

Écriture Féminine in Ken Bugul's *De L'Autre Côté du Regard*

Écriture Féminine dalam novel Ken Bugul *De L'Autre Côté du Regard*

Mega Subekti^{1,*}, Sandya Maulana², & Indra Sarathan³

^{1,2,3}Universitas Padjadjaran

Jalan Raya Bandung-Sumedang KM 21, Jatinangor, Kabupaten Sumedang, Indonesia

^{1,*}Email: mega.subekti@unpad.ac.id; Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4316-8228>

²Email: sandya.maulana@unpad.ac.id; Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-2857-2039>

³Email: sarathan@unpad.ac.id; Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8861-870X>

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Abstract

The article analyzes the representation of *écriture féminine* in Ken Bugul's *De L'Autre Côté du Regard* (DLCR) and its connection to feminist ideology and the narrator's hybrid cultural identity. This research applies a close reading technique, utilizing the framework of feminist narratology by Lanser (1986) and *écriture féminine* by Cixous (1976) and Brahim (2000). Through data analysis, it is found that the narrative structure of DLCR, which represents the concept of *écriture féminine*, appears very fluid and non-linear, similar to writing pattern of memoirs. Repetitive phrases are found that represent the narrator's deepest emotions regarding her maternal relationship and her in-between identity within postcolonial context. The results indicate that the structure of *écriture féminine* in DLCR appears to represent the narrator's process of reconciliation, not only related to the maternal relationship with her biological mother but also to her motherland, Senegal. By incorporating the voice of other women, the text opens up a collective space of solidarity emblematic of African feminism. DLCR's narrative is argued to offer a distinctly African reinterpretation of feminism where bodily experience, ancestral tradition, and political resistance converge, ultimately presenting writing as an aesthetic and emancipatory act of postcolonial female self-definition.

Abstrak

Artikel ini pada representasi *écriture féminine* dalam novel *De L'Autre Côté du Regard* (DLCR) karya Ken Bugul dan kelindannya dengan ideologi feminis serta identitas budaya narator sebagai perempuan hibrid. Selain menggunakan kerangka kerja naratologi feminis Lanser (1986) dan teori *écriture féminine* Cixous (1976) dan Brahim (2000), penelitian ini juga menerapkan teknik pembacaan mendalam sebagai pendekatan metodologis. Melalui analisis data, ditemukan bahwa struktur naratif DLCR, yang mewakili konsep *écriture féminine*, tampak sangat cair dan tidak linear, mirip dengan pola penulisan memoar. Beberapa frasa berulang dibaca sebagai representasi emosi narator terkait hubungan maternalnya dan juga identitasnya yang *in-between* dalam konteks poskolonial. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa struktur *écriture féminine* dalam DLCR terlihat mewakili proses rekonsiliasi narator, tidak hanya terkait dengan hubungan maternalnya dengan ibu kandungnya tetapi juga dengan tanah airnya, Senegal. Dengan memasukkan suara perempuan lain, narasi ini membuka ruang solidaritas kolektif yang menjadi penciri ideologi feminisme Afrika. Alih-alih meniru ideologi feminis Barat, struktur narasi DLCR menawarkan reinterpretasi pandangan Afrika yang khas; pengalaman tubuh, tradisi leluhur, dan perlawanan politik bersatu, menjadikan *écriture féminine* strategi estetis dan emansipatoris dalam mendefinisikan ulang diri sebagai perempuan hibrida.

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A. Introduction

This article hypothesizes that Bugul's narrative in *De L'autre Côté du Regard* (henceforth abbreviated DLCR) exhibits characteristics that Cixous (1976) and Brahimi (2000) argued for. In this regard, Bugul, as a Senegalese writer, admitted that there was no specific intention to follow certain writing patterns. She merely tried to convey what she thought, saw, and heard from her environment (Bugul, 2000). As is the case in some African feminist work of fiction, Bugul's narrative manifestation of *écriture féminine* is associated not only with sexual and bodily issues, but also with their long history of colonization (Brahimi, 2000). We argue that these connections involve the racial position of Black and Non-Western, widely considered as frequently facing triple oppression: being black, a woman, and a non-white/non-European at the same time (D'Almeida & Hamou, 1991; Kane, 2021; Maleka et al., 2023). The discussion of women's issues in Senegal, therefore, tends to be more complex and contextualized than in the European tradition, as it involves the intersection of Senegalese and European cultures in a postcolonial context.

In this article, *écriture féminine* is linked to Helene Cixous' 1976 essay *The Laugh of the Medusa*. *Écriture féminine* refers to writing produced by women and about women. Like Cixous, Bray (2004) views language and text as not neutral but gendered, i.e., male-centered. Women are therefore called upon to break out of this hegemonic construction by creating their own language and texts. Cixous, as expressed by Jensen (2000), proposes that women write using patterns or methods of writing that truly characterize their female body or femininity. Cixous (1976) argues that women should break out of the silence that has historically bound them, and thereby enable themselves to write their own experiences, histories, and bodies. It also writes about women and brings women into writing. In order to do so, "women must engage themselves, and especially their entire bodies, in the texts they produce" (Cixous, 1976, p. 875).

When it was first introduced, Cixous's idea and concept of *écriture féminine* did not necessarily belong to women. This was because even men could produce *écriture féminine*. Bray (2004, p. 82) states that Cixous's idea of *écriture féminine* originated from her reading of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, a novel by a male writer who employed a style relevant to the stereotypes attached to women. Cixous refers to Joyce's writing style when introducing the concept of *écriture féminine*. Cixous then asserts that women should be able to position their writing in the same way Joyce has done in *Ulysses*. *Écriture féminine* ideology is political because it subverts the perspectives, assumptions, and structures of writing that adhere to patriarchal norms.

According to Brahimi (2000), African women's *écriture féminine* extends beyond their sexual or bodily concerns. It creatively restructures the experiences of marginalized African women while also raising several issues – challenging colonial perspectives, linguistic hierarchies, and patriarchal power at the same time. D'Almeida & Hamou (1991) identify a tendency among African women writers to emphasize thematic and ideological aspects relevant to the issues faced by African women. These aspects are often used to illustrate the differences in how the concept of *écriture féminine* is constructed by African and European women writers. This is because the issues that African women face in literature are arguably more complex and context-specific than those faced by women in the West, where *écriture féminine* first emerged. As Subekti et al. (2013) note, the issue of multiple forms of oppression faced by Senegalese women is reflected in Bugul's works, such as *Riwan ou Le Chemin du Sable* and her short story *La Femme de Gouverneur*.

Although Bugul's works have been extensively researched, her tendency to employ *écriture féminine* strategies of writing remains underexplored. Ahihou (2019) article directly highlights and compares Bugul's stylistics with Mariama Bâ's narrative but focuses only on the novel *Le Baobab fou*'s novel. The narrative strategy and *écriture féminine* aspect of Bugul's other work have not been discussed specifically in relation to any of Bugul's other works, including DLCR's novel.

DLCR presents a fluid and non-linear narrative, portraying the narrator's personal emotions as a woman regarding her relationships with her family members. At times, the narrative reads like a memoir, revealing her deepest feelings for her mother or baby. She also merges Senegalese oral expressions into the text, creating a distinctive musical effect. The novel centers on the first-person

narrator's emotional memories of her relationship with her mother—a recurring motif in Bugul's works—highlighting the tensions and disharmonies also present in her earlier writings. The story about the maternal relationship with her mother is not a new issue in Bugul's work. Descriptions of the relationship with her mother are often inserted as interpolated narratives and juxtaposed with narratives about her failure to understand Senegalese tradition. Her contact with Western culture had a profound influence on the construction of her identity as a woman living in two traditions (Senegal-Western). Although born in Senegal, Bugul's engagement with Western culture made a significant contribution to the construction of her identity as a woman in-between. This experience enabled Bugul to explore issues of motherhood in the context of gender or postcolonialism.

This article aims to examine how the narrative strategies of the novel *DLCR* are intertwined with the ideas and ideologies of *écriture féminine* as presented by Cixous or Brahim. The discussion in this article focuses on the problems of the first-person narrator as a woman in both daughter and mother roles in Senegal. These problems are visible not only through the narrative structure, but also through the issues represented within the narrative structures and the thematic aspects of the storyline. The discussion of these two issues will relate to how *écriture féminine* operates to reveal the narrator's experience as a hybrid woman, overcoming postcolonial trauma while challenging conventions about gender and motherhood in Senegalese tradition.

B. Method

This research uses a feminist narrative approach to examine the narrative constructed by the narrator and interprets it as a form of resistance to patriarchal ideology. Using classical narratology and feminist literary theory, this method provides a framework for analyzing the formal structures of narratives and the ideological functions of gender represented in literary discourse. In the context of this research, we use a close reading as a methodological approach combined with an analysis of the elements of the narrator's focalization in relation to race, gender, and cultural identity as a hybrid woman in a postcolonial context.

Feminist narratology, as expressed by Lanser (1986), challenges the assumption of neutrality in traditional narrative models by foregrounding how narratives are constructed based on specific gender subjectivities. Furthermore, Lanser (1986) as well as Yovela et al. (2024) emphasize mimesis and are more concerned with character than other narrative aspects. This research examines how narrative structures contribute to embodying the narrator's or writer's resistance to patriarchal ideology as well as the representation of gendered experiences in literary works that have been considered patriarchal spaces. In analyzing, the process of identifying the form and structure of the *DLCR* narrative is first carried out by linking to the *écriture féminine* concept. Then, we portray the intertwining between the structure and the gender identity represented by the narrator's voice. The interpretation process related to the ideological and political dimension is realized.

Écriture féminine is often regarded as a writing strategy that suggests intimacy for women because it reveals personal experiences. This tendency makes *écriture féminine* more often take the form of a diary, epistolary writing, or a commentary that often contains confessions that are more emotional, warm, and intimate. Such tendencies illustrate the 'intimate' and 'close' communication between the writer and the reader. *Écriture féminine* is not only related to narrative patterns as part of the writing style, but it can also be seen through the elements displayed in the thematic and ideological aspects of a writing. "Nothing is definitive in women's writing, neither the stylistic effects, nor the thematic elements, nor even the strictly ideological aspects" (Frémont, 1979, p. 323).

C. Results and Discussion

1. DLCR as *Écriture Féminine*: The Narrating and Confessing ‘I

DLCR's narrative is told by a narrator who is also a character in the story. The focus of the story is not solely on the first-person narrator, although her perspective is central to all the events that occur in the narrative. The narrator's view is like a camera that records the scenes that take place in the narrative, allowing her to freely construct and move the story from her point of view. The narrator can be seen as an attempt to display her subjectivity as a woman who is the subject in her own story. In the DLCR's narrative, she presents herself as a mother who has a baby girl and talks about her experience as a daughter who lacks her mother's love. According to Priyatna (2015), the subject-object position in a narrative is actually never in a fixed position. In DLCR, the narrator has at least positioned herself as a subject who speaks to other women, including to herself as a woman.

For Bugul, her writing was the only way for her voice as a woman to be heard and for her mind to be at peace. In one of her essays, Bugul said that for her, writing is a process of ‘becoming’. Writing is a process of self-expression to testify, participate, contribute, denounce, and change the course of events. Bugul also emphasized the presumption that the patterns and forms of narrative found in her works are a narrative strategy and a political strategy that contains ideological understandings in relation to the position of Senegalese women (Bugul, K., Bourget, C., & d’Almeida, 2003). One of Bugul's most significant writing strategies is the use of the first-person singular ‘I’ as the narrator who drives the story. In addition to demonstrating her feminist political and ideological stance, this strategy also gives a strong impression of an autobiographical aspect as expressed by Ndiaye & Sagna (2017). In their writings, they reveal the tendency of Bugul's three novels, autobiographical works: *Le Baobab fou*, *Riwan ou Le Chemin de Sable*, and *De L’autre Côté du Regard*.

The identity of the narrator in DLCR's narrative serves as the intended author. In one excerpt, we find the narrator explicitly states that her name is Marie through a telegram addressed by one of her family members. “Miss Marie, Aba Diop needs you right away in Nguininguni” ((Bugul, 2003, p. 110). We argue that the narrator Marie, who appears in DLCR, does indeed refer to Ken Bugul, whose real name is Mariétou Mbaye Biléoma. There are similarities between the narrative in DLCR and Bugul's confession about her childhood story, which she told in an interview in 2013. On that occasion, Bugul (2013) described in detail her disharmonious relationship with her biological mother.

DLCR's narrative employs the first-person singular narrator ‘je’ (I), which makes the narrator's voice always present and her positions as a daughter or as a mother. In many ways, the narrative structure is more like a memoir in the form of a live running commentary and is dominated by short monologue sentences that contain the narrator's personal feelings regarding her relationship with her little child and biological mother. Short sentences and sometimes repetitions of a sentence become the defining features of the novel from early on, representing the feelings of a mother's love for her child. The repetition of short sentences in DLCR produces a rhyming sound. In some of the early chapters, the narrator even seems to deliberately include the lyrics of a lullaby that a mother often sings to calm her child.

<i>Ayo néné</i>	<i>Ayo baby</i>
<i>Néné néné Bouti</i>	<i>Baby little baby</i>
<i>Touti touti béyo</i>	<i>Little little béyo</i>
<i>Ayo néné</i>	<i>Ayo baby</i>
<i>Néné lo di dioy?</i>	<i>Why are you crying, baby? (Bugul, 2003, p. 13).</i>

The above quotation also represents at least two important points. The first one relates to the emphasis on the musical aspect of the narrative, which is considered to characterize the unique orality of African society in terms of language. As Sacharewicz (2019) argues, the quotation as well as the repeated phrases that have a similar sound, as if deliberately inserted as a characteristic of Bugul's narrative, show her efforts to become part of African tradition. Furthermore, Sacharewicz (2023, p. 28) specifically asserts that the above quotation is an excerpt from the lyrics of a lullaby used to calm babies. Not only does it calm the narrator's baby, we argue that the lyrics also serve as a comforting song for the narrator herself in the context of the maternal relationship with her mother.

The second point relates to the mixed language used by the narrator: Wolof and French. This phenomenon can be read as a representation of hybrid identity (in-between position in a postcolonial context). The narrator appears to demonstrate her proficiency in both Wolof as a mother tongue and French as her second language. Not only because of the exposure to French colonialism during her childhood, the narrator's French language skills were also enhanced because she had studied and lived in European countries

The majority of sentences that comprise the DLCR narrative are direct speeches, frequently employed in oral discourse. The repetitive and short sentence structure is a defining feature of the text, appearing in almost every chapter and sometimes even dominating the narrative. We assume that this is part of the narrative strategy, which has the effect of creating a very personal atmosphere and impressing a strong emotional involvement. The narrator's relationship with her daughter initially seems to frame the DLCR narrative, but the focus progressively shifts towards a more profound engagement with her relationship with her mother. The story appears to be driven by the narrator's memories of her past relationship with her mother, as well as her experiences and expressions of anger, sadness, disappointment, and happiness. As expressed in the following narrative, which reveals the narrator's emotion towards her mother, who never even spoke to her daughter as a mother would. Even if there is talk, the subject is only related to her niece, Samanar.

My mother once talked to me about Samanar's friend
My mother doesn't talk to me much
My mother only talks about Samanar.
But why did my flesh and blood mother never talk to me? (Bugul, 2003, p. 57).

As the main character, the narrator's identity is presented as a Senegalese woman who is the mother of a baby girl. But when talking about the relationship with her mother, the narrator presents a narrative related to her past experiences as a girl who did not get enough love from her biological mother. All the characters and events in the narrative are also told through the "I/eyes" of the narrator. As Priyatna (2021) mentions, within a feminist narratological approach, the storytelling technique using "I" represents the strong subjectivity of the narrator's voice as a woman, employing the first person to construct a feminine self-image while revealing both her subjectivity and her awareness of gendered positioning. In this context, we argue that her hybrid identity makes the narrator more critical of women's issues in both the Western world and Senegal. However, her critical views often result in her being ostracized and alienated by her family and even by the social circles of Senegalese society, rather than gaining social sympathy.

The narrator focuses on at least three main narratives. The first is about her childhood memories. The second is about her child and her family members. The third is about the narrator's relationship with her mother. The narratives about her family members often focus on their relationship with the mother character. For example, when the narrator describes her mother through the bond with her older brother, Bacar Ndaw: "*Mbaue Ndaw! Our mother called him that. She gladly gave her son the affection she had*" (Bugul, 2003, p. 15). This narrative is more than a simple account of her older brother; we argue that it functions as the narrator's attempt to reconstruct her mother's character, who deeply loved her children. Regardless of how the mother character treats

the narrator, in her relationships with other family members, the mother character is portrayed as having great attention and affection for her family members. The narrator's role as both the main character and an observer gives her control over the story. She uses this role to link the narratives about her family members with her own story as a daughter and a mother.

Despite having three different narratives, the focus of the storytelling in DLCR has led the reader to surmise that the narrator's relationship with her mother is the focus of the story. Although the beginning of the story there seems to be a distance between the narrator and her mother, the content of the story seems to move towards a reconciliation of the narrator's relationship with her mother, who is already dead when the story is recounted. Since there are few memories of her mother, the narrator is forced to borrow stories that describe her relationship with family members to describe her mother's character. Unsurprisingly, we found that many narrative interpolations describe the relationship between family members and the mother.

The narrator's voice is marked by unexpected interventions of the mother's voice and by frequent interior monologues expressed as unanswered questions. These interrogative fragments operate less as requests for information than as invitations, drawing the reader—perhaps even the narrator herself—into a shared space of reflection on a daughter's experience of maternal absence. Furthermore, the use of such interrogatives also suggests a tone of doubt, hesitation, and perhaps even ambiguity in Bugul's feelings. Echoing this argument, Utami (2022) also reveals that women's use of tag questions in the novel also tends to represent elements of uncertainty and self-doubt. This is clearly seen in the excerpt below, which evokes the departure of the town's mother to care for a cherished grandchild, illustrating this dynamic: the sense of loss resonates through both the emotional charge and the subtle, almost lyrical sound patterning that embodies the rhythm and texture associated with the ideology of *écriture féminine*.

*Elle était partie alors que je n'avais que cinq ans.
Comment pouvait-elle me laisser?
Comment pouvait-elle partir sans se retourner?
Sans promettre de revenir me chercher?
Sans m'écrire?
Sans me téléphoner?
Mais elle ne savait ni lire ni écrire.
Elle n'avait pas de téléphone.
Mais cela ne suffisait pas pour l'excuser** (Bugul, 2003, p. 59).
(* To show the rhyme form, in this citation we keep the original language)

She left when I was only five.
How could she leave me?
How could she leave without looking back? Without promising to come back for me?
Without writing to me?
Without phoning me? But she couldn't read or write.
She didn't have a telephone.
But that was not enough to excuse.

The narrative structure of DLCR is unquestionably a flashback plot. It features the narrator's persona reflecting on past memories and the present. The DLCR narrative consists of two plots. The first is the plot that recounts the first-person narrator's memories, and the second is the plot happening in the narrator's present, including her communication with the voices of her mother. However, the present-time plot is merely a small part of the overall narrative of DLCR, which is primarily about the narrator's memories of her mother or about her mother's life. These memories are depicted as intertwined, and in some parts of the narrative, they even trigger other memories:

"The memory of little Soxna also brings back so many other memories. Painful, bitter memories" (Bugul, 2003, p. 141).

The narrator does not always make the present explicitly clear. To understand the flow of the narrative, one must examine the grammatical tenses of the sentences. The use of the past tense indicates that the narrative is recounting the narrator's past. In contrast, the present tense used in the present-time narrative denotes that it is told by the narrator at the moment of narration and is most evident at the beginning of the story. One narrative that shows the use of the two tenses is seen in the following quote: "*It is always with sadness that I remember the day I joined my mother. I had run to my mother on a train. A train that I loved...*" (Bugul, 2003, p. 81).

These unanswered questions give way to reflections that expose a complex web of familial ties. Her jealousy toward the niece Samanar—whom she perceives as the recipient of their mother's greater affection (Bugul, 2003, p. 67)—becomes a lens through which memories of the wider family surface: father, siblings, nieces and nephews, even neighbors. These interwoven recollections shape her understanding of maternal love and loss, positioning family narrative as central to Bugul's practice of *écriture féminine*. As D'Almeida and Hamou (1991) argue, this emphasis on family resonates with a broader pattern in African women's literary tradition, where the domestic sphere is inseparable from the articulation of African women's experiences.

The story about the relationship with her mother is interpolated with stories about her family members, and even towards the end of the story, the narrative about her brother's death still appears. The DLCR story begins with a narrative about the arrival of a letter from her brother, Bacar Ndaw, informing her of Samanar's death. The narrator's childhood memory then appears and begins to tell the story of Samanar, whom the narrator believes stole her mother's attention and affection. From here, the narrator begins to tell the maternal problems with her mother and continues to move and be interspersed with other narratives. The DLCR story then concludes with a narrative about the narrator's views on death, including her sincerity in letting go of her mother's death, which can also be interpreted as a form of reconciliation regarding her maternal relationship.

In addition to showing the narrator's voice, DLCR also features the disembodied voice of her mother. This can be interpreted as the narrator's effort to reconcile their maternal relationship. At first, the mother's voice seems frightening. However, as the narrative progresses, she begins to feel comfortable and at certain moments even seems to look forward to their intimate conversations as mother-daughter. This moment is something they rarely did when the mother was alive. The culmination of this reconciliation is when the narrator consciously realizes that her mother's voice is coming from her own body, as evidenced by the line, "*I heard my mother's voice again, coming from the tip of my nipple*" (Bugul, 2003, p. 280). Not only does this signify her awareness of her present role as a mother, but the narrator's quote also marks the culmination of her reconciliation with Senegalese tradition, which emphasizes that Senegalese women will eventually become mothers, a perspective that the narrator had previously resisted.

In general, the narrative appears very dense and fast-paced. This is not only due to Bugul's tendency to use short sentences but also because many other characters are involved in the story. Although the main focus of DLCR's narrative can be said to be about the narrator's memories of her mother, the other characters' stories intertwine with the narrator's efforts to evoke memories of her mother. Furthermore, the other characters also contribute to the narrator's description of her mother's character regarding her family. This makes the flashback storyline seem incoherent; it jumps around and is similar to the plot of detective fiction, which, according to Dutta-Flanders (2017), tells a piecemeal plot to raise the reader's curiosity.

The subjectivity of the narrator appears more dominant in the narrative because she herself becomes the main figure who plays the double roles of a mother and a daughter. When the narrator tells the story about her mother, the narrator is like looking in the mirror, seeing herself in her mother, and seeing her mother's soul in her body. As seen in the following quote, which tells of how she began to look more and more like her mother.

Since my mother's death, I had gradually adopted all her habits and mannerisms.
I sat like her
I spoke like her
I cooked like her
I divined like her (Bugul, 2003, p. 343).

The structure of DLCR highlights how its first-person storytelling embodies *écriture féminine*, foregrounding the narrator's subjectivity and reflections on the motherhood's issue. In line with Hélène Cixous's idea of writing that flows from the woman's body and emotions, the narrator employs repetition, poetic rhythm, and lyrical language to convey sensory experience and the memory of trauma as a hybrid Senegal woman. The insertion of Wolof terms and musical effects functions as a form of resistance to the colonial French language and opens a fluid, hybrid linguistic space. We argue that the narrator's "I" stands at the center of the flashback-driven plot, weaving together childhood memories, experiences of motherhood, and attempts to reconstruct the figure of her biological mother. In this way, the narrator seems to integrate the politics of language, family memory, and feminist practice into a stylistic strategy of *écriture féminine* that negotiates trauma and reclaims a Senegalese female identity

2. Motherhood and the Issues of Being a Mother

Bugul's tendency to narrate her maternal experience is connected to D'almeida and Hamou's (1991) argument about women's issues in African literary discourse produced by women writers. They note that the discourse of women's writing in works written by African women writers often focuses on everyday life that is close to them as women: the self, the family, and the social relations. A similar notion is expressed by Kamara (2001), stating that African women's writing is a narrative about themselves in their social relations, their race, their relationships with male writers, and also about their conflict with their African tradition.

In DLCR, the issue of self and family is manifested in the narrator's uncertainty in positioning herself as a daughter in her relationship with her mother and as a mother to her daughter. Due to the lack of affection from her mother, she feels that she does not have enough experience to become a mother. Her efforts to recount memories and moments with her mother have become an integral part of her desire to construct the image of a mother in Senegalese cultural tradition. Her past as a daughter who has been neglected by her biological mother has created a traumatic sense of re-engaging in maternal relationships, and at the same time, makes her doubt her own maternal instincts.

The narrator faces a mothering problem after the birth of her niece, Samanar. Since then, the relationship between the narrator and her mother has become distant, unlike the relationship between her mother and her older brother or sister. As her mother's daughter, the narrator felt that it was Samanar's presence that made her mother's attention and affection no longer fully felt. The narrator's childhood experiences of abandonment and neglect at the hands of her mother left her with deep emotional scars. This led to feelings of being unworthy of motherhood, or even the fear of repeating her mother's mistakes. She begins to realize this feeling of abandonment after the incident of being separated from her mother, who departs for the town of Hodar when she was only five years old. Although her mother explains that she has gone to visit her older brother, the narrator knows that her mother has actually gone.

But in my case, I can say that I suffered the most.
Because my mother had left me, probably voluntarily.
She didn't try to stay with me.
She didn't find a solution.
That's what made me never be able to forgive my mother.
She left when I was only five years old (Bugul, 2003, p. 58).

Due to the distant maternal relationship, there are not many affective memories that the narrator recalls about her mother. This is also the reason why the narrator has to borrow stories about the relationship between her mother and her family members to simply describe the affection and attention her mother has for her child and other family members. The narrator assumes that her biological mother has never really needed her as a child. On the contrary, the narrator is the one who really needs her mother. For her, the absence of a biological mother figure has meant that she has never felt important moments and events that should have played a major role in the process of forming her identity as a woman, whereas, as Rich (1995, p. 219) says, "a woman's first experience of warmth, nourishment, tenderness, security, sensuality, togetherness, comes from a mother." The narrator honestly admits that her need and desire for her mother's affection and attention is powerful, even more so than the other members of her family.

I was looking for my mother's breast.
I needed to hold my mother's breast.
I wanted to suckle my mother's breast.
I was over seven years old.
But as soon as I touched her breast, she woke up!
Without opening her eyes, she would take my hand and throw it away (Bugul, 2003, p. 67).

The expression of the narrator's feelings as a daughter about the figure of the mother is actually not only because of the lack of affection. Even more so, the narrator needs a mother figure who can guide her and introduce her to the world of [being] a woman and to the ability to recognize the female [body] that she has. Apart from the fact that she does not feel close to her biological mother, when the narrator narrates herself as a daughter in her relationship with a mother, she actually sees herself in the image of the mother she is narrating in the story. The image of the mother figure in the narrator's memory has actually played a significant role in the process of forming her identity as a mother. The following quote shows how the image of the mother that the first-person narrator has constructed in her mind ultimately dominates her attitude and character as a woman.

I sat like her
I talked like her
I cooked like her
I guessed things like her
And I even told my brother Moundayé about it.
I had the impression that my mother had come back to me (Bugul, 2003, p. 267).

There is a strong maternal quality in the narrator to make her mother a 'model', and how she recognizes and sees the femininity in her body. Like looking in the mirror and seeing the figure of her mother in herself, the narrator's descriptive narrative about her mother is an effort to construct her [new] identity as a mother. This also proves that the trauma related to her past relationship with her mother cannot immediately eliminate the narrator's intuition as a daughter. She still needs

a mother figure to guide her through the process of becoming a mother, because, as Beauvoir (2016) noted, when a woman becomes a mother, she actually replaces her mother's position with herself.

The issue of women in the family space is presented through the narration of the character of Samanar, who experiences the same conflict as the narrator. Samanar, who is the narrator's niece, is also seen as a daughter who does not receive enough affection from her biological mother. When Samanar was born, Assy was still too young to be a mother, and, according to the narrator, she was not yet capable of nurturing Samanar. This justification is used by the mother to position herself as a "mother" to Samanar, replacing Assy's duties. The relationship between Samanar and Assy is not as well portrayed as the relationship between Samanar and the narrator's mother. According to the narrator, her mother's role as Samanar's surrogate mother has made Samanar's character feel more comfortable, so that she no longer needs the affection of her biological mother.

In many traditions, becoming a mother is an important cultural milestone for women because, as Latha (2016) explains, it is related to recognition of reproductive abilities and symbolizes a "real" woman. In Africa, motherhood is the highest status for women due to their central role as a bridge between generations and a guru for understanding tradition (Diop, 2019). Echoed by Diop (2022), who emphasized the pivotal role of mothers as guardians of Senegalese patriarchal traditions. Mothers are expected always to be faithful to their husbands, mentor their children, and serve the needs of the family.

We argue that the concept of motherhood presented in the narrative not only represents Bugul's interpretation of Western ideology, but also her adaptation or even negotiation of Senegalese traditions, particularly in the context of the mother's role as guardian of Senegalese tradition. The process of negotiating her hybrid identity has significantly influenced the way Bugul narrates the issue of motherhood in her work. As Sani (2023) explains, in Francophone literature, the discussion of motherhood issues appears more complex because it is intertwined with the West-East position in the postcolonial context.

If a woman does not have the ability to become a mother or does not have maternal intuition, she will certainly be socially frowned upon. This is also experienced by the narrator in DLRC through the doubts about her maternal intuition due to childhood trauma. The sense of doubt grows after the narrator's mother's death. The voices of the mother that come to invite her to communicate may have been the narrator's fantasy arising from her doubts about her maternal intuition in relation to the mothering process.

Although not explicitly stated, as a woman bound by Senegalese tradition, the narrator is expected to have maternal intuition. Before finally having a daughter, the narrator is even pressured by some members of her family to adopt one of her nieces if she is not ready to marry and have children. For the narrator, the desires and pressures considered part of tradition are social oppressions that other Senegalese women may also feel. As Akujobi (2011) said, in African tradition, "mothers as she makes woman-as-mother the primary upholder of the native culture. The mother teaches the child about the society's ways of knowing and doing things" (2011, p. 6).

Although she is aware of the social oppression of women and has been described as 'escaping' by having children, the narrator's decision to have children is a form of negotiation with Senegalese tradition. Moreover, the narrator's practice of negotiation is also evident in the transformation of her views on her relationship with her biological mother. Although at first, she always refuses and seems to want to put aside her maternal role, the narrator still admits that she has consciously or unconsciously behaved like her mother. Despite her deep disappointment and hatred of her mother's attitude towards her, the narrator still acknowledged that the image of her mother had played a role in shaping her identity and personality as a mother. We argue that becoming a mother and reconciling with her biological mother is part of the narrator's attempts to redefine her own femininity as a Senegalese woman.

On the one hand, the narrator's mimicry of her mother can actually be seen as normative, as part of her maternal intuition that emerges naturally with her pregnancy of her little daughter. On the other hand, however, it cannot be denied that there is an influence that is unconsciously part of the first-person narrator's negotiation process with herself, with the disappointment and trauma

of her past with her mother, with the social situation and conditions she is currently facing, and with the demands of her family or the social community around her to have children soon.

Within the framework of *écriture féminine*, the conflict between the first-person narrator and her biological mother can be read as a form of writing about the female body and experience that rejects a patriarchal narrative logic. For the narrator, the strained relationship with her mother is not merely a personal psychological problem, but rather a representation of the tension between the hybrid female subject—shaped by encounters with European modernity—and the “motherland,” which symbolizes Senegalese tradition.

The DLCR narrative, which can be understood as a personal interpretation of the *écriture féminine*'s concept, became Bugul's strategy for inscribing her female body as a hybrid woman. The motherhood, which is the dominant thematic aspect in the narrative, not only signifies Bugul's reconciliation with her mother, but also represents her adaptation and possibly also a symbol of her negotiation with Senegalese tradition. On this occasion, *écriture féminine* serves as an arena for Bugul's ideological contestation, reinterpreting the concept of motherhood in Senegalese tradition, not as a burden but as a symbolic representation that can always be negotiated or even celebrated.

D. Conclusion

In DLCR, the concept and ideology of *écriture féminine* are seen through the way narrative is constructed. The distinctive, intimate, and non-linear storytelling style is considered a representation of the narrator's female body and experience as a hybrid woman. Like a female body, the narrative appears to have no center, even though it is dominated by stories about the narrator's maternal relationships as mother-daughter at the same time. The narrative seems to flow in various directions, connecting emotional fragments about the childhood experiences with her mother. On this occasion, her hybrid female body appears to be a sort of center that drives the story to narrate another woman's problems. The DLCR narrative also demonstrates how narrative crossover not only narrates her own subjectivity but also that of other women who have similar problems, including those faced by the character Samanar and even her own mother. This practice can be interpreted as a strategy to demonstrate solidarity and collective testimony, which are the key characteristics of the African feminist movement.

Bugul's writing style in DLCR has at least proven how *écriture féminine* operates as a discursive strategy to reconfigure her identity in relation to her maternal relationship as a daughter-mother. Moreover, *écriture féminine* seems to be a healing medium, similar to *écriture thérapeutique*, to facilitate Bugul's reconciliation process with Senegalese tradition, which has positioned the mother figure as guardian of tradition. The success of her reconciliation process with her mother also signifies Bugul's acceptance and understanding of Senegalese tradition. Instead of fully mirroring Western, *écriture féminine* presented by Bugul in DLCR, it is a new interpretation. Not only ideologically but also stylistically, due to her in-between identity and position. She appears to write with critical consideration for the contextual issues faced by herself as a diasporic woman. Therefore, Bugul appears to offer *écriture féminine* as an aesthetic and political practice, integrating her personal experience, maternal memory that heals the complex identity of postcolonial women in Senegal.

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