

# The Maintenance of Patriarchal Order Through Silencing

## Literary Territories of Female Subordination in Cameroon

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### Abstract

This article explores how the management of female speech is one of the most effective mechanisms for maintaining the patriarchal order through the imposition of silence. By analyzing the literary enunciative power of a young Cameroonian author interested in various sites of patriarchal violence, it shows how the mechanisms of invisibilization, marginalization and silencing of cadets of all kinds operate. The injunction of silence is part of an ecology of patriarchal positions and stances held by central and auxiliary agents of policing. Silencing as the production of absence and the erasure of the noise surrounding the female condition, creates a confrontation between desire and institution at the heart of a discourse order (in Michel Foucault's sense). The article is based on a dialogue and a reflexive return to ethnographic findings, illuminated by a literary narration of the female condition in Idool. It highlights the tension between a claimed but largely unsuccessful fictionalization and a social transgression as a driving force for self-determination.

### Keywords

Patriarchy, social subordinates, law enforcement, masculine domination, literature, cameroon

## Introduction

To perceive writing as a social act that represents and reproduces reality raises the following question, on the scale of a literary event in the northern part of Cameroon: Is it permissible for a young woman to write about her desire to escape the patriarchal prison through clumsily edited<sup>1</sup> fictional statements that are perceived as being too factually inclined? A quarrel, set against the backdrop of a seemingly unimpressive

<sup>1</sup> The hundred-page novel under review contains numerous errors and mistakes, a sign of youthful writing and sloppy editing.

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literary work, is the occasion. The authority of these words, whose youthfulness is obvious, lies in the art the author employs in her ability to convey, through writing, a truth that is strictly and radically anchored in a personal trajectory and experience that she makes intelligible. This occurrence is captured by the notion of patriarchal violence, understood here as the violence experienced by girls and women within patriarchal systems (Habeas Corpus Working Group, 2006)<sup>2</sup>. The perpetrators include fathers, brothers, uncles, family friends, husbands, partners, ex-husbands, peers, teachers, coaches, colleagues, neighbors, supervisors, but also strangers. It is physical (MacKinnon, 2007) and the symbolic aspects have been inscribed in the mechanics of masculine domination by Pierre Bourdieu (1997). In its many forms, gendered violence serves an ideological function, as Rona Kaufman demonstrates, to create, maintain, or avenge the loss of patriarchal power, ultimately ensuring female subordination<sup>3</sup>.

At the heart of this literary production is the creative resilience<sup>4</sup> of an emerging writer, Marzouka Oummou Hani, who, in her first novel, chooses among other subjects, to depict certain forms of patriarchal violence. The sociopolitical and administrative reception of her work is caught up in a system designed to uphold patriarchal order and enforce silence. In line with work on the mechanisms and dynamics of invisibilization, marginalization, and silencing of cadets of all kind<sup>5</sup>, it becomes clear that the injunction to silence operates within an ecology of patriarchal positions and stances. Three specific attributes amplify the transgressive power of this young female writer's voice: she is a high school student, a Muslim, and from northern Cameroon. Her novel, deemed transgressive, is seized by a patriarchal system of domination, not by issuing a fatwa, but by bringing the case to court in pursuit of a judicial condemnation of the young author. Beyond the purely linguistic dimension and value of the text, and beyond the youth—or even the relative immaturity of the narrative—the controversy sparked by this literary release is a powerful tracer of the dynamics of self-determination under the control of patriarchal forces, particularly when they are the work of social cadets. At the root of the controversy is the publication of a novel in which the author, a 17-year-old high school graduate, recounts the life of Astawabi, confronted with oppressive patriarchy and the various forms of gender-based violence at work in rural spaces, using as a reference point a village in the commune of Bélel in the Adamaoua region. The reception from the community of Idoon, a village explicitly named in the book, is hostile and accompanied by a heavy legal process, in which the young author is ordered to pay 150 million FCFA as compensation. Various negotiations were conducted, and a settlement reached under the active mediation of Asta Djam Saoudi, Director of Performances and Creative Industries at the Ministry of Arts and Culture. Both the lawsuit initiated by the community and the intervention of the Cameroonian government raise questions about state regulation of the power of women's literary expression. This episode reveals the weight of constraints surrounding the narration of different forms of violence, whether overt or hidden, experienced by women in African societies, especially young women. It also prompts reflection on the cost of breaking away from structures that, in various ways, seek to silence them (Lashgari, 1995).

The process of novelization, through which a claim to freedom of expression emerges, sometimes places literary value in tension with socio-historical and anthropological truth. The claim of the fictional nature for the narrative becomes an intrinsic value of the work. This tension between the artistic merit of a work and the truthfulness of writing reflects a situated and meaningful process of composition and structuring. Subject to certain rules, the freedom to write led Guy de Maupassant to express skepticism, asking, "What are these famous rules? Where do they come from? Who

2 See also article 1 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, December 20, 1993.

3 We quote Rona Kaufman: "*Patriarchal violence is all violence that creates or maintains men's power and dominance, or avenges the loss of their power. It is the enforcement tool that sustains the patriarchy, that is, the institutionalization of male superiority and female subordination. It manifests on internalized, interpersonal, social, and institutional levels through an interconnected system that harms, undervalues, and terrorizes girls, women, and other gender-oppressed people. It often manifests as private interpersonal violence such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, and family violence. The harms caused by interpersonal acts of patriarchal violence are compounded by social and institutional patriarchal violence. Patriarchal violence creates a process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear*" (Kaufman, 2023, pp. 519-520).

4 On this notion, see how two authors use it in relation to the resilience of urban working-class groups (Desmond & Travis, 2018).

5 On black slaves and their descendants, see Herbeau, 1970; Mattos, 2019; on immigrants see Noiriél, 2007; on subalterns see Guha, 1997, on the working and popular classes, see Thompson, 1963. On women, Perrot, 2001; Greaves, 1985.

established them? By what principle, authority, and reasoning?” (Maupassant, 1887, p. 17). These questions take on a particular significance in spaces where the authority of fictional speech, about beings and things, is determined by practical and symbolic structures that are sometimes overwhelming. As Josette Gaudreault-Bourgeois rightly notes, “The novel creates its own rules, its own laws” (Gaudreault-Bourgeois, 2018, p. 104)<sup>6</sup>. We must recognize that the confrontation between literary power and rules of all kind, formal and informal is constructed in a disciplinary space, as demonstrated by a social history of the literary field and the legitimate figure of the African writer. Claire Ducournau details the material and symbolic mechanisms that enable authors’ publication and recognition, shaped by transnational dynamics but also marked by unequal exchanges between them (Ducournau, 2017). Beyond these external power dynamics within the literary field and the various postcolonial biases that run through them, it seems important to emphasize the importance of the internal factors at play (Dabla, 1986; Wynchank & Salazar, 1995; Lawson-Hellu, 2008; Ndiaye & Samujanga, 2004), particularly the weight of literary commitment as a key criterion for the value of writing (Kouvouama, 2004; Kesteloot, 2012; Leperlier, 2018).

Nocky Djedanoum emphasizes that writers’ commitment to fighting barbarism “can lead to death, if not forced exile”. The vast majority of them have dipped and continue to dip their pens in the ink of resistance. It is no coincidence that literature emerges as the major expression of freedom in Africa” (Djedanoum, 2004, p. 12). Two Cameroonian literary figures, from different eras, illustrate this vividly: Mongo Béti and Patrice Nganang. The first’s writer activism journey was marked by frustrations and setbacks, including his first return from 32 years of exile in 1991 (Kemedjio, 2016), while the second, both a scholar and a writer, ended up in jail in the central prison for “apology of crime” and “threats” after a post on his Facebook account targeting Cameroon’s highest political authority in December 2017 (Machikou, 2024).

Writing also serves as a mechanism of “disembedding, escape, and evasion” (Césaire, 1939) from daily oppression. Within it lies the courage of a literary poetics subject to an intensive process of structural domestication. For women, the autonomy of those who choose to express themselves through writing is particularly tested by structures of male domination. Rangira Béatrice Gallimore remind us that hegemonic patriarchal discourse poses a major constraint on women’s writing in Africa (Gallimore, 2001), with “one topos, that of silence, delimits a space, that of marginality. The discourse of women, emerging after a prolonged period of silence, bears the marks of ostracism and confronts hegemonic patriarchal discourse” (Ouédraogo, 1998, p. 2). From Mariama Bâ and Aminata Sow Fall to Calixthe Beyala, Léonora Miano, Ken Bugul, Hemley Boum, and Djaili Amadou Amal for example, writing about what we might call the female condition in Africa is a challenge. This literary Afro-feminism is often an act of transgression (see analyses by Gafaïti & Crouzières-Igenthron, 2005; Détréz, 2010) within a symbolic economy of writing shaped by sociopolitical relations.

This article extends the exploration of the territories of order (Machikou, 2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2022) by examining how the regulation of female speech serves as one of the most effective means of maintaining patriarchal order through enforced silence. It operates through the social and political production of silence, as demonstrated by Alain Corbin in his *Histoire du silence: de la Renaissance à nos jours* (2016) and others (Vincent, 2017; Hernández Gómez, 2023)<sup>7</sup>. It is one of the most unthought-of tracers permeating the working of contemporary societies. The aim here is to consider, on the basis of a particular occurrence, the way in which silencing functions as a production of absence and erasure of the noise of the female condition. Framed as a discourse order (to quote Michel Foucault) within the literary territories of female subordination, silencing manifests as a clash between desire and institution. The challenge, the author analyses, lies in the fact that “in every society, the

6 See also Tati Loutard, J. B., 2003.

7 See Michel, 1986, for an earlier example.

production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its power and dangers, to control its random events, to dodge its heavy, formidable materiality” (Foucault, 1970)<sup>8</sup>.

This analysis requires an epistemological clarification regarding the qualitative material from which the process of authoritarian restructuring, unprecedented in Cameroon<sup>9</sup>, is reconstructed and interpreted. The issue of causal inference in tracing these processes is complex. The causal affirmation of the search for patriarchal harmony as an explanatory framework is re-inscribed within a prior ethnographic observation. As part of the *Contending Modernities Project* at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana (United States), I conducted two research stays in the village of Idool (Adamaoua region) in 2018, followed by interviews with village natives, including members of the royal family<sup>10</sup>. The research focused on identifying entry points through which the women of Idool consolidate their community, strengthen and/or challenge authority in contexts where they use the tools of their faith to claim their rights, emancipate themselves spiritually, and empower themselves economically and politically vis-à-vis the authority structures established both by the state, and by aid and development actors, and religious forces. The literary episode reignites the question of contextualizing feminist struggles and taking charge of the more or less protective frameworks and regimes within which women evolve. The caution Françoise Vergès calls for, particularly regarding developmentalist paternalism and, more broadly, the Western civilizing feminism (Vergès, 2019, p. 15), has been a critical lens in our previous research on the women of the village of Idool.

The specific and contextual demand for freedom observed during the ethnographic fieldwork six years earlier, is not some kind of creative prediction or self-fulfilling prophecy in the sense of Robert King Merton (1949)<sup>11</sup>. This episode is not a figurative correspondence of the quest for freedom by the women of Idool. When juxtaposing the findings from these two field studies conducted six years apart, the aim is not to “refer” (in the sense of relating to) to previous findings when interpreting this literary moment but to show how this episode surrounding Marzouki Oummou Hani is an entry point to “proclaim” (in the sense of bringing forth) the struggle of living within and breaking free from the patriarchal prison (Watzlawick, 1988). This article is a dialogue and a reflexive reconsideration of ethnographic findings, illuminated by the contested narration of some of these situations in Marzouki Oummou Hani’s novel. It is intended as a chronicle of the process through which a social<sup>12</sup> cadet is literarily assigned a role within a context of patriarchal violence. The analysis focuses on the process of maintaining patriarchal order through a trial based on the fictionalization claim without much success by the young author attempting to free herself from an imposed and reinforced framework by probable and improbable figures (I). The analysis aims to highlight the link between thematic transgression and social transgression as a driving force for self-determination (II).

## An unsuccessful claim to fictionalization

The novel, regardless of its scope, is not only an artistic act but also a symbolic exchange within a community that may or may not welcome it and assign a given value on it. The Cameroonian episode surrounding the construction and reception of an amateur or “profane” writing, borrowing the term from Claude F. Poliak (2006, p. 4), reminds us that such writing cannot be dissociated from the frameworks of its production, which are often marked by marginalization and subordination. Following a chronicle of the controversy (1), we will examine how this event became an opportunity for the State to position itself as a facilitator of patriarchal harmony (2).

8 In his inaugural lecture in 1970, Michel Foucault confronts the desire “I would not like to have to enter myself into this hazardous order of discourse, I would like it to be all around me like a calm, deep, indefinitely open transparency, where others would respond to my expectation, and from which truths, one by one, would arise” and the institution that responds to him: “You do not have to be afraid to start, we are all here to show you that discourse is in the order of laws; that we have been watching over its appearance for a long time; that a place has been made for it, which honors it but disarms it; and that if it happens to have any power, it is indeed from us, and us alone, that it derives it” (Foucault, 1970).

9 Literary censorship has been commonplace in the past, but this is the first time a 17-year-old author has been the target of a rewriting injunction.

10 I would like to thank greatly here Cecelia Lynch, Tatiana Fouda and Daïrou Bouba with whom this research was conducted in 2018. Some interviews were conducted in 2023 and 2024.

11 See also and Brionne (1965) and in the constructivist usage favored here, Watzlawick (1988).

12 On this notion, see numerous works in the sociology of the State, particularly Bayart, 1985 and 1989.

## Chronicle of a Controversy

On May 18, 2023, Mohaman Ahman, Djaourou (village chief) of Idool, on behalf of the village leadership and its population, wrote to the Minister of Arts and Culture through the regional delegate of the ministry for the Adamaoua region, “denouncing and requesting for the withdrawal of the work by Miss Marzouka Oummou Hani, titled *Mon père ou mon destin* (Volume 1), published by MD editions”. In his letter, he expressed his distress and sadness over the publication of the high school student’s novel, in which she portrays “the village of Idool and its founding father ‘Sidi’ (...) in an unhealthy and blasphemous manner, anything that is likely to mislead readers about the scientific or historical facts of my village”. Initially, the village chief denied her and her parents the status of rightful natives of his village. He further emphasized the “imposture”, accusing the novel of fabricating unfounded claims. Above all, the grievance focuses on the invocation of witchcraft practices allegedly perpetrated by the village founder: “*Mon père ou mon destin* is nothing more than the result of a grotesque and malicious project orchestrated by hidden figures with the sole aim of delaying and obstructing our development ambitions”. The claim against this so-called “grotesque project” is not just an administrative one. On July 20, 2023, the author was summoned to appear directly before the High Court of Ngaoundéré on charges of defamation. Djaourou Mohaman Ahman also requested the “confiscation of the incriminated work in accordance with Article 35 of the Criminal Code” and compensation amounting to a staggering 150 million CFA francs. The bailiff’s notice, served by Barrister Youssoufou Ibrahim, indicated that this sum was to be divided between the Djarou (50 million) and the customary and village community of Idool (100 million). As the controversy escalated, the book was withdrawn from sale, yet it continued circulating on social media. The author defended her work as fiction, explaining that she chose Idool because of its “touristic appeal”. Meanwhile, the Cameroonian Bar Association, through its president of the Commission on Social Affairs, Barrister Gladys Fri Mbuya, expressed shock over the judicial proceedings against a 17-year-old girl. She “strongly condemned all acts of intimidation against her, affirming that freedom of expression is a constitutional right that must never be altered by anyone. Dragging a minor who is a promising defender of women’s rights, before the courts, constitutes a serious threat to human rights and the rule of law and therefore deserves to be unequivocally condemned<sup>13</sup>”. She urged the court to end the legal proceedings and called on the President of the Republic to ensure the author’s safety, financially support the novel’s publication, and guarantee its free distribution in schools nationwide. The right to express oneself, including in fiction, is advanced by a collective of lawyers, formed pro bono<sup>14</sup> who see in the young author “a genius destined for a great writing career<sup>15</sup>”. According to a family member of the author who regret the politicization of the case by the Djaourou of Idool, there are no hidden forces and “Marzouka is a writer. When she is not at school, she locks herself in her room to write novels, poems, and plays. You cannot claim that she is being guided by hidden forces”<sup>16</sup>.

Protesting against any form of defamation against Yaya Oumarou, the village founder and a patriarchal figure who has been given sanctuary and removed from any possibility of fiction, but whom the author would have profaned by describing him in the guise of the character Sidi, she defends herself by highlighting the contested passage from her novel:

The story of an ancient sorcerer who lived in Idool; his name was Sidi, and he ate the souls of those who did not worship him. Sidi saw himself as a god. Bouba recounted the day a woman and her daughter went to the market and came face to face with him. They were new and did not know who he was. Anyone who met the sorcerer Sidi was supposed to

13 Communiqué of the Social Affairs Commission of the Cameroon Bar Association, 20th of July 2023

14 At the forefront of the collective, Universal Lawyers and Human Rights Defense put six lawyers on the case (Me Dominique Fousse, Me Moteng, Me Yanou, Me Massi, Me Oyie and Me Nwayin).

15 Josiane Kouagheu, “Au Cameroun, une écrivaine de 17 ans en guerre avec son village”, *Le Monde*, July 31, 2023 ([https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/07/31/au-cameroun-une-ecrivaine-de-17-ans-en-guerre-avec-son-village\\_6184022\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/07/31/au-cameroun-une-ecrivaine-de-17-ans-en-guerre-avec-son-village_6184022_3212.html), accessed August 2023).

16 Josiane Kouagheu, « Au Cameroun, une écrivaine de 17 ans en guerre avec son village », *Le Monde*, July, 31 2023 ([https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/07/31/au-cameroun-une-ecrivaine-de-17-ans-en-guerre-avec-son-village\\_6184022\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/07/31/au-cameroun-une-ecrivaine-de-17-ans-en-guerre-avec-son-village_6184022_3212.html), accessed August 2023).

bow down. Surprised and angry by their indifference, he dragged them to his hut, and no one ever knew their fate. The sorcerer died one day when he attempted to fly over a tree (...) he crashed to the ground. Astawabi was terrified by this story. (p. 14)

This fictional transposition of an “ancient sorcerer” is repeatedly presented by the young writer, and rightly so, as a very superficial fragment compared to the overwhelming weight of this founding figure in Idool<sup>17</sup>. His son, the village chief, invokes the traditional order, but in a way that takes the form of an inquisition within the framework of postcolonial modernity; with the legal recourse as a trace. While the case was postponed till August 17, 2023, various negotiations were underway to persuade the withdrawal of the plaintiffs.

### *The State, Facilitator of Patriarchal Harmony in the Name of Heritage Protection*

Beneath this small literary dispute lay a larger issue: The State’s investment in facilitating a process of literary revision. The subjugation of the young writer unfolded within the familiar confines of patriarchal brutality, particularly within traditional spaces where, through various negotiations, Marzouka Oummou Hani was invited to modify her work. Face with an impasse, the intervention of the State, acting as an intermediary between the parties involved, is decisive as a journalist reported:

Last Monday, the two opposing parties were gathered at the office of the governor of the Adamaoua Region Governor’s office. This mediation was led by Asta Djam Saoudi, Director of Performing Arts and Creative Industries at the Ministry of Arts and Culture, in the presence of Kildadi Taguiéké Boukar, Governor of Adamaoua.

For the Governor, an auxiliary of the patriarchal order, the mediation is part of a desire to achieve appeasement and peace, and he promises, while deploring a “regrettable chapter”, to continue “working towards social cohesion and ‘living together’ which is dear to President Paul Biya”. The argument put forward by the representative of the Ministry of Arts and Culture was striking: “We have an obligation to protect our cultural heritage, which includes both books and traditional chieftaincy”. The novel was deemed harmful to the village’s image, which need to be restored, including as she promises, through an

Official monograph of Idool. A book will present the history of the village of Idool. It will be written by specialists at the ministry in close collaboration with the village’s sociological representatives. Additionally, a Reading and Cultural Animation Center (CLAC) will be established in the village. This facility, consisting of a library and a room dedicated to the transmission of heritage values, will work to preserve the local cultural legacy. Furthermore, plans are underway to rehabilitate the village chieftaincy and establish a museum for the conservation of artifacts<sup>18</sup>.

The mediation resulted in the author’s public expression of regret over the “harm caused by her book to the memory of Sidi, patriarch and founder of the village of Idool. She agreed to formalize her apology in writing and republish her book with the contested passages removed<sup>19</sup>”. The next day, a follow-up event took place at the village chieftaincy, attended by local residents and overseen by Boubakari Faribou, the Sub-Prefect of Belel (the administrative division covering Idool). Mohaman Ahman, the village chief, remained firm in his stance: As soon as the writer submits her letter of apology, we will withdraw our complaint from the court. We had a discussion with her and her mother at the governor’s office. The exchanges were rich in lessons for the future of our relations. We are proud because the government has taken all necessary measures for a happy end<sup>20</sup>.

17 The ethnographic research shows the extent to which the village founder is a decisive prism in the political, socio-economic, religious and even ecological construction of the village.

18 *Cameroon Tribune*, p. 25.

19 *Cameroon Tribune*, p. 25.

20 *Cameroon Tribune*, p. 25.

After a mediation ordered by the State for the rewriting of certain fragments of the disputed book, the writer eventually stated:

I have learned with great honor about the steps taken by the government to reach this happy conclusion. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all parties involved, in particular the Ministry of Arts and Culture and the local administrative authorities, led by the Governor of the Adamaoua region, who acted like a father. I apologize to Idool and to those who were hurt by my work. I will remove the contentious part before the next edition<sup>21</sup>.

A letter of apology was required by the traditional authorities of Idool and was ultimately sent to them on August 10, 2023, titled: “Public Apology Letter Regarding the Controversy Over Certain Passages of My Book Entitled: *“Mon père ou mon destin”*”.

The author addresses “the people of the village of Idool S/C S.M Mohaman Ahman, traditional chief of the third degree of Idool” in the following terms:

In reference to letter no. 036/L/RA/DRAC/SALLP/023 dated May 23, 2023, from the regional delegate of the Ministry of Arts and Culture, and in accordance with the resolutions from the working session held on August 8, 2023, between the various parties involved in mediation and reconciliation between the IDOOL delegation and the writer that we are, conducted at the governor’s office in Adamaoua, in the presence of emissaries from the Ministry of Arts and Culture, under the coordination of the Governor, I have the great honor to formally, solemnly, and publicly offer you my sincere apologies for having, unknowingly, offended your sensitivities in certain fragments of my novel, which is purely a work of literary fiction and was published last May by MD Editions. (...) Driven by a spirit of peace and sincerity, it was only after the publication of our novel and the extent to which it became known in our society that we became aware of the sensitive and complex nature of certain passages in this literary work. We have now, regretfully discovered that our book has hurt the sensitivities of the noble people of the village of Idool, who promote and safeguard their ancestral cultural values. In light of the facts and circumstances, I would like once again to implore your forgiveness. I reaffirm my willingness to take all necessary steps to strengthen social cohesion, respect for human dignity, and living together. To this end, I commit to making all necessary corrections to restore dignity of these people and to maintain the literary nature of my novel. Please accept the expression of my deepest respect.

The distribution chain of this apology is extensive, highlighting both a desire to communicate on a broad spectrum, but also the presence of a patriarchal chain more or less self-aware, involved in or interested in the outcome of the matter: Services of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Arts and Culture, the Ministry of Justice, the Governor’s Office of Adamaoua, the Divisional Office of Vina, the Subdivisional Office of Bélel, the Adamaoua Delegation of Arts and Culture, and the Lamidat of Ngaoundéré. This extensive network of recipients demonstrates a surveillance system relying on administrative, judicial, traditional, and religious institutions, interconnected circles reinforcing each other in the maintenance of the patriarchal order.

Though public authorities were not the initiators of the demand to ostracize the young author, or even to prosecute her work, it is their involvement in supporting a literary revision process that is striking. Indeed, there was a form of State endorsement of a “cancel culture” demanded by the traditional authorities of Idool, a stance widely criticized by the media<sup>22</sup> and civil society organizations. This was done despite various precautions aimed at presenting this involvement as “mediation” and

21 Interview of Marzouka Oummou Hani, *Cameroon Tribune*, 09 August 2023, p. 24.

22 The newspaper *Mutations* talks about “Idool. Le livre qui fâche”. La Voix des jeunes notes that “*this literary work, written in a moving style, finds parallels with the work of other avant-garde women writers, such as Djaili Amadou Amal, who dared to raise the voice of women in societies where they were often marginalized. The writer has, moreover, given Marzouka Oummou Hani her unwavering support and pledges to accompany her in the future.*” <https://voixdesjeunes.com/actualite/affaire-marzouka-oummou-hani-le-proces-de-la-jeune-ecrivaine-de-17-ans-renvoye-au-17-aout-2023>, accessed August 2023. Paul Chouta writes a long post noting that “*in a region classified as a priority education zone, where women’s voices are not free, we understand that a great deal of work still needs to be done to change the mentalities*”.

indicating that “responsible” writing is not necessarily the product of self-discipline. The process of shaping a “responsible” writer results from an internalized form of coercion, with the looming threat of a defamation lawsuit. Postponed until August 17, 2023, the case was ultimately dropped when Djaourou Mohaman Ahman withdrew his complaint before the Ngaoundéré High Court on the eve of the hearing. His lawyer stated: “We have filed a withdrawal letter and, in accordance with Article 62 of the Criminal Procedure Code, the voluntary withdrawal of the victim, who initiated the public prosecution, terminates this action. The matter is closed<sup>23</sup>”.

The resolution of the case also came at the expense of the publisher, whose lack of professionalism was highlighted as an argument for absolution. A figure of editorial exploitation, according to the young author’s own analysis, the head of MD Editions, the publishing house behind the controversial book, was ultimately singled out as the sole guilty party for the errors found in the publication. This subordination, including the power (to act irresponsibly), is embedded in a socially and historically consolidated patriarchal ideology, with the practical and symbolic power to initiate a secondary attribution that Emmanuel Lévinas would call a substitution through the assertion of responsibility for the other, radical and abrupt (Lévinas, 1991, p. 212). On the other hand, the de-substantiation process, which is concomitantly the sexualization of de facto responsibility, will be supported by the mutual validation of religious, administrative, and judicial actors, without any legal action being taken against the untraceable publisher<sup>24</sup>. It is a mechanical dispossession, consented to (willingly or by force) by self-reinforcing patriarchal institutions, and a form of symbolic violence directed at the author, since it becomes effective “only through the intermediary of the one who executes it” (Pierre Bourdieu, 1997, p. 243). Indeed, this violence is a “coercion that is established only through the intermediary of the adherence that the dominated cannot help but grant to the dominant (and thus to domination), when they have no other way to think about themselves and their relationship with the dominant except through the tools they share with them”. (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 245).

The shift of the debate from the realm of fictional freedom to that of the professional responsibility of an editor who was never truly one is an expression of a form of denunciation of a relationship of economic and symbolic power: the forces of maintaining patriarchal order engage in an act of self-usurpation (Lévinas, 1991, p. 216). In her apology letter to the people of Idool, the author, under pressure, exclusively blames the publisher:

In good faith and with the desire to carry out an objective piece of work, we turned to a certain presumed editor, Mr. Mve Dexter, head of MD Editions, for proper, effective, and efficient guidance. Unfortunately, not only did he fail to provide the necessary support, but he also prematurely published my manuscript without first addressing its semantic and syntactic shortcomings, issues that could tarnish the reputation of our novel. Worse still, throughout our collaboration, he did not adhere to the ethical and professional standards of this field, as required by current regulations.

On her Instagram account, Marzouka Oummou Hani posted the publisher’s press release, crossed out with a “FAKE” in large red characters, with the caption: “The book is no longer available from this Mr. Mve Dexter. My contract with him is about to be terminated. Please be careful. Do not buy from him. Please share widely<sup>25</sup>”. The book’s takeover by Proximité Editions signals an effort to align with publishing standards. Founded in 2002, this publishing house describes itself as motivated by two observations: “the challenges young authors face in getting published locally, and the desire

23 *Cameroon Tribune*, “Affaire Marzouka : la page judiciaire close”, August 21, 2023

24 Editions MD 2023, whose address is given as “B.P.: Messamendongo - Commissariat- Yaoundé”, could not be found in the locality. The ISBN number indicated (978-9956-1-1713-0) could not be found in the book catalogs. For the purposes of this article, telephone calls are forwarded to voicemail, indicating that the numbers are unavailable.

25 This press release, dated July 21, 2023, states under the heading “Les Editions MD: Proudly alongside author Marzouka Hani and her book *Mon père, mon destin*” (instagram account consulted in February 2025, [https://www.instagram.com/marzouka\\_oummouhani/p/CvAJG1fLf64/](https://www.instagram.com/marzouka_oummouhani/p/CvAJG1fLf64/)). The book will be republished by another publishing house, *Editions Proximité*, in Yaoundé in June 2024, with a few changes, and in this edition has 90 pages (<https://www.youscribe.com/BookReader/Index/3708327/?documentId=6076110>).



to promote the circulation of local and foreign publications at an affordable price<sup>26</sup>. Having co-published one of the novels by Djaili Amadou Amal<sup>27</sup>, we can consider that her support for the young author has extended to this editorial facilitation.

This power shift between the author and the publisher is largely enabled by the same people who hold her unaccountable (see Bessard-Banguy, 2018). It is one of the expressions of the rejection of a structurally imbalanced relationship between the country's central and the northern peripheral regions, often the object rather than the subject of action. This dynamic resembles a form of developmentalist activism, imperialist<sup>28</sup> in essence, identified six years earlier as structuring the relationship of "others" to Idool. It is anchored in the country's deep fault line, the North-South line ("Wadjo-Gadamayo"), marked by the marginalization of the Far North, North, and Adamaoua regions. The markers of this are major inequalities in access to essential services: high poverty rates, low level of schooling (literacy rates, low primary school completion rate, low pupil-teacher ratios in primary and secondary schools), reduced health provision, a largely underdeveloped road network, etc.

## From Thematic Transgression to Social Transgression: The Weight of Women's Will for Self-Determination

Analyzing silencing first requires acknowledging that the power of public speech, regardless of its form or medium, is a socially unequal competence, shaped by opposing processes (Bourdieu, 1982). For women, expressing themselves primarily means speaking within the private sphere, where they "hold, practice, and exchange intimate speech (...). They talk about their bodies (menstruation, menopause) as well as the 'staging' of their bodies (clothing, hairstyle), their sexual lives, their daily experiences, their love stories, their children (...). They discuss the problems they encounter with their children, husbands, or boyfriends. They rarely keep to themselves matters related to their private lives and those with whom they share their daily lives. And they talk primarily to other women, their 'girlfriends', with whom they exchange words, information, and reflections" (Mossuz-Lavau & de Kervasdoué, 1997, p. 17). By its very nature, feminine/feminist writing is a transgression within the patriarchal order. It represents an attempt at self-assertion in the first person, challenging gender hierarchy, female subjugation, and invisibilization. The novel opens with a remarkable phrase: "In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. I thank Him for this blessing". The unsuccessful attempt to convey an enunciative power by wrapping it from the outset in various, circumspect precautions<sup>29</sup>, is undoubtedly a metaphor for the articulation of patriarchal forces striving to impose silence (Guilhem, 2008, p. 15). From thematic transgression to social transgression, the writing of a "social cadet" (1) initiates and fosters the reorganization of the forces supporting women (2).

### *When a Social Cadet Writes*

The linguistic market is shaped by violence, disagreements, negotiation, or resistance, as Pierre Bourdieu already highlighted (1982). He demonstrated that speaking situates individuals within a space of verbal interactions where power relations are inscribed in and through language. This observation is equally relevant in the literary field (Bourdieu, 1992; Sapiro, 2014), as illustrated by the construction and reception of Marzouki Oummou Hani's work, deemed transgressive in its two editions (2023 and 2024). Contextualizing transgression through speech acts in certain Fulani

26 <https://www.alliance-editeurs.org/proximate,1199> (consulted in February 2025).

27 These are the Cameroon editions of *Walaande. L'Art de partager un mari*, 2010 and *Le harem du roi*, 2024.

28 See, for example, the analysis by Kemedjio and Lynch, 2024.

29 The heroine is confronted by a third party who suggests that she wear the veil, saying: "I'd like you to dress like a true Muslim, put on the veil and believe in Allah. I have realized that your faith in him is very weak. Modesty is part of our faith. I do not want to force you to do what you do not like; I just wanted to tell you what I was thinking. Islam is the most beautiful of all religions. Praying to Allah, asking him for your wishes, making daily invocations to protect you from evil can radically change your life". To this discreet proselytizing, Astawabi replies "I do not know this religion. True, my father, with whom I grew up, was a Muslim, but I do not know anything about the Islamic religion" (p. 76).

societies, (Idool is one such society) is necessary. One could start with the monographic studies of Dorothee Guilhem on the Djeneri Fulani. According to her, one aspect of feminine charm is silence and restraint (“munyal”):

A woman must hide her emotions from others during social interactions. Making direct eye contact is interpreted either as love or as impoliteness. The Fulani expression “a woman walks like a cow” refers to looking at one’s feet while walking. This expression suggests that feminine charm also lies in a reserved attitude.

This injunction to restraint is deeply rooted in religious precepts of a “strict Islamism that keeps women away from temptation, protects the village from venereal diseases, and is an important factor in demographic renewal” (Boulet, n.d.)<sup>30</sup>. The relegation also regulates the movement of female bodies, as Danièle Kintz had previously observed in certain Fulani societies<sup>31</sup>. Silence governs women’s daily lives by confining their speech to the private sphere. They may speak, but only within their courtyards, and certainly not write in a transgressive manner.

Like Kambili, the shy and suffering 15-year-old Nigerian teenager and the main character in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s novel *Purple Hibiscus*, who recounts her ordeal under the yoke of a courageous father, a devout Christian, a wealthy entrepreneur and a fanatical, violent tyrant in his family, Astawabi is a 17-year-old girl living in a patriarchal prison. Just like her protagonist, the author lives in a society where early marriage is a major barrier to girls’ education and self-determination. Indeed, with 38% of girls married before the age of 18, Cameroun ranks among the top 20 countries in the world with the highest rate of child marriage. This figure varies from region to region, reaching 73% in the northern part of the country. Child marriage is deeply rooted in interdependent factors such as poverty, sociocultural and religious traditions, under schooling of girls and lack of education in addition to social and legal discrimination against women and girls, who are often considered a burden on their families<sup>32</sup>. More than half of uneducated girls are married, compared to one in ten girls with secondary education, and almost none among those with higher education. Dropping out of school exposes girls to an increased risk of child marriage and early pregnancy. It has been highlighted by Cislighi et al. (2019) that an ecology of material, institutional, individual and social factors intertwine to support child marriage: poverty, low levels of education and a marital model influenced by polygamy.

If the village of Idool is an exception, it is precisely and largely due to the modern vision behind its creation, particularly characterized by gender-inclusive schooling. During interviews conducted in 2018, one of the village’s sons recalled that for Oumarou Yaya, the village’s founder, education is a path to fulfillment, “a means of gaining access to divine blessings<sup>33</sup>”. In his sermons, the chief emphasized that “to seek knowledge is to perform meritorious and beneficial act” both for oneself and for “the construction of a better community life”.

In a focus group organized with a number of teachers and parents from the village’s secondary school, the prince said that economic constraints largely explain why families prioritize boys’ education over girls and why girls are often pushed into early marriage. During interviews, several high school girls expressed their desire to “live freely and work in public spaces”. Some proudly shared their aspirations on social media: “I want to be free”, “Let me live my life”, mentioned in some posts. Two high school girls expressed their wish to marry outside the village. These aspirations are central to the novel, which in one passage recounts an exchange between Astawabi and her father: “Baba, I have a request. I know you do not want to let me go, but I want to continue my studies. I dream of going to the city to keep learning. I dream of becoming a great writer<sup>34</sup>”. (p. 12) Her father’s response is unequivocal:

30 Conducted by an anthropologist from the Office de la recherche scientifique et technique Outre-Mer (ORSTOM), the monograph indicates on page 16, footnote 2, that the survey was carried out in April 1967.

31 In particular, the injunction not to show oneself in public, to remain in one’s own backyard, a socially determined reclusion, Kintz D., (1988). Formal men, informal women and Fulani support for their anthropologists, *Journal des anthropologues*, (34), pp. 59-66.

32 These figures are provided by Girls not Brides <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/cameroon/> (accessed August 2023).

33 Focus group interviews from February 12, 2018.

34 All passages are reproduced verbatim, without correction.

My daughter, you are too old for that nonsense. Now, you must focus on learning how to take care for a man. Insha'Allah, we will find a good young man for you to marry. I have waited long enough. I let you go to secondary school, but now there is nothing I can do for you. Do you realize that it was only through scholarships that you got this far? Otherwise, I would never have financed these foolish ideas. I only allowed it because you are my only daughter. (p. 13)

The “patriarchal prison”, described through a powerful phrase (“not realizing one’s dreams is like not being able to breathe<sup>35</sup>”) is based on relationship of brutality and subordination build on gender, seniority, position in the lineage, but also on wealth, which can redistribute practical and symbolic resources. Previous ethnographic research highlighted these relations of social subordination, but also noted that the women of Idool were working to reclaim their existence within their designated spaces (primarily domestic and enclosed in the *sarés*<sup>36</sup>), so that thinking about their presence in the world always involved the test of their visibility.

In fact, women of Idool are both practically and symbolically tied to the *saré*. The weight of the religion, social and traditional practices, such as patriarchy and *pulaaku* (a Fulani code of conduct), impose on them a spatial dichotomy inside/outside or private/public in the village. This state of affairs clearly reveals a sexual division not only of task and activities, but also of circulation spaces. The woman handles domestic tasks, maintaining their *saré*, doing household chores, and raising children. She has no access to public space, which is masculine, i.e. occupied exclusively by men. This public space appears as a grey zone of all women, including those who, married outside the village (very isolated cases), have to live with it when they return to their native village. Only girls who are attending school can be seen outside when they go to and from school, and also women who have come from elsewhere.

Widows and divorcees can also be seen in very limited cases. Even a remarkable rate of school enrolment did not call into question the inescapable horizon of confinement in enclosed spaces. This violence is already present in the testimony of the leading literary figure, widely quoted at the height of the controversy. Djäïli Amadou Amal, winner of the 2020<sup>37</sup> Goncourt des Lycéens laureate and originally from the Cameroonian Septentrion, had herself previously said that books had given her “a small seed of insubordination<sup>38</sup>”, leading her to use literature as a weapon of liberation and to amplify the voices of women in the Sahel on themes similar to those addressed by young Marzouka: early marriage and motherhood, which systematically eliminate girls from public sphere, locking them up in a patriarchal prison. From her own testimony, the emphasis put on schooling is striking:

In elementary school, there were about fifty girls and fifty boys. Then, in secondary school, the girls gradually disappeared as if by magic. They had only one horizon: marriage. One destiny: motherhood. All they had to do was know how to run a household. At the age of 14, family pressures and the round of suitors, negotiations and engagements began. And my girlfriends left school one after the other, finding it normal<sup>39</sup> (Amadou Amal, 2020, p. XX).

For both writers, the literary act is a personified process that confronts struggles for freedom and mobility. This act of freedom testifies the fact that, even in symbolically closed spaces, speech remains possible and open; in Édouard Glissant’s terms, a “baroque speech, inspired by all possible words” (Glissant, 1990, p. 89). The differences in women’s lives and in their responses to this violence can help foreshadow a social situation in which their dissatisfaction is growing, and they want more in terms of access to rights. These are just some of the ethnographic findings made six years earlier.

35 See back cover of the novel.

36 Houses in Fulfuldé, the language spoken in Idool.

37 The prize-winning novel is entitled *Les Impatientes* (2020).

38 Le Monde, Interview with Annick Cojean, March 7, 2021 ([https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2021/03/07/djaïli-amadou-amal-laureate-du-prix-goncourt-des-lyceens-avec-les-livres-une-petite-graine-d-insoumission-a-germe-en-moi\\_6072234\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2021/03/07/djaïli-amadou-amal-laureate-du-prix-goncourt-des-lyceens-avec-les-livres-une-petite-graine-d-insoumission-a-germe-en-moi_6072234_3232.html)).

39 Le Monde, Interview with Annick Cojean, March 7, 2021 ([https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2021/03/07/djaïli-amadou-amal-laureate-du-prix-goncourt-des-lyceens-avec-les-livres-une-petite-graine-d-insoumission-a-germe-en-moi\\_6072234\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2021/03/07/djaïli-amadou-amal-laureate-du-prix-goncourt-des-lyceens-avec-les-livres-une-petite-graine-d-insoumission-a-germe-en-moi_6072234_3232.html)).

The socio-political and cultural reception of *Mon père ou mon destin* brings to life and makes tangible the battles against the weight of the structural forces that silence and render women invisible within patriarchal systems.

### *Two Mirroring Female Figures: The Mother and the Literary Reference*

The mother figure, central to feminist discourse (Bretécher, 1982), is for Astawabi a fierce advocate for her daughter, whom she wants to save from a marriage contract based on a financial debt contracted by the father in exchange for the promise of marrying off his daughter at the age of 17. This notion of commodification, in which women are treated as objects in society, is a key theme in Marxist-oriented analyses. Luce Irigaray argues that, as both an exchange value and a use value, women are “commodity-objects” relegated to a passive role in the exchange process, which is organized by and for the benefit of men, the “producer-subjects” (Irigaray, 1997). In this patriarchal economy, Astawabi is a utilitarian object of value: through marriage, she becomes a mirror of value used to facilitate relations between men. Luce Irigaray further explains that in this commodification process, women receive nothing in return but oppression and the branding of the father’s name. The protagonist’s mother will plead with great success to get her daughter out of this economy, where she is merely a vessel of intangible possibilities determined by men. This commodification can also serve as a means to repay a debt burdening the parents and reducing them to the status of slaves (Atwood, 2009).

Why are you punishing our daughter? She does not deserve this life. She does not deserve this man you call your friend, who already has a wife and children her age. She deserves to continue her studies; she is already grown and responsible. Please, I beg you, my dear husband, think of her future. This man will turn her into his sexual slave, his domestic servant. Will she get along with his wife and children? Will she be happy? (p. 21).

Astadicko, as a testament to her daughter: “I want you to be strong and happy. Fight to achieve your dreams; you are capable. You must believe in yourself, no one should make you feel inferior. My daughter is capable. Every time you face a difficult situation, tell yourself that you can handle it. You are a strong woman, Asta” (p. 69). The mother is as central to the story as she is to the author’s life: on the back cover, the biography note introduces the author as “daughter of the businesswoman Hadja Bilkissou”; with a brief mention of the father figure appearing only in the acknowledgments, after the mother: “*strong and courageous woman; she supported me in achieving my dream*”. Both in the novel and in the author’s life, the mother is highly influential. The administrative mediation for reworking the book took place in her presence, as noted by the village chief of Idool in his interview with *Cameroon Tribune*. Some interpret the mother’s involvement as an ambition imposed on her daughter. On social media, a post by Dewa Aboubakar, who claims to “explain the situation in simple terms”, argues that “it is the culture of Northern Cameroon that is under attack. Her mother believed she had a future Djaili. She gained fame at the expense of our culture’s reputation. Today, in the eyes of so-called defenders of women’s rights and freedoms, Northern Cameroon is hell”. From the post, we learn that the refusal to submit to all these societal expectations comes from the author’s mother: “She said she is not afraid of anything and that she will imprison everyone in Idool”.

Beyond the petty literary quarrel, the broader issue of the power to speak emerges, embodied by strong female figures such as the mother but also, more ambiguously, by the elderly reference and brilliant protector, Djaili Amadou Amal. A mirror figure systematically invoked by many journalists covering this story<sup>40</sup>, she appears in the novel as an allusive symbol of success story. The writer found herself compelled to offer a somewhat awkward show of support to the young author. Faced with growing controversy, on July 20, 2023, the day of the trial, she signed an article pledging she will help the young author to rewrite her novel. While acknowledging that Marzouka Oummou Hani had contacted her via Instagram for assistance in finding a publisher, but that the exchange did not progress due to a lack of response from the young author, she takes charge of the attacks against her redirecting them in a tone designed to reframe a social cadet whose “immaturity” is due to “her very

<sup>40</sup> See « Cameroun - Justice. Writer Djaili Amadou Amal commits to help the young author Marzouka Oummou Hani in re-writing her novel », *Cameroon24.net*, Friday July, 21, 2023.

young age.” She emphasized her own experience as a writer facing similar criticisms: “I also went through this when I was accused of encouraging women’s rebellion, betraying traditions, being a bad Muslim, and so on”. By emphasizing the possibility of rewriting the novel, she provided material for those advocating for literary revision, suggesting:

Marzouka will rewrite the book, adjusting any parts that do not conform to the novelistic code as needed, while of course preserving the inalienable freedom of expression. And naturally, I commit to mentoring her for her publications. As writers, we never intend to trample on our traditions or insult anyone. Even when we set a novel in a specific village or location, a novel remains a work of fiction. Fiction means an invented, imagined story. This is also an opportunity to highlight the responsibility of unreliable vanity publishers with little credibility and no real editorial expertise, who exploit the inexperience of young writers whose work they are not even prepared to support, let alone defend. Those are my main observations. I am, of course, in contact with Marzouka and will continue to work with all parties involved. The complaint against her has no grounds and must be withdrawn. I support her and think she is a courageous young girl with a bright future, of whom I am proud.

This forum also allowed her to position herself as a guardian figure prescribing order and respect for established *insiders*. With assumed authority, she emphasized the necessity of deferring to elders: “My message to young aspiring writers is to absolutely seek guidance from elders to accompany them in their writing projects. That is what I did when I approached Pabe Mongo and the Cercle de la Nolica, where, for nearly two years, I participated in writing workshops alongside many other writers who shared their experiences with me before I embarked on publishing my first novel. Writing is a long term exercise, where patience is essential and haste is to be avoided”.

Her reprimand of the young writer aligns with her assertion that the northern part of the country has its own specificities, its rules: “traditions we hold dear, values etc”. In response, in the 2024 edition, for which she presumably facilitates access to a much more professional publishing house, the young author expresses her deep gratitude to her generous mentor: “*Writing is not a race. You have to read, reread, rewrite, word by word. Sentence by sentence. You have to weigh every comma, every phrase...*” Advice from Djaili Amadou Amal. My godmother, the one who helped me to see writing in a different light. Thank you very much<sup>41</sup>”

The *Prix Goncourt des Lycéens* had previously highlighted them brilliantly in her novel *Les Impatientes*, exposing the torments of the golden prison of marriage, often forced and polygamous. By granting the young author nothing beyond her youth and suggesting, in a somewhat patronizing tone, that she rewrites her work under her supervision, Djaili Amadou Amal reinforced the patriarchal forces that regulate speech and silence women.

Ultimately, the construction and reception of Marzouki Oummou Hani’s work across its two editions (2023 and 2024) serve as tag of patriarchal violence through injunction to silence. The prescribed rewriting of her novel has revealed the mechanics of this process (public confession, apology, a letter rehabilitating the figure of the sovereign chief, the young author’s absolution) and assessed its disciplinary effectiveness. On the other hand, this literary occurrence anchored in the matrix invocation of paternal figures, both the father in the family and the father of the nation, in a symmetrical and fluid power dynamic extending from the domestic sphere to the public realm. The strong administrative mobilization (from the Subdivisional Officer to the Governor, including the Minister’s representative) can be seen as an effort to preserve the honor of the Sovereign reference to whom certain administrative authorities will explicitly refer: “the Head of State”. The administrative and judicial production of silencing aims to restore harmony disrupted by the defiant writer, whose work ultimately challenges the very figure who upholds the patriarchal order. The symbolic imprint of the paternal figure echoes that of the Head of State, who, beyond

41 <https://www.youscribe.com/BookReader/Index/3708327/?documentId=6076110> (consulted February 2025).

the patriotic hymns exalting him at commemorative<sup>42</sup> events and his official designation as “Father of the Nation<sup>43</sup>” on the presidency<sup>44</sup> website, is indeed an interesting parallel in the production of the literary order. This reminds Élisabeth Badinter’s analysis of patriarchy as a social structure of power confiscation, where the power of the father, and with him those of the leader, varies from one society to another (Badinter, 2002, p. 107). The maintenance of the patriarchal order is one of the ways in which political order, as conceptualized by Michel Foucault in *Orders of Discourse* (1970) and *Discipline and Punish* (1975), is prolonged.

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42 One of the most frequently used is the rallying quatrain: “Paul Biya, Paul Biya, our President, Father of the Nation, Paul Biya, always forward” or “Paul Biya, Paul Biya, our President, Father of the Nation, Paul Biya, always a hot guy” (quatrain used by Docta, one of the characters in Patrice Nganang’s novel *Temps*, 2001, p. 274).

43 This status, generally unique, is shared between the two national presidential figures.

44 <https://www.prc.cm/fr/actualites/1963-paul-biya-appelle-au-courage-au-dynamisme-et-a-la-volonte-apres-les-tristes-evenements-du-21-octobre>, or <https://www.prc.cm/fr/actualites/7401-accueil-triomphe-du-president-paul-biya-a-yaounde>; consulted on December 30, 2024.

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