give up. She had to give up that early because even her husband did not fight for the relationship and did not treat her well. He even had another relationship with another woman that finally led to them getting married. That is where he placed all his interest, abandoning Mama Rebecca to take care of herself and her children. Today, she regrets the fact that she cannot even read nor write anything because her formal education was terminated at a very premature stage, though there is nothing she can do now to remedy the situation.

The following case (interview 20th January 2020) is a bit different as the interviewee had the opportunity of being sponsored by the husband. It brought a lot of controversies to the family, but she was able to defend herself confidently and was lucky her husband did not bow to the pressure from her in-laws. So, Mama Cecelia Nebane[46] went to school between the ages of eight and nine, and she went to school this late because, as the first child, she had to stay to take care of her junior ones. Mama Cecelia recounted that in her village, it was considered that schooling was mainly for the boys, while there was no need to spend much money to send girls to school as they were considered someone else's 'property' (wife). She completed her schooling at the age of twenty-five after getting married. Mama Cecelia got married between the age of 18 and 19 to a man who knew the importance of schooling. He then took over from her parents and continued sponsoring her until she got her GCE Ordinary Level (O-Level). From this very point of voluntarily deciding to sponsor his wife, one can say Mama Cecelia's husband had a different relationship with her in contrast to the first two cases presented above. For sure, she confirmed this by saying that her relationship with her husband was good. She rather had problems with her in-laws, who did not like the fact that their brother had such a close relationship with his wife. She emphasised on the point that her in-laws did not like her at all, and they hated her more for the fact that her husband sent her to school and complained at every given opportunity that he was spending too much on her. They feared that their brother would stop taking

[46]Fictitious name

care of them and looked for every means to create problems. This hatred, according to Mama Cecelia, came more from her sisters-in-law, and it became so intense that they lost their two sons. Her in-laws went as far as trying to teach her husband how to behave at home and even tried to convince him to get a second wife, which he did not agree to it. Mama Cecelia's emphasis on not knowing how their sons died was because, like she mentioned, both of their sons died mysteriously, and she is strongly convinced that their deaths were connected to the family misunderstandings. At the time of the interview, her husband was still alive (he died months later), and they were still together and stronger in their relationship.

Interview with Mam Cecelia Nebane

Interviewer: …. Mum, I want to ask you a few questions concerning your education and your married life.

Interviewee: Yes...

Interviewer: Okay, mom. At what age did you... Did you go to school?

Interviewee: Yes, I went to school.

Interviewer: Na woa ooo (wow!!). At what age did you go to school?

Interviewee: I went to school... primary school at the age of nine... Eight and nine. Interviewer: Eight and nine, mom, okay, why did you go to school at that age?

Interviewee: I went to school at that age because I was taking care of my junior ones.

Interviewer: Okay, so you had to stay back at home and take care of your junior ones for them to grow before you go to school?

Interviewee: Yes

Interviewer: At that time, were some of your siblings going to school? Interviewee: Yes, the boys were going to school.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Because normally in our village, they consider that only boys can go to school and

that girls are different people´s property.

Interviewer: Okay. Interviewee: Ehem (yes).

Interviewer: So, at what age did you complete your school? Interviewee: At the age of 25.

Interviewer: Okay, okay. At what level did you complete? Interviewee: I completed in form 5.

Interviewer: Okay, mom. At what age did you get married? Interviewee: I go married at the age of 18, 19, between 18 and 19.

Interviewer: Okay, mom, so you got married and continued going to school? Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: I went to school sponsored by my husband.

Interviewer: Okay, wow! Okay, how was your relationship with your husband? Interviewee: Emmmm... my relationship... my relationship with my husband was good.

Interviewer: Okay, then how was…how did you relate to your in-laws? Did they like you or not? How did you relate to them?

Interviewee: My in-laws did not like me at all, simply because my husband and I communicated well in our relationship and the people hated me, and more to that because he sent me to school, and they thought as he is spending on me, he cannot spend on them. They continued doing many things in the family; a lot of hatred was there, especially from the sisters-in-law: their hatred was too much to a point that we lost our two children that we couldn't know how it came about. So…. Ehemmm.

Interviewer: Okay, mom, can you give some details, for example, the way they used to treat you or the bad ways that they used to treat you?

Interviewee: Specially... some of the bad ways they used to treat me: they indoctrinated my husband against me, they used to tell him how to come and behave at home, especially when... it reached a time that they said my husband had to get married to another wife. But my

husband was not in support of the idea. So, they kept on convincing him in that direction, and when they failed, we lost our children, and we couldn't tell what happened.

Interviewer: Okay, mom. Are you and your husband still together till date? Interviewee: We are still together.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay, thank you very much. Interviewee: You are welcome and thank you too.

Among these three interviews, she was the only one who lasted in her marriage until the death of her husband (as of the time of the interview, her husband was still alive but died some months later). Her husband's love for her could be clearly seen, and just the decision to educate his wife was something so special, something that was done by very few men in the past. He was even interested in getting his wife educated to a level that was higher than his. He had a great level of unity with his wife, such that his family could not influence him negatively. She faced a lot of resistance from her in-laws, who thought their brother might stop taking care of them after sending his wife to school. They tried by all means to indoctrinate her husband to go against her, yet he did not give in. The death of the only two sons they had to her was an attack on the whole family, launched by the in-laws when they could not turn her husband against her. She strongly believed that her sons were killed due to jealousy and an attempt to disrupt the family. According to their tradition, women hardly inherit properties (though things are gradually changing with time). As a result of this, people always think when one has a male child, then he has someone who will take over him when he dies, but when he has just daughters, it becomes difficult because women are meant to get married and join their husbands, and not to stay and take care of their father's properties (see Falola & Yacob-Haliso 2017:242). She [Mama Nebane] therefore thinks it is because of this tradition that her sons were killed because the husband's family had always and is still interested in his properties.

The above interviews are just three out of the many cases I spoke to and observed that contributed to the impression people have that women will always carry the blame. These three cases all showed that whether the women had good relationships with their husbands or not, their in-laws saw them as intruders in their family and showed them how much they were disliked at every given opportunity. From my observations too, it seems more like the blame allocated to women in their marriages and the impression that they are always the cause of every problem around them is not limited to one's

immediate in-laws. Sometimes even neighbours will take turns in trying to cause one man or the other to hate his wife. During this research, some women opened up and lamented on how their neighbours, especially women, will throw slang and insults at them whenever they feel it is necessary, trying to dictate to them how to run their homes. During one of my fieldwork trips, I observed and spoke with one neighbour who seemed to have been going through a lot. I observed that her landlady was always complaining about her; nothing she did ever seemed right to this woman. Whenever this landlady had the least opportunity, she would gossip to anyone around about how much she hated that lady because of how lazy she was and her attitude. She will sometimes even transfer her aggression to the lady's son and will sometimes make sure that the lady hears her grumbling about her. Getting all of these complaints, I decided to talk to this lady in question (during one of our casual discussions) to know if she was related to this landlady in any way or if they had ever had any disagreement. According to her, she had no idea why the lady hated her that much and was bound to make her life miserable. She said she could not imagine leaving her mother-in-law's house because of the troubles she was facing just to come and meet someone who was even worse than her mother-in-law. According to her story, she used to live with her husband at her mother-in-law's house, who asked the son to divorce her or leave her house with his 'rejected' wife. The husband decided that they should go and look for a place far away from his mother so that he could have some peace with his family. Little did she know that she would come and meet a landlady who would want to control her like her mother-in-law. Her landlady complained when she cooked late, complained when she used the general toilet, complained when she delayed cleaning her own house, and even complained when she delayed bathing her child or give him food at the time the landlady deemed necessary. She decided to ignore the landlady and would not respond to whatever she said, and because of this, she [the landlady] started pressuring them to leave her house as fast as possible. The biggest shock to her was when her landlady called her husband to complain about her, telling him how lazy and dirty his wife was, and even went to the extent of telling him that she would not have approved of it if he informed her before going to get married to her. According to her, this was the peak of it, as she could not imagine why a fellow woman, who is supposed to be like a mother to her, would rather choose to make her life that miserable. She could not comprehend the fact that this is the same woman who had told her how much she suffered when she got married at an early age and was treated badly by her in-laws and her husband. She was later sent out of her marital home, and her husband took in a new wife. Since then, she struggled on her own to take care of her kids and herself until she got to where she was at the time of the research. In her opinion, she would have expected more understanding from this woman who knew what it meant to be hated by the very people who are supposed to receive you into their family and show you

love. She expected this woman to love her more and be more motherly to her, considering the fact that she had been rejected by her mother-in-law and needed more love than hate. On the contrary, she decided to be torn in her flesh and was even trying by all means possible to tarnish her image to her husband to make him hate her. As of the time we had the chat, she had resorted with the husband to leave the house and go look for another house to get away from her troubles.

These are some of the cases that led to a reflection of the relationship between the mother and the son. Could it be that mothers are always so close to their sons that it becomes so difficult to be objective whenever their sons are involved? It seems as if the relationship between mothers and sons has made some mothers think that only their sons deserve the best. It has made society think that women are the ones to fight hard and get married; it has influenced the ideology that when there is a problem in marriage, women should be questioned more. This mindset and behaviour have led to the societal belief that only women should be questioned when they are not married, while men are left to decide when to get a wife or not. This ideology people have, that it is a disgrace for a woman not to be married at a certain age, has placed so many women between the fire and the deep blue sea. Women are not free from the bad treatment they get from their mothers-in-law; neither are they free from the pressure they get from their own mothers. Some cases and situations have proven that many women coax their kids to adhere to certain societal beliefs even unintentionally—that is exactly why it is quite common to see people complaining about the same practices they take part in. It simply means they had advanced the same ideologies or influenced them without even being aware of their consequences. On Delly's Matchups, as indicated in Figure 19, a guy lamented how his mother did not want to accept his fiancé because of her background, and he really needed help on how to go about it. It is worth noting that inasmuch as this case, like many other Facebook cases, might be unverifiable, it is yet symbolic, as many others might have faced a similar situation, which I find so connected to in-law cases. This is because it shows how some women start their marital journey already with rejection from an in-law(s). One can only imagine what will finally become of her situation if the man gets married to him against his mother's wish.

So, according to this guy, his mother is completely against his choice of the woman he wants to marry. His mother does not find the lady educated enough or of good social standing to be her son's wife. It is even more difficult for the poster because his father, though he would have loved to, cannot give him the full support he needs as his mother will always shut him up [father] whenever he tries to speak on the matter. The story supposed that he was fighting so hard for his girlfriend that he even had to sponsor her education at one point since the mother was complaining about her educational level. Yet she was still insisting on her class, which she considered to be low.

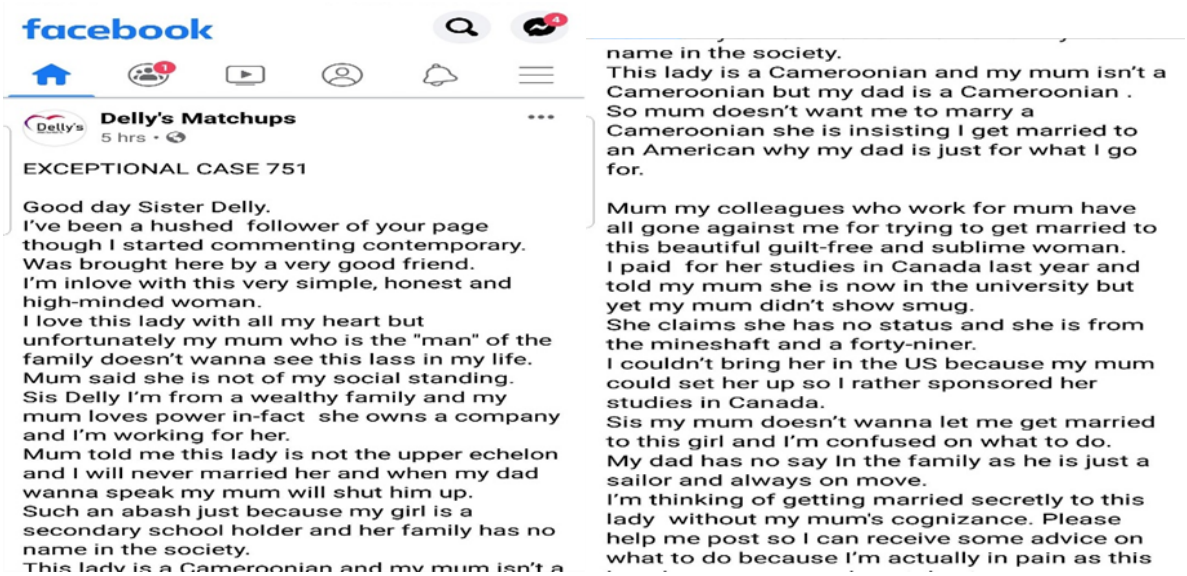


Figure 20: Screenshot from Delly's Matchup[47]

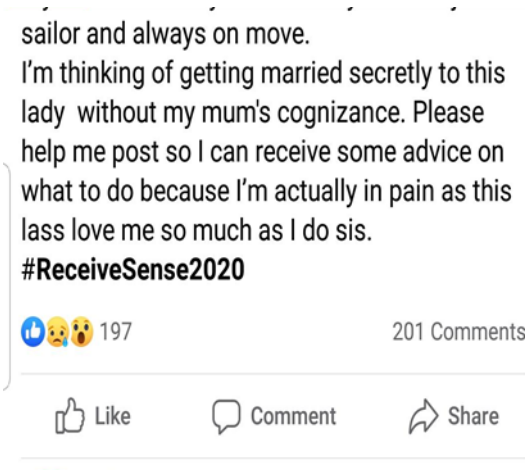


Figure 21: Continuation from figure 20.

When this case was posted, he got many proposals from the platform, but one comment, as seen in figure 22 below, attracted many readers more, especially as it came from a guy who rather chose to use the opportunity to educate women:

[47] https://www.facebook.com/DellysMatchupsRe Accessed on October 17th 2018

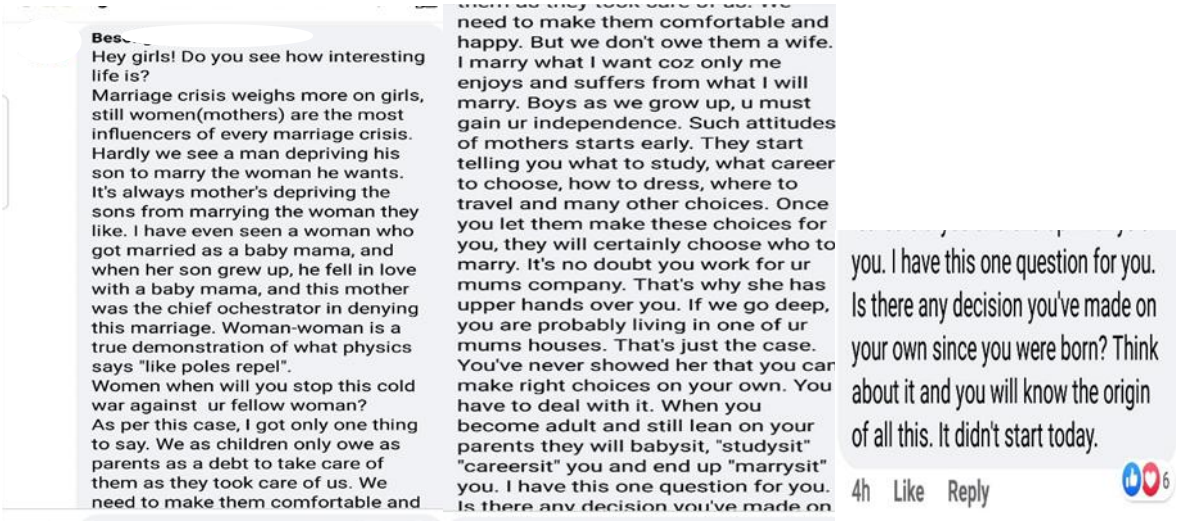


Figure 22: Comments under the post in figures 20 & 21[48]

It is important to mention that having a comment from a man, contrary to the many comments coming from women, makes a difference, which is necessary for this work. It is interesting to also read what men think about these topics. Now, as mentioned in figure 22 by the commentator, many women are still making the same mistake of deciding for their sons from childhood. He pointed out to the women that despite the fact that marriage crises weigh more on women, women are still the ones influencing the crises. He mentioned one case he was versed with, where the mother had a child out of wedlock before eventually getting married but was the first person to kick against her son getting married to a baby mama when he presented one to them. The commenter even compared a women-to-women relationship to the statement “like poles repel," saying women’s relationship to their fellow women is a typical demonstration of the above statement. He then went further to say that children only owe their parents the responsibility to take care of them as they did for them when they were young, but do not owe them wives. By implication, he meant that he gets married to whoever he chooses because he is the one to live with his choice and not his parents or family. He therefore urged men to get their independence as early as they can because parents, in most situations, try to influence their children’s decisions. They even start making decisions on behalf of their sons, like what to study, the career path to follow, how to dress, and even where and when to travel. When you give this chance to continue being influenced, then it makes it easier for them to even want to choose a wife for you. His advice to the poster was that he had to stand on his own, as it was obvious that the mother could easily control him as he was working in her company and probably living in one of her houses. He wondered if the poster had ever made any decision on his own, and if not, then he shouldn’t have been surprised that

[48] https://www.facebook.com/DellysMatchupsRe

he was experiencing all that control from his mom. He, however, ended by saying that if given the chance, parents can "babysit," "studysit," "careersit" and end up "marrysit" you; hence, being independent is very important.

This attitude of parents, as seen in the above case, finally leads to them wanting to decide whom their sons end up with as wives. Even women who got married after having a child or children out of wedlock strongly go against their sons getting married to women who have had kids before. This is so because society upholds someone who got married as a virgin in very high esteem, such that they attribute bad morals to women who have kids born out of wedlock. This is in such a way that in some societies, as opined by some writers, an extra ceremony is held before a marriage ceremony to prove that the bride to be is a virgin; otherwise, some consequences might be faced (Gueye, 2013:11–12). Many families might not be courageous enough to ask their sons if his wife-to-be is a virgin, but once a baby is involved, it is a clear indication that she is not a virgin, and they sometimes even assume and conclude that she has been sleeping around with numerous men. The billion-dollar question that many people have always asked, though it seems no one is getting an answer, is: Who has ever questioned whether a man is a virgin or not? On the contrary, it seems like men are being hailed for having had so many girlfriends before marriage. Some men even derive pride in making a list of the women they have dated and sharing with friends—something a woman will immediately be termed a "prostitute" if she does something similar. No one seems to care that the deflowered women obviously had an encounter with a man who, at that moment, is obviously not a virgin too. This is why, though Lupri's (1983) work on this topic might come across as something that happened so many decades ago, I still find it not completely out of place, as many people still testify to experiences like that. Lupri had it too that another aspect of women's changing position in family and society in South Africa was their connection to premarital relationships. It is explained that even though it might vary from clan to clan, all ethnic groups value virginity seriously as it determines the lobola paid for each woman. With this high consideration for virgins, it therefore implies there could be a possibility that women with children out of wedlock might not be easily welcomed by in-laws or might be received yet not valued as much as a virgin will be valued. This attitude of scrutinising women, especially by their mothers-in-law, has placed so many unmarried women under fear. While some of the already married women seem to be living in total fear of the unknown and even traumatised just at the mention of their mothers-in-law, many unmarried women are already worried about what the future holds as they wonder what kind of mother-in-law they will meet. Some single ladies are already wondering what it takes to make a mother-in-law happy, how to become friends with them, and how to avoid having a misunderstanding with them. One lady came up with a question on how to be friends with a mother-in-law, and I was

shocked to read the mentality women have about mothers-in-law through the many comments that followed:

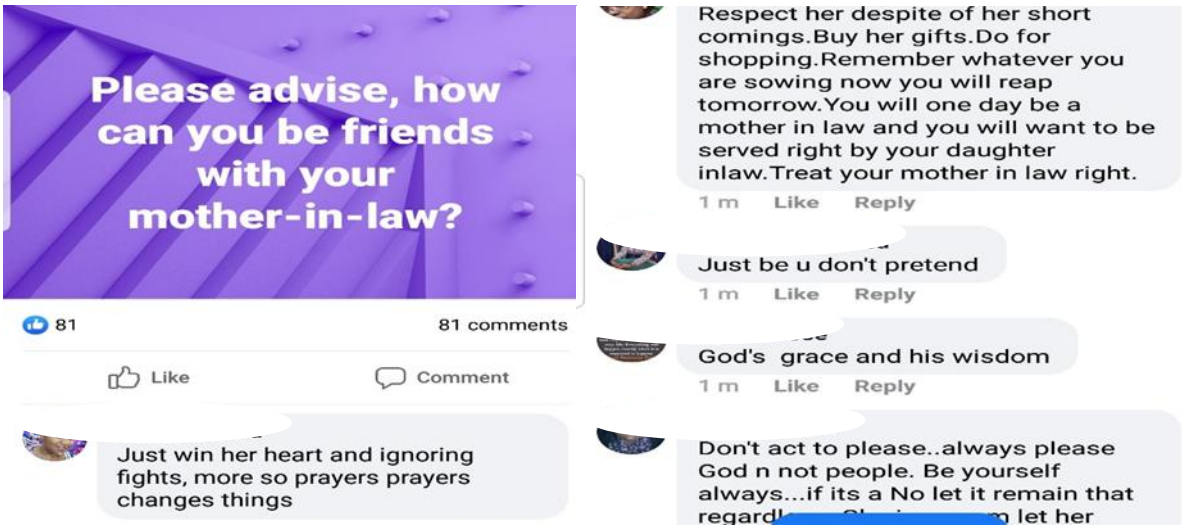


Figure 23: Screenshot from Eve's corner (when members "cruise" and learn)[49]

Analysing these first screenshots in figure 23, while the first commenter thinks that the poster should just work on winning the heart of her mother-in-law and ignore every fight, in addition to praying hard, the second commenter suggests that she should respect her despite her shortcomings.

She thinks it will also work better if she buys her gifts and takes her shopping. She urged her to consider this as seed sowing as she was reminded that she will also be a mother-in-law tomorrow and will expect her own daughter-in-law to treat her well. The third commenter, on her part, opines that the poster should simply be herself and not pretend, while the fourth is of the opinion that she should seek God's grace and wisdom on how to go about it. The last commenter on these screenshots ended by saying she should always try to please God and not act to please the people around her, and she should always stand by her decision regardless of what her mother-in-law thinks or says.

[49] https://www.facebook.com/groups/1954927878161846

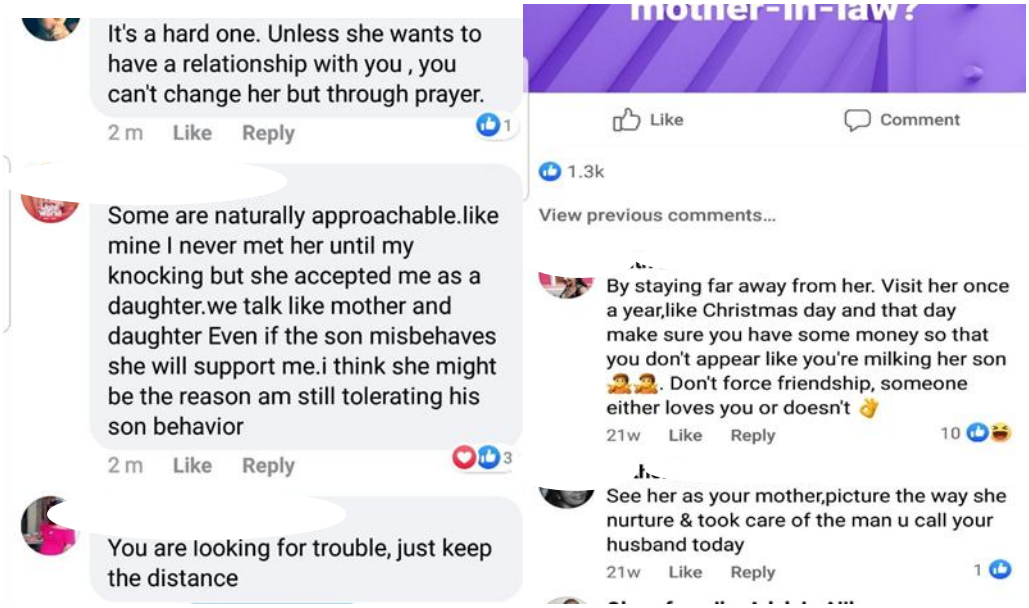


Figure 24: Follow up comments under figure 23[50]

Coming now to figure 24, the first commenter thinks it is hard for someone to have a good relationship with her mother-in-law, unless she is willing to have one with you. To her, you can only change your mother-in-law's behavior through prayers. The next person propounded that some mothers-in-laws are very approachable and make good friends. She used hers as an example, stating that she had always had a good relationship with her mother-in-law since the first day they met, and she even thinks her mother-in-law is the reason why she is still tolerating her husband's behavior. The other person suggested that the poster is simply looking for trouble by wanting to be friends with her mother-in-law and should just keep her distance. Meanwhile, the fourth person advised the poster to stay away, visit her once a year on days like Christmas and should always make sure she has some money on the day of her visit, otherwise she may appear like she is milking their son's money. She

thinks that friendship is not forced as someone either loves you or does not. Then the last person advised her to consider her like a mother and relate with her in the same way she would relate with her own mother and reminded her of the fact that she is the one who nurtured and took care of the man she calls her husband.

[50] https://www.facebook.com/groups/1954927878161846

Figure 25: Continuation of comments for figure 23[51]

The commenter on figure 25 put forward that not all mothers-in-law are as bad as people may think, for some of them are really good and easy to live with. The next person implied that her own mother-in-law is good so far as there is money for her. Hence, to her, some of them are good if you give them money and gifts. The other person believes that it is better when one stays far away from her in-laws but also thinks that money talks—meaning that money can make them love you. Then, the last commenter made it very clear that she should respect boundaries, pray hard, and bear in mind that her mother-in-law will never be her mother. She advised her not to try too hard, as her mother-in-law has her own children to love genuinely.

Just from the comments, one could deduce that many people think it is very difficult and even impossible to have a good relationship with your in-laws, especially the female in-laws. This is something where one should have expected the contrary to be the case, a situation where women can freely confide in their mothers-in-law. During my fieldwork, it was realised that whenever the word mother-in-law was mentioned in the chats with the women I had spoken to, either during a formal or an informal setting, the reaction was almost the same at every point. Women will recount their experiences with their mothers-in-law, which in most cases were not pleasant. The women expressed an ideology that a mother-in-law can never be good to her daughter-in-law. During one of the sessions (of the different meetings held with women), a lady mentioned that she lives in her mother-in-law's house, and the mother-in-law is even the one taking care of most of the bills in the house. The reactions that came from the other ladies were intriguing—most of them did not believe that the love and care were genuine; someone even warned her to be careful because her mother-in-law might show her "real

[51] https://www.facebook.com/groups/1954927878161846

colour" at one point. One of the ladies just went as far as assuming that she must have had good in-laws too when she got married, and that is why she decided to also be good to her daughters-in-law. On the contrary, as recounted by the said lady in marriage, her mother-in-law never had the opportunity to enjoy her marriage like some women did. At a very tender age, she was forced to get married to a man who was old enough to be her father and even older. She was just one of his many wives and could barely get any love. At that time, the woman she considered a mother-in-law was one of the man's wives, and she could not boast of being married and did not have the luxury of talking about in-laws like her friends did. It was because of that experience that she promised to give her children the best. She further clarified that being good to her does not mean her mother-in-law treats all her daughters-in-law the same. She rather believes that the two things influencing their relationship are the fact that her husband has never given the mother the chance to complain about her and the fact that she tries her best to maintain a good relationship with her mother-in-law. It has established a level of trust between them now to the extent that they can confidently confide in each other on certain issues. On the other hand, she [the mother-in-law] has issues with one of the daughters-in-law, which means that this lady will not see their mother-in-law in the same way she sees her. In other words, she tried to explain that not all mothers-in-law are bad or wicked, as some may put it, but their behaviours could also be influenced by those of their sons or their wives. If a man stands to defend his wife without disrespecting his mother, then there is a high possibility that his mother will accord the same respect to his wife too.

This research seeks also to add to the existing knowledge that the issue of gender inequality, when well rooted in society, is finally experienced at many levels, and the part of the in-laws is not left out, as seen here. These cases might give one the impression that most in-laws in this area of study have become more like rivals, creating camps and trying hard to discredit the other camps. One would have thought that two families coming together should be an opportunity for families to grow bigger and stronger, yet it seems to be the time when many families get to beef against one another. Some women, during their interview sessions, expressed their disappointment in the language that their mother-in-law will even use to address them. According to one lady called Beatrice (interview 16th March 2020, Bamenda), it is bad enough that you are married in a family, and no one seems to accept you. But it becomes terrible when they use very derogatory words to address you at home, making you understand that you have no background or that your own background does not matter to them. Even in situations where they are not speaking, their body language even turns out to play the worst role. She had the following to say:

"Have you ever lived in a home where each time someone sees you, her body language from head to toe changes? She even sometimes spits, claps her hands, and makes all sorts of side comments just to provoke you. That is exactly what I go through in my home, just because I am living with my in-laws. I have always wondered if that woman has ever considered for once that she has daughters who are married and some who will one day get married. The daughters are not even better, yet they will be praying and hoping to get a loving husband with a good mother-in-law. I seriously laugh at them because what you sow is what you will reap. You cannot be treating your brother's or son's wife like trash yet expecting to enjoy it when you get married. I have come to realise that it seems women have not come to terms with the fact that we keep reproducing what we complain about. When you plant maize, don't go to the farm expecting to harvest beans. That is the society we complain about, yet unfortunately, it is the same society we are rebuilding.".

Beatrice

Mariam (interview of 16th March 2020, Bamenda), in her own case, opined that she has been wondering if all these were total witchcraft or hypocrisy. To her, she could not understand how a mother will be working at the ministry of women's affairs, a ministry that is meant to protect the rights of women and ensure that they receive equal treatment yet treats her daughter-in-law back home like she is a nobody—using her situation as an example. She also mentioned an incident where her sister-in-law was boasting about how much her husband loves her and how he showers her with gifts all the time, but she was extremely shocked when her own husband bought her an expensive gift for her birthday, and the same sister-in-law complained bitterly that her brother is spending unnecessarily and using money that could be used for better things in the family. This got her thinking, and she could not believe that her sister-in-law finds it okay when she receives gifts from her husband, but not when her brother does the same for his wife. This case was like a confirmation to a post that was meant just for fun, posted on one of the Facebook pages, yet carried an important message as the women deliberated on.

Figure 26: Screenshot from Eve's corner[52]

Going by the many stories followed during my fieldwork, the above post in figure 26 represents some women's reality on the ground. So many women experienced situations where they had to be called names for being loved by their husbands. Juju, as used in the above screenshot, is a term from Naija, which means charm. This implies that most in-laws will hardly believe that their brother or son loves his wife genuinely; it will always be attributed to charms, meaning the woman must have given something mixed with charm for him to eat or have visited a witch doctor to do some incantations. Following this, Cecilia (interview, 16th March 2020), one of the participants of the interviews, emphasised the fact that the problem between couples and in-laws, especially between women and their in-laws, is far from ending. In her opinion, the solution on how to deal with this still lies in the hands of the couples, their relationship will stand the test of time if they have love and respect for one another. According to her,

"There is no way I will stand to see my parents or siblings talk to my husband with disrespect. I love my husband so much to see anyone belittle him. My family has understood this and is following suit, and that is what is important to me. On my husband's part, it is the same. His family can't disrespect me even if they wanted to, because he has not given room for that. Trust me, my father-in-law can send you to hell and back if your feet are not strong, but my husband is his medication."

Interestingly, Cecilia's case is almost the same as another lady's case who shared her experience with us on Facebook, as will be seen in the screenshot below. One would not imagine how much a sister-in-law will attempt to control her brother's home and dictate what should and should not be done, even to the extent of trying to tell her what job to accept or reject. But unfortunately, from every indication, that is the reality some women go through in their marital

[52] https://www.facebook.com/groups/1954927878161846

homes. This lady's case in figure 27 was different and good for her because her husband was on her side and did not give his family the chance to control his home. According to the post, the lady in question picked up a good job with a reasonable pay that could sustain their family at a period when her husband's business was depreciating. Before she knew it, her sister-in-law called and was shouting at her for even daring to accept a job—that the job was out of the city where her family was based. She was lectured on how important her family is and how she is supposed to put them ahead of anything else. Her sister-in-law went as far as telling her to decline the job, terming her advice 'a womanly advice', and that she needs to focus more on her family instead of considering such jobs. However, her advice came in late as she had already signed her contract and other necessary documents. Realising that she was not giving up, the sister-in-law angrily told her that she should bear in mind that her brother will not follow her to her new location, and she will always be the one on route to come and see her husband. Then she [sister-in-law] hung up the call on her because she was not interested in getting any further explanation from her, and besides, in her mind, she, as the sister-in-law who seemingly had the right to act as her husband, had spoken. When she later told her husband the discussion she had with his sister, he could not understand how none of his siblings helped out when his business was down yet wanted to determine whether his wife should accept a job or not. In a nutshell, the husband wilfully followed her to her new location, and everything went well with them. In summary, she was advising women to choose partners who love and trust them because those types of men will always support you in whatever you do, no matter what their family thinks.

Figure 27: Screenshot in Eve's corner on Facebook[53]

As already seen from the many case studies, having a good relationship with one's in-laws seems to be far-fetched for so many women out there, yet it will be easier to live with it when your husband can protect you. The worst that can happen, as opined by many women, is to be despised by both your in-laws and your husband. You become a complete stranger even in your own house, and everything you do irritates them.

Furthermore, to solidify this, there was a WhatsApp interview with one of the respondents, and her experience, as recounted by her, was not favorable. To her, contrary to the past where many women had no choice when it came to who they got married to, meaning arranged marriages were more common, Martha Fuh[54] had a choice and decided to settle with her man after three months of dating. Despite the opposition from her family, as will be seen in the screenshots, she made up her mind and was not ready to let go. He was the first love of her life, and she enjoyed every minute of it and anticipated what it would feel like to spend the rest of her life with someone she loved so much. Shortly after her marriage, one would wonder if Martha actually enjoyed the marriage she had been looking forward to.

WhatsApp interview with Martha on 1st August 2020.

Interviewer: Hello sis, I would love to know your experience(s) during your marriage with your husband and your in-laws.

Interviewee: Ok. My dear marriage is a beautiful institution, but when it is with the right person who can, protect, understand, and most especially communicate with you

[53] https://www.facebook.com/groups/1954927878161846

[54] Fictitious name

Interviewer: Okay... What can you say about what women are subjected to in marriage, following what you went through?

Interviewee: My marriage experience was not an enjoyable one. I went through a lot of prejudice, pain, and no protection.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: My husband showed me love for the first few months of marriage. We did not date for long; we dated just for about three months. I was so excited because he was my first love ever, and despite the rejection from my family after investigating him, I was determined to get married to him. I was very naive and could not understand the reality of many things. Amongst my suitors then, I preferred him because he was humble. Little did I know I was mistaken. Reading the content of a book from its cover. I got pregnant immediately, I got married, and due to stress, I had a threatened miscarriage three months later.

Interviewer: Hmmmmmm...

Interviewee: They stayed in the family compound and intruded in the family of their siblings around. The worst part of this story is we lived around the in-laws. And later on, we built our house in the family plot just beside the main compound. It was hell; my husband was so attached to his family that it made him never understand it was a disadvantage living there. He exposed a lot about our home to my in-laws; he was never protective of me. My in-laws gave me no respect as they constantly got into my sleeping room and my kitchen and made decisions in my house that were accepted by my spouse.

Interviewer: Wow!!

Interviewee: My husband never treated me as a priority, but his family and friends came first in his life before kids and me. Whenever we had any type of misunderstanding, he would invite his family from Baffousam, Yaounde, and Douala to come hold a meeting to discipline me. Hmmmm!! bad memories.

Interviewer: Sounds really bad indeed.

Interviewee: Women are subjected to a lot of pain; I mean A LOT. I think they should be heard, their voices (thoughts) should be given a chance. Some go through slavery in the name of marriage. Come to think of those who are ignorant and 'illiterates' and cannot help themselves. Oh no!! I talk with respect to what I have been through. Experience, they say, is the best teacher.

Interviewer: Sis, from observations and experiences heard, it seems the pain women experience, comes more from their fellow women. Would you say your female in-laws were more influential (negatively in your marriage) or was it irrespective of the gender?

Interviewee: My dear, I will say both. They all had their parts to play; the female in-laws constantly came to my house and provoked me by either insulting me for not doing this or that correctly. They went to my pot of food without my consent. They entered my bedroom without my knowledge. They advised the kids given to me through marriage to do negative things to me. As a result, I didn't feel okay; my man will always take their side.

Interviewer: Hmmmmmm!!!

Interviewee: For the men, I will say they influenced my marriage negatively too because they sometimes determined which pictures should be put on my living room wall. I never heard or saw them advising their younger brother (my husband). I say this because they constantly supported him in front of me and told me to my face I was a bad woman. They

came and wanted to intrude in my home like it was correct. They supported my spouse spending nights out of home with no just reason and helped him womanize. This is all evident because, after he had changed the locks of the house we both built and left us stranded, we had no choice but to come to my dad's house, where I am with the kids now. None of his brothers or sisters have come to check on us, and none of the many mother-in-laws have come to check on us.

Interviewer: Hmmmmmm!!

Interviewee: I decided to take him to social welfare, but he never respected the summons sent to him. I was advised to take the case to state council, but since I was out for peace, I.... denied. For the three years and seven months I was abandoned, he never came to talk to me, nor did any member of his family. I WAS ONLY SURPRISED TO RECEIVE A PETITION FOR DIVORCE FROM HIM TWO MONTHS AGO.

Interviewer: Wowwww!!!

Interviewee: During the period of separation, he went on with his life and put most pictures on social media with much love. My friend has been attacked by this girl.

Interviewer: Why? Just for being your friend?

Interviewee: Accusing her for saying she is an intruder in the marriage, while she confessed she did not say so.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: One frustrating issue is the fact that while I was in his house, he moved out of our matrimonial room for more than a year, he didn't talk to me, and he didn't eat my food. I was so frustrated. He had a baby with a small girl who should be my student.

Interviewer: Hmmmmmmmm!! What an experience. Interviewee: While I was in school, he dated my student too, who happened to be my neighbour.

Interviewer: That must have been a terrible experience for you. Thank your sister for sharing your experience with me.

Martha, like many other women, believes that marriage is a beautiful thing when you meet the right person, though her marriage experience was not the best, as she went through prejudice, pain, and no protection. Martha dated her ex-husband just for about three months and could say she was simply excited about the whole thing. Her family had done some background checks on him and warned her against getting married to him, but she did not yield to the advice as she was so much in love. She misread his attributes and thought he was the humblest guy among all the suitors who came for her at that time but only realised a few months into their marriage that he was the complete opposite. According to her, she only felt loved by the husband for the first few months of their marriage before he finally revealed his real self to her. Shortly after getting married, Martha became pregnant, but unfortunately, due to stress, she had a threatened miscarriage. She took into account the fact that she got married to a man whose father had thirteen legal wives; hence, she had so many mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law to deal with. To make it worse, most of her sisters-in-law were not married, so they were all living in their family compound. Since most of the married siblings were staying in and around the family compound, the sisters-in-law had the chance to intrude in their homes. After their marriage, Martha and her husband lived in their family compound for some time and later built their own house on another family land just close to the main compound. And this was like a nightmare to her. Unfortunately, there was nothing she could do about it because her husband was so attached to his family and did not see anything wrong with living close to them. With constant visits from her in-laws, her husband will expose everything and just anything about their marriage to his people, and they have little or no respect for her. They will get into any part of her home at will and will make decisions in her home without her consent. She never felt well treated by the husband, as his friends and family were more important to him than his wife. Whenever they had the least misunderstanding, Martha's husband would invite his family from all over the country to come and discipline her. To her, these are terrible memories that she would not wish any woman to go through. And from her own experience, she could understand why women's voices need to be heard.

Martha, talking in respect to what she has gone through, thinks that there are some women who are going through slavery in the name of marriage. She wonders what women who are ignorant of these things or those who are restricted by a lack of education from defending themselves can be going through. In her case, she faced maltreatment from both male and female in-laws. The women will

come to her house and do whatever pleases them and even induce the children living with her to disrespect her. The male in-laws, on their part, will always support their brother, encourage him to spend nights outside with different women, and even tell Martha to her face that she is a bad woman. They even went to the extent of determining which pictures should be put in their living room, yet Martha could not object to any of them.

So, when her husband finally sent her away by changing the keys to the house (they built together), she moved to her father's house with the children. Until the time of the interview (almost 4 years later), neither he nor his family ever came around to check even on the children. At one point, she decided to take the case to social welfare, but he never respected any of the summons that were sent to him. She was then advised to take the case to the state council, but since she valued peace more, she decided to let it go. It should be noted that before their separation, Martha's husband had moved out of their matrimonial room and stopped talking to her or even eating her food for more than a year. During this period, he also impregnated one of her students and was dating another just in their neighbourhood, yet he was not remorseful about any of these. Then, after their separation, he continued living like before, dating different women and posting the pictures on social media so that they could get to Martha. One of his girlfriends even went as far as sending warning messages to Martha's friend, boasting how she now owns the man. She was surprised when, about two months prior to our interview, he sent her a petition for divorce. It was a shock to her, but it seems she has no way out, as he did not even wait for the divorce yet went ahead to get married to a different woman.

This is an example of a case where the lady had already lost the 'battle' as the husband never considered her his priority. He preferred to take instructions from his family on how to run his home than to listen to his wife. His family, being a domineering type, as pointed out by Martha, did not make things better for him as they kept intruding and meddling in her family business such that she had little or no control over things. Even after their separation, where he took the decision without her consent, she keeps getting messages about his extramarital affairs to the extent that his new partner sends threatening messages to her [interviewee] friend. After going through the threat messages sent to her friend by her ex-husband's partner, I figured out that it adds as a supporting point to what this research is all about. If a woman can freely move into a man's house who sent his wife and children away without giving them any explanation or time to put themselves together yet spends her time sending threat messages to her friends and telling them to stay away, then there might be no need to put all the blame on men for not treating us 'fairly'. One of the things I particularly took note of was the part where she mentioned that if the man would have gotten married to an uneducated woman, then her situation might have been worse. In other words, she could even withstand the storm to the extent to which she

went because she was at least formally educated and even knew her rights. An uneducated woman would not have been able to stand in-laws like that, and the treatment they would have given her would have been worse, bearing in mind that most uneducated people, especially women, easily get intimated. This is supported by some researchers, like Steady (2011), who mentioned in one of her research projects (where she interviewed some female leaders in Ghana) that, according to the interviewees in the work, the United Nations Conference on Women, which took place in Beijing in 1995, acted as an eye opener to Ghanaian women. Both the educated and uneducated women were encouraged to stand up and fight for their rights or take their rightful position in every area. Moreover, women were advised to get higher education in order not to be afraid of men or feel intimidated (Ibid.). Considering how much this work is based on the influence of home training on some of our decisions and experiences, I was interested to know if Martha's decision to stick to her marriage to a point where the ex-husband had to lock her out of her home, not even considering their kids, had something to do with her upbringing. According to her, in the beginning, she did not want to tell her family about what she was going through in her matrimonial home because she did not want to expose her husband. She thought at that point that staying quiet and praying about it could help the situation, yet it was not changing. This was also influenced by the fact that Martha comes from a community that believes that praying for marriages, especially as women, is very important. Hence, this is typical of her upbringing, as it is believed that a woman determines the state of her home and has the power to either make it happy or sad depending on how much effort she puts in. At one point, Martha could no longer bear the bad treatment and had to open up to her mother-in-law, who promised to talk to the son. When the situation did not change, she decided to open up to her own mother, who advised her to be patient and endure because, according to her, many women went through worse situations yet stayed in their homes. The above statement will not be strange to an average Cameroonian woman because many mothers believe that walking out of marriage, whether for a good reason or not, is not something positive. Hence, when you find yourself in whatever condition, just endure as "others" are going through worse conditions yet do not consider quitting (see Johnson, 2015). It was also interesting to read about other societies with the same or similar cultures; for example, Drozd, Saini, & Olesen (2016) mentioned that despite the presence of violence, Latina women received little or no support from their communities and actually reported feeling pressured to stay in marriage despite all odds. Divorce was considered detrimental to the community because, according to Latino culture, family unity should be valued above anything else. Coming back to the case at hand, when the situation aggravated, Martha talked to a pastor who invited her husband for a discussion so many times, but he never showed up. That was the moment when she decided to disclose her situation to her entire family, and her parents still insisted

that she endure. She then made up her mind to stay there and ignore whatever he was doing until he decided to change the lock of their house so that she and their children could not get into the house. Martha felt like her decision to stay in that marriage was connected to her upbringing because her mother had always made her understand that if she [her mother] left her own husband, she and her siblings would have been frustrated. That alone is enough reason to make a woman stick even to an abusive marriage because she is putting her kids first. We have come across so many cases where the women express their disappointments when it comes to their marriages; they share their experiences of going through all types of abuse, yet they keep holding on because they have kids or because they might never find someone to love them as divorcées (Cornwall, 2005:77).

To better understand the issue of in-laws, especially the relationship between mothers-in-law and their daughters-in-law, I organised a group chat with several women, and some of the contributions gathered were helpful for this dissertation. According to a number of women, the relationship mothers have with their sons from birth might be one of the main determinants of how they relate with the wives of their sons. Many sons usually get this special attachment to their mothers and create a special bond that it usually seems very difficult to break. This point is also backed up by Jacobs (2003.54-55), where he analysed Sigmund Freud's early theory on the Oedipus complex. Freud examined the affection children have for their parents of the opposite sex and observed how women are prone to spoiling their sons and the men, their daughters. According to these women in this discussion group, when mothers share this closeness with their sons, they develop a feeling of insecurity, especially when their sons reach adulthood. They start being overprotective of their sons and think it is their responsibility to determine their happiness. Some express this self-acclaimed responsibility by going to the extent of wanting to choose wives for their sons. According to these group members, choosing a wife for their son does not, in many cases, take away the feelings of insecurity. Whenever men get married, whether to the women of their choice or those chosen by their mothers, most mothers start feeling sidelined. The things their sons used to discuss with them will now be discussed with their wives; they fear that the time and attention they received from their sons prior to their marriage will be transferred to their wives. They [mothers] therefore strive hard to maintain the position they had before and also try hard to see that their sons, whom they have always considered babies, get the same level of love that they [mothers] used to offer from their wives. As a result, many of them tend to be paranoid and will complain about their daughters-in-law at every given opportunity. According to one of the ladies, "No two persons are the same; if mothers-in-law will always be expecting to see their son's wives treat them [their sons] as they used to treat them, then the fight between mother and daughter-in-law will surely never come to an end. Everyone is someone's son or daughter, and women too need to be treated

well by their husbands, so women should stop behaving like only their sons need attention from their women." The sons, on their part, are equally influenced by the relationship they had with their mothers. Most if not all these women attested to the fact that many of them are facing these in-law issues because their husbands will always take sides with their families, especially with their mothers. They tend to forget that they are now making their own families, and it is their responsibility to protect them. Some men will compare their wives to their mothers at every given opportunity, making some of the women feel inferior, and this can gradually lead to an atmosphere of comparison and tension. Many women have gone through all sorts of derogatory treatments from their mothers-in-law, as seen in some of the cases above, yet cannot confide even in their own husbands because even their first attempt to complain was met with shunning. One of the ladies in the chat group shared her own experience as she is going through hell with the mother-in-law. According to her, when it first started, she was patient for some time, and when she could no longer bear it, she had to complain to her husband. She was very shocked when her husband told her straight to her face that his mother is not a troublesome type, so if there is any problem, then it should be the wife's fault. He even went ahead to warn her never to complain about his mother again and reminded her that she is his mother and has every right to intervene in his home when deemed necessary. She therefore resorted to staying silent in the face of whatever treatment she dished out to her. The mother-in-law, on her part, knew the son would always protect her and was bent on making her life a living hell. On the other hand, Miriam, one of the women (still in the chat group), equally confirmed the ideology by putting forth her own experience, and to her, her marriage is intact because her husband protected her. She recounted a situation where her mother-in-law came to visit and would complain about every move she made, but her son told her to relax and let his wife (who is also an adult and can take care of things) be; she did not find it funny but had to obey. Since then, she now shares a good relationship with her mother-in-law and is happy that they both know their boundaries. In a nutshell, one cannot always control the way his or her parents or family treat their partners, but it can be limited when you choose to protect your spouse. Going by the Oedipus complex as explained by Freud, this attachment to the parents of opposite sexes greatly influences these behaviour patterns, and following the cultural point of view, many women in Bamenda, Cameroon, might face the consequences more because the culture sees the man as the head of the family, the provider in the home, and the decision-maker even when the woman is the main provider, as seen in Bih (2017). As such, his family always feels threatened when he brings in a wife, especially if he gets married as a wealthy man or later on gets rich at some point in his life. The man, on the other hand, might love the wife but will do all he can to protect his mom and avoid hurting her in any way, which

has made some mothers think that they can control their husband's homes and still control those of their sons.

According to another participant in the group, some men even give their mothers the impression that their wives are not taking good care of them. This makes most mothers feel disturbed, such that some even go to the extent of wanting to invade their sons' home to cook and take care of them despite the presence of a wife.

"We cannot blame the mothers-in-law all the time when some of our husbands are the ones who take reports to them about our homes. Tell me, how many mothers will maintain a good relationship with their daughter-in-law when their son always calls to complain or comes with a bad report whenever he is visiting? She will obviously see you as the wrong choice for her son and might even go to any extent to see you leave her son's life. When some of these mothers try and cannot take you out of your matrimonial homes, they even go as far as looking for another wife for their son—but in any case, I still blame the men who cannot stand up for their wives.

Lydia

With the experiences, testimonies, and observations made in this chapter, it could be safe to say that in-laws have a big role to play when it comes to the execution of the practices of gender inequality. In most cases, when in-laws shift their attention to the women, behave like marrying a lady into their family is doing her a favour, and sometimes even resort to controlling her activities and movements, then one-sided gender problems will obviously arise. However, it seems all is not completely lost, and from observations, it gets better when men join in the protection of women's rights at home by standing for their wives. It has been proven by some cases in this chapter that when men stand to protect their wives against bashing from their families, women stand a better place to have a voice—this might not completely wipe the hate they receive from their in-laws, but it gives them a level of security and confidence in their marital homes. Yet in all of these, there could still be the question of why all these experiences? What could be the driving force behind women needing to put in more work in marriage, expected to prove that they are worth being considered wives, as opposed to men to men? To make this clearer, I will say that if we put together all the testimonies coming from the different participants, their behaviours, and reactions to the way they are being treated, one could deduce that it is all centred around the way they view marriage. It does not seem like singlehood is celebrated at all compared to marriage, which in turn gives someone the confidence to treat another in a given way, no matter the consequences (as long as they are in a position that seems to be superior, so far as marriage is concerned—like the case of in-laws, for example); or causes another to accept certain treatments

whether willingly or unwillingly (so far as it will lead her to marriage or contributes to her staying married). It is also worth mentioning that most, if not all, of the participants were Christians or at least had a Christian background; hence, they also strongly believe in what the church envisages as the ideal situation. Therefore, since the church promotes marriage so much, as I discovered during my research, the participants also follow accordingly. This is also reflected in Wariboko & Falola's work (2020). According to their findings, churches, especially Pentecostal churches, idealise marriages as the ideal state in a way that excludes single women, who are often made to feel incomplete in places that are specially designed only for the married. In an interview that they [the aforementioned writers] conducted, Reverend Linda Ochola-Adolwa, an ordained priest of the Anglican Church and a very influential woman in the Kenyan social and religious community, shared her thoughts on single women and how she thinks the church fails them. In her opinion, the bulk of messages preached in churches are designed in such a way that they make one dissatisfied with being single. Marriage is privileged over singlehood in such a way that it reinforces the ideology that singlehood is undesirable and does not adequately reflect the image of God. This is why, to her, women will do all it takes to get out of their present realities (singlehood): In other words, the sermons preached are designed to make women desire marriage. This research might not have been conducted in Cameroon, but it is important to note that it might not be so different from what is happening on the ground in Bamenda. Society accords special respect to married women, such that most women will desire being in that position. A woman starts receiving respect on the day of her marriage ceremony while her single friends and relatives are being questioned about when exactly they will get married too. Chisanga (2022:211) also contends that in the Zambian culture, which might be similar to other African cultures, every woman is expected to get married and bear kids, and parents and other family members do feel concerned when they have a daughter of marriageable age who has not been married for a long time. The fertility of a woman is therefore used as the biological foundation of marriage, and it governs the male-female relationship within the institution. Moreover, since society strongly believes that having children is not to be experienced outside marriage, it could be a determining factor for most women to try by all possible means to marry early enough so as to have the chance to have their own offspring. Chisanga continued that in most African societies, no woman is to remain single, and women are expected to start preparing themselves for marriage even while still at school. She explained that as a young girl, when you visit your relatives and there are children there younger than you, you are expected to behave like an adult and assume the responsibility of looking after the younger ones and taking care of house chores—duties that are considered as what it takes to become a housewife. In fact, singleness is a foreign concept to them (Ibid., 212). With this, I guess this can also explain better why, when a woman visits

her in-laws or potential in-laws for the very first time, she is being observed and her housewife potentials measured by how much she can do the house chores. To Siwilia, marriage in the African tradition is highly respected, and a woman who is married is treated with more respect than a single woman. One of her interviewees also opined that if someone does not get married at an expected age, the family gets worried because they believe that an unmarried individual in an African society is missing some human value. In other words, a single person is not considered a human being and cannot participate in or make reasonable decisions on certain issues. Addressing the same issue from the perspective of the labour market, Konnigs Pet draws his example from the tea plantation in Cameroon. According to his findings, women get to receive different treatments when working on this plantation, depending on their status. When it comes to unmarried female workers, they are relatively free from customary patriarchal controls but are still held in very low regard as they are being labelled as 'loose women' or 'prostitutes.' Married female workers, on the other hand, are more respected yet are subjected to male controls—this could be in terms of their husbands being afraid that earning wages will make their wives too 'headstrong' or independent or in terms of them insisting on their wives spending less time at work and more at home (Konings, 2012:55–56). When one puts together these ideas from these different writers, it does not sound like so much fun for anyone to want to be in the position of an unmarried woman and end up receiving all the disrespect, name-calling, and labelling. Therefore, to evade this unpleasant situation, it is easier when one works or associates in different areas as a married woman. Hence, they are left to deal with the societal pressure and forced to face those who usually feel like they hold the solution that will end their singlehood 'misery'—of which, in many cases, these 'solution givers' are usually the in-laws from the man's family. This could be the reason, or part of the reason, why they feel so entitled and responsible for scrutinising a potential wife coming into their family.

Chapter 8: LANGUAGE AS A TOOL OF GENDER INEQUALITY

Cumcéré' ŋka' tínen Mbà' ŋkfəə'mé La wìr làỳ woŋ

Vér dzə' wón Ɔgònnso' eeh We're proud of who we are

Vér sí tu'tìn tu'tìn eeh Vèr sí távsín ntà'tìn eeh Vér dzə' wón Ɔgònnso' eeh

We're proud of who we are

"We are scattering like a jumping cricket; it is cloudy; do not get lost in the world. We are the offspring of Ngonso (the founder and mother of the Nso clan), and we are proud of who we are. We are going here and there; we are working hard; we are of Ngonso; we are proud of who we are."

The above is a portion of lyrics extracted from a music by one of the Cameroonian Anglophone musicians (Witty Minstrel)[55]. His music depicts the Nso people of Cameroon as an ethnic group that takes immense pride in their identity and is willing to go great lengths to promote their culture and language. The Nso community, commonly referred to as Banso in Cameroon, is in the northeastern part of the Northwest region of Cameroon. It is worth mentioning that the Nso community is one of those communities in Anglophone Cameroon that has faced the highest backlash from other communities regarding its language and certain aspects of its culture. Yet they stand out as the most resistant people who steadfastly cling to their language and culture and actively utilise them to a greater extent. In many cases, these people will encounter ridicule and mockery whenever they speak in English, as many claim to find their accent "funny" and are believed by many to have a very poor command of English. As such, a handful of them find it embarrassing to identify themselves with the accent and try to avoid this accent in a bid to demonstrate their English proficiency. That notwithstanding, a majority of these people do not find any pride in using English more than they will use their Nso language. They take great pride in using their own language wherever they find themselves. This deep appreciation has gained admiration from outsiders who believe that this love for their language and culture is a key factor in their unity. Hence, they hold firmly onto their culture and try by every means to preserve it and prevent it from being influenced or diluted by anything Colonial. This mindset is one of the driving forces behind Witty Minstrel's music, as he aims to demonstrate to the world that despite any criticism that may arise, they remain proud of their identity. It is obvious in the way he mimics their accents and incorporates their repertoires within an English

55 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0LFtrXN6GU8 accessed on 19.04.2022

context. The need to prove oneself and love for their language could be common in situations where multilingualism is the norm and individuals have multiple linguistic repertoires to choose from. In such a case, one or more languages may be considered more socially acceptable and suitable for the public than the others. Not everyone succumbs to the pressure of accepting his or her language to be classified under the "inferior" group, and this is exactly what the people of Nso are demonstrating. It is worth noting that their actions have contributed greatly to shaping their society in different ways. Due to this reputation, especially within the Anglophone community, the Nso people are beginning to gain ground in the Cameroon entertainment industry, especially in the area of music and comedy. If many Cameroonian communities or other communities in Bamenda could take pride in their own language like the Nso people, then there might be little or no need to talk about the marginalisation of certain groups, especially women, using language.

This chapter therefore aims at highlighting how language plays a role in relegating women in society. It will add to existing knowledge by exploring the impact of colonial education, the imposition of an inferiority complex on Cameroonian languages by both foreigners and Cameroonians themselves, and the role of language secrecy in marginalising women. The chapter will also acknowledge how other languages used in Bamenda, for example, have played a positive role in shaping society and how, despite some of the bans placed on these languages, the speakers have shown resistance and dedication in maintaining and ensuring the sustainability of these languages. However, the focus will be on the role played by "formal" education in setting the foundation for language-based marginalisation of women in Bamenda from the point of introduction until date. This explains why this chapter will predominantly touch on the English language as a language of marginalisation affecting both the general population and women in particular—and Cameroon Pidgin, otherwise known as Kamtok, as its rival. Linguists have often observed how speakers of different languages contribute to shaping their societal structure through their choices of language. Mous (2003), among many others, has made different contributions to better understanding the influence of social structure on linguistics and how speakers' use of language influences societal structures. Hence, language and society have a great influence on each other. This could also mean that the more languages a society has, the more it will benefit from societal diversity and linguistic richness. At this point, it is necessary to discuss multilingualism and its many benefits, but before delving into the strength of multilingualism, let us examine the illustration below. I find it worthwhile as it demonstrates the interdependence of school, home, church, media, and society in relation to the spread of language(s) or the process of learning new languages.

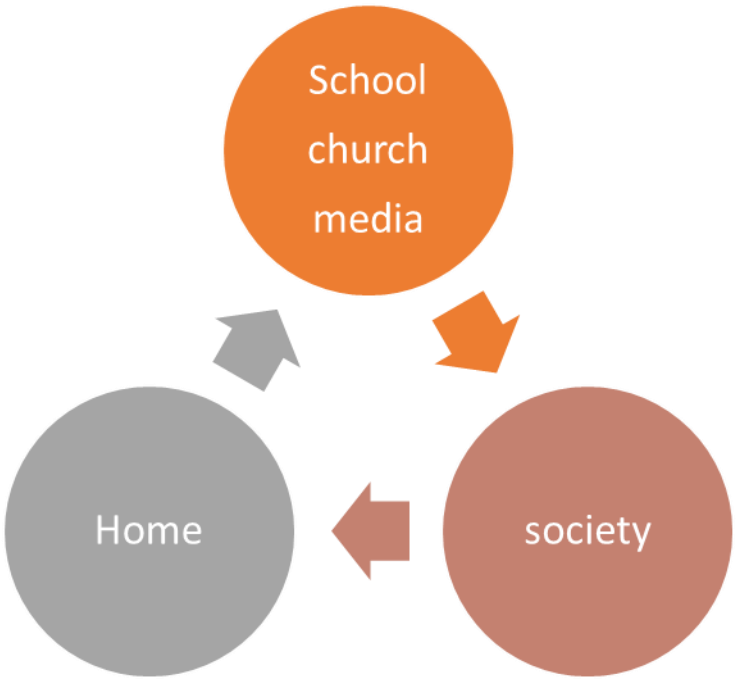


Illustration 2: The connection between the home, school, church, media, and other social meeting points.

The above diagram could be used to explain the interconnection of different areas of one's life and how they influence one's linguistic life. It shows how different aspects, such as education, religious institutions, social media, and family, are interconnected and influence one's ability to learn and use a language. Using a cycle instead of a pyramid to illustrate this is also aimed at indicating that every area of a speaker's learning process is as important as the others. Learning in one area (home, for example) does not stop the learning process in another area (school, for example). It will be more likely to add to the speaker's list of repertoires and languages than take something away from it. That having been said, it is also important to mention that the effect of languages or repertoires learnt in different areas of an individual's communication cannot be minimised given the unique role they each play. Hence, it will be important to connect the home to the school, church, and media to see how the repertoires used in one area affect the other.

Learning a language from home is more effective for children. This is mainly through the frequent contact a newborn will have with the mother or primary caregiver and other members of the child's linguistic environment. However, some writers argue that in the modern world, it is becoming increasingly difficult to talk about an environment with a single culture. Foley & Thompson (2017) stated this in their work when they mentioned that a child's environment should be talked about with

consideration to the many cultures that reflect the heterogeneous linguistic environment of that child. This is why they think some terminologies used when discussing multilingualism can sometimes be misleading. Examples of these terms used could be first language, community language, mother tongue, and heritage language. Foley & Thompson further emphasise that the term "mother tongue" originates from the assumption that a child learns its first language from the mother, and the learning process is usually in a naturalistic manner, that is, not through a formal teaching. They went ahead to give synonyms for a mother tongue as follows; First Language (which is the very first language a child learns to speak and understand), home language (considered to be the language used at home), family language (language used within the family or the language mostly used by family members as their lingua franca), community language (mostly referred to the language used within the immediate community which might also be considered the mother tongue in case the mother tongue is a vernacular which is less widely used or perceived as a language of lower status) and finally heritage language (the language which is often used as a means of establishing and reaffirming consolidation with one's origins). All the above synonyms suggest the different meanings given to the term, but it is important to note that the mother tongue might not, in every case, be the speaker's most spoken or dominant language. However, what is more important for them to pass on is the realisation that the balance between a child's actual and potential use of two (or more) language systems in their day-to-day interaction is not constant. According to them, the balance between use and competence is continuously changing throughout their entire life. Whenever there is any conversational interaction between a child and others, be it the caregiver, mother, peer, or sibling, it reveals to the child not only information about the language but also information about the world in which the language is occurring (Foley & Thompson, 2017).

After looking at the language environment of a child during the early stages after childbirth, there comes a point where the child could be left to be taken care of by the elderly siblings and other secondary caregivers (apart from the mother or primary caregiver). At this stage, the child is exposed to more languages spoken by other children around (when playing). In the case of Cameroon, for example, this exposure could include French, Pidgin, English, Camfranglais, one or more of the above mentioned, as well as many other local languages spoken in the country (see Awah 2022:28). This could also be the best moment when a child's ability to become multilingual is strengthened. It will be important to note that children as well as adults interact according to their respective age groups. Hence, Lüpke & Storch (2013) opine that most of children's socialisation in many African societies does not take place in a nuclear family as others may think. On the contrary, from an early stage of their lives, children predominantly interact among themselves or, better yet, with their peers. These

interactions allow for frequent and more meaningful communication opportunities that will contribute significantly to developing their language skills and fostering social interactions. To them (Ibid.), the term "intergenerational" suggests that the transmission of language from adults to children, which results in the acquisition of language, ends at the beginning of adulthood. Meanwhile, in many African societies, new languages are added to individuals' repertoires throughout their lives and occupy different central positions in their lives depending on several factors. Hence, adults continue to socialise in the languages they have learnt before while being open to new ones when they migrate from one geographical location to another, move houses, retire, marry, divorce, and foster children (Ibid., 308).

All of the aforementioned could be happening simultaneously with the child actively taking part in other areas. For instance, apart from accompanying the elder siblings to interact with their peers, children also watch TV programs where they either improve in their already existing language(s) or have the opportunity to learn more languages. Moreover, for those who are Christians, their children often join them to church, where they join Sunday school. This too is another great opportunity for kids to interact with their peers and gain access to more languages. However, the repertoires for some gatherings such as the church are fully monitored, and kids learn at this point how and when to use certain repertoires. In the case of the church, they learn more about taboo words and are taught to limit themselves to words that are deemed acceptable and appropriate for worship. At a later age (starting from nursery for some and primary school for others), schooling (formal education) comes into the picture. At this point in the case of Anglophone Cameroon, especially in urban areas, the language of instruction is limited to English while French is taught as a subject. It is at this point where children and students are punished for using any other language other than English. Pidgin and other local languages are seriously discouraged, such that a punishment is imposed on anyone who goes against these rules. It is worth noting that in many cases, it is from this moment that many individuals start developing feelings of inferiority and superiority complexes for particular languages. All these date back to the period of colonialism, when the languages of the colonial masters were introduced and promoted as the best language that should be used in all official domains, as opined by some writers. Some of these writers argue that this ideology gave the impression that these languages were superior. As a result, individuals may internalise these beliefs, leading to the development of language-related feelings of inferiority or superiority. Therefore, to be able to delve well into the topic of marginalisation in connection to language, it will be necessary to mention how and why some languages are even considered inferior. To some scholars, colonial masters came with a sense of superiority complex such that everything they introduced, including their language, was superior. They argue that this mindset

is the genesis of the African problem, especially when it comes to accepting their own languages. This introduction of colonial languages and the denigration of indigenous languages created a legacy of linguistic oppression that has resulted in marginalization. This is reflected in Akinyemi & Falola´s work (2021), where they recounted that colonialism had too many negative influences on the culture of the colonized. During colonisation, many Africans had their own indigenous programs terminated abruptly and were forced to adopt a different culture that had very little understanding of the existing African ways of life, belief systems, and traditions (Adjibolosoo, 1995:59).

Talking specifically about the case of Cameroon now, it is important to mention that since it was mostly colonised by the French and British (apart from the Germans), French and English were the languages that needed to be adopted, and this was possible through formal education where all learning materials in schools were either in French or English (Ayuninjam, 2007:71; Kamwangamalu, Baldauf & Kaplan 2016:2). In the case of West Cameroon, English became the 'prestigious' language that needed to be acquired mostly through formal education and acted as proof for someone who was educated.

These observations were also made during interviews. Interviewees had the choice to choose the most suitable language they would prefer to communicate in. I observed that many who could at least speak English chose it over Pidgin as to them; first, it is the official language, and secondly, it is the language of the "educated." One could therefore observe that this aspect of limiting speakers to a particular language tends to reduce the value attributed to the other languages (Indigenous languages, Pidgin, and youth languages). This could have far-reaching implications such as the erosion of linguistic diversity, loss of cultural heritage, and limited opportunities for the uneducated. I had a conversation with a friend who was worried about her brother's choice of language. She could not understand why the elder brother speaks in French to everyone, even in the village, even though he knows their local language so well and can communicate in it very fluently. Apparently, her brother was based in Yaoundé, the capital city of Cameroon, and whenever he visited the village, he was seen as one of the 'privileged' town dwellers in the village. With intention of defending this position, he will pretend to forget certain words in his "mother tongue" or better yet frequently switch from the "mother tongue" to French, often portraying it as an unconscious occurrence. By demonstrating a preference for the superior language and appearing to struggle with their "mother tongue," individuals may seek to align themselves with the associated prestige of being educated and cosmopolitan while stigmatising those who speak the indigenous languages as being uncivilised and "uneducated." This is just one of the many cases I came across in the field, which simply confirmed to me that there is so much importance attached to these colonial languages, which in turn stigmatises the regional languages. The fact that

English is a global language and used in most parts of the world now, as opined by Crystal (2003:10), Northrup (2013), and Pinner (2016), cannot be minimized. Unfortunately, it seems most people fail to understand that you can successfully learn a new or foreign language without necessarily stigmatising your own. Strangely enough, Pidgin, which is one of the most spoken languages in Bamenda and which does not even need any formal education to be acquired, continues to face stigmatisation (Jenkins, 2014:215; Tande, 2009:12).

Taking us back to illustration 2, one will realise that society is not independent of all these processes. At the time when the child is in school learning all these values about language and what the school considers an "ideal" language for the educated, there is also interaction simultaneously taking place with the broader society. The school, being part of this society too, has already sold out its idea of what language should be the most preferred. This shapes the child's thinking when it comes to languages and language repertoire and keeps them alert each time there is a need to interact. Given Cameroon's language diversity, society cannot be limited to what the school demands. While formal education may have a significant influence on language, it is important to recognise that not everyone attends formal education, yet everyone engages with language in their daily lives. It is at this point in society that a child increases his or her vocabulary of languages with new languages like youth languages such as Camfranglais and Mboko (Nkengason, 2016:9) and other languages like Pidgin and the local languages of the respective regions. In this case, the richness of multilingualism is also realised as the speakers equip themselves with different languages and repertoires depending on the person or persons they are communicating with.

As Storch (Lüpke & Storch 2013: 77) mentioned, in every society across the world in general and in multilingual communities in particular, individuals are offered many options of languages to choose from. Moreover, a single language can have different sociolects or registers within it, which makes the possibilities even wider for speakers to be able to choose from. These different languages and registers could either be learnt in childhood or at a later stage of an individual's life. Noteworthy is the point that individuals do have different phases in life, which could involve migrating to different linguistic areas or coming in contact with speakers of different languages, which therefore gives them the chance to learn new languages, registers, or sociolects. Even though a certain society might be multilingual, the languages might not be spoken at the same time as each language or register might be spoken depending on the time, place, and context—context could be in terms of the home, school, church, or market. It is in this regard that Storch noted in Lüpke & Storch (2013) that the ability to learn and know the circumstances under which a particular language can be used can be an ability as critical as being capable of speaking a certain language or register. Moreover, apart from numerous advantages

of being multilingual, multilingual speakers are rich in the vast number of linguistic choices that they can choose from to express themselves in a given situation and are also very rich in their perspective of the world. While monolingual speakers might have a limited perspective, multilingual speakers have the added advantage of approaching issues from multiple angles due to their knowledge of multiple languages. For example, each language has its own unique way of expressing thoughts, concepts, and experiences and could shape the way speakers perceive the world. Being a speaker of more than one or two languages is a very common phenomenon in Africa, considering its rich linguistic diversity. Friederike Lüpke (Lüpke & Storch 2013:13) therefore highlights that many people from the West will easily be able to state their mother tongue or first language, and their second language might either be a foreign language or any other language(s) they have learnt or speak. Unless they are from a multilingual or bilingual background, these languages would have been learnt in school, and they often will not have to use them daily. On the other hand, monolingual speakers do exist in Africa but are far from being the norm. This implies that the idea of "mother tongue" or "first language" might not be of much importance in many African societies. Storch therefore opines that in West Africa as well as in many other parts of Africa, speakers use different languages depending on the context, and they live in multilingual families and neighborhoods. Therefore, being multilingual to them is not just a skill but also makes up part of their social integrity and culture (Ibid., 105). It is worth noting that despite this high level of multilingualism in most African societies, many of the languages are still alive because there is a level of discipline in their usage. In essence, one might know what language(s) to expect and in exactly which place or context. Routines are therefore created, and there are usually different occasions made for playful interactions and conventionalised contexts to put these different languages in use (Ibid., 19). Apart from the previously mentioned means of maintaining multilingualism in many African countries, several other practices equally contribute to this maintenance. Lüpke provides some examples of these practices in their work, drawing examples especially from Senegal: exogenous marriages, which are where women from an outside group get married into another community; language acquisition within different age classes and peer groups; fostering migration for economic, religious, ritual, and educational reasons; and joking relationships (Ibid., 33).

Now, despite the existence of tribalism when it comes to marriages, exogenous marriages are very common in many African communities. In most situations, the women have to learn the language(s) of their new communities, which is considered one of the important processes of integration. In most of these cases where women are required to learn the language of their in-laws, one will realise that this is often effective because they mostly leave their communities and move into the man's

community. Even after being married for a long time, they are usually considered strangers. Multilingualism is highly maintained here because learning these new languages does not pose a threat to their already acquired language(s) but rather adds to their linguistic richness.

As for age classes and peer groups, they play an important role in maintaining multilingualism—they sometimes even play roles that are normally assumed by the family in other parts of the world. When in these age classes or peer groups, the members create a rapport between and among individuals that even go far beyond ethnolinguistic boundaries. It is in this regard that Bernardi (1985:2) opined that Africa is rich in age-class systems. This goes with Bernardi's definition of age class systems as "formal systems in which members of a society come to be classified into special groupings by being assigned a common age and, thus, by forming a collective body of age mates with special prerogatives and specific tasks (Bernardi 1985:2). At a certain age, in most communities, peer groups play a very big role in language socialisation, as children of a certain age stick together on a regular basis. In communities where one language is spoken, the language socialisation process tends to focus on that particular language, while in communities where diverse languages are spoken, the children help new children (who come into their community) to learn their own language while they equally learn the language(s) of these new children in the process (see Lüpke and Storch 2013:38).

Fostering, on the other hand, could be linked to the family type (extended family) that is mostly found in African societies. In this case, it is a very common phenomenon that children are not raised by their biological parents but by foster parents. The foster parents could be family members, family friends, neighbours, or even total strangers who may take over the responsibilities of the biological parents for different reasons. Fostering also ranges from location and cuts across linguistic borders. When children are placed in foster homes, they are faced with the situation of learning new languages. Isiugo-Abanihe (1984:11) classified fostering into the following categories: Kinship fostering, where a child is raised by a member of the family; Educational fostering, a case where children are being sent to or taken by family or non-family members in order to have the opportunity to attend formal education; Domestic fostering—in this case, girls in particular are fostered to help with household chores in the families of their foster parents; Crises fostering, which occurs when the parents are either dead or divorced and Wardship and alliance fostering is meant to create and maintain social, economic, or political alliances. In all the above cases, the fostered children are expected to integrate into a new family, community, culture, and sometimes linguistic repertoire, which now maintains the status quo of a multilingual society. When there is frequent language contact as such, it finally leads to code-switching, language mixing, or even word borrowing (just to name a few), which now leads to the development of many variants of a given language. It is important to note that despite its richness in language diversity, many

languages in Cameroon have received very limited linguistic attention, even though most of these languages have so many speakers. This could be one of the reasons why many, including some of their speakers, do not find them "attractive." Talking about language attractiveness, it is also common to find people distancing themselves from or attaching themselves to a given language(s) because of either the stigma or values attached to the said language. This is highly influenced by how some languages are banned from use in some official settings and others like English and French are promoted. In moments like this, one is left wondering about the contradictory nature of language use, while colonialism is both condemned and promoted simultaneously. Giving more value to Cameroonian languages with high regard to different strategies to promote them rather than English and French would have gone a long way in making them attractive to both the speakers and foreigners. In addition to that, instead of rejecting them in official settings like it is often done in most parts of Cameroon, it will be more meaningful to integrate them in the list of languages needed for learning. Using these languages as a medium of learning is very important in the process of decolonisation, as colonial languages alienate and silence many African students in academies (Tamale 2020:274). Tamale also suggests most African universities presently follow the language of the colonising power(s) of the country as the main medium of instruction. Therefore, according to her, these languages, in most cases, act as a barrier to the students' learning process (Ibid.). For example, Munzali Jibril expressed a concern that English proficiency among Nigerian students is declining at a rapid rate, which could consequently affect their ability to communicate effectively and eventually their perceptive engagement. The case is not so different in many other African countries. It is clear that the mastery and fluency of a given language affect its comprehension. and going by this, it implies that so many graduates from African universities and colleges might be considered half-baked simply because they lack the skills to grasp a language that is apparently foreign to them (see Brock-Utne & Hopson 2005). Despite the fact that home-based languages have been suppressed for so long by colonialism, it is not impossible that these languages could still be revitalised, developed, and promoted. When we look at the example of Afrikaans as pointed out by Mamdani (2019:61), it was initially referred to as "Kitchen Dutch," which seemingly aimed to portray it as a language inferior to the "standard" Dutch. But within half a century, Afrikaans has developed into "the bearer of an intellectual tradition" in South Africa. According to Mamdani, this development would not have been possible or successful without a vast institutional network. The network encompassed various entities such as schools, universities, magazines, newspapers, and publishing houses, and above all, was sponsored through public funds. The success was more of a collective work. and consequently, this joint effort changed the status of Afrikaans from a folkloric language to a language of science and scholarship, a language

of high culture and legal discourse. With this, it is safe to say that Afrikaans represents the most successful decolonising initiative of Africa as a continent. When we look at some widely spoken languages today, such as Arabic and Chinese, it is worth noting that these languages are made up of clusters of various related dialects (Ibid., 62). This is exactly the point Mamdani is trying to promote—that Africa needs to prioritise the diverse family of languages and dialects spoken on the continent by similar sub-groups to develop core Indigenous languages. From clear indications, this does not seem far-fetched, as languages such as Cameroonian and Nigerian "Pidgin" are spreading and being regularly used in more areas than they were some decades ago. This implies that in very few decades to come, they will be so much larger than standard English, and African indigenous languages will surely outnumber colonial globalised English. In addition to the above, the "nativised" lexicology, which is a subversion of the colonial languages along the West African coast, is something worth talking about. In this part of West Africa, different dialects of "pidgin" English are widely used to such an extent that the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) had to introduce a radio service in pidgin in 2017 (see Edosa Edionhon October 14:2018)[56] There is therefore an indication that there is a constant creation of repertoires in most African societies, and most of these repertoires, in many cases, start with loanwords from existing languages and code-switching, among many other mechanisms. They could, in a later state, develop into a youth language (that meets national resistance in many cases) and finally grow into an acceptable language. Looking at the case of Camfranglais in Cameroon, for instance, it started out as an urban youth language (Mous 2009). Like many other languages, Camfranglais serves as a uniting factor, bridging gaps between Anglophone and francophone Cameroonians. It is no longer limited to urban youths, as many youths in rural areas of Cameroon now use it as a means of communication too.

This is not different from the case of Cameroon Pidgin, otherwise known as Kamtok, which initially emerged as urban jargon but has now become a language in its own right. Kamtok is used in both urban and rural areas in Cameroon, and different variants have been developed depending on the region where it is used (see Nkengason 2016:11). The same goes for the Nigerian Naija, which is widely used in both urban and rural areas as well.

As reported by Quartz Africa Magazine,[57] inasmuch as Pidgin has not been recognised as an official language anywhere, it is widely spoken across West Africa. In Nigeria alone, about three to five million

[56] https://qz.com/africa/1423524/west-africas-pidgin-can-be-official-language-bbc-shows (accessed on April 6th 2022)

[57] https://qz.com/africa/1423524/west-africas-pidgin-can-be-official-language-bbc-shows (2018 accessed on 6th April 2022)

people use it as their first language, while a further seven million others have it as their second language (Ibid.). We also have different versions of Portuguese-based Creole spoken in Cape Verde, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Casamance in southern Senegal (see Kihm, 1994). This indicates that languages that were initially "colonial" have now been indigenised and made quite different from what was initially introduced (see Tamale, 2020:277). The situation is the same for Sheng in Kenyan, also known as "Swahili-English," which the urban youth prefer to use more as their primary medium of communication (see Mazrui, 1995:168-179). On the other hand, as individuals and groups, especially African feminists, strive to build strong and strategic networks, they face challenges like the multiplicity of languages—both home-based and colonial—that act as strongholds that block them from linking up with each other. Language politics create barriers in different areas—between and within countries, the educated and those without formal education, between the urban and the rural populations, across cultures, among sub-regional enclaves, and many others (Tamale, 2020:372). This should be one of the problems plaguing women in Cameroon in general and women in Bamenda in particular, whereby in a very small community, more than a hundred languages could be spoken. These women sometimes have Pidgin as their last resort, which is the same language that, despite being widely used even across borders, as mentioned above, has still not gained official recognition. Despite these challenges, as Tamale puts it, "somehow, African women always come out on top and sustain their communities despite the challenges." Hence, according to her, feminists may be invisible in mainstream spaces and discourses, but they impact societies in great ways (Ibid.). Moreover, multilingualism might have a number of challenges, as pointed out above, yet as Djité (2008) and Mazrui & Mazrui (1998) opined, instead of multilingualism posing a problem, it can also be an important resource. However, whether a language is generally acceptable or better still permitted or not, speakers have a choice about what language they want to use, in what situation, or whether to continue using a particular language or register at all. Their choices are determined by different factors, but the most important factor that determines their choices of language or its continuity is the ideology they share about a given language. Inasmuch as some languages, such as the Cameroon Pidgin, for example, might not be officially accepted, it is important to note that every language is important depending on the context in which it is being used and the person(s) using it. This is because different languages might lead to different opportunities for their speakers depending on prestige relationships, their use in education, and sociolinguistic parameters, among others (Lüpke and Storch 2013:125). See the case of women in Cameroon as an example, who can occupy leadership positions in both the public and private domains of the country due to their ability to use the English language. In this case, English has opened doors for different opportunities for these women, in the same way other women might get

a chance to lead in other areas due to their ability to communicate in Pidgin or other local languages of the country. It goes without saying that as societies are changing, the roles and prestige attributed to different language registers might change as well. This might either contribute to the marginalisation or acceptance of other languages as new registers emerge from these changes—the level at which Pidgin (Kamtok) is today in Cameroon is not the same as it was some decades ago. There is more openness to it in contrast to the past, and more people even feel a sense of pride in their ability to communicate in this language. Since we are talking about marginalisation, it is also important to note that the issue of language, particularly English in this case, affects not only those who struggle with using it correctly. Educated individuals sometimes face stigma and discouragement from those who are not proficient in the language. They may be accused of showing off by those who are not proficient.

There were a number of women who confessed during the interview sessions that their silence in public domains or at some gatherings has more to do with the fear of being hushed and labelled as pompous than the inability to communicate in English. As such, they gradually lose their voices and will prefer to stay quiet, especially in the presence of other women. This becomes an issue of confusion where both those who do not have a good command of the language and those who have a good command of it face criticism and judgement. That notwithstanding, when some parents go through certain embarrassments due to language barriers, as per some of the responses I got, they try by every means to ensure that their children do not go through the same problems.

They strive to provide their children with the necessary language skills and opportunities to overcome such hurdles. Hence, many parents will need to be seriously convinced that Pidgin is as important as English. Therefore, in societies where some languages are marginalised, such as in the case of Cameroon, where Pidgin and other indigenous languages are not promoted or are sidelined, most speakers claim that their primary motivation for raising their children to use the dominant language, which is English in the context of the target community in Cameroon for this research, is to ensure that they have access to education and well-paid professional jobs (see Lüpke and Storch 2013:142). It is common in cases like this to see speakers blaming their inability to utilise modern technology on the lack of education; hence, ensuring their children do not experience a similar situation.

According to an interviewee (interview 4/05/2020), in the past, most children at an early stage of their lives (below the school-going age) could only speak in English if their parents were well educated. They would frequently communicate with their children in English. Cases like this were even fewer because many people valued and regarded their local languages as the most ideal means of communication, such that even the educated mothers still communicated with their children using their

mother tongue. She emphasised mothers because mothers or primary carers were the ones who spent most of the time with their kids at home or on the farm. It is quite different today, as the English language is highly rated and considered necessary for school success. Hence, every parent tries to teach their child English instead of Pidgin. They assume that being able to communicate in English already suggests a level of literacy and advancement. Just to mention, this prestige attributed to certain languages depends on the ideology sold about these languages and how the languages have been portrayed or even referred to by both outsiders and speakers themselves. Hence, it is a common phenomenon for African languages to be called "dialect" by both outsiders and the speakers themselves. Not in the sense that it is a sublanguage to a bigger group, but rather in the sense that it is being minimised and not seen as qualified to be on the same level with "real" languages. One of the reasons for this is because language is seen as a symbol of power, and since these languages do not get any political attention, they lack this power as seen by the people. In addition to that, since they are not seen as languages, they are not equally used as national languages. Dating back to colonial times, as Storch mentioned, before the arrival of the colonial masters to Africa, European languages had been attributed to the symbol of power and a representative of nationhood. On their arrival, an established language from their countries was part of the education package they brought to Africa, and this was established through the church and the state of many African countries. At this point, speakers of different languages in these communities were convinced to accept that their languages were equivalent to "dialects" because they did not have the features that European languages had. Hence, it should be worth less and therefore used less too. By implication, it means the newly introduced educational system intended to "cook" and feed the Africans with knowledge that made them see their own languages as inferior and should desire to have the ability to use a more advanced language(s), which were the European national languages (Lüpke & Storch 2013: 144). This is why some writers hold that contrary to some beliefs that Creoles and Pidgins have "killed" some African languages, it has rather been added to their repertoires. Therefore, Vigouroux & Mufwene (2008a) emphasised that African languages are dying because of the spread and continuous use of ex-colonial official languages. With this level of marginalisation of African languages, colonial languages, which are languages that mostly require other "costly" means to acquire when compared to naturally learnt languages from birth, flourish more. This is also because the official educational systems in most African societies only promote colonial languages, and the formal economic sector also creates options only for them. Moreover, there is a deplorable reality that systems of knowledge transfer commonly found in many parts of Africa, as well as the economy in which most Africans participate both in urban and rural areas, are being regarded as "informal." It could now be safe to say that this could be one of

the ways through which the ideology of formal and informal systems of education emerged in communities like Cameroon, where education is only considered formal when people have registered in a school and have been given patterns and syllables to follow. However, one might wonder what we mean by stating that a language is expensive to acquire. As is already known, languages could be learnt through different methods, such as oral and written, among others. Hence, when we mention that a language is "expensive" to acquire, it is often in reference to the resources and efforts required to learn and become proficient in that particular language. Spoken language might be considered less expensive to learn as it may not necessitate extensive efforts and learning materials since individuals can acquire it through natural exposure and practice. However, when it comes to written language, the process of acquisition can differ significantly. It may require formal education, access to textbooks and learning materials (like books or papers, pens, and computers), literacy programs, and dedicated instruction to develop reading and writing skills. These additional requirements contribute to the perception of written language being more expensive to acquire, contrary to spoken language that might require just a tongue (see Lüpke 2011).

Therefore, it might not be an exaggeration to say that many people might find it easier to acquire a spoken language compared to written. As Lüpke & Storch (2013:270) have it too, language transmission in Africa is not just from one generation to the next but also through peer groups. According to them, arguably, one could say that language transmission through peer groups could even be more important and more effective than intergenerational transmission. Although it is often seen as a sign of language endangerment when children and adults speak a lingua franca or a youth language among themselves more than their indigenous languages, there is no proof that these could lead to a permanent shift in language—same as there is no proof that the use of Pidgin endangers other languages in Bamenda. They went ahead to say that the problem between African languages and European or colonial languages is not that European languages threaten African languages but rather the fact that the latter is being disempowered by empowering the former. Hence, though European languages are only accessible to part of the population in most African countries, they dominate in these countries. This is because, even though they are not a threat to African languages, they do not give these languages (African languages), especially those that are suitable, the chance to be used as languages of wider communication as all these “official” areas are reserved for European languages. (Ibid., 274). When a language is seen as “dialect” in the actual sense that it is being used and consequently seen as not fit for the educational milieu, there is a tendency for it to be limited or restricted from being freely used. This is a common phenomenon with other marginalised languages, such as the “dialects” in Cameroon and Pidgin, which are considered less important with nothing to

offer in the area of power relationships, and politics. These languages, when spoken, especially in educational milieus, are considered languages for the poor and "uneducated," who have nothing to offer society and are even sometimes punished for using these languages. For example, Anchimbe (2013:11–12) opined that Cameroon Pidgin has always been held as the scapegoat for the supposed falling standards of English and considered a negative influence on the acquisition of standard English. Hence, it is being prohibited in educational institutions, government offices, and even in some homes. Signs prohibiting the language are placed in most school compounds, and students or pupils are being punished if they are heard speaking Pidgin. As pointed out by Storch (Lüpke & Storch 2013:151), some of the limitations of these marginalised languages are their nature of being predominantly oral, and the lack of a written medium. This is true for many cases, with one of the exceptions being the Kamtok, which does not suffer from this deficit as it has its written form yet suffers from the same fate of marginalisation as the others. Apart from being marginalised, it could be safe to say that when a particular language is rarely used because an alternative language has been introduced and preferred, there is the tendency of the former being endangered. That notwithstanding, the very nature of language makes every language endangered, no matter its status. This is so because, once any language is not seen as being static but considered something that changes with time, it will be susceptible to an "original" aspect or part of it being lost to new changes. Looking at the above-mentioned point from the angle of urbanisation, attraction to large cities could lead to the emergence of new languages as migrants from diverse linguistic backgrounds come together and interact. In addition to that, civil unrest, climate change, and genocide could be important factors that equally contribute to the formation of new languages. In discussing this, it is essential to acknowledge the very case of civil unrest, or better yet, genocide, ongoing in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon. This has been going on for more than 5 years now, and due to the indiscriminate killings and kidnapping, especially in rural areas, citizens are forced to move from one area to another. Some have moved to the bigger cities such as Yaounde and Douala that are in the French zone, while others have simply moved from their villages to either the Bamenda city or other cities in the Anglophone regions, which are equally affected but considered safer than the rural areas (see Tawe & Bomono, 2022:254–264). With these movements, many have learnt new languages for the past 5 years, while others have also been able to influence their contacts with the languages they brought along. It is considered that it is easier for rural migrants to forgo their "native" languages in exchange for an urban vernacular, which in most cases is based on the lexicon of colonial languages. An example could be seen with the Cameroon and Nigerian Pidgins—migrants, especially from rural areas, easily switch to these languages as they are frequently used in most public domains. This could be confirmed in Nkengasong's (2016:7) work where it is

mentioned that the confusing situation of which language is superior between the two colonial languages of French and English in Cameroon worked in favour of Pidgin. It rapidly expanded in both the Anglophone and Francophone regions of the country as the only language uniting the French and English speakers. Hence, about 97.8 percent of Anglophone Cameroonians speak Pidgin, while about 61.8 percent of Francophones living in urban areas also speak Pidgin, which implies that in terms of its function and spread, Pidgin competes freely with English and French as well as with the over 270 languages in Cameroon (Mbangwana, 2004:23). Even in settings like schools where Pidgin is highly prohibited, students will rarely use it with teachers, but it is still widely used among the students as a marker of in-group status (see Schröder, 2003: 134). Also, among the many reasons for the wide spread of Pidgin is the fact that some people see it as a language of humour, intimacy, and secrecy where speakers can express themselves in ways that are best to them depending on the particular group or the targeted audience at that point in time.

Another pertinent factor is geographical mobility that could be influenced by employment, education, or other aspects of either the parents or children. In this case, like many others, language attitude is being characterised by one's open-mindedness towards different languages and the ability and willingness to learn. In a nutshell, the possibilities of learning these new languages leave one with a chance of adopting new repertoire, which in many cases come with a sense of pride too. When narrowed to the community of study in this research, one could look at women from Bamenda, for example, who have migrated to new areas and have had the opportunity to learn new languages. It is notable that they often enjoy a level of prestige for their ability to use multiple repertoires at a time. For instance, some women who migrated from rural areas such as Babanki to urban areas are looked upon with a level of envy when they return to the village by other women who have not had this same opportunity to migrate. Their new repertoires are usually admired, while in other cases, they could assumedly be seen as being more educated (especially when the newly acquired language or repertoires are English or influenced by English).

On the other hand, there are some speakers who intentionally choose not to learn certain languages for reasons that they perceive as beneficial. Taking the case of Cameroon Pidgin, for example, some speakers deliberately avoid speaking it or ensure that their children do not learn this language (especially during the early stage of their development) because they believe that it is so close to the English language. Seeing it as being so close to the English language, they therefore think it could be a little confusing, especially for these children, to differentiate what repertoire is needed at what time. This might end up making them not master the right English repertoire. Since English to them is more important as it is used widely, they will prefer to be good in English than in Kamtok, which is limited

to the Cameroon community and not even officially encouraged. Nkengasong (2016: 14) further explains that although Pidgin has a long history of multifunctionality in Cameroon, it still faces much contempt and disdain. To him, Cameroonians generally regard Pidgin as a language spoken by the people of the lower class, and some argue that it has a negative effect on the acquisition of "standard" English. This is why colleges and universities have resorted to putting up signposts that prohibit the use of Pidgin on campus. Educated parents, on their part, have done everything within their powers to prevent their children from having contact with the language. He used the University of Buea, which is an English-speaking institution, as a good example to illustrate this, where the fight against Pidgin is well aligned in accordance with its vision of promoting English proficiency among students, using the Oxford standards for English proficiency. This condemnation of the language could be seen on boards and banners planted in different parts of the campus, and some read as follows:

"English is the language of the Commonwealth, not Pidgin."

"If you speak pidgin, you'll write pidgin."

"English is the password, not Pidgin."

"Pidgin is taking a negative toll on your English; shun it." (Bobda 2006:362)

The point mentioned above still boils down to the point that this happens when one language has been prioritised over the other. This factor also leads to other situations like job opportunities, careers, and other leadership positions. Preferring to learn English instead of Pidgin or other local languages in Cameroon could be because of wanting to gain access to jobs and other career opportunities. The speaker at this point is aware of the limitations that come with speaking just Pidgin or other Cameroonian languages and will want to avoid any case of joblessness by avoiding the language(s). Another example in Cameroon that fits well with the above explanation is the difference in relevance attached to the French and English languages. Since French is the dominant language, it is common to find more English speakers learning French to gain access to more job opportunities in the country than one will see French speakers learning English. Torrent (2012:150) supported the point mentioned above in her work when she found out that there were more incentives for non-French speakers in Cameroon to learn French than there were for non-English speakers to learn English. She recounted how the French ambassador, out of undisguised satisfaction, noted that French was the main or dominant language of both the political and economic capitals of Cameroon, which are Yaounde and Douala, respectively. Moreover, there were very limited daily-life situations that could convince the Francophones that English was a requirement. Torrent also noted that even the British Consul in Buea

in 1968 observed this trend, noting that French was virtually compulsory for anyone who aspired for economic, social, or political promotion and that a greater amount of information in Cameroon was exclusively published in French. An important factor too that determines people's choices of language worth mentioning is the ideology speakers have about a particular language. For example, the Mboko language spoken in the Anglophone regions and some parts of the francophone regions of Cameroon is one of those youth languages that comes with so much stigmatisation—especially since it originated from a deceased Cameroonian musician who used it as a language of attack to the government in his music. As such, many people (especially women) prefer to distance themselves from Mboko, as it is more often than not linked with a negative reputation. Speakers also distance themselves from languages like Mboko because it is believed that one can easily be vulgar in Mboko compared to English. Hence, when someone uses mboko, they may be perceived as badly brought up or sometimes labeled as a street child (see Vandyck & Nyagura, 2019:280).

On the aspect of some languages being marginalised or prohibited in public domains in Cameroon, it is important to note that such actions are typically taken when there are more superior alternatives. These alternatives are therefore seen as more "useful," "prestigious," and "attractive." But it is very important to take into consideration the fact that for a language to be attractive, the speakers or owners have the responsibility of making it attractive. An example is the case of Fula, which is spoken across many west African states and some northern parts of central Africa. Irwin (2012) mentioned that there are some speculations as to why Fula has not emerged as one of the predominant languages of communication in Africa despite its widespread distribution across the continent. And one of these speculations is that the users have failed in making their language attractive. This could be connected to the case of Cameroon Pidgin, which, despite not being official yet, is beginning to gain ground as the speakers are making it more attractive by the day. It will also be necessary to mention that some English-speaking parts of the country do not need the government's approval to make Kamtok their "unofficial" language, as they even attest to it being their first language. An example of one of these towns is Kumba, and Nkengasong (2016:10) has it that it is the only major town in the country where the indigenes are a visible minority, and their languages are of little significance in influencing the linguistic setup of the town. The people have therefore, recognised Pidgin as their "unofficial" language of communication. In this town, one can hardly hear people communicating in English, French, or other Cameroonian local languages. It has been realised that apart from in formal settings like in the classrooms and in a few official contexts where English is utilised, Pidgin is employed in all other aspects of life in Kumba, including judicial matters. This is also because the population of this town is predominantly composed of people from different tribes within the country as well as

immigrants from neighbouring Nigeria who significantly outnumber the indigenes. Additionally, speakers of Kamtok continuously create new repertoires that foster a sense of pride in using the language. Some words, according to Kamtok speakers, can only be conveyed in Kamtok and will lose their charm if spoken in English. Hence, it is a common phenomenon to hear speakers express a feeling of pride for being able to communicate in kamtok. For example, a recent phrase has gained popularity in social media such that even if someone starts a comment in English, if that phrase is to be used, there must be a switch to Pidgin at some point.

"Na gud acsion, but de kwesion na seh, e go tay?"

If translated to English literally, it will mean "It is a good action, but the question is, will it last?".

The statement took a very short time to go viral among the Cameroonian community, where most people want to associate themselves with it. T-shirts with the statement were recently printed with the intention to be able to raise funds and support the author of the statement—talk of a typical example of how language can shape a society. The good thing about this is that speakers do not find this translation in English as attractive as it is in Pidgin because it takes away the beauty and the fun part of the statement and makes it sound very official to them. Apart from that, Kamtok is used in many areas, like advertisements, news, and Christian gatherings. Some books like the Bible have been translated to Pidgin, and movies, especially Christian movies (commonly known as Jesus' films), have been translated and acted in Pidgin too. Same goes with the Naija or Nigerian Pidgin that has been made so attractive, especially through its use in the entertainment industry, which has attracted so many foreigners, including non-Africans, to the language (interested in learning the language).

The big question and focus of this chapter now is: how then are women marginalised using language in this community under research? First and foremost, it is important to mention that language marginalisation could even extend to the mere fact of who is to learn, what language? Who is expected to speak in what manner and who is permitted to use a certain language or repertoire, or register at a given time? Bringing gender into the picture, it is important to mention that amid multilingualism, there could be an aspect of gendered language introduced. This is to say that among the many languages spoken in a particular society and at a particular time or situation, it is common to hear of languages that are restricted for either women or men. This concept is highly influenced by power relations in connection to language—where in many cases, men could use language to portray their power over women. Hence, Tolmach Lakoff's (2004) look at masculinity and men´s use of language suggested that gendered linguistic norms for men serve as ways of portraying an engagement with power. For example, in the case of Cameroon, Pidgin to a lesser extent and Mboko or Mboko tok to a

greater extent are those languages that are considered inappropriate for women. In this case, women are considered uncultured when they use these languages, while men, on the other hand, are not stigmatised for using them. This is an indication of their power and freedom to make their choices compared to the women. In Senegal, for example, as mentioned by Lüpke, women in general and girls in particular are discouraged from using French because they will be looked upon as having been assimilated and acculturated. Funny enough, this stigma is not applied to boys or men, as they can freely use French as desired. This consequently makes men's repertoires to be more of French, while girls or women are the main promoters of Wolof, as they tend to communicate with their children in Wolof (Lüpke and Storch 2013:48). In a nutshell, one could say women's language or repertoires are being "censored," and they are sometimes not permitted to use certain languages as it will be seen as taboo, and they might even be expected to pay a fine when they do not go by these rules.

Apart from taboo language, we have those communities where men always claim ownership of a language and are considered the "better" speakers of these languages. This is common with exogenous marriages, where women are mostly expected to learn a new language or languages when they get married into a new community (see Lüpke and Storch 2013:34). Storch's study in the central region of Nigeria also shows that due to the family structure being a patrilocal type, men usually claim to be first language speakers of their group's dominating language, while women, on the other hand, have a very unclear position. More to that, women are considered to be foreigners or guests in their husband's family when they get married to men of the Jukun-speaking groups such as the Wapha (Ibid., 81). Hence, after learning these new languages, they are still restricted from using certain registers, especially when religious practices are concerned. Looking at the Tarok community, for instance, women are seen as outsiders; hence, most of the shrines and religious societies are closed to them except they change their social position after reaching postmenstrual age. The women in this society are therefore known for showing their unclear situations using gendered language. Moreover, as the men's way of speaking is seen as the "real" and "perfect" in Tarok, the women's language will be considered as having flaws and being foreign (Lüpke and Storch, 2013:83-84). With patterns like these, women remain foreigners in their husband's family for a significant period, and some might never be integrated into the family. One could also say that keeping women away from certain registers and religious ceremonies works on both sides. It comes from the idea of wanting to reduce women to lower positions as opposed to men. At the same time, as the women stay away or remain silent, men maintain their positions of power, and that is how the religious activities remain relevant. In a nutshell, women play a big role in keeping men in power by remaining silent and ignorant about the things hidden from them.

This brings to mind the idea that this could be one of the reasons why women are mostly expected to learn the language(s) of their in-laws. After being taken away from their own community and brought into the man's community, they are expected to learn a language that they cannot even make an ownership claim to as the men are seen as the "first owners" of such languages. In the same way they are seen as foreigners, women are often not trusted when they join these new communities through marriage. There is a prevailing belief that they will betray or even bewitch their husbands (see Ibid., 81). This suggests how women are quickly associated with witchcraft and easily blamed for their husband's misfortune (see Spence 2017). Moreover, this is another area where women could be seen as "suffering" from the consequences of being women, as they are expected to seamlessly assume responsibilities in two distinct communities upon marriage. These expectations add to the challenges and pressures that women face because of their gender. They are expected to maintain the ties with their family of origin, which usually includes maintaining their language, and expected to fit well in their new community. In some cases, these situations are contradictory, yet they are expected to manage it just the right way, and as Linares notes, a woman is first loyal to her family before her in-law's family, as she has more power in her capacity as a daughter and a sister in contrast to when she is in the capacity of a wife (see Linares 1992:109). It is evident that her responsibilities go beyond simply learning a new language and remaining loyal to her father's house. She is also expected to take care of her new home while also remaining fully present in her father's house (even if not physically, at least in other aspects, such as providing financial support) yet demonstrating unwavering loyalty to her husband. She is expected to fulfill the role of a good wife who is pleasant to her in-laws so as to avoid being unjustly accused of wickedness, witchcraft, or other vices. This could be typical of families where many wives share the same husband, and everyone must put in their best. In families as such, the conflict and competition between or among the women can sometimes lead to witchcraft accusations (see Lüpke and Storch 2013:81).

Coming back to the case of Cameroon, these promoted colonial languages are not gendered as such, though the different variants could be. However, my focus on them is because the process of acquiring them is very limiting, with men having the upper hand in the past (as opposed to the present days). An important aspect that should be noted is that since the promoted languages are mostly acquired only through "formal" education, not everyone has the opportunity to acquire this education. And since language is used as a tool of expressing power, it plays a big role against those who lack this opportunity. Individuals with the opportunity to use English, for example, sometimes have a level of "power" over those who are lacking in it. Now, specifically in the case of Bamenda, the socio-cultural values of this community did not give women the equal opportunity to acquire this 'prestigious' and

most promoted language. This was somehow used as a means of relegating some women, and they had little or no voice even in matters that concerned them (Fonchingong, 2013:116). With all these, women were therefore forced to be limited in their communication. It is worth noting that even some of the women who had the opportunity to get at least a certain level of this education still feel limited when they come across others who are more educated; hence, they still shy away from public communication due to the fear of rejection or being mocked. Had it been the language (English) was not prioritised over the others, using it properly or not might not have been an issue. These women have the advantage of communicating in alternative languages because of the multilingual nature of the community. But, due to the stigma placed on those who cannot use this dominant language, they feel left out when they cannot use it properly because not communicating in English or in 'perfect' English gives the impression that one lacks education (Ouafeu, 2010:2).

The empirical data collected for this work proves the previously mentioned point. I observed a level of discomfort in some women when expected to take part in a group discussion. Considering all the methods through which data was collected, like WhatsApp, Facebook, interviews, workshops, and observations, I realised the usage of English was the common setback in all. For example, when a WhatsApp group was created for the group of women who attended the research workshops I organised, some women had to be convinced to join the group as they had the impression that the group was meant for the educated women and it was needless for them to join since they could barely write in English. They were encouraged to use voice notes and speak languages they felt comfortable with, like pidgin. During the workshops, pidgin had to be maintained as the main language of communication after observing that the women were from different backgrounds with different levels of education. I realised it was the decision, as many of these women freely expressed themselves and fully took part in these workshops without language limitations. Some of them appreciated the choice of language, as their biggest worry when invited for the workshop(s) was that they might end up as listeners and not be able to participate in the talk. It was different with interviews, where the attitude shown by interviewees who could use it indicated that it gave them a level of confidence and the feeling that "I am educated, and I can also use this language properly." This aspect was confirmed during one interview when the interviewee kept boasting of his proficiency and the level of accomplishments he had attained through his language skills. He was so proud when recounting the fact that during most of his meetings, many people always had the impression that he was highly educated, whereas he only had a basic-level education. Their assumption was always because he has a good mastery of the language and could use it even better than some well-educated individuals. With the observations made, I came to realise many people struggle to prove themselves worthy enough to communicate in

English than they will try with their local languages. Being able to speak English or other foreign languages seems to indirectly present someone as a "civilised" individual who has had the privilege to master the queen's language and other foreign languages (see Anchimbe, 2013:155). Apart from the stigmatisation that comes with not having a good command of English, marginalisation was also looked at from the angle of women always having to prove themselves as being "good" or well brought up with their choice of language. This is because even Mboko, which is seen in Cameroon as a language for street dwellers, does not raise eyebrows for listeners when used by guys compared to ladies. Women who use this language are highly stigmatised and labelled as wayward. This should not come across like we do not have languages too that men will be seen as being "feminine" for using them, but it is important to note that such cases are relatively few compared to the reverse situation. This could also be observed in the case of Ghana, where women in particular are still given the impression that it is not 'womanlike' to use pidgin, hence so many women, especially young girls, in trying to prove femininity resort to English even if they do not have a good mastery of it (see Mesthrie, 2008:96).

During an interview (Bamenda, 19th May 2020), Mrs. Ngwa[58] lamented about the changes that have taken place in this new generation. According to her, in their time, going to school was not considered as important as it is today; those who went were respected, but those who did not go to school did not face the same level of stigma as it is in present times. Their culture was still intact to an extent, their languages were still the main means of communication, and it took very little effort to convince women to stay at home and help their parents rather than going to school. As in her case, she was told to stay home in order to take care of her younger sister so the mother could go to the farm. She further explained that the challenge was very minimal, as very few women even had the chance to get this education, so they had little or no cases of people stigmatising their own languages and making the speakers feel inferior. Notwithstanding, she is extremely proud of her Ngemba language, as it is her pride and identity.

However, we can attest to the fact that times have changed, and things are no longer the same as in the past. Globalisation has come along with some changes, and almost everyone wants to flow with the changes. The mentality of "a woman's place is in the kitchen" is not as strong as it used to be in the past in Bamenda; hence, more women are getting into job markets and holding certain leadership positions because they have received formal education. It is at this moment when some women who

[58]Pseudonym used for privacy reason

did not have this chance to attend formal education yet were less worried have started having some regrets and wishing things were different. Women are observing their fellow women gradually getting into leadership positions and being exposed to greater things; some women have even moved from the general position of housewives and can now accompany and support their husbands in many domains.

With the coming of these changes, women also started upgrading from just sitting in small groups at home for little gossip and discussions on how to better their living conditions to sitting in well-organised meetings with agendas and well-planned purposes. Hence, with the trend of official meetings, the need to have leaders and organisers increased, and it was almost but natural that most of the leaders needed some level of education to be able to lead other women or their meeting members (depending on the nature of the meeting or group). These circumstances can create a feeling of discomfort for some women, especially when they are unable to take up responsibilities. It is sometimes uncomfortable for them when they find themselves being controlled by a fellow woman simply because she had the opportunity to receive formal education. Mrs. Ngwa narrates this scenario better as;

> *"Most of wa meeting group dem even for da day dem be need presidents and secretaries dem as dem be be de most important post dem, how person like me with small or no education be fit get dis post dem? Secretary dem ever get to di write and read information dem for group, so e be normal say make na persin weh e know how for do am take de position. ah nodi just understand time weh some woman dem di complain about di tin dem. Na true say all man need for get a chance but nobe any man e fault seh wa papa and mami dem nobe see the importance for make we learn book. For talk true, if dem gi me post for even financial secretary for ma group, ah no sure if ah go fit even hold am becos e need say make man di always read and calculate. Make pipo weh dem don train do am"*
>
> (Most of our groups needed presidents and secretaries, as they were the most important posts. How then could someone like me with little or no education get this position? Secretaries are always expected to write and read information for the group, so it is normal for someone who can do it to take the position. I just don't understand when some women complain about these things. It is true everyone needs a chance, but it is nobody's fault, some of our parents did not deem it necessary to give us this education. To be honest, if I am offered the position of even a financial secretary in my group, I wonder if I will be able to handle it because it entails a lot of reading and calculation. Let those who have been trained do it.)

In another woman's response (Bamenda, interview 23rd January 2019), she told me she belongs to a women's group in church, and she really wishes she could do more. To her, education could not be limited to language. Her church group uses Pidgin as the main language of communication, which to her is okay. But she still thinks the women who are educated still do better than the "uneducated ones" in the way they use even Pidgin and carry themselves around. She expresses her regrets for having missed the chance to acquire formal education

> *"Language na big problem for da one, ah gree, but plenty tin dem dey for dey. For example, for ma group CWF, one of delaw dem na say na only pidgin all man must use am for tok so dat make all man fit understand den get chance for tok too. Na true say de law don gi plenty pipo equal chance for tok and forget de feeling of belonging, no man nodi show over know for English weh e go make some pipo feel bad but ah still feel say tin dem for be different wit me. Ah di still see plenty differences for the way weh some pipo dem di lead, de way dem di carry dia skin and even de way some woman dem di use di simple pidgin weh all we di use am so for gi dia message. If you visit dis group, ah tell you say you must to differentiate between woman dem weh dem go school and the one dem weh dem nogo school, e be very clear. Seriously we be di talk in dose days say problem no dey but true true so problem dey and ah wish say ah be get the chance for change things dem den gi myself de education weh ma papa dem nobe gi me"*
>
> Language is a big issue. I agree, but there is more to it. For example, in my group Christian Women Fellowship (CWF), one of the rules is to use pidgin as the primary means of communication. This ensures that everyone understands and hence has the chance to participate in discussions. Truly, this has given a lot of people equal chances to communicate and to feel a sense of belonging. No one uses language to bring down another, but I must mention that I still wish things were different with me. One can still notice differences in the way some people lead and carry themselves, and even in the way some women use the same pidgin we all use to communicate. If you visit this group, I bet you must be able to differentiate between the educated and the uneducated, as it is very obvious. Seriously, in the past, we used to say it does not matter, but to be honest, it matters, and I wish I had the chance to make things right and give myself the education that my parents never gave me.
>
> Ma Delphine.

The above testimonies gave me the impression that many of these old women who cannot communicate in English are only feeling the consequences now with the change of time. It seems they

have been faced with so many ‘competitors’ that they wish things were different. These women felt like it would have been different if their local languages were not tagged or considered "primitive." They could still be open to something new without necessarily throwing their own This aspect of throwing their own indigenous languages is even quite different with the older generation, as they still attach so much value to these languages. On the other hand, it is quite a different scenario for the younger generation, who are greatly influenced by this feeling of stigmatisation towards their own languages.

Another way in which language is used to marginalise women is by making certain language or languages in a community a secret and taboo to women. In cases like this, women are made to believe that men are also powerful in languages, such that some languages are special and limited to them. Some of these languages are believed to be languages used by men (the initiated ones in most cases) to communicate with the gods, and women usually try the best they can to avoid these secret languages in order not to face any consequences from the gods. Women are even expected to pay heavy fines or face severe punishments ranging from banishment to death in some societies when these taboo languages or secrets are exposed to them. For example, talking about the practices in some Jukun villages, Storch (2011:134) noted that in these societies, when a secret is transformed into a public secret, women have to pay dearly for it. They are expected to prepare meals and supply live chickens, goats, and beer to appease the gods. It becomes a steady supply that disappears each time they are taken to the shrines while the men claim that some powerful forces are out there asking for more. Women who are not willing or able to make these sacrifices are threatened with punishment to the extent that they are even expected to die. Now, since these punishments are usually very visible and real, everyone believes with no doubt the existence of these secrets, and the women themselves will not want to be victims of these punishments. Secret and taboo language also extends to calling body parts. In this regard, it is taboo for some body parts to openly be mentioned compared to others. In some communities, like the Jukun-speaking societies, it is taboo to even mention that men have body odour as opposed to women, who could be discussed in any aspect. It is in line with this that Storch mentioned that in Jukun, where body effluvia is obviously taboo, the organs that excrete them are treated differently, not in terms of their origin but with respect to gender. Hence, words for male organs and body odour are never mentioned in public and are not permitted to be used in swearing. While words used for female organs are frequently uttered and even make up an important segment of swear words. All these developments of gender-marked swearing terms are motivated by the cultural treatment of gender and power relations and by the way secrecy, considered the base of power, is handled (see Storch, 2011: 151). Empirically speaking, looking at the community of research, the

above aspect is not completely absent. In my local language (Babanki) and even in Pidgin, we can hear women's private parts being used in very vulgar language or in the form of an insult. For instance, an angry vulgar man in Babanki language known as Kedjom will throw words at someone like "kenah keh li wu," which literally means "your mother's private," yet I cannot remember anyone ever saying "kenah keh chi wu," which could be translated as "your father's private part." The same goes when using Pidgin, and all these go a long way to confirm the point that it will be easier and even okay for some people to refer to a woman's private part, than even considering the same thing for a man. Furthermore, this could not be limited to spoken words and taboo language. What about the case of women's bodies being exposed in music clips and movies as a way of attracting views? A woman's exposed body will easily be seen as a point of focus and even a toy in public outings, while a man's body will be kept sacred, hence, well covered. Durkin, Dayan, Englun, & Clauius (2022) addressed this issue in their work when they opined that women are often at the centre of musical descriptions. To them, in as much as male characters give music its status of artwork, the rendering of music and direct references to the music played rely on women and their bodies. She therefore thinks if music vibration is associated with the female body while the musical conception is associated with the male mind in literature, it implies that music is also split along gender binaries, which, in consequence, set up gender norms. Associating the female body to music means that the female body has been defined and reified by a patriarchal frame, which has also associated it with music. Therefore, the gendering of music should not only be about music; it is also understood within the hegemonic dominance of conceptualisation of music and language, bodies and technology, and artistic practices. This to me implies that women's bodies are a form of language in their own right. If a woman's body can be used to attract people as portrayed in music even without the use of words, then it possesses a great power that is unfortunately used for the benefit of others.

In conclusion, one could say language is strongly embedded in the marginalisation of women. Firstly, because it is needed in their day-to-day interaction, and secondly, it is used as a means of exhibiting power. When it comes to a language like English that everyone has an equal right to speak, there can still be limitations and challenges for some individuals, especially in the form of the cost and efforts required to learn it. Conversely, when a language like Pidgin does not require an extra cost in learning it, women may still face limitations in speaking it due to the stigmatisation placed on it. As if it isn't enough, when a language like some of the indigenous languages is considered a language for indigenes, women are still limited as some repertoires and registers are strictly for men, and even at that, the ideology of men being the real speakers and owners of these languages is highly promoted. In addition to that, when it comes to body language and other forms of nonverbal languages, while their body parts

could freely be described in any language without any restrictions compared to that of men, women's bodies are even used as a way of communication and means of making money with or without their knowledge.

Chapter 9: EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON GENDER INEQUALITY

With the most part of this research carried out during the COVID-19 era, I would say it was such a coincidence to carry out research on gender inequality, with the home as the main focus at a time when a pandemic kept almost everyone at home for quite a while. At this time, individuals had no choice but to stay at home with their spouses, as it seems nowhere was saved at that time for people to run to. As such, it seems, as much as this period was used by some as an opportunity to stick with family and bond better, it was also an opportunity for so many spouses to know their significant other better. That having been said, it will be important to know if and how much change COVID-19 brought in connection to gender inequality and violence.

As Ouedraogo & Stenzel (2021:3) put it, the COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in domestic violence against women. Their research, which was based in 18 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, had it that during this period, the poor economic and social conditions in these countries, not leaving out the lockdown measures, worsened existing abuse and control. This is also confirmed by a report by the International Growth Centre[59] that the pandemic has really aggravated violence against women in Nigeria. According to the report, Nigeria has been facing gender-based violence crises for a long time now, with 30% of women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 who have experienced sexual abuse. It went further to compare other diseases to COVID-19—while disease outbreaks may threaten the population's health, the case of the pandemic was different as it was responded to by governments with aggressive response measures such as lockdowns. These lockdowns come with effects such as an increase in women's and girls' vulnerability to violence. Since the beginning of lockdowns as imposed by governments in different countries to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, authorities from Singapore and China to the UK and US have reported an increase in the cases of domestic violence and the demand for an emergency shelter. The case in Nigeria is not so different from the ones reported elsewhere in the world. The report shows that following the introduction of lockdowns at the end of March 2020, there was a monthly increase of 149% in reports of gender-based violence in Nigeria. Apart from that, prolonged school closures also put young and adolescent girls at risk of teenage pregnancy and child marriage. It was reported that Capital Territory experienced a significant increase in gender-based violence by 56% throughout April 2020. It should be noted that just during the first two weeks of lockdown, gender-based violence cases rose from 346 to 794 (Ibid.). During this period, health-care services were flooded with COVID-19 cases—this implies that there was a limitation in

[59] https://www.theigc.org/blog/the-shadow-pandemic-gender-based-violence-and-covid-19/ (accessed on 22nd June 2022)

this area to be able to meet up with other needs of individuals. These breakdowns, coupled with the distancing measures, imply that health-care sectors as well as other social sectors were limited or overwhelmed by the whole happenings to provide satisfactory care to women who were or are suffering from violence. Since telephone usage was more prevalent at that time, it was not beneficial to all women, as many nations, especially those facing many forms of gender inequity, might have been unable to access help services by cell phone or internet—due to the lack of it. On the other hand, even if they had access to these means, they might have been unable to use them as they were closely monitored by their perpetrators of violence. Moreover, as the use of online platforms has equally increased, many women's rights experts as well as other bodies in charge of women's affairs have reported an increase in different forms of online violence against women—these include stalking, sexual harassment, bullying, and sex-trolling. (Ibid.). This infers that the anonymity of the internet has increased the chances of violence against women through means like verbal abuse that might seem relatively insignificant yet come with adverse consequences for the women.

April 2020 was the period when COVID-19 just started spreading wide to different continents. At this time, most radio and TV stations were very frequent on news broadcasts in connection to COVID-19. On the 19th of April 2020, France24 had one of its reports on the pandemic with the caption "*WOMEN AND COVID-19*" and subtitled *"PANDEMIC SET TO WORSEN GENDER INEQUALITIES, UN WARNS."* This drew my attention as I was already informed about the fact that there was already a level of gender inequality where women seemed to suffer the effects more in many cases. According to the correspondence (from Washington, DC) in that France24 news, the pandemic will have more effects on the women. This begins with the very fact that at the decision-making level across the world, very few women are part of this body. As of that time, she reported that out of the 193 finance ministers in the world, just 25 were women, out of all the health ministers in the world, less than 40 were women, and out of all the ministries of planning in the world, about 70-80 were women. This to her implies that it is going to take a lot of effort to ensure that women's needs are made central or factored in at the level of policy making. According to her, the loss of jobs during the pandemic was even felt more by women, as most of the jobs that were laid off were those predominantly occupied by women. The call was to ensure that policy members should not forget that as they were trying to build what was lost during the period of the pandemic, the most vulnerable groups, including women, should be taken into serious consideration. The correspondence went further to make it clear that despite the fact that the main topic at hand was connected to health, economic crises still come first, and health crises come second. Hence, it was already observed in the global South that the main problem had to do with food security, and the women who were hit the hardest were the women in the informal sector. The call was

therefore centred around calling on the policymakers to regulate the distance between the informal market and the formal market—to ensure that those in the informal sector (predominantly women) will not suffer shortages of food or suffer economic crises more than the rest of the population.

Talking about policy making, it is important to mention that it can promote gender inequity in the state, which is also as important as handling gender inequality at an intimate and home-based level. In this regard, Grugel, Barlow, Lines, Giraudo, & Omukuti (2022) have it that feminist political economists (EPE) call the public's attention to the significance of taking a broad understanding of the meaning of gender-based violence. In general, gender-based violence is understood as intimate partner violence. EPE, however, shows that it is far from being a problem that happens behind "closed doors," but rather, it is a problem of the public domain. To them, it is even obvious that the effects of intimate partner gender-based violence spill over into the so-called public sphere in a multitude of ways. According to True (2012:12), gender-based violence in public and private spheres both prevents women from being able to have access to economic opportunities, welfare benefits, and livelihoods. True therefore thinks that gender-based violence should not just include 'economic violence or exploitation occurring in the family' but also that which takes place within the 'community and/or perpetrated or tolerated by the state' (True, 2012:6). During socio-economic crises, violence against women and girls, both in the sense of intimate home-based violence and the wider effects of policy-based violence, increases (see True, 2012). This therefore means it was expected to be the same scenario with regards to COVID-19—where the intricate- and gendered-costs of socio-economic inequity, joined with policy invisibility, would contribute to gendered spikes of poverty, overwork, exclusion, and neglect (Grugel et al. 2022). It is of paramount importance to know that inasmuch as policies addressing gender-based violence are the most common type of gender-sensitive COVID-19 policies worldwide (UNDP, 2020b, 2020c), they do not recognise or act upon its structural causes, nor do they provide sufficient long-term solutions to protect and empower girls and women. Grugel et al. (2022) went further to mention that policies that deal with women and girls's unpaid care work are actually scarcer in number and even limited in impact. Now according to them, any crises, whether health or economic crises, unavoidably increase pressures within households, except governments make a conscious decision to alleviate their domestic gendered costs. Moreover, in as much as the predicted increase in women's unpaid care work and the demand for low-paid care work in the formal economy made up part of the early discussions of COVID-19, contrary to gender-based violence, almost no policies exist to tackle it and its consequences (UNDP, 2020b, 2020c). During the COVID-19 pandemic, all aspects of life were pushed into the home, and due to this, the caring responsibilities that are mostly placed on women and girls increased exponentially. Consequently, it did not get the attention that it deserves, and the

pandemic policies ignored and sidelined girls' and women's experiences. As a result of this increase in unpaid health care services, it led to scenarios like bad health, less education, and unemployment for women, during the COVID-19 crises (Grugel et al. 2022).

Connecting the situation of COVID-19 to food security, some researchers are of the opinion that it affects women more than men could be affected. As reported by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, World Food Programme (2022),[60] rising food prices have come under stress due to breakdowns in global supply chains. In this light, it implies that households in general faced increased difficulties as not only food prices increased but also there was a reduction in income, loss of livelihood, disruptions in food supply, and loss of remittances. This in turn affected poorer homes more, as they could barely have access to nutritious or healthy foods. Directing the above points specifically to the case of Iraq and Sudan, for example, the report shows that the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to result in the loss of 1.7 million jobs in these Arab regions. Out of all these, it is reported that about 700,000 of these jobs were held by women. This was because of measures that were taken to restrain activities, travel restrictions that limited transport and economic activities, border closures, and the limitations in the possibilities for people to go to work and for businesses to continue. These were much of a concern as the Arab regions already had the world's lowest rate of women taking part in economics, which is 26 percent compared to the global average of 56 percent. Moreover, there are barriers in the type of work considered "appropriate" for women in these regions, caused by patriarchal norms. In the same way, restricting women's individual freedom of movement, the excessive burdens of care work weighing on them, yet the lack of care facilities within workplaces and safety limitations constitute more problems or limitations for them to participate equally in the labour market (Ibid.). This is to say that apart from COVID-19 having more effect on women in terms of abusive relationships, it also has more effect on them health-wise. This is because the pandemic came along with a double burden for many women as they had to increase their caregiving responsibility as well as providing for the family. According to the report, just 10-33 percent of men in the Arab region have ever taken part in domestic work, with women spending more time in unpaid work than men—when compared to all other regions in the world. With this increase in unpaid work, there could be multiple negative impacts on women, as it reduced the time they could offer for paid jobs, led to both emotional and physical fatigue, and reduced immunity, which consequently increased the risk of contracting the pandemic. As Georgieva et al. (2020) put it, there is already an existing level of gender inequalities in

[60] https://www.google.de/books/edition/The_impact_of_COVID_19_on_gender_equalit/JFhqEAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=Effects+of+COVID19+on+food+security+in+Arab+regions&printsec=frontcover (accessed on 15th July 2022)

economic opportunities that may become worse in the face of COVID-19 crises. The first reason for this is because women are more exposed to the details as they make a greater percentage of the frontline workers in comparison to men. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2020) has it that women make up almost 70 percent of healthcare workers. The second reason for this is that most of the temporary and part-time positions are more likely to be held by women—which are the types of jobs employers tend to cut first in a recession. Thirdly, it is more likely to find women working in sectors that are hit the hardest by social distancing, such as hospitality, retail sales, and leisure. Finally, as women handle greater care work and housework than men, the burden increases on them during school closures (Alonso et al. 2019). In all of these, Aoyagi (2021) opines that women in "developing" countries and especially in sub-Saharan Africa may experience even more risks that challenge gender equality. When there is already an economically insecure working population, lockdown makes it even worse as it becomes more challenging. The majority of this insecure working population is based in sub-Saharan Africa, with women mostly affected due to the lower income and the higher poverty rate. According to them, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) database suggests that in sub-Saharan Africa, 81 percent of female workers were already facing the threat of poverty before the pandemic, and this is in comparison to 77 percent of male workers. Another important point to note is that most women in sub-Saharan Africa work in the informal sector, which has little or no employment benefits and lacks even basic legal and social protection benefits. Looking at the MalaFund (2020), there is an indication that after the Ebola crises, the population of girls not attending school nearly tripled in Liberia, and in Guinea, girls were 25 percent less likely to re-enrol in school in contrast to boys. This is not different from the COVID-19 crises, as prolonged school closure could make the possibility of girls returning to school more difficult and even get them exposed to domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence. Moreover, due to prolonged school lockdown in Sierra Leone during the Ebola outbreak, girls spent more time with men, which led to an increase in adolescent pregnancies, and many of those students who were pregnant never returned to school (Bandiera, Buehren, et al. 2020). It is also worth mentioning that during the Ebola outbreak, there was a lack of resilience in the health sector, which led to a serious rise in the rate of maternal mortality in West Africa (Sochas, Amos Channon, and Nam 2017).

Linking the above to the area of studies (Bamenda), one could say that it was one of those parts of the continent that was not so affected by the COVID-19 restrictions, especially in the early days of the pandemic. By being affected, what is meant here is that, inasmuch as some social distancing measures were put in place, businesses and other workplaces were not shut down compared to other parts of the world. It was a coincidence that the pandemic outbreak, which had so many effects on the world—as

borders were blocked and movement of people almost came to a halt—occurred just when I had travelled to Bamenda to carry out some research. I was held down in Bamenda for six months, experiencing what it was like for the people to navigate through the period of the pandemic. At this time, the people were caught between the pandemic and the crises (civil unrest) that had been going on for the past 4 years before the pandemic. During the period of this civil unrest, there was a compulsory shutdown of schools, and children were forced to stay at home. It is therefore important to note that due to the civil unrest, school lockdown was not such a new phenomenon or experience for the people of the Northwest Region (NWR) of Cameroon as they had experienced even worse cases in connection to this (see Teno, 2021). At the peak of the civil unrest (not to sound like it is over now), it was so risky for schoolgoers to go to school as the "freedom fighters" declared it a crime for schools to be operational. This deep fear took over the population for more than two years, as young people and teachers were even killed for "stubbornly" going to school. So, as young men were facing the risk of being killed, young girls had to flee their homes to safer cities where many involuntarily got involved in prostitution or were victims of sexual abuse. Some were forced into early marriages by their families, who could barely feed the family at that time. However, at one point of the civil unrest (till now), schools went operational but not with full status as before, as pupils and students were still not permitted to wear uniforms to school. Now, with the pandemic, going to school in hiding was not even possible as schools all over the national territory were shut down. What was observed during this period, which was also reported by UNESCO (2021),[61] was how much child labour increased in Cameroon during that period. Paradoxically, kids were kept out of schools to ensure social distancing and to see that the risk of spreading COVID-19 was reduced. Yet, while at home, children take part in other activities intended to increase household income, such as farming and trading. While farming has little risk of spreading the pandemic as very little contact is experienced in the farms, going out to sell was riskier, considering how often people make contacts in marketplaces. This got many wondering, as to why will children be stopped from going to school with the aim of protecting them from COVID-19, yet get exposed to the worst conditions? In connection with girls and early marriage, one could say that the act of early marriages for young girls could not be blamed on the pandemic as it was an ongoing practice already, and besides, school lockdown due to COVID-19 only lasted for a couple of months. Notwithstanding, the healthcare system became so saturated during that period, and again, women make up the highest population of healthcare providers. As such, they were

[61] https://www.google.de/books/edition/When_schools_shut/ifBMEAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=effects+of+COVID-19+on+Cameroon+homes&pg=PA33&printsec=frontcover: accessed on 13th July 2022).

overburdened with taking care of the entire community, as their services were highly needed at that time, and having to handle their family needs at the same time.

Researching on COVID-19 in Cameroon, Benoni-Wang (2021), found out that the consequences of the new norms implemented with the aim to contain COVID-19, at one point, started straining many social interactions and relationships. One of these relationships that was seriously affected, according to her, was marriage. Benoni-Wang opined that even if marriage endured socio-political chaos, her study argues that COVID-19 is threatening to melt some marriages that were formerly strong. These threats to melt strong unions as such are fuelled by the fact that spouses are suspicious, have doubt, and fear one another; some even succumb to untimely deaths at a time when they are so far from the presence of their partners, and to make it worse, some are being buried in the absence of their surviving spouses and family members. Moreover, in as much as marriage continues to be highly respected, the pandemic exposed sides of couples that might have been hidden for a long time, exposing controversies, strange tensions, and dilemmas among couples. Benoni-Wang's main worry is, if love and marriage fail, then what becomes of the home and society at large?

Coming back to the case of Bamenda, Teno (2021) tried to turn the coin and look at the good sides of COVID-19 in the home, in what she termed "restoration of marriage bonds." According to her, a typical African woman has the mindset that it is the husband's responsibility to take care of his family while the wife is required to stay at home and take care of their children and the home. Yet, many women want to have their husbands spend some quality time with them at home. Inasmuch as the woman needs her husband to be there for the kids and herself, it is not the custom of the people of Bamenda for a woman to freely express her emotions to her husband. Teno explains further that the culture of the people of the Northwest Region of Cameroon makes a woman understand that it is a sign of respect for her to stay quiet and not try to express her emotional needs to her husband. This has set a wrong standard for men, who will consider any woman who freely asks for sex from the husband as a "prostitute." As a result of this mindset, some women can only wait for their husbands to demand sex before they can use the opportunity to satisfy their own needs. As a usual routine, most men will leave their homes very early in the morning and only come back in the evening tired. In many cases, they will have no time for their wives and children, and family ties suffer from this routine. This is where it is now considered that COVID-19 brought a smile to the faces of married women. Teno shares the experience she had with some mothers in Bamenda who recounted their stories about how they related with their husbands during the period of the pandemic. Out of the 36 women she spoke to, 29 in the course of sharing their stories used the common phrase used in Bamenda, *"some tin di spoil fix someone,"* which is a local expression meaning "the occurrence of one bad situation is a steppingstone

for the restoration of a missing treasure." So, each time this idiom was mentioned, there was a resounding affirmation in a chorus, *"ar swear oh"* (confirmation in Pidgin), that followed. They all shared the view that before, their husbands spent little or no time with them. Even when they were not working, they were either in beer parlours sharing drinks with their friends or chasing after "little girls." But with the outbreak of the pandemic, their husbands are forced to stay home, which is strengthening the family bond. Still, according to the women, they have never enjoyed their marriage as they do now. To some, before, it was not easy for them to get their husbands to touch them at night after a long day of work, due to tiredness. But these COVID-19 days come with restrictions on movements, which consequently pushes the men to express their desires for romance more often than before. The lockdown period also gave couples the chance to be able to dialogue on many topics and solve marital issues that had been pending.

Moreover, during the second seminar/workshop in Bamenda after the heat of the pandemic, the women in attendance shared their different experiences made during the pandemic and how it affected their daily activities as women. According to them, during this period of pandemic, due to the restrictions that were placed on movements, women who were involved in petty businesses and other mini jobs suffered a great loss. This is in the sense that many of these women do these petty businesses to be self-sufficient and not to depend solely on their husbands. This implies that with restrictions in movement, they could no longer do their businesses and had to go back to being dependent, and this was not easy for those women whose husbands were barely supportive even in the pre-COVID era. With the lockdown of businesses, there was a corresponding drop in their standard of living, and they were more exposed to health risks. In addition to that, the issue of teenage pregnancy was also very evident in Bamenda, as there was a sudden increase due to slowdown of activities and restrictions in many areas. This is because these young girls did not have school to concentrate on, and some of them who depended on businesses for their basic needs had their businesses on hold—hence, they had to spend more of this free time with men, while depending on them for financial assistance and consequently being vulnerable to their sexual demands. Moreover, the women of Bamenda, like many women in other parts of the world, faced an increase in abuse and domestic violence. This was explained in the sense that a woman whose husband used to physically abuse her might have been resting (from his usual beatings) when the husband was at work. But at this time, when they spent all their time at home with their wives, the chances of being frequently abused increased; in the same way, the chances of having misunderstandings increased. According to the women, it was also noticed during the pandemic period that there was an increase in sexual abuse on women, and the perpetrators were not just outsiders but also family members. This is because the compulsory lockdown might have

come at a time when women and young girls were sharing a small and tight space with other male family members. Many of these family members (especially the males) had women, especially young girls, abused on a more regular basis, yet there was nowhere to escape to. The women were also keen on the fact that since it seems to be a culture that rape cases against family members are hardly taken seriously, many of these young girls who suffered this fate never had the courage to report their victims to other family members; hence, the abuse continued. During one of the presentations, the presenter even told the story of a young girl whose aunt (due to the lockdown and a drop in her finances) gave her out for prostitution to her male customers. This was one of those disheartening stories heard during the period of the pandemic where the vulnerable ones (especially young girls) had little or no control over their own bodies and actions.

To me, after navigating through the different articles, news, and testimonies from individuals among others, including the women's input during the seminar, in connection to COVID-19 and its effects on women, one could say the pandemic, for the most part, only increased women's marginalization. In essence, women were already in deep trouble, as largely seen in this work, and the pandemic only came to make matters worse. When one observes how some of the articles and newscasts recounted how women were the ones who lost their jobs the most during this period (as they initially were more involved in jobs that could easily be laid off), yet were the ones mostly in the frontline of health workers required to provide services necessary, especially for the COVID-19 situation, which put them in a riskier position; one could only see how women were hard pressed on every side. It is worth noting that these health services required of them did not end in the hospitals, especially in African countries (as recounted above). It was extended to the home, where women are believed to be the sole providers of care. In this case, they were expected to continue providing health care to their old and young family members who at that time were all stuck at home due to the restrictions of movement with the aim of curbing the pandemic. This now implies that they even offered more free services, worked tirelessly, yet suffered the most from unpaid services. Apart from these health care services, women were still the ones expected to take care of other family needs, ensuring their husbands' and children's needs are fully met. What could not be missed out from these reports is the fact that despite all these efforts, women suffer more from domestic violence as they get to spend more time with their abusive partners, or at least partners who became abusive just during that period. It seems their condition became even worse as some of them were in areas where they could barely access communication facilities or were largely monitored by their abusers to ensure they did not attempt reporting them to the authorities. However, it shows that it was not all negative, as marital bonds were equally strengthened during this period. Some women got to spend more time with their husbands and could frequently get some

emotional satisfaction from their spouses. That notwithstanding, I am still wondering, why will women only get the satisfaction they have been yearning for from their partners during a pandemic? Is it therefore safe to say that some women's satisfaction could be considered a temporary thing as everything might go back to normal after the pandemic? Then will one not also say that it is possible some women in this situation could only hope for the pandemic to be around for quite some time? These are unanswered questions that could only go to confirm how many things about women seem to be very conditional, including even the marital satisfaction they deserve. Moreover, if a woman can rejoice for the fact that due to a pandemic ravishing the rest of the world, she can get to see her husband, and his cheating can be limited—it implies that that is the only confirmation she can rely on. Therefore, COVID-19, like any other situation, has played its role in intensifying the marginalisation of women. Inasmuch as some women find it advantageous, I wonder if, on a larger scale, many will want it to stick around for long, considering its negative effects on the greater population. Hence, this work might add to existing research that strives to indicate the dangers of using bad conditions such as COVID-19 to worsen the situation of women. The future is heavy and very unpredictable; no one can tell what will come next, but it is even worse when women always have to fear what the future holds in connection to their marginalised conditions.

Chapter 10: CONCLUSION

This dissertation presents a critical assessment of the relationship between women's upbringing and their reactions to gender relations in different public and private spaces. It identifies the need for women to first assess their relationship with fellow women to be able to get lasting solutions to their problem of gender inequality. This implies that women must change their approach to how they perceive and act on gender inequality, especially as they feel most affected. The research has shown that it is easier to target problems such as gender inequity when the root problem is assessed rather than concentrating on the act alone. This includes identifying the different platforms where women are likely to meet and interact and considering the implications of their interactions. To understand this better, the research undertaken for this dissertation concentrated (but not exclusively) on areas like household experiences, women's relationships on social media, women's relationships with their in-laws, workshops bringing women together (in small informal gatherings), not leaving out women's involvement in activism—towards their own liberation.

In the area of social media, I realised through this research that vicarious writing, which is the main method this research is based on, is much more put into practice here. Women's stories were predominantly told or written by other women as the owners of these stories couldn't tell them by themselves, ranging from reasons such as wanting to keep their identities confidential, not having a platform (with a big audience to listen to them), or maybe not being emotionally strong enough to tell their stories themselves. Inasmuch as most of these stories could not be independently verified as their identities were hardly known, it acted as a representation of what many other untold women are going through and played an important role in teaching women about experiences like this. It was also realised that this is one of the biggest spaces where women beef one another—whether with fellow women they have met in real life or not—and it is a platform where I have heard the statement, *"na woman di kee another woman"* (it is a woman who kills her follow woman), the most. The research in this chapter demonstrates women testifying of having received so much backlash on the social media space from fellow women for choosing to tell their own stories. They sometimes feel judged by other women who have little or no understanding of what is happening in their lives behind keyboards. Apart from the story owners, those who tell the stories on their behalf, who in most cases double as the page owners, also receive their own share of backlash. Many of these page owners, who also sometimes double as activists for women, have complained about being shunned and accused of being "feminists," who are rather misleading women and derailing them from building a home. Sad as they see it, these accusations come rather from women more. Feminism is considered an insult to them [those who accuse] because, as it has been seen in this research, a better part of the African communities still see

feminism as a western idea that is not family friendly and should therefore be discouraged. Coming to the chapter on household experiences, in as much as all the chapters are interwoven, this particular area (the home) of women's meetings could act as the pivot for all other meeting platforms in this project. This is because it gives an idea of where most women are coming from, where they got their principles from, and one of the main areas where their emotions could be nurtured. From the personal experiences shared by some of the women who took part in this project, it shows that women's ability to be able to share and even receive love highly depends on what they have personally experienced back home with their mothers and sisters. Most of the women who boasted of their ability to fight and protect other women shared a great bond with their sisters back home. In the same way, some of the women who testified to not having any close relationship with their sisters might not have openly declared not seeing any need to stand for other women but might have proven to have the tendency of not dwelling much on the need to protect fellow women. This was clearly seen as the result of having not learnt the act of protection right from home. In the same way, most women's ability to build their self-esteem and stick to their values, the tendency to fall for societal pressures on marriage, and the possibility of allowing themselves to be stigmatised for whatever reason, among many others, still largely depended on the teachings they had had back home in the process of their upbringing. Education being an important aspect of this PhD project too, indicates that most women who grew up in homes where education was not considered as something meant strictly for men, especially in the past, have a certain degree of confidence contrary to women who were made to understand that women are better in the kitchen, cooking and tidying up, with the sole aim of taking care of their families. These sets of women were observed to be more confident in their interactions with other women outside their homes and were more likely to defend themselves in the face of any discrimination. In addition to that, the possibility of staying in a violent environment (especially in marriage) could increase, depending on the home upbringing and the level of education. This could be confirmed by the fact that most of the old women interviewed who testified to having suffered from domestic violence in their marriage also indicated their regrets of not having someone who could send them to school and not having someone in the family who could protect them from getting into abusive marriages. In addition to that, we could conclude that women need to work more towards protecting one another, especially at home (so it can subsequently be a habit), due to stories shared by women who could not depend on their mothers for protection when they were being sexually abused. Most if not all the stories shared in this research show that the mothers of these women, who were victims of sexual abuse, knew their daughters were going through something like that yet did nothing to protect them or take them out of the abusive environment. This therefore implies these could be an important

area for women who are willing to better women's situation when it comes to the topic of gender inequality to investigate. Still in the home, women's relationship with their in-laws, according to this research, has proven to always be tense. So far, no lady among the women interviewed admitted to having had or having a good relationship with the in-laws. They all complained about receiving bad treatment from their in-laws and being handled as though they were strangers even in their own homes. It was observed that one of the reasons for this attitude towards daughters-in-law is the ideology behind what marriage is in this community. Marriage being considered an institution where every woman should get into and even seen to an extent as a proof of good character adversely pushes women into a certain level of desperation. Most women have fallen into the trap of wanting to prove themselves worthy of being in a man's house. The fear of having kids out of wedlock and, at the same time, the fear of getting to menopause without at least a child also put women at the desperate end. With this mindset, in-laws from the man's side always feel like they do have the upper hand. It seems to be one of those moments when they can show their authority over women brought into their family. This research shows that most of the people with the urge to show authority in the family are usually women. They seem to want to decide who their brother/son should get married to and still want to control how she [the brother's wife] should behave in the family. Another reason for this not-so-good relationship, especially between a daughter-in-law and her in-laws, is the mindset that men are the providers of the family. Families hardly take time to find out if their son is the provider of his family but simply go ahead to assume that his wife must financially depend on him. Hence, there is already prejudice against her and accusations of overspending money she did not work for. This could also be seen from the side of jealousy as the man's family starts exhibiting signs of fear of not financially benefiting from their brother again (if at all they used to benefit). They now tend to treat his wife with disdain, and in their minds, she has no choice but to stay and succumb to them because, first, singlehood is not celebrated in this community, and secondly, she won't want to leave her husband, who is financially taking care of her. And yes, many of these women stay to bear all these terrible treatments from their in-laws, not necessarily for financial purposes but also because divorce, according to society, seems to be worse than not even getting married at all.

Going by these research findings, it has been realised that language also plays a big role when it comes to the marginalisation of women. The first argument is that language is important for their everyday interaction; secondly, there is a strong connection between language and power, such that it is used in many cases as a means of dominance. With this in mind, many of the women reported in this project recounted situations where their languages were questioned, simply because of women's language having a higher potential of being scrutinised when compared to that of men or as a way of making

them stick to silence through the questioning of their ability to use a proper language to communicate. Many languages were mentioned, but the concentration on Cameroon Pidgin and English is very eminent, as one [English], which is considered superior, is mostly learnt through formal education, and the other [Pidgin], which is trying to gain its grounds, is considered inferior and a language of the" uneducated." Hence, when a language is already linked to formal education, it becomes a language of pride, as education itself is considered an asset that anyone should be proud of having. This implies not being able to use this language of pride already introduces the speaker as an "underprivileged" and an "uneducated" individual. Being in this position, according to this research, already gives you a lower position in society with little or no respect. Since many women of the older generation lived in the times when education for women was a luxury and very rare, they fall under this category of being discriminated against. Meanwhile, speaking in Pidgin, which requires no extra cost or effort to learn, comes along with the stigmatisation of using an unauthorised language or the language of the "uneducated." Moreover, since the many indigenous languages in Cameroon have no special attribute associated with them (no policies put in place to even promote their usage), being good in them does not add any value to these women. As a matter of fact, most of these old women are expected to be and are actually good in their indigenous languages, but how important is that to them when foreign languages like English and French have been prioritized? This therefore creates room for marginalisation as women are left with very limited options. Moreover, this research shows that language as a tool for marginalisation extends even to taboo words and language of restrictions, as women unfortunately have themselves restricted from many languages more than their male counterparts in many societies—especially in the area of indigenous languages. Even the ideology propagated by some communities, as seen in this work, that men are the real owners of a language and women are mostly seen as strangers to languages, especially when they get married into a new community, is just another evidence of women being marginalised.

Furthermore, as the research was carried out during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, it only added more information to what women face, especially during pandemics like Corona. It was discovered that during this period, women in Bamenda (and not exclusively to Bamenda, as very similar reports were gotten around the world) reported to have felt more marginalized. This was manifested in areas like losing their jobs. This is because many of them were initially into jobs with little or no security, and at the same time, they were the ones who did the most unpaid jobs during this period. They also felt more exposed to the risks of the pandemic, as it is reported that women are more in the health sector than men. In addition to that, some women experienced abuse, especially from their spouses, during this period more, as they had no choice but to spend more time with their families

at home (yet had limited chances to report their abusive conditions to anyone)—due to the compulsory lockdown. The research reports many other vices that happened during this period, like teenage pregnancies, early marriages, and sexual abuse, among many others, but it is worth mentioning that most if not all of these occurrences were not completely new to women's experiences, but it is worth talking about how intensified it became, which is exactly why it is relevant for this dissertation.

From the results gotten from this research, I realised that almost everything is influenced by power relations. It is about who is more powerful than the other, who has more rights than the other, and who has the right to make certain decisions. That notwithstanding, one implication of these findings, both for women and the different communities involved, is that the approaches involved in tackling gender inequality need to take into consideration the aspect that men cannot be fully blamed for women's marginalization. Therefore, this approach of telling women to begin the adjustment among themselves can be very helpful. In that case, their bond will be stronger when complaining about issues faced in the hands of men on the one hand and the laws and policies put in place on the other hand. If women speak in one voice, it could go a long way to fostering the possibility of women convincing men to join them in bettering their [women] situation—because, as it is, women are not fighting to take over men; they are fighting to be treated better, notwithstanding their gender. Besides, it might not speak well for anyone to fight to become what they are fighting against; hence, women should not be fighting to dethrone men and give them a taste of marginalisation but rather to coexist without anyone being disregarded because of her or his gender. In addition to that, I would suggest that women need more freedom to exercise their opinions, abilities, and desires. This will go a long way to change a lot. Moreover, forcing women to submit, whether by men or women, could be a problem; hence, there should be a clear difference between submission and subjugation. Submission should be an act of willingness, as this is what makes it submission; otherwise, anything short of that is force or subjugation.

This dissertation is not just another regular dissertation; it was not intended to simply research a group of people and document it. I decided to do something different from what academics might have been doing, not to go down the route of conventional writing. My work aims at opening new perspectives for the academic contributions that no longer reproduce theoretical frameworks but respect safe spaces for women and create and take part in their activities in order to offer a new insight to the empowerment of the oppressed. By their safe spaces, I mean the spaces where they freely make their contributions, express their desires, air out their viewpoints, and create opportunities to solve their own problems. Here, they discuss those things they do not find normal and take measures to adjust them. I choose this particular style of writing because I want to open a new perspective in academia, a standpoint where

the research talks about the group researched in an in-depth manner, has them actively participate in the process of their story being told, and works toward changing something to make a difference. This dissertation was written with the intention of writing something more engaging and empowering, and something that those who were talked about can easily identify themselves in it. I avoided another opportunity of producing something abstract, another opportunity of getting information from a group or a certain society and producing a document that will simply be added to the shelves. Moreover, this research was done in Bamenda during a period of war, when the people felt suppressed and many were killed for wanting to have a voice. I was there regularly; I witnessed how unbearable the situation was for the people and even more unbearable when it felt like there was no solution or no one was coming to help them any time soon. I even observed how their story of oppression and killing was told, yet it seemed to have ended at the level of news broadcasts for the whole time that I was carrying out my research. This inspired me even more as I worked with the women in Bamenda who felt oppressed too. They felt like nothing was being done about their situation; they felt like so many books had been written and research done about their situation already, but it lacks the solution, or better yet, nothing was changing. This was also a push for me to choose methods that will lead to listening to the women more and getting them to talk about their perception of what a solution should be. This should definitely add to the richness of academia in a way that academics might consider not just wishing to be informed but also to take into consideration steps and research methods that aim at changing something.

In addition to that, it seems there has been much to talk about the suppression of women by men in Bamenda but little to talk about the marginalisation of women by fellow women. This work equally adds to research, the findings of how much women marginalise fellow women to feel more powerful, informed, better, and superior. It is obviously necessary to know through research that women could be having the solution to their suppression that could be effected through their treatment for one another. Furthermore, adding my voice to other researchers who have discovered how much women use social media as their safe spaces is very necessary for academia. Going by the Facebook posts used in this research, for instance, it is obvious that Facebook plays a bigger role for most of these women than a book could ever help. This implies other academics could learn from this and add this to their methods. Be open to those sources of data that many might not take seriously, like Facebook and other social media platforms, which are rather safe spaces for these women. Here, they talk freely and express themselves in ways that might not be the same when put under conditions of very structured interviews. For African linguistics, this research is far from concentrating on what grammar should be acceptable, what language should be ideal, and what language should be superior. It has rather looked at how language is used to marginalise these women, and to avoid contradiction, it has been written in

the words of the people in Bamenda, for the people and as a means of identification for them. Hence, this dissertation could play a double role: first as academic research with a new flair and secondly as a document of resilience from women in Bamenda and maybe even depicting or representing African resilience to oppression.

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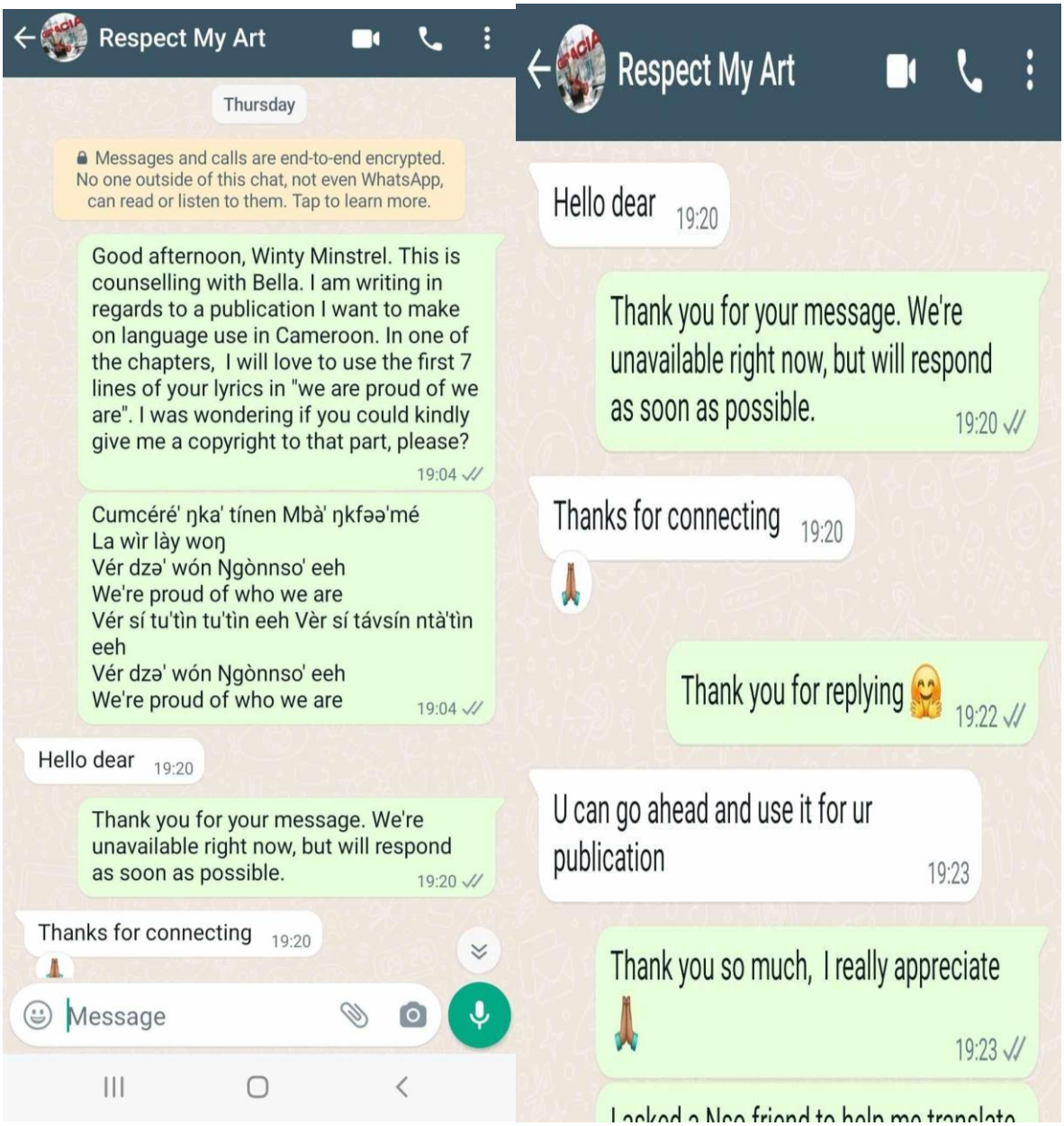
Appendix



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