

**Initiation practices among Ejagham women of Cameroon and patriarchy: a
womanist perspective**

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Dedication

To You “MISHI’ LI” - MR ELI, Oh Atah Ri, TabeNdipArrey

My deeply loved Papa

How I yearned for you to be here to behold and hold this “*cafificate*” with your beaten, broken hands, charred by rubber, mud and mire and suffering to give me life!

And to You:

Pa MUNDAME Bellewang

Beloved father-in-law, Lover of Peace

You gave me the man of my heart!

You Both Should Be Here If Humans Had the Say

But you are with Papa YAHWEH the SUPREME BEING;

The GOD of our Foremothers, Fathers, AND OUR BROKEN SEXUALITY.

You are beholding this, And Possessing a better CROWN

LOVE YOU BOTH

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own original work. All the works of other authors that are used in this thesis have been acknowledged and referenced accordingly.

Signature of student:..... **Date**.....

Signature of Supervisor..... **Date**.....

List of Abbreviations

ABEMO	ANTI - Female Genital Mutilation Action in the Republic of Cameroon
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women
ATR	African Traditional Religion
FC	Female Circumcision
FGC	Female Genital Cutting
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FGS	Female Genital Surgeries
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SWF	Second-wave feminism
UNESCO	United Nations Educational and Scientific Organisation
UNO	United Nations Organisation

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Abstract

The persistence of the 'genital mutilation' problem is still a concern for Africa and the world today. Could this crisis be described as one that was never meant to be? Inspired by second-wave feminist clitoral debates in America, which critiques practising cultures in the Global South, we engaged the Ejagham community of Cameroon to understand the reasons for the persistence of what has been termed "female genital mutilation" in the area. Some of the questions raised are: could the persistence be the result of patriarchy and its suppression of women's sexuality as feminist theorists suggest; or is there more to this practice that gives meaning to Ejagham women's sexual life? Is the cultural worldview of the people a motivation? And if so, is there something about the Nkim culture that needs to be engaged or taken into consideration before the practice is labelled as the destruction of women's sexuality? Are other practices of the Ejagham laced with patriarchal violence towards women's sexual well-being? An exploration of the Ejagham contextual realities then exposes the sexual complexities that are intertwined within in the 'genital mutilation' and orgasm discourses, thus revealing the control factor which still maintains coloniality in the Global South.

Chapter one

1.1. General Introduction

The question of human sexuality still deserves attention today particularly because it continues to expose new concerns and challenges about issues of sex, gender, masculinities, race, culture, and identity. Sex is a human act as well as a right for every human and especially women to enjoy without restrictions (Masenya, 2012b: 126, Machera, 2004: 157ff, Mbuy Beya, 2005: 155). In addition, people deal with sex and sexuality differently according to their contextual realities.

Sex expresses the physical biological features that differentiate the male from female; it is also the act of intercourse. While sexuality expresses the sensual emotions that humans express for each other through corporal interconnectedness and otherwise, theologically, human sexuality is integral to God's covenantal relationship with human beings. God's interaction with humanity stipulates intercourse not only physical but also a spiritual act that connects humanity to one another and to God. In other words, humanity, and humanness are anchored with emotion and affection that are considered sacred even as they express thoughts and feelings that are linked to our sexuality through the sexual act (Reidy, 1978: 623).

Bernadette Mbuy Beya (2005: 155) sees sexuality as the primary determinant of human behavioural reality, specifically women. She states that as a human act, sexuality is both noble and good and remains part of God's plan for humankind. She quotes Gen1:27 and Gen 1:26-28 that show both sexes as God's image created to possess each other. Together they are to fill the earth according to each one's identity and responsibilities of husband and wife in God's plan for humanity (1989: 56, 2005: 172). Therefore, sexuality entails free and pleasurable flesh bonding (Genesis, 2: 24b) and the giving and taking of joyful emotional experiences where all humans have equitable rights (Masenya, 2012b: 127). It is God's intentional act of corporal bonding and interconnectedness for humanity. As an intimate human experience, human sexuality also conveys a sense of power, freedom, and identity.

However, in Machera's (2004: 157), opinion this complex phenomenon that elicits deep physical and emotional feelings of "belongingness" could also unveil issues of power and vulnerability in gendered contexts and relationships; be they cultural, racial or otherwise. Masenya (2016b) also thinks that even though a God-given, sex is one of those 'gifts' which either makes or breaks humanity. In her opinion, women could experience more of such brokenness if societies thrive with the notion that women do not bother about their rights to enjoy sexually fulfilling lives (Masenya, 2012b: 127).

Beya (2005: 156) hails African traditional behaviour and customs for making provision for varied initiatory practices that prioritise human sexuality. However, she notices that these practices are complex in their specific interactions with female sexuality, which makes it sometimes problematic. She hails the woman as the stronger sex because of her natural potential to undertake the sexual act and to nurture its proceeds (Mbuy Beya, 2005: 156). The difficulty a woman, however, faces is that often, as a result of the multiple gender discrepancies that dichotomise her sexual life, she sometimes underrates, underestimates and disclaims her strength (Mbuy Beya, 2005: 171) as a sexual being.

These gender discrepancies that stratify bodies are products of patriarchy. The concepts of masculinity and femininity are designed to promote sexism in patriarchal dispensations. They are vital products of the gendered sexual divide. As early as childhood, boys and girls are groomed to respond to and fulfil concrete sexual roles differently assigned for them in keeping with social expectations. The divide these roles create dichotomises and flaw sexuality from its early roots. They also create secondary bodies (women's) in relation to the ideal bodies (men's) (Beauvoir, 1972: 9, Fransella & Frost, 1977). Doubtless, gender difference is a natural component of the human sexual act (Corbett 2012).

Nonetheless, the basis for human sexual relationships are being challenged constantly by flawed constructs of the sexes and their interrelations through complex patriarchal power dynamics. The living community, through gender stratification and often times biases, frames what it entails to be male or female, and how each sex engages in the sexual (Beauvoir, 1972: 14-15; Machera, 2004: 160). In most societies the world over,

such framings are tilted to afford more privileges to male sexuality (Masenya, 2012b: 127). Mid-20th-century Euro-American society is a clear expression of the gendered divide we have been describing. Some women known as second-wave feminists arose to address this society.

Second-wave feminist theorists (Friedan, 1963; Koedt, 1968; Firestone, 1970; Fiorenza, 1975; Hosken, 1976; Daly, 1978) unveiled to the world a gendered mid-20th century Euro/American society, influenced by patriarchy and general androcentrism in its construction of women's sexuality. A culture influenced by medieval philosophy and Christian patristic thought construed women and their sexuality differently and very often, negatively (Hite, 1976; Daly, 1978; Grosfoguel, 2013; Elliot, 2013). Women's enjoyment of sexual pleasure was portrayed as excess and lecherous. Their sexual urges were considered superfluous, childish or even dangerous. It was assumed that without some kind of restriction or intervention, women could exceed their enjoyment of sex and be uncontrollable (Boyle, 2002: x). This led to differing and often elaborate strategies to constrain women's sexuality.

Moreover, domesticity reflective through home care and nurturing was indisputably feminine; while carrier and breadwinning maintained a masculine outlook (Fransella & Frost, 1977: 13ff, Friedan, 1963). Opting for carriers outside the home was considered jeopardising for a woman's femininity (Buhle, 1998: 173). The two world wars saw a turnover of events. Women were needed in public spheres to assume professional carriers to fit in for men who had gone to the battlefields. For many, this was a welcome opportunity, which also meant fitting carrier schedules into their already charged domestic roles. Incorporating the two roles soon caused women to bear the brunt of societal contempt and agitation, considering that domesticity had assumed a feminine face.

Buhle (1998: 173) states that consensus in American society ruled that women's stability to merge these two roles had been undermined by the competing attractions of expanding opportunities outside the home. Society concluded that the conflicting demands of carrier and marriage were turning American women into a, "bunch of anxieties" (Buhle, 1998: 174). They could choose domesticity and be physically and

emotionally comfortable with home care and nurture, or they could 'jeopardise their femininity' by minimising these 'natural roles' and opt for public carrier jobs; and bear psychological implications (Buhle, 1998: 173).

Sexually, women's challenges intensified by the psychoanalytic evaluations of Sigmund Freud who began his career from 1905 (Gerhard, 2000: 450). A woman and her sexuality were constructed to suit heterosexual reproductive needs. Freud and other psychoanalysts, physicians, and marriage experts who followed him, used the diagnosis of frigidity, defined as the absence of an orgasm during intercourse, to establish the parameters of normal female heterosexuality, and this gave them heroic status in their society (Gerhard, 2000: 450; Buhle, 1998: 168). Freud's psychoanalysis became so important that he became the subject of advice and instruction in children's books, newspapers, radios, and televisions (Buhle, 1998: 168).

Nevertheless, the sexual revolution that erupted in the mid-20th century reversed this trend of women's sexual suppression. This period saw women rising to challenge the sexist constructs of sexuality and seeking sexual liberation. Women generated new accounts of female sexuality by challenging and reworking the terms of American sexual thought. They did so not through an orchestrated and coherent critique but through a range of writings and activism from different and, at times, antithetical perspectives (Gerhard, 2000: 450; Buhle, 1998: 23).

Anne Koedt's classic, *The Myth of Vaginal Orgasm* specifically released in 1968 became one of the first academic articles to challenge androcentric political constructs of sexuality and women's pleasure. Political in the sense that women's achievement of pleasure, through the vagina, had reproductive implications that constrained women to domestic spaces while clearing them off the public sphere for men. Even more, men possessed the exclusive right to enjoy sex just by being men. Thus, vaginal orgasm attained exclusively through heterosexual intercourse became keynote in the clamour of expert ideas about female sexual health and normality (Gerhard, 2000: 449). Anne Koedt challenged this as a well-orchestrated myth designed by a sexist society to shield women from sexual pleasure.

The new generation that arose with Koedt has been dubbed second-wave feminists. Female orgasm attainable solely through the clitoris became their common unifying force as it came to signify the political power of women's sexual self-determination and the symbol of the liberated woman in the American society (Gerhard, 2000: 450). In due time, they make this perspective of women's liberation through clitoral pleasure an inclusive phenomenon for women worldwide in a quest to combat universal patriarchal oppression of all women. Their war against sexism in their context was legitimate, considering that patriarchy's definition of an endorsement of women's sexual suppression took its toll on women's physical, sexual and psychological health and well-being.

However, as Fransella and Frost (1977: 15) state, what goes without saying in one culture may look more than bizarre to another. As such, when second-wave feminists succeeded to achieve sexual freedom for Euro-American women, they immediately set out to translate their knowledge of sexuality and clitoris to other parts of the world. They largely targeted cultures that modify the clitoris in any form. These cultures and their practices were labelled in tandem with sexual knowledge and perspectives from the West (Dellenborg, 2004: 88ff). One of those practices that received wide concern is what feminists have termed 'female genital mutilation' (FGM). Their labelling orchestrated global concern for women and girls in practising cultures, leading to the 'female genital mutilation' problem.

Despite elaborate attempts in addressing, 'female genital mutilation', worldwide by the global community represented by feminist theorists, international bodies, Non-Governmental Organisations, social sensitisations teams and local activism, the practice is still alive and thriving in a number of communities in Africa such as the Bondo tribe in Sierra Leone, the Oworonshoki community in Nigeria, including the Ejagham tribe of Cameroon where I originate. Some African women theorists (Ogunyemi, 1985; Dellenborg, 2004; Arnfred, 2004; Nnaemeka, 2005; Tamale, 2011) are of the opinion that legitimate as feminist claims are, they may have been skewed in their understanding of this mostly cultural practice, thinking and tilting it in line with Western sexual culture. In many cases, as change agents, they have been hesitant to

“wear native spectacles” to help them see more clearly how FGC is entangled with other aspects of culture (Pemunta 2010: 7). They suggest that their interpretation of these largely African cultural practices in light of Western sexual knowledge without a corresponding understanding of motives of the practice became problematic.

On the ground in Ejagham, there is little knowledge and understanding of reasons for the persistence in the practice in the community. Could this be the result of patriarchal domination and suppression of sexuality as suggested by second-wave feminist theorists, or is it that the women in this community have a different perspective of the practice altogether? Could the difficulty be the result of ignoring Ejagham women’s perspective of the practice? Could it be as James Cone (2011: xviii-xix) suggests that there are cultural and religious resources in these women’s experience that could help the international community deal more effectively with what they view as violence on all women? Could refusal to engage the real meanings of cultural and religious practices for Ejagham women have been the reason for the bankruptcy in attempts to combat FGM? (cf Cone 2011: xvi). This study sought to understand these preoccupations theologically from a womanist viewpoint in order to capture the feelings and perspectives of Ejagham women on the practice.

A womanist perspective is a holistic approach to address oppression in humanity, which has a starting point and interlocution with black women and their daily experiences. Such experience of struggle with the forces of oppression, exploitation, and dehumanisation provides womanism with the epistemological lens that opens it to the God of the Bible as the God of liberation for Ejagham women and their culture (Mosala, 1989: 15). As a black liberation paradigm that is rooted in the progressive dimensions of black history and culture (Mosala, 1989: 141). A womanist perspective especially delights in understanding whether *Nkim e Nkim* carries the same connotation of barbarism, subjugation, marginalisation, torture, and mutilation for Ejagham women, as suggested by second-wave feminism, other world bodies and local feminist activists and NGOs such as ABEMO that combat the practice on the ground in Ejagham. It ponders with Walker (2006: 17) that even if *Nkim e Nkim* were to carry such connotations, should not Ejagham women be given the opportunity to explain this in their own words?

Should their experience of Nkim be known solely by the words of other women, namely, feminists?

As a liberation perspective, the place of womanist theology as pursued by the study fits into the framework of what Mosala (1989: 19) describes as “rebel theology”. This is because it deals with oppressed suffering humanity whom it sees as Frantz Fanon’s “wretched of the earth, and not through the uncritical Biblical lens of bourgeois theological interests (1963: 31, 32). As such, it supposes that a cultural critique should not be undertaken in isolation, but alongside factors such as race, class, sex, gender as concepts that influence especially black women’s lives and sexuality. It proposes that viewed with the feminist lens, the practice of Nkim e Nkim has been seen as perpetuating patriarchal violence on African/Ejagham women’s sexuality. Attempting a better understanding from womanist/Ejagham, women’s perspectives could breathe new life force in the struggle against female genital mutilation in Ejagham and Cameroon.

The Ejagham are a Bantu speaking community situated in Manyu division of the South West region of Cameroon. They are culturally minded people blessed with different cultural practices that inform their daily realities. Various sexual initiation practices shape the sexual lives of Ejagham women such as *Mbi ebe*, *Nkekwet* (widowhood) rituals and burial of Ejagham daughters. Some of these practices have been labelled from without as barbaric and patriarchal, while others are laced with patriarchal violence from within, sometimes even upheld by women themselves. This chapter thus introduces the problem of this research by presenting background to the research problem.

1.2. Background of the Problem

The persistence of Nkim e Nkim among the Ejagham, a practice which has been globally described as, ‘female genital mutilation’ remains a concern for the area and the global community. Attempts to address the practice in Ejagham community are replete with controversies. Ejagham is one of the many communities in Africa and Cameroon where the practice thrives. Traces of the origin of the practice largely remain a matter of speculation. Earliest sources such as Talbot (1926) and Ruel (1969) show that the

practice endured long before, and after colonisation in Ejagham land, it is almost a century old. This section seeks to suggest that global and national perspectives applied to address the practice among the Ejagham have for the most part, been skewed, thus leading largely to criticism rather than dialogical and engaging attempts in addressing the practice.

Globally, second-wave feminism's preliminary attempts to address the practice from a Global North perspective could be considered stereotypic. Feminist theorists from the mid-20th century have focused primarily on sex domination, through patriarchy as the primary motivation for the practice in other parts of the world (Oba, 2008: 5). Their knowledge has been explored extensively by stakeholders to address the practice leading to a lack of knowledge of other existing motivations on the ground in Ejagham. Just emerging from a background of patriarchal suppression of the clitoris, some second-wave feminist theorists attributed practices modifying the clitoris in Africa to patriarchy and its suppression of sexual pleasure in women. Many of them who have never been to Africa strongly pushed for this position, basing their knowledge on the stereotyping of gender relations based on Western models (Oba, 2008: 4, 5).

Daly (1978: 160), particularly felt that African women are physically reconstructed and "tightened up" through this practice to offer pleasurable intercourse to their masters while depriving themselves of pleasure. Hosken (1979:247), on the other hand, is believed to have coined the term, "female genital mutilation" or sexual mutilation of females' as an attempt to attract immediate international attention and support to eliminate the practice. Lack of enjoyable sex as an act of patriarchy became the second wave's basic reason for the practice. Their argument is considered skewed on both fronts in that women are primarily responsible for this practice among the Ejagham tribe and sexual deprivation is interrogated in this context (cf Oba, 2008: 5). Their intervention circulated more Western notions of sexuality and the clitoris while local knowledge on the ground was largely shielded.

International bodies such as the United Nations and its related agencies such as Amnesty International and World Health Organisation (WHO) have largely acted in line with feminist perspectives. The urgency is eradication and not contextual

understanding. Amnesty International specifically sees the practice in Africa as crude and brutal (Oba, 2008: 17, 18). Their action provoked the passing of various laws, protocols, and conventions by WHO such as CEDAW, calling the practice a violation of human rights (Nyirikindi, 2007: 128). Dellenborg (2004: 88) reports that the World Health Organisation started receiving 'pressure' in this light from the West to eradicate rather than engage the practice from as early as 1958. It finally took a decision to ban the practice in 1975, largely pressured by the excitement of sexual liberation achieved by Western feminists.

Another area of much sentiment and controversy, which has hardly favoured positive engagement of the practice, is in the area of naming the practice. The various namings could be considered skewed because, they are largely reflective of the points of view of their varied appellants and not the adherents. In addition, they have increased resistance on the ground addressing the practice, on the basis, of labelling. The appellation, "female genital mutilation", has been adopted by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and defined as, "all procedures which involve the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or any other surgery to the female reproductive organ for non-medical reasons" (Oba, 2008: 2, 20). As early as the 1960s and 70s, Mbiti (1979:119-120) and Kenyatta (1965: 130) referred to the practice as "clitoridectomy" and indicated some vital cultural impacts it had upon the traditional communities of Kenya. Obermeyer (1999: 84) explains the controversy in the use of this naming as mostly connected to a popular belief that equates clitoris to male penis and that unless it is shaped it could grow and distort female anatomy. Reducing the clitoris then is a way of differentiating the sexes in some communities.

Njambi (2011: 194) views the practice as one with "many names" each of which represents the same practice but generates varying responses. She explains that often, the term *clitoridectomy* and others such as female genital cutting and circumcision are used as synonyms even though they vary in their meanings and implications in various contexts (Njambi, 2011: 194). Shaw (1995:65) agrees with Njambi; she notes the case of Kenya where the term *clitoridectomy* may have had positive implications in the minds of its adherents. It was used in this context to indicate an operation carried out on the

bodies of women, which became a symbol for the 'pure' or 'true' Kikuyu. Correspondingly, it was used symbolically by Western-educated male leaders to stir their constituents against the colonial state and its churches, and it later became a rallying point for the Mau Mau rebellion (Shaw, 1995:65). In this context then, the term was being utilised positively. Nevertheless, Shaw's usage of clitoridectomy according to Njambo (2011:194) also imposes connotations that are inappropriate with the Gikuyu culture and context.

Other terms used to refer to the practice include *female genital surgeries*, *female genital modifications*, *female circumcision* (Mhordha, 2007: 3) and female genital cutting (Boyle, 2002: 24ff). Lewis (1995: 8, 2009: 203) encourages varied appellations for the practice. She, however, acknowledges that most of the names are value-laden and non-neutral. She raises concerns with the term 'surgeries'. In her opinion, using clinical terms like "surgeries" or "operations" to describe clitoridectomy, excision and infibulation may shield the physical trauma experienced by those affected, and may misleadingly imply the use of antiseptic, anaesthetic surgical techniques intended to correct a disease or disfigurement.

Human rights advocates in the West and, more recently, in Africa, also use FGM to emphasise physical pain caused by the practice and to stress the intentional infliction of harm (Lewis, 1995: 7-8, 2009: 204). Though used by prominent world bodies like WHO and some UN agencies, this appellation has a problematic origin. It was coined by Frank Hosken to portray the barbarity in the practice (Lundquist, 2002: 26). However, modern studies have found shortcomings in the research methods she used to arrive at this appellation; its adoption by the international community is now known to have problematised the practices even more (Obermeyer, 1999: 85).

Lundquist (2002: 23) agrees with the term 'mutilation' because, in her opinion, the practice permanently scars the female genital. The word 'mutilation' implies that the procedure, contrary to traditional justifications, destroys rather than corrects or purifies the vagina. Meyers' (2004: 203) observation on naming is that the choice of terminology for this "multiform phenomenon" can be a matter of "vexed controversy" arising from the struggles of Western advocates to find proper names to describe the practice. She explains that the language employed to describe the practice tends to depend on the

point of view of the user, and insufficient thought is given to practitioners' views or language; which are often misjudged as brutal and unacceptable. Obermeyer (1999: 94) agrees with Meyers about naming and users. In her study, she notices that the appellation FGM shields the meanings that practitioners attach to the practices, thereby objectifying them as though they are a syndrome to be eradicated.

It is important to state that each culture that undertakes the practice traditionally has a specific name for it. The name *female circumcision* has also been used from a Western perspective as a translation for various local appellations for this practice, which is also preoccupying. Early researchers used this term in comparison with male circumcision for easy understanding of local traditional terms. Yet some Western advocates have outrightly rejected the term on grounds that it minimises the horror and brutality of the practice by simply comparing it to male circumcision (Mende, 2018: 48, Njambi, 2004: 282). Daly (1978: 156) especially describes the term as “vague and misleading expression”, shunning those who employ these appellations in preference to, ‘African genital mutilation’ that in her opinion, captures the horror and human atrocity inherent in the practice (Daly, 1978: 157).

Nyirinkindi (2007:128) prefers to describe the practices as human rights violation and gender based violence. Lundquist (cited in Nyirinkindi, 2002: 23) analyses the nuances of the various terms employed such as *mutilation*, *cutting* and *circumcision*. She makes the case that the use of the term *mutilation* is meant to connote the undesirable elements of the procedure on the female genitalia in contrast to male circumcision, which is fundamentally different in intention and outcomes. Similarly, the expression ‘cutting’ is adopted to differentiate the procedure in women from male circumcision in an attempt to infuse neutrality into the discourse. Njambi (2004: 282) contests the above appellations and specifically female circumcision. She bases her arguments on grounds that it denies the various practising cultures, especially those of Africa their unique histories and meanings of their own except the meanings generally drawn from male circumcision or other forms as understood in the West.

Maira Mhordha (2007:3) and Lundquist (2002: 23) see the term *FGM* as the mostly “value-laden and condemnatory term”; it is also problematic because it alienates the people in support of the practice from efforts to address it. Lundquist (2002: 23)

acknowledges the difficulty inherent in coining a proper perfect term that describes the procedures that may not ostracise adherents. In her opinion, it is difficult to ensure that everyone understands and agrees with the rhetoric of naming. Such efforts are yet to be accomplished and with it complete eradication.

Turning attention to the Ejagham community, *Nkim e Nkim* is used as an Ejagham (Njemaya) word to describe this cultural sexual initiation practice. It is the process that introduces a young woman into the growth stage of maturation and womanhood. It is a holistic process, which involves putting a young woman in a fattening room (*Nju Nkim*) for sexual upbringing and character-building activities such as learning, dancing and aesthetics, writing and designing with the *Nsibidi* language. At a particular stage in *Nju Nkim*, the young woman's clitoris is 'fixed' or shaped to look smooth and beautiful as the name *Nkim* signifies. This fixing keeps her beautiful and ready for eventual exposition to the community as *Moninkim* through the *Moninkim* dance. Apparently, there is no local name or word in Ejagham dialect for 'female genital mutilation' or female circumcision and the others.

The word *Nkim e Nkim* signifies a holistic process and not a single act of 'cutting' or 'mutilating'. *Moninkim* refers to the dance as well as its dancer (the woman or young girl who has been fixed). Meanings for the word include the following: 'beautiful woman' (literal), fixed woman, child of a real woman (orik *mo n'enkai!*) because her mother has gone through *Nkim e Nkim* just like herself. *Nkim* is never taken in isolation as fixing the clitoris because this is only a single aspect in a holistic traditional process designed to show case the girl child as the subject of beauty, pride and sexual maturity in her family and society. *Nkim e Nkim* does not prioritise fixing of the clitoris.

Considering this and all the above explanations on naming and the ambiguities that accompany them, we will refrain from referring to the practice as "female genital mutilation" or 'genital cutting', surgeries and others, considering that the negative connotations attached to some of the namings may sometimes not be reflective of the minds of adherents. Therefore, "*Nkim e Nkim*" or "the practice", the "practices" will be used often in the study to identify with the cultural context and language of the Ejagham. Nevertheless, we will adhere to the various terms used by authors when directly discussing their works or quoting them. This is to acknowledge with Carla Obermeyer

the difficulty inherent in finding the appropriate name(s) for the practice or sticking on a particular contextual naming (Obermeyer, 2005: 445, 446).

At the national level, views of the practice are also controversial throughout the country. Pressure from the international community caused Cameroon to become a signatory to several international conventions aimed at promoting the rights of women and girls against 'harmful' practices such as genital mutilation. Some of them include, the 1981 Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Pemunta, 2012; Oba, 2008: 23, Tetchiada, 2006). In 1997, Cameroon joined the Inter-African Committee on Traditional practices affecting the Health of Women and Children created in 1992. All these conventions put the welfare of women and girls at the fore and condemned all 'harmful' practices that pose a threat to them with emphasis on genital mutilation. National attempts to address the practice led to its banning and henceforth police surveillance from 2011. The move has only shifted the practice to intractability on the ground, as posited here by an Ejagham mother:

And you see like what they are saying about this *Nkim*, it is not finished. Am telling you that it is not finished in the sense that you do it but you do not tell openly that you are doing it. You do it quietly because I cannot see how my own child will be like this (indicates hand between the leg) ... They are doing it but quietly. If I do not take you to police to go and report you, would the policeman just leave his office and come and catch you? Except it becomes a problem. No way, there is just no way! (Interviewed 06/03/2017)

Pemunta (2010: 7) reports from another respondent who had given the same response way back in 2006 when asked the same question by an anthropology student researching the practice in the area as follow:

Interviewer: Don't you think that if a road network were to pass here, the police can easily arrest you?

Madam Ndom: Arrest us? For our tradition? Do you mean to tell me that those police officers do not have their own tradition? In so far as our tradition is concerned, there is no police. Even if there is a main road here, we will still circumcise our daughters. If you circumcise your child at home, how will the police know? Do they announce it over the radio, over television? You have seen my female children, how do you know whether or not, they have already been circumcised. Unless they are smeared with camwood dye or calabar chalk, you cannot know (Egbe Ngon, Interview by Pemunta of 31/07/06, Babi).

While international perceptions of the practice remain controversial, on the ground, the practice is persisting unperturbed.

Moreover, lack of knowledge of why *Nkim e Nkim* and other sexual initiation practices are undertaken and their consequences on women's sexual life is manifested in the way Ejagham women are perceived by the Cameroonian society. Ejagham women are perceived as promiscuous and commonly labelled with slangs associated with sexual looseness or promiscuous behaviour including 'free givers,' 'easy going,' 'sharers,' *ashawo*, *akpara*, *awalawala* and *nyangi*. An Ejagham woman is an indication of what Masenya describes (2012b: 128) as a deviant member of society. This is because sexually overt, expressive or passionate women are never celebrated by patriarchal societies (Masenya, 2012b: 128). Apparently, the pejorative labels are associated with their involvement in the prostitution plague of the mid-20th century. Whether their promiscuous behaviour is related to the removal of their clitoris through 'genital mutilation' as some have suggested (Peminta, 2012) or economic reasons, or patriarchal suppression of sexuality, has not yet been established. As such, there is still such a gap of lack of proper knowledge to establish actual motivations of the practices, which this study hopes to fill.

Advocates along the years, specifically second-wave feminist theorists, charge practising cultures such as Ejagham with patriarchal control of women's sexuality and destruction of women's sexual urges for the benefit of the patriarch. Would encounter with Ejagham women vindicate this reason as a primary motivation of the practice among the Ejagham? Alternatively, would it validate women's veneration of prestigious cultural practices in the region such "*Moninkim*" dance club and the *Ngbokondem* cult? Could these aged old traditional women's associations have more influence on the

personhood of women, identity and agency in Ejagham land to keep the practice thriving? Are such motivations convincing enough to activists within the subcontinent and the West? These ponder are attempts at understanding if there is more to the persistence of *Nkim e Nkim* in Ejagham than meets the eye.

1.3. Problem statement

The study is rooted in the assertion that the practice of *Nkim e Nkim* was a non-issue worldwide until the rediscovery of the clitoris by second-wave feminism, a phenomenon that equated clitoral pleasure with patriarchy and sought clitoral orgasm as eventual liberation of women. The persistence of the practice in Ejagham community, however, posits a contrary view concerning sexual fulfilment and relevance of the clitoris. With this background, the study grapples with the following research questions:

- Could the persistence of *Nkim e Nkim* in Ejagham community be the result of its relevance in definitions of womanhood in Ejagham community as opposed to feminist definitions?
- Are women without clitorises not sexually satisfied? And if not, are they not women?
- Is the removal of a clitoris destruction of female sexuality?

The research examines the clitoral debates and the genital mutilation discourses that have taken centre stage since the 1960s, to show how these have influenced Ejagham sexual initiation practices with implications to women's sexual and cultural identity.

1.4. Hypothesis

'Genital mutilation' might have been a non-problematic event had second-wave feminists not universalised the clitoris as the sole organ for sexual pleasure and women's liberation. While a clitoris is an important female organ, it may not be from the Ejagham women's perspective a defining symbol for womanhood or femininity. Gender is not a product of biological sex, but a social and cultural construction. The study attempts to show that through the initiation practices of *Ngbokondem* and *Moninkim, Mbi ebe*, Widowhood rites and burial of Ejagham daughters, elements of womanhood and

femininity are constructed and discernible in Ejagham community, although the same practices are laced in patriarchal violence. The liberation of an Ejagham woman, therefore, could be in her cultural dispensation and not in a particular sexual organ namely, the clitoris.

1.5. Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to examine clitoral and genital mutilation debates and their implications on Ejagham womanhood. Furthermore, it sought to portray through women initiation practices that patriarchy oppresses and limits Ejagham women. Specifically, in the practice of *Nkim e Nkim* (*Moninkim*), patriarchy (SWF) impinges on Ejagham women's sexuality. With this, the study pursued the following objectives:

1. To investigate if clitoral orgasm is the sole criterion for women's sexual pleasure according to the feminist definition.
2. To examine how the removal of a clitoris through *Nkim e Nkim* in Ejagham community in Cameroon is central to defining womanhood.
3. To investigate how patriarchy infringes on women's sexuality in *Nkim e Nkim* and other sexual initiation practices in Ejagham community.

1.6. Methodology

1.6.1. Womanism

Womanism is chosen here as a methodology to demarcate the frame within which this thesis is written. Womanist perspective becomes the vital "principle of hermeneutics" for the study (Oduyoye, 2001: 12). Womanism is a liberation perspective that originated out of the non-acquiescence of Black African American women to be defined according to the cultural lens of white supremacist American society. As a social change perspective, it has interlocution black women/women of colour, all oppressed black people and their daily experiences of struggling with the forces of dehumanisation (Phillips, 2006: xx). Contrary to second-wave Western feminists' theorising, womanism is not an individualised, self-absorbed, me-centred, reductionist perspective to put it in Boesak's (upcoming) words. Rather, it seeks universality of God's liberating power, saving grace, and compassionate justice for all people (Boesak upcoming). Its

beginning point is marginalised, black women; as such, it can comfortably be situated within the ranks of Black theology of liberation that takes the historical, cultural and ideological challenges black people seriously (Mosala, 1989: 6).

Emphasis on black womanhood as a starting point is not accidental. Black women and women of colour have peculiar experiences of suffering and exploitation because of varied historical challenges they have been exposed to along centuries of race politics from 1492. It takes into consideration the fact that this sector of humanity has been forced through the intermingling of centuries of race, culture, class and gender oppression to occupy the margins of the societies in which they live. Just as Allan Boesak (upcoming) notes, living in the margins signifies a life of complete powerlessness. They have occupied the bottom of every social hierarchy created by man in the last four centuries that have characterised the modern era (Walker Color 2006: 3, Phillip 2006: xxxix). Dehumanising poverty and lack of basic economic resources have constantly been black women's, subjecting them to suffering.

Progenitors of the concept include Alice Walker, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi and Clenora Hudson-Weems. They arrived at their perspectives of the concept almost simultaneously in different parts of the world. Phillip (2006: xxiv) outlines five overarching characteristics of womanism which are anti-oppression, vernacular, non-ideological, communitarian and spiritual. These signify that womanism challenges oppression in all forms such as sexist, racist class, culture and others. In addition, it deals with the masses, the low-class, the "common", and the "grass root" sectors of humanity; (Walker, 2006: 7, Phillip, 2006: xix-xx). It discourages rigid lines of demarcation while pursuing the well-being of the entire oppressed community and not just isolated factions or individuals. Moreover, as liberation paradigm, womanism acknowledges openly that there is a spiritual, metaphysical universe and that the entirety of human activities is directly influenced by it.

1.6.2. Womanism and patriarchy

Womanists acknowledge that patriarchal oppression is a universal problem. It is the definition of patriarchy, however, that sets womanism apart. Womanists believe that while all women experience patriarchy in their different contexts, black women's

experience of patriarchy is plagued by multiple complexities. Ogunyemi (2006: 24) summarises the black woman's experience in the following words:

...as blacks they, with their men, are victims of white patriarchal culture; as women, they are victimized by black men; and as black women, they are also victimized on racial, sexual, and class grounds by white men.

She specifically goes beyond feminist ideas of patriarchy, which stress solely sexism and includes race as well. While women generally suffer from patriarchy, black women suffer the phenomenon triply. Womanists believe that any genuine look at patriarchy should not only end at the level of cultural male domination but also take into consideration race, sex and class (Ogunyemi, 2006: 21). This dimension has not been exploited in discourses of Nkim within Ejagham, which is shielding the aspects of dehumanisation resulting from racism and poverty hidden within the discourses (Ogunyemi, 2006: 24, 25).

1.6.3. Womanism and sexuality

Sexuality is complex within feminism but nuanced and fluid within womanism. This phenomenon is one of those areas where womanism differs widely with feminism as well as with itself. The tact exercised in dealing with this concept makes it a fitting perspective for the study. First, it believes women in most parts of the world are sexually oppressed. However, unlike feminism, it does not isolate sexual oppression from other forms such as race, class, culture. Moreover, womanism is not stringent or prescriptive in sexual issues. Western feminism endorses diverse and sometimes free expressions and complex forms of sexuality, while strictly identifying heterosexuality as oppressive to women's sexual liberty (cf Koedt, 1968; Hite, 1976; Gerhard, 2000). Womanism is nuanced in its approach based on the stance of its early progenitors (Phillip, 2006: xxxvii). One aspect, however, stands out; womanists, though varied towards sexuality, do encourage dialogue and discourage all forms of oppression and dehumanisation based on sexual imposition or discrimination (Phillip, 2006: xxxvii).

1.6.4. Womanism and liberation

Two crucial aspects of culture stand out as challenges to Ejagham context as at the moment. First, the place of the Bible/Gospel message within the “genital mutilation” discourses. To put it clearly, what is Ejagham women’s place within the Bible/Christian community as adherents of Nkim culture and other African traditional practices? In addition, Ejagham women’s paradoxical dealings with Nkim culture in a context of impoverishment and empire. As far as one could observe with the first aspect, that women could simultaneously position themselves as Christians and traditionalists, sometimes amidst strain ridicule.

While most adherents to Nkim and Ndem are church members, they are still considered unbelievers based on adhering to ‘paganic’ practices. They are sometimes suspended from church rites in strict Pentecostal church settings where they are told to recant before belonging. In mainline churches, they are allowed but considered double-minded and uncommitted. Those that have completely abandoned Nkim and Ndem are considered real believers. This creates tension between culture and appropriation of the gospel messages. In line with this, Tamale (2014: 152) has noted that though Christianity was implanted through the process of proselytisation based on subverting, overthrowing and demonising African traditional religions, which shaped African sexuality, African traditional religions and cultural histories have remained deeply ingrained within its people exerting considerable influence in their psyche. In her opinion, the negligence to initiate proper dialogue between ATR and Christianity even today still causes many African peoples to mingle the two in contradiction and sometimes hypocritical ways that she describes as, “suspended between a dim African past and a distorted, Westernised existence” (Tamale, 2014: 152).

Ela (1994: 136) sees this situation as a major crisis for all African society, one which arises from the fact that African people cannot obtain appropriate responses to their life problems in the churches as they are today, churches that overlook a cultural worldview. The question that arises here is: Should Ejagham women abandon their initiation practices before they can fully receive the gospel message of Jesus Christ? A practical example here is Ma Eyere Ntui of Otu village who is Moninkim, Manyi¹ and

¹ Manyi is another form of seer that has come up in place of the Ndem spirit, wherein women

Christian. She handles all three statuses to keep up with the needs of both Christians and traditionalists that seek her services. However, she is branded as a demon possessed.

Boesak (2017: 82) has implored theological paradigms engaging in the liberation of the oppressed in whatever setting to develop “a theology, ethics and hermeneutics of liberation and inclusion” that oppose dehumanisation of peoples in all forms, whether they manifest as an empire, religious or personal structures of domination. In his opinion, this becomes possible only when liberation hermeneutics look at prevailing global realities not through the eyes of the powerful and privileged, but through the situation of oppressed people. Mosala (1989: 3) agrees with Boesak, and specifically so if such hermeneutic goes back to engage the historical and cultural foundations of the people while debunking all bourgeois epistemologies that are used to enslave them.

Mosala (1989: 3) believes that the difficulty inherent in the liberation of oppressed peoples, especially those from the Global South, is directly linked to this form of controversial gulf created between the Bible/Christian message and the people’s historically cultural foundations, which are integral to their appropriation of the Christian message. He sees Western civilisation, culture, theology, idealist epistemology, as features that have influenced the presentation of the Bible in a political manner that keeps the oppressed (Mosala, 1989: 5, 6). With a liberation perspective, womanism applies basic tenets of liberation such as history, culture, ethnicity as a hermeneutical lens (Masenya & Ramantswana, 2012: 598). This to peer into the practical realities of black/Ejagham women who have been relegated to the margins of society (Williams, 2006: 120) It becomes in Goba’s (1988: 11) description, a theology of praxis informed by the gospel and black cultural experience engaged in the process of liberation against internal and external forces of oppression.

claim to use the Bible to pray and communicate with ancestral spirits of the land. She insists that her power is from God even though many people think they are demonic. Landman (2012: 1-6) also discusses elaborately on this controversial positioning of women as also a South African phenomenon. She shows how women are traumatised as the shuttle between different forms of healing such spiritual healing, Christian sangomas (specifically women) and their traditional cultures to meet the challenges of their daily lives.

The next vital aspect is that of using Nkim culture double-mindedly in the context of biting poverty and empire. During the field study, we observed that women projected Nkim culture differently when funders are concerned and later returned to proper culture after their departure. These schemes were meant to be brief financial relief moments in a context of suffering and impoverishment. In return, women reproduced a picture of Nkim culture that was needed by the funders concerned. These schemes nevertheless, fortify women's image as barbaric beings, problematising even further the Nkim discourses. A practical example is a visit of the Canadian Ambassador's representative to Eyumojock Ejagham from the 26th-28th January 2016, to put a final end to "female genital mutilation" in the area.

Ela (2001: xvi) noted that whenever and wherever situations of suffering and deprivation present themselves in the living community, the "liberation of the oppressed" who are made in the image of God still stands as the central Christian message and the quest of every theologian. Citing the Kirdi community of Northern Cameroon, he exposes a dehumanising situation wherein the people are bound to drop their cultural millet for a capitalist economic production of cotton, which yields yearly minimal income but leaves the natives with no ancestral base to sustain their hungry stomachs and deprived souls. Could one not consider Ejagham women as oppressed if they must first abandon their vital practices before they can become members of Christ's body or contradict them in order to survive capitalist impoverishment?

1.7. Delimitations

The study is a PhD thesis undertaken as socio-theological ethics from a womanist perspective. Womanism and other liberation perspectives (black/African) are the tenets that guide the study. Writing about women, even in an enclosed setting as Ejagham, is an arduous task. It poses a problem in that one cannot speak for all women, not even all Ejagham women. As such, the generic title "Ejagham women" has been used to refer to those that have undergone Nkim e Nkim and all those who may not have undergone it, but willingly accepted to contribute to the study.

In addition, one was supposed to be neutral towards women, neither for nor against the practices. However, with the prevailing realities on the ground, neutrality came to mean

many things; sometimes even standing side by the side fixed women advocating for and activist women advocating against the practice. This duality in action became a vital strategy to allow informants and respondents on both sides of the divide to participate freely without feelings of judgement.

Our presumed “insider” status gave us confidence that we are dealing with our own people and as such, should have a smooth ride through. Painfully, we came to the realisation that we were outsider/insider. By virtue of birth and nurture outside the cultural realm, our lack of certain cultural insight, and studying in “Nteke b’ Okara” (white man country) we were we constantly referred as ‘okara ba bha’ (the white man has come). Similarly, we are not fixed and so we could hardly completely fit into the world of *Moninkims*. We cannot speak for them or try to represent them or women as a whole. We are gradually led to this consciousness of who we are at present in the eyes of *Moninkims*- more outsider than insider to Ejagham cultural reality.

The sheer site of meeting many different fixed women aside from one’s own mother brought mixed feelings of joy, pride and fear; feelings that accompany the researcher even today. Such emotions arose as women openly and genuinely shared their Nkim statuses, the magnitudes of which differ widely. While some reported mild and less mild fixings, others stated that they are flat. Thus, in one context, one could encounter different levels of fixings, which make it difficult to lump all together under one description ‘genital mutilation’. Respondents, however, used Nkim e Nkim without any cultural differentiation.

Another delimitation in the study is the dependence on Western sources (Talbot, 1912, 1926; Ruel, 1969; Brain, 1979; Ardener, 1996; Röschenhaler, 2006) to tell African/Ejagham stories. Most of the earliest sources of the practices are British colonial researchers sponsored by imperial funding. As a result, they wrote the practices with particular epistemological perspective and power dynamics. Cone (1984: 70-71) cautions against using foreign ideas, literary sources and conceptual frameworks to work out African or black liberation because according to him, “Not everything is what it appears to be”. He thinks that often, hidden beneath Western discourses and ways of relating ideas of equality and freedom is the slavery that leads to death. Moreover, Cone

(1984:71) and Goba (1988: 9) see that black thought may not be able to create a genuine future for its people if it relies continuously on Europe for intellectual support. Cone (1984:71) specifically thinks that, since most of the problems that occasioned need for liberation were created by Europe, it is naïve for black people to expect that any form of genuine salvation could come from there.

Koyana (2001:64) discusses Sindiwe Magona who expresses this as the fear that became her primary motivation for writing her personal stories as an average person in African society. Her fear is that 'the meaning, measure, and balance' in black people's lives would be lost if their history was mostly recorded by white researchers, who would never experience that 'reality'. In her opinion, Western researchers with their power and privilege can never completely grasp the worldview and experiences of the researched. Only those who experience oppression can truly tell the experience the way it is (Koyana, 2001:64).

Kobo (2016) admonishes oppressed black people against expecting outsiders to champion their liberation cause. She considers true liberation as a cause that "must be self-implicating and self-authored", one wherein the oppressed set the pace and even dictate the terms for their own liberation (Kobo, 2016). The study minimises this important limitation by pursuing Maluleke's (1996: 42) caution to academic researchers who study grassroots communities. He stresses that data gathered from research contexts cannot interpret themselves. Therefore, the tools one uses to interpret data collected is what makes the study meaningful.

1.8. Research Gap

The study is an attempt to understand the persistence of 'genital mutilation in Africa' through womanist engagement of second wave Western feminists' notions of sexuality and pleasure dependent solely on a particular part of the body, namely, the clitoris; and the contrarily held view that women's sexuality is destroyed by 'genital mutilation'. Womanism has been pursued on the basis that it is not Western and prescriptive in its intellectual commitments but dialogical. In this light, it engages feminist stance on patriarchal control of women's sexuality as the primary motive for 'FGM', engaging other

understandings of the practice that view clitoris fixing in light of sexual arousal, women's empowerment, beauty, identity and liberation.

1.9. Outline of chapters

The entire research covers seven chapters, beginning with a general introduction and ending with a concluding chapter that proposes the womanist way forward against patriarchy and for women's practices and sexuality.

Chapter one: Introductory information pertaining to the structure and general methodology of the study. This chapter contains precisely the introductory phase of the research, a part of the proposal, which reflects the plan of the entire work.

Chapter two: The problem of patriarchy: The chapter presents the 1960s second wave Western feminist clitoral debates as the climax of agitations against women's sexual suppression from a sexist Euro-American context. The subsequent translation of ideas of the clitoris as sole organ for women's sexual pleasure and liberation to other contexts by second-wave feminist theorists is viewed as the continuous perpetration of colonial matrix of power, which is patriarchal.

Chapter three: Ejagham women's cultural initiation practices and patriarchy: The chapter is a concise presentation of the Ejagham woman through empirical data collected from the field. Here, contrary to feminist notions of the destruction of sexual pleasure through the removal of the clitoris, she is portrayed as sexual being specifically through the initiation practice of Nkim e Nkim. The chapter is sustained with graphical representations of women's experiential perspectives on sexual pleasure after Nkim e Nkim.

Chapter four: It is a continuation of data analysis pertaining to initiation practices. The chapter poses as a self-critical stance about blackness as it engages other women's cultural practices. In other words, it seeks to argue that although African practices are complicated, and influenced by external views and lenses, there is also the violence of patriarchy within the cultural realm of Africa. The analysis has been carried out from data collected in the form of personal and group interviews, qualitative questionnaires, videos, tapes, audio recordings, written texts, notebook, news items and journals. Here

personal views about the practices, sexuality, womanhood and identity are expressed among the Ejagham.

Chapter five: Patriarchy and human sexuality. The chapter posits as a womanist engagement of second-wave feminists' concepts of sexuality and pleasure. It presents various feminist arguments put forth for the clitoris as the sole organ of sexual pleasure and liberation; and womanist counter-contestations. Both perspectives engage Ejagham women's stance on the clitoris. Interpretations of womanhood, gender, sexuality, femininity, liberation, sexual pleasure and identity are engaged in this chapter.

Chapter six: Implications of womanism for Ejagham and the global context are discussed. The chapter takes womanism forward as a perspective that informs the Ejagham and global contexts in light of the challenges posed by multiform patriarchy.

Chapter seven: Summary of the study. The chapter is a general conclusion of all that has been stated and major findings of the study. It proposes sites for further research as well as possible recommendations for the future.

1.10. Conclusion

The study is an attempt to understand the persistence 'female genital mutilation' problem among the Ejagham of Cameroon. It engages second-wave feminist notions of sexuality, which proposes a single view and usage of women's clitorises; thereby redefining Global South cultures according to Western cultural and epistemological realities. Viewed in light of ongoing coloniality and cultural imperialism, second-wave feminism's stance poses an equally patriarchal threat to African women. Nonetheless, the study does not romanticise patriarchy, which is also a Global South and specifically the Ejagham phenomenon. Some practices that are meant to uplift, empower and liberate the Ejagham woman are laced with patriarchal violence. This then creates obstacles for women's sexuality portrayed through initiation practices *Ngbokondem*, *Nkekwet* (widowhood) rites, *Mbi ebe* (Marriage money) and funeral for Ejagham daughters. Patriarchy galvanises even women into effectuating major roles to sustain its schemes, thereby creating a situation of triple patriarchy. Womanist perspective is

pursued as a liberation paradigm to propose possible solutions to the liberation of Ejagham women in a context of patriarchy in Ejagham land.

The next chapter examines the problem of patriarchy as a subjugating phenomenon, which impinges on both Western and Global South/Ejagham women's sexuality. The struggle against patriarchy in the American context is considered the direct offshoot of the orgasm and genital mutilation debates, respectively. The quest to address sexual oppression in the American context shifted attention to practising cultures in the Global South unveiling the 'genital mutilation' problem as patriarchal practice'

Chapter two

2. Patriarchy and Second wave feminism

2.1. Introduction

Patriarchy and its control of women's sexuality and gender injustice in the American context led to elaborate suppression of women's sexuality through the shielding of the clitoris for centuries. The shielding of the clitoris was meant to curb presumed excesses in female sexuality in order to create the Victorian type of woman- passive, domesticated and submissive. A new generation of women called second-wave feminists arose to challenge this sexism. They soon re-established the clitoris as women's organ of sexual pleasure, debunking old theories of vaginal orgasm that endorsed heterosexuality as sole means of women's freedom.

However, the clitoral sensation caused the second wave to turn their attention to other parts of the world where clitorises were dealt with differently. They soon translated Western notions of sexuality and the clitoris to these contexts, stating that all women need a clitoris in order to enjoy sex. In so doing, they labelled as barbaric cultural practices that dealt differently with the clitoris in the Global South, such as Nkim e Nkim in Ejagham land. Their move is seen to have a direct influence on the genital mutilation problem in Africa. The persistence of the practice in Ejagham land is an indication that some women in the Global South do question Western standards and notions of sexuality, womanhood, femininity and identity.

The chapter discusses how the rediscovery of the clitoris by second-wave feminists in the West has implications for the clitoris of women in the Global South, specifically Ejagham women. It is an engagement of Western and feminist sexual categories that have been used to judge the Ejagham woman and her practices, specifically Nkim e Nkim. It discusses the clitoral debates as an act of patriarchy as far as knowledge from one context is translated to another in light of 'otherness and subjugation'. In so doing, it engages feminists who have pronounced themselves clearly on the subject matter of 'female genital mutilation' in the Global South. It, therefore, revisits the feminist clitoral orgasm discourses to show how it is the springboard for the problematisation of 'female

genital mutilation' in Africa. The chapter argues that in their quest to address patriarchy in the American context, SWF perpetrated patriarchy on Global South cultures through its translation of clitoral understanding from North to South.

The chapter is approached in three major subdivides: first, as a departure point, it engages the problem of patriarchy and suppression of bodies as a global phenomenon. It then narrows down to the rise of second-wave feminism the clitoral orgasm discourses as a direct response to American contextual realities of patriarchy. Last, the chapter critiques second-wave feminism on the basis of the geopolitics of knowledge wherein it discusses second-wave's translation of knowledge of the clitoris to the Global South as the incepts of the genital mutilation problem. This act is judged as patriarchy driven by colonial matrices of power, which reinforces coloniality in Africa.

2.2. The problem of patriarchy

Patriarchy is an androcentric institution that operates consciously or unconsciously on subjugation based on sex, race, culture, and epistemology. It is a holistic systemic evaluation of oppression based on the dominance of the male sexually, politically, culturally or religiously. At its worst, patriarchy involves violence, bigotry, manipulation, poverty, brokenness and death. As an ancient superpower structure, it operates in most spheres and settings in the world. Sources are replete with male ruled and male-headed societies where women are, expected to or made to submit. There have, however, been some exceptions wherein women have headed societies in matriarchal settings but not with the domineering tendencies that often characterises male power.

The very etymology of the concept carries gloom-ridden connotations in that patriarchy is known to suppress the weak and powerless in the world and specifically women. Along centuries, it has assumed fluid dimensions, ranging from father to male, race, and sex-rule. In itself, patriarchy could pose no concerns had the concept not been utilised manipulatively along the centuries to validate violence, subjugation and objectifying of peoples and bodies.

Even with such evaluation, some schools of thought have endorsed patriarchy as the only capable human-led institution that is bound to maintain peaceful order in the world

to ensure governable societies. Farnham and Lundberg (1947) particularly pushed this view in the American context during the post-world war II years. Throughout history, the male has been posited as the norm in, and determiner of society; this concept was especially strengthened by colonialism in most African societies (Masenya, 2016). Social settings in most contexts in Cameroon and Ejagham land specifically hold this view. It is common knowledge to hear both sexes agree that some measure of “masculine power” (Stander, 2016: 42) is necessary at home, state and church to ensure that the living community is in check. What has been unsuccessfully established, however, is the extent of such power, and why only the male gender should enjoy such it. Patriarchy pervades all spheres of human society - the religious, political, cultural and economic.

Religious spaces are known to foster submissive adhesion to patriarchy. Obianga (1979: 146-147) shows how notions of masculinity and power in Africa, especially in protestant church spaces in Cameroon that have evolved along the years advocating and also endorsing the idea that women’s submission is Biblical. This has made worship and familial life difficult for many women who are expected to submit to an expression of Christian devotion and allegiance to ‘God’. Ela (2001: v, vi) shows how the blending of religion and empire has been used for many decades to drain the minority Christian Kirdi population of Northern Cameroon, especially its women of all humanity, subjecting them to acute exploitation from both Muslims and the state ruling elites.

In Southern Africa, Nadar (2009: 19) cites prominent religious figures such as Angus Buchan and his Mighty Men’s Conference² who advocate submission to male authority as a command from God and pre-requisite for the stability of the family. She addresses this phenomenon as Palatable Patriarchy and shows how religion is capable of

² Sunnel Stander (2016: 15) describes a similar movement for women, the Worthy Women’s Movement founded by Grether Wiid also advocating return to additional feminine roles of submission and nurture so that women can enable their men become husband, father and master to restore the family as God created it.

promoting flawed notions of masculinity to perpetuate sexist and racist oppression and violence on women's bodies even in the 21 century (Nadar, 2009: 20). Politically, patriarchy thrives as a global male power structure that controls the world, and women's bodies and sexuality have been a special target. Grosfoguel (2013: 73) employs Enrique Dussel's philosophical lens to show that Christopher Columbus (Grosfoguel, 2013: 79) inaugurated this power in the West since 1492 with the discovery of America.

Columbus and his context were themselves influenced by the Cartesian philosophy that designed a form of capitalist "global racial/patriarchal power structure" through the projection of white men and epistemological framework from five Christian European nations as the true human and knowledge system (Grosfoguel, 2013:86). They unleashed a series of genocides on other races such as Africans, indigenous peoples, Muslims, Jews and women who were categorised as sub or non-humans to subjugate and/or extinct them (Grosfoguel, 2013: 84). While black African women and their men suffered death and sexual assaults in the middle passage as slaves from this capitalist patriarchal power structure, an unholy alliance of medicine, church and state in Euro-American set out to reduce European women to frantic sexless beings from as early as the seventeenth century (Daly, 1978: 223ff). Women who attempted to resist these established male ruled systems and institutions based on special knowledge, insight and leadership skills were branded witches and sexual perverts and burnt alive for many decades (Daly, 1978: 223). Grosfoguel (2013:85, 86) sees this almost a century of witch burnings as a threat exerted by these women's autonomy upon the reigning ecclesial and state androcracies of the day.

Laqueur (1989) also exposes the political agenda within Euro-American sexuality towards the end of the Enlightenment period. He blames changes that occurred in medical history in the West from the end of the 18th century (1797) as a major problem that affected human sexual history, specifically women's sexuality and its manipulation by patriarchy. In his opinion, it is from this period that the politicisation of the sexes became crucial and with it questions about the essence of women's sex and pleasure (Laqueur, 1989: 4). Prior to this period, sexes were complementary; male and female sexuality brought together in the heat of pleasure infused life into both bodies to

produce human species. Gendered meanings were not attached to bodies as such. The male structure was used as the basic structure on behalf of the human body to study the sexes, while the female body was interpreted in the light of the male (Laqueur, 1989:2). Nevertheless, studies of the day did not concern themselves with physical and anatomical differences in male and female

However, Laqueur (1989: 2) notes that this complementarity of body theories of the previous centuries came under devastating attack from the 19th century. Male and female bodies became hierarchically conceptualised, and genders became distinctive on the basis of biology (Laqueur, 1989: 2). In Laqueur's opinion, political meanings attached to bodies and especially women's bodies is what politicised the course of human sexual history to the suppression of, especially women's sexuality (Laqueur, 1989: 4).

Isabel Phiri (2007:12) understands patriarchy as a cultural phenomenon structured under father-rule, where all power and authority rests in the hands of the male head of the family. In her evaluation, the majority of African societies and almost all African churches are structured based on patriarchal patterns of the hierarchy of sex. Martina Wood (2013: 14) explains the term patriarchy as derived from the Greek words *patēr* (πατήρ, father) and *archē* (αρχή, rule). Literally translated, they mean 'the rule of the father in a male-dominated family'.

Wood (2013: 14) thinks that patriarchy thrives only because of its subjugating intent, and in order for it to do so, it uses the father-head syndrome as a social and ideological construct to impose norm for the social context. She explains that though commonly understood as a concept for female oppression, patriarchy has been used over time in various ways. It has been discussed as ideology, as a symbolic male principle, as the literal power of the father, as a method of controlling women's sexuality and fertility, and as an institutional structure of male domination. To summarise Wood, this is a universal system of social structures and practices, in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women (Wood, 2013: 2).

She suggests that patriarchy is not a simple institution to be dealt with casually; rather, it is a phenomenon that has developed gradually, but elaborately over a period of nearly

2500 years at different times and places. She cites the civilisations of China, Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, Mesoamerica, Africa, Europe and Malaysia as founded on patriarchal foundations. With such lengthy period of formation, she thinks that the patriarchal concept be given considerable attention because it is engraved deep into the mental constructs of peoples and societies and has remained invisible and consistent in its manifestations.

In the Ejagham context, we examine patriarchy in three dimensions pertaining to the life and practices of Ejagham women, which all have bearing on her sexuality. First, patriarchy is dealt with as Western epistemological imposition upon local culture and bodies through second wave feminist notions of the clitoris and its implications on local sexuality. Additionally, it is a system of home-based male domination, which privileges the male on issues of sexuality. Last, as a system that consciously privileges a few women, enabling them to subjugate their kind. The study terms this phenomenon *triple patriarchy*. The entire study explains how these three manifestations of patriarchy juxtapose themselves within the context to influence the Ejagham women's sexual experiences. This chapter concentrates on the very first patriarchal form.

2.3. The American context of patriarchy

American patriarchal oppression manifested in multiple forms and magnitudes. However, its domestication of women and repression of women's sexuality on the basis of the difference from the early 20th century are seen to be vital in motivating the rise of second-wave feminism, and its influence in the clitoral orgasm discourses and genital mutilation problem in the Global South. This women's political movement with a goal to achieve women's liberation, especially sexual liberation, assumed universal dimension when it touched women's sexuality in Africa as their focus moved from Western women's clitorises in America to the genitals of Global South women, birthing the genital mutilation problem.

2.3.1. American patriarchal domestication of women

According to Fransella et al (1977: 16), American pre-capitalist society experienced some form of equality between the sexes wherein labour and wage earning was non-gendered. The entire household was often involved in the production of labour and

raising of capital. Roles were usually segregated by sex and age, but, women, and children all took part in the production of goods for exchange and for sale, as well as immediate consumption by family (Fransella et al, 1977: 16). However, they see the introduction of industrial capitalism as the main cause of the stratification and subsequent distortion of American familial setup. The man who now worked outside the home became the 'breadwinner' while woman the dependent 'homemaker' who is "non-productive, economically dependent, became isolated from the society" (Fransella et al, 1977: 17).

The introduction of other races such as black slaves from Africa into American life reshaped familial setup to upgrade women's plight. However, white American women came to the realisation that though equalised on the basis of race and sometimes education, they still experienced forms of subjugation that strengthened their confinement to the domestic sphere. Friedan (1963: 22, 33) summarises the situation of white middle-class American women during this period as 'helpless and miserable housewives'. A woman's passion, pursuit, and goal were centred round man and all that makes him happy as a man (Friedan, 1963: 35).

Almost all young women growing up in American society from the 1950s were taught that they were different from men and that a woman can really be happy only when she marries a man, gives birth to his children and allows him to dominate her (Davis, 1999: 50). Young girls from as early as ten were trained on how to trap men, while women made careers out of having babies (Friedan, 1963: 16, 17). Women sat at home all day waiting for husbands to come back home and then make them come alive (Friedan, 1963: 29). Those women who aspired for better out of life were termed "unnatural and unfeminine" (Davis, 1999: 50). Even intellectuals and experts in society urged women to stay at home with their children and nurture them so that they do not grow up to become disturbed and deprived for lack of motherly care (Fransella et al, 1977: 18).

Freud's (1963: 193) Oedipus complex especially held that one of the reasons a girl child turned against mother-love to father-love is that "the mother gave the child too little milk and did not suckle her long enough". Such theories were used to pin women with nurture and rearing as the most meaningful aspect of their lives. Even women's college

education proved useless because it landed at the service of housewifery (Frances, 2010: 3). Fiorenza (1975: 606) summarises women's position in the mid-20th century American society as follows:

...man's helpmate, to cook and work for him without being paid, to bear and rear his children, and to guarantee him psychological and sexual satisfaction. Woman's place is in the home, whereas man's place is in the world earning money, running the state, schools, and churches.

Friedan (1963: 15, cf Fransella et al, 1977: 20) explains those 'feminine' roles as follows:

...made the beds shopped for groceries, matched slipcover materials, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, Chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night... buy a dishwasher, bake bread, ...dress, look and act more feminine and make marriage more exciting...

Fiorenza (1975: 606) concluded that the magnitude of women's domestication, subjugation and sexist stereotyping in American society is comparable only to racism and its oppression of black people in all spheres of societal life. Friedan particularly wanted to know if this was all that society holds for women. She concluded that the mother/housewife institution, as designed by American society, was dehumanising (Boucher, 2003). With such domestication naturally came repression of women's sexuality.

2.3.2. Repression of women's sexuality and shielding of the clitoris

Apart from the domestication of a woman, American patriarchal context oppressed women through elaborate repression of women's sexuality. Fear and suspicion of women's sexuality particularly led to the shielding of the clitoris, which stood as the symbol of women's sexual pleasure in American society. Laqueur (1990) again uses the works of Galen of Pergamum and Aristotle to engage the political arguments that were advanced for the repression of women's sexuality and the clitoris as an organ of sex, lust or delightful copulation after the 18th century. As already explained above, Laqueur believed that Euro-American conceptions of sex had not always repressed women

sexually. Hierarchical differentiations in male and female erogenous interactions only surfaced from the end of the 18th century, and this largely by the androcentric culture of the day (Laqueur, 1990: 63, 64).

Using Galen, he shows that prior to 18th century, male and female genitals were viewed as similar organs; the female genitalia was only an inverted form of the male penis and the male genital a protruded version of the female genitalia. All of them generated the heat (orgasm) that was crucial in enabling the reproduction of the human species (Laqueur, 1990: 25, 26). In Galen's opinion, among the two, woman produced the lesser heat and this enabled her uterus to remain inverted to provide a suitable temperature for gestation (Laqueur, 1990: 29). Aristotle, on the other hand, differentiated the sexes as male and female but again bonded them together as inseparable in terms of their natural sexual roles, which were meant to complement and not oppose one another (Laqueur, 1990: 29).

Medical arguments at the end of the 18th century Western societies largely ignored the aspect of female pleasure and treated sensations from women's clitoris as a disease (Gruenbaum, 2001: 9). As a result, women have been subjected to a range of negative characterisations (e.g., polluting, dangerous temptresses and their bodies have been accused of being "inherently different from men's [bodies] in ways that made them both defective and dangerous" (Pemunta 2010:6). Even more, women have been systematically overdressed and undressed, locked indoors and exposed to public humiliation, burnt at the stake and feet bounded to placate men's fears about the hyperbolised, often mythologised, dangers their bodies are purported to pose (Pemunta 2010:6). As a result, female sexuality was approached with caution, and sometimes feared as a "hotbed of sin" (Zagatta, 2011: 3). Theories on female sexuality were largely construed by a male scholarship through physicians, anatomists, psychoanalysts, philosophers and religious authorities. These largely androcentric institutions worried, debated and disagreed about the excesses of women's sexuality especially in relation to sexual pleasure and the clitoris (Gerhard, 2000: 451-52). They continuously tied heterosexual reproduction and the married stead together and projected penile-vaginal

penetration as the ideal form of coitus. Any sexual contact outside this description was considered deviant and a threat to human well-being (Roderiguez, 2014: 4).

The first American anatomist to tie the clitoris as the sexual organ was George Kobelt in 1884, and he associated the organ to sexual arousal and pleasure (Roderiguez, 2000: 5). During this period, major experts in human anatomy such as Richard von Krafft-Ebbing, C. Bigelow, William Goodell and others produced anatomy studies that agreed that sexual intercourse was healthy for women. However, they disagreed regarding the role of the clitoris in women's sexual health, or whether women needed it at all to reap the full rewards of sex (Gerhard, 2000: 452). Anxiety about the clitoris and its potential to unsettle heterosexual hierarchies also permeated medical representations of the organ (Gerhard, 2000: 452). Physicians were constantly faced with the dilemma of respecting its role in women's stimulation for healthy sexuality and its role as a cause and symptom in cases of medically and socially perceived unhealthy sexual expressions (Roderiguez, 2014: 3)

In the field of psychology, psychoanalysis and sexuality, the period between the 1920s and 1960s could be seen as the period when women experienced the highest regulation in sexuality and the clitoris. Gerhard (2001:5, 2000: 451) describes this period as one wherein varied stringent measures were employed to restrict women sexually. The period birthed the Victorian model woman - the passive, compassionate, sexually submissive, heterosexual and reproductive woman; the true social model desired by society. Sigmund Freud and his team of psychoanalysts such as Helene Deutsch, Eduard Hitschmann, and Edmund Bergler laboured profusely to maintain this model of woman.

Their theories subjected women to stringent sexual conditions from child to adulthood, putting them under constant medical surveillance for the slightest symptoms of abnormality, which eventually attracted psychoanalytic evaluations and eventual treatment. Conditions such as penis envy, homosexuality and masturbation (Freud, 1963: 189, 191) were phallic conditions that were unavoidable for a woman if she attaches sexual meanings to her clitoris. True womanhood only occurred when women

surrendered or transferred these 'perverse' emotional ties and upheld maleness as a feminine duty (Freud, 1963: 190).

Freud had discovered the sexual potential of the clitoris, which he equated with the male penis in sexual intensity (Freud, 1963: 189, 197). Nevertheless, this knowledge did not become available to society in a manner that could enable empowerment for women. Through his theories of Oedipus and castration complexes, he succeeded in his endorsed women's sexual dependence even more (Freud, 1963: 184, 188). Freud (1963: 184, 2010: 278) appropriated the Oedipus complex or *Oedipus Rex* from the Greek myth written by Sophocles in a drama about King Oedipus.

Sophocles (Greene & Lattimore, 1954: 52, 53, cf Freud, 2010: 278-79) presents Oedipus as one predicted by oracle from the gods to kill his father and marry his mother. As a grown-up, he learns of the oracle and runs away from his hometown Corinth to Thebes to avoid this, but then on the way, he engages in a bitter feud with an old man whom he kills. He proceeds to solve a puzzle and relieves the land from an evil beast (Sphinx) threatening the land. He is rewarded with the king's widow Jocasta as a wife who bears him children (Freud, 2010: 279). The old man he kills is his father, king Laius, and the woman he marries is the old man's wife, his mother Jocasta. He ends up fulfilling the horrible oracle at Thebes (Freud, 2010: 279; Greene & Lattimore, 1954: 63).

Freud (2010: 278-279) uses the Oedipus myth to make a psychoanalytic evaluation of child behaviour in his concept the *Oedipus complex*, where he reasons that certain behaviour in children and their parents are beyond human control and destined by the divine against human will (Freud, 2010: 279). He thinks that just like Oedipus, all of us in our youthful stages of growth do "direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father" (Freud, 2010: 280). He believed that though we do our best to suppress or hide this impulse or instinct, it remains and thrives within us to affect our later lives (Freud, 2010: 280).

It is however, Freud's use of the concept of female sexuality,³ that informs the study. Here, Freud nails all women's hope for clitoral pleasure. He argues that at the early stages in her growth process, an adolescent girl transfers her leading genital zone of pleasure from the clitoris to the vagina and in so doing, silences the clitoris forever. He states the following:

We have long realized that in women the development of sexuality is complicated by the task of renouncing that genital zone which was already the principal one, namely, the clitoris in favour of a new zone- the vagina (Freud, 1963: 184).

He explained the necessity of this transfer in that, in the case where it failed to take place, the girl risked suffering from such psychological problems as penis envy, hostility towards men, hysteria and neurotic discontent when she becomes a grown-up woman (Freud, 1963: 184)

Freud (1963: 188, 189) further reduced the clitoris and exalted the penis in his castration complex where he explained that upon sight of a female genital, a boy undergoes a transformation process which develops into "super-ego". Whereas for the girl, her castration causes her inferiority, which leads her either into "turning her back on sexuality altogether" or "becomes dissatisfied with her clitoris and gives up her phallic activity and therewith her sexuality in general..." This second option may lead her into penis envy creating the "masculinity complex"; that is the yearning to own a penis or be a man (Freud, 1963: 189). This haunts her all her life and may further lead to homosexuality (Freud, 1963: 189). Briefly, Freud's psychoanalysis identified but then dismissed clitoral pleasure as immature in preference of the vagina. "Vaginal orgasm and its shadow, vaginal frigidity, became two central components of Freudian femininity" (Gerhard, 2000: 453).

³The book we have here of Freud is a collection of his essays on sexuality edited and introduced by Philip Rieff and published in 1963. Philip distinguishes each of the essays by the year they were written. The particular study on female sexuality was written in 1931.

His predecessors, especially Helene Deutsch laboured profusely to maintain this image of a sexually passive heterosexual reproductive woman. His theories produced the most devastating effects against women's sexual image until contested and disapproved by Shere Hite's, *The Hite's Report on Female Sexuality*. Though not a medically nor academically grounded study, Hite's work gained following among feminists because it revealed contrary perspectives of female sexuality to the works of Freud and other sexologists. Her study unveiled views of women's sexuality and the clitoris that became used as bait by radical feminists to seek clitoral liberation in America and to later intervene in 'genital mutilation' discourses in Africa. It is important to note that through all these took place within the American context, Freudian assumptions closely guided, in addition to being guided by biological as well as Euro Christian assumptions about female sexuality. Ironically, while women were associated with unbridled sexuality, there has always been an apparent male/female double standard (Pemunta 2010: 6). This double standard in female/male sexuality is what second-wave Western feminism rose to address. These assumptions were also translated to Africa and Global South in the wake of the second wave feminism and its struggles with a clitoral orgasm.

2.4. The rise of second-wave feminism and the clitoral orgasm discourses

2.4.1. The rise of the second wave

Second wave feminism arose as a direct response to the prevailing domestic, sexual and political restrictions of American women. In the 1950s and 60s, social movements inspired mass protest groups in the United States for civil rights; second-wave feminism has its direct inception from these protests movements. The movements saw students, women's organisations, black civil right groups and far left, all bringing the general situation of inequality in America to the attention of the world (Johansson, 2015: 67). Women of all races and class joined these protests movements and put their lives at risk of imprisonment, injury and death, especially during the leads of Martin Luther King Junior and Rosa Parks (German, 2015: 25)

Even though women took active political roles in the rights movements, they were often relegated to 'female' roles such as typing and making refreshments during important events (German, 2015: 26). Those who tried to question the appalling sexism

experienced during the protest movements were dismissed or vilified (Johansson, 2015: 67). With political consciousness cutting across the spectrum of American social life, women began to question their place within the protest movements and concluded that they were cutouts (German, 2015: 26). They then came to the painful realisation that the rights movements did not propagate women's agenda.

Middle-class white women were the first to realise that though the Civil Rights Movements condemned racial inequality, they ignored the equally high level of sexism and male superiority that prevailed in the society. Cone (1984: 122) shows that varied black and white feminist movements strongly developed from the second half of the nineteenth century. However, radical feminists "from the white community" came out forcefully during the 60s and 70s against women against oppression, using terms such as "patriarchy", "misogyny" and "sexism" to combat women's plight (Cone, 1984:127). These women came to see sexuality as the primary source of their oppression and liberation (Gerhard, 2001:3). Their efforts to question these restrictions and their resistance against them rallied the group of women that became known as the second-wave feminist movement.

The movement forced the world to understand and focus attention on women's plight and issues concerning women's sexuality. Tribble (1989: 280) refers to the second wave feminism as a prophetic movement. Their basic tenet opposed domination and subordination in all forms, especially that of male over female, but or master over slave and humankind over the earth (Tribble, 1989: 280). Theologically, they castigated male rule over female as sin, stating that such hierarchy violates the integrity of creatures made God's image. They insisted that in denying women full humanity, men's humanity was distorted as well as the suffering of both sexes (Tribble, 1989: 280).

From 1963, many women and some men began to examine the *status quo*, pronouncing judgements on the basic ills against women and called for repentance for the entire nation (Tribble, 1989: 280). Women invaded academia and ecclesia with publications on women's plight. Archer and Douglas (2005: 85) reveal that financially strapped universities seeking tuition revenues even increased funding for women's studies because they attracted high enrolments. This, in turn, meant that departments

hired more women. Faculty and commercial presses competed to wring profits from this rich market in feminist publications (Archer et al, 2005: 85).

However, their motive was politically and profit-driven, it helped publicise women's studies, thereby causing the rapid spread of feminist ideas. Betty Friedan used this opportunity to voice the voices of countless women with her book *The Feminine Mystique*. This book, for the first time, openly brought the question of male and female to the attention of the American public (Trible, 1989: 279-280). Friedan's book was immediately followed by Anne Koedt's article *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm*. Then followed Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millet, Frances Beal, Elizabeth Firenza and Mary Daly's *The Church and the Second Sex* in 1968, which added a religious voice to the struggle (Trible, 1989: 280). All these contributions exposed the androcentric nature of sexual oppression in both scholarship and scripture (Trible, 1989: 284-285), and perceived traditional gender and social problems created by such roles on women (DH, 2017).

2.4.2. A re-visitation of the clitoral orgasm discourse

In this section, we engage some second-wave feminist theorists, and how they put to task sexual theories of the day to disprove the old myths of vaginal as against clitoral orgasm. We show that the work of these women debunked old sexual concepts in America but then laid the foundation for the introduction of new sexual theories in the Global South that set in motion the genital mutilation controversy.

Anne Koedt was one of the first feminist theorists to confront sexual oppression headlong in the American context. She came against phallic penetration and vaginal orgasm in a most spectacular way by ridiculing masculinity and its shielding of the clitoris. She opined that masculinity was a product to compensate male inferiority and the clitoris was the utmost threat to masculinity in several ways. First, it is an organ, that depicts, "feminine masculinity" thereby giving the woman equal and even upper sexual edge above the man. Men such as Freud had discovered this truth and shielded it for centuries through chauvinistic theories (Koedt, 1968: 4). In addition, women's reliance on the clitoris for sexual arousal was bound to render men expendable who find vaginal

penetration comfortable and desirable. Since the penis must penetrate to thrive, to maintain penetration, the clitoris had been shielded (Koedt, 1968: 4).

Koedt also exposed the fact that lesbian sexuality is anathema to many men because it prioritises the clitoris and extinguishes penile penetration. This makes many women independent as sexual beings separate from men; thereby relinquishing male control over the female body. Last, clitoral orgasm poses a dangerous threat to the heterosexual institution, which is the origin of all women's oppression (Koedt, 1968: 4). With clitoral pleasure, this institution was bound to crumble, as women will seek each other women sexually. Moreover, in her opinion, there is nothing that the oppressor fears more like the unity of the oppressed (Koedt, 1968: 5).

Koedt was the first to come to the important discovery that as opposed to the penis and the vagina, which possesses reproductive essences, the clitoris is an organ in the female anatomy designed solely for sexual pleasure with no reproductive functions attached. Walker (1992: 178) associated this discovery as a reason for men's jealousy of the organ, because with the clitoris, women do not require men to achieve orgasm. Hence, the organ does not need phallic aid to express its sensual potential; it was by its own essence sexually saturated. Koedt revealed to women the damage that Freud and his peers have done to their minds and bodies for several decades:

The worst damage was done to the mental health of women...who either suffered silently with self-blame or flocked to psychiatrists looking desperately for the hidden and terrible repression that had kept from them their vaginal destiny... Looking for a cure to a problem that has none can lead a woman on an endless path of self-hatred and insecurity. For she is told by her analyst that not even in her one role allowed in a male society-the role of a woman is she successful (Koedt, 1968: 2; Koedt et al, 1973: 201, 204).

Friedan (1963: 19) lamented how women began their sessions with psychiatrists by being apologetic and declaring how ashamed they were of themselves and how they must be hopelessly neurotic. Koedt responded that women were forced to suffer endless guilt and self-blame for not being able to attain a vaginal orgasm that was never really in the first place (Gerhard, 2000: 460).

As a strategy to further discredit Freud, Koedt exalted the works of Kinsey (1953) and Masters and Johnson (1966). These sexologists had identified the clitoris as a concrete erogenous zone for women and equally equated the organ with the male penis. They also challenged Freud's theories on frigidity and diminishing sexuality in women (Gerhard, 2000: 461). While Freud blamed women for these, these sexologists declared frigidity a psychological fabrication. They confirmed that women and men were equal sexually and that with the clitoris, women were even capable of multiple orgasms in a row (Gerhard, 2000: 464). Koedt hailed their works, stating that these sexologists based their studies on facts from women's bodies rather than ideas about proper womanhood as in Freud (Gerhard, 2000:460). She stated that:

...women have been defined sexually in terms of what pleased men. Our own biology has not been properly analyzed. Instead, we are fed the myth of the liberated woman and her vaginal orgasm- an orgasm which in fact does not exist (Koedt, 1968: 1, 2008: 61).

She argued that Freud and co.'s sexual expertise and exposition of human sexuality had been "poisoned by male chauvinism" and urged women to use their new knowledge of clitoris to reconstruct new knowledge of women's sexuality and in turn exploit their sexuality to maximum (Gerhard, 2000: 460).

She accused men of hypocrisy, assuming that they knew about the importance of clitoral stimulation for so long but preferred to shield knowledge leaving women "aroused and unsatisfied". This in her opinion was a vile male power ploy against women (Koedt, 1968: 2). Moreover, Koedt questioned vaginal theorists such as Farnham and Lundberg (1947). She stated that they either lacked knowledge of their own anatomy or were accomplices of a manipulative patriarchal medical system. It was either they were faking vaginal orgasm or confused (Koedt, 1968: 3, 2008:61).

She outright urged women to debunk the phallus. Her call yielded fruits as it caused feminists to take up arms in the clitoral vs vaginal orgasm debate (Elliot, 2012:19). They wrote articles, organised matches, undertook strikes to demand the reduction of state, expert, and capitalist control over women's bodies. They asked that women be given

individual and collective say in issues pertaining to their anatomy and social conditions (Murphy, 2012: 2). They also put to practice their new knowledge of clitoris to battle reproduction by “varied low tech, do it yourself, and local interventions” (Murphy, 2012:2).

We bring in feminist sexologist Shere Hite into the discourse, not to show that she had any direct interaction with ‘genital mutilation’ or the Global South, but that the report she made on female sexuality reawakened the importance of the clitoris as the seat of orgasm in the popular settings of American life. Her work targeted women on the margins of society as she did a detailed survey of what Koedt had earlier written. Hite used women’s proper experiences to clarify previous notions of the clitoris and stimulation (Hite, 1976: 315), vagina/clitoral orgasm (Hite, 1976: 127, 183), masturbation (Hite, 1976: 58) and the general sexual act. She showed that contrary to previous theories, these conditions were natural for women to enjoy and engage in with or without phallic assistance. Her study became a concrete immediate weapon at the hands of feminists, which they used to contest old theories.

Hite (1976: 56, 2008:62-63) outrightly proposed masturbation in that a woman having sex with herself as opposed to phallic penetration in heterosexual intercourse could be the means for women’s attainment of their much-deserved liberation. Masturbation was simple - touching, exploring and enjoying one’s body either alone or with others; women were caring for themselves (Hite, 1976: 59). She urged women to take time to explore and enjoy themselves and not use reproductive sex to shield the importance of masturbation (1976: 57). She hailed the fact that women could orgasm easily and pleasurably whenever they want, many women several times in a row. This for her showed beyond doubt that women knew how to enjoy their bodies and no one needs to tell them how to do it (Hite, 2008:63).

The call of these women inaugurated an era of sexual freedom in America. Gage (Murphy, 2012: 81) rallied women to engage in vaginal self-examination wherein individually or in groups, they manipulated their clitorises. The results, as she states, were exciting moments of “...shock, that extreme rise of consciousness...The women who did self-exam, one second were not able to open their legs and the next, there it

was and no big deal. I mean it was that fast. It was extremely exciting” (Murphy, 2012: 81). Lesbianism and other sexual orientations became open, while women engaged in an era of sexual frenzy yearned to bury the vaginal orgasm myth forever.

2.5. The legitimacy of second-wave feminist cause

Considering that sexual pleasure, in particular, is not a solely male prerogative, second-wave feminist theorists should be hailed for their struggle to take the female body away from constructs that limited bodies to phallic heterosexual relationships, depriving them of all other autonomies (Elliott, 2015). Evaluated within the American context, the second wave clitoral discourses left a concrete impact, opening up new possibilities for women. The debates rapidly changed American sexual thought for women’s benefit. Feminists, gays and young people could express their liberties using their sexuality ‘as they wished’, especially not restricted to the confines of heterosexual marriage and intercourse. This feminist method to address a prevailing contextual concern could be lauded.

2.6. Feminist application of orgasm debates in relation to ‘genital mutilation’ in Africa

Here we make a critique of some feminist theorists who made themselves clear on the genital mutilation problem because of the orgasm debates. Feminists’ call for the preservation of the clitoris began to ring louder than the American context, reaching areas where its removal or modification was culturally imperative. Here we will engage Anne Koedt, Mary Daly and Fran Hosken as primary motivators for the problematisation of genital mutilation Africa. Their interventions began as a quest for sisterhood through projecting feminists’ clitoral plight as the same with those of women in other parts of the world. Their motive was to salvage these women who were presumed to be subjected to the patriarchal discipline of bodies and sexuality (Hota, 2017: 199). These second wave theorists identified the practice as another tactic of subordination of women in cultures that practice it and labelled the practices as ‘mutilation’ (Hota, 2017: 198). Their move created paradoxes, controversies and contradictions that are known today to hamper progress in addressing the practice in the Global South.

Koedt (1968: 5) is again one of the first radical feminists to directly channel Western minds towards women's genitals in other parts of the world. In her 1968 article, she stated the following:

One reason given why men cut the clitoris off women in the Mid Eastern countries is that it will keep the women from straying. Removing the sexual organ capable of orgasm, it must be assumed that her sexual drive will diminish. Considering how much men look upon their women as property, we should begin to consider a great deal more why it is not in the men's interest to have women totally free sexually. The double standard...is set up to keep the women bound as property, while men are free to have affairs as they wish (Koedt, 1968: 5).

At the very early stages of second-wave struggles, for Koedt who resides in America to report on clitoridectomy with no specific knowledge of the practice could have fuelled some misconception and overreaction. Her description of the practice as “done by men” and “to keep women bound by diminishing their sexual drive” could have awoken painful emotions among second-wave feminists, considering that they were still struggling with male domination and clitoral shielding. With the advancement in research, Koedt's reasons are well contested today (Obermeyer, 1999; Dellenborg, 2004; Oba, 2008).

Koedt manifested two early lapses: first, she spoke as an authority from an outsider perspective, though at the time she had made no in-depth study of the *modus operandi* of practitioners. Second, she wrongly thought men were the ‘cutters’ in these cultures. In so doing, she paved way for other feminists to castigate the practice within Western patriarchal epistemic patterns and constructs of the clitoris.

Fran Hosken wrote several reports on FGM in Africa and other parts of the world in her *The Hosken Reports*, using her *Women's International Network News* forum to publicise them. Gruenbaum (2001: 22) describes her work as “... the bombshell that generated much of the popular awareness and the seriousness and widespread of the practice.” In her opinion, the practice was genital ‘sexual’ mutilation of women, considering the harm it does to their sexuality (Hosken, 1981a: 368). She declared the practice an ‘epidemic’ in the Global South that should be treated as a public health concern in Africa (Hosken, 1978: 150, 155). Sudan was highest plagued of this epidemic with almost all girls infibulated by the age 12 (Hosken, 1978: 152). However, an epidemic, the actual

statistics were rare to establish because of the secrecy surrounding the practice. This is the result of “ignorance and confusion” on knowledge of “reproduction and sex in Africa” among illiterate women and medical personnel (Hosken, 1981: 429).

Hosken also accused patriarchy in that men were the ones who enforced the practice on women for their sexual benefit. In this light, she writes:

It is men who determine what becomes a custom and finally a tradition in each society. The objective, which is quite openly stated by African... men, is to deprive women's sexual pleasure and to keep women under male control. ... women are told that they are unable to control their sexuality; therefore, they must be excised... (Hosken, 1993: 32).

She employs the same parameters used by second wave theorists on American clitoral struggles by insisting that removal of the clitoris was to deprive women of sexual pleasure.

In her 1981 report on the violation of Women's Rights, Hosken reports on 'genital mutilation' of women and girls in Africa, Asia and the Middle East and called for intervention (1981: 4, 8, 1981b: 416). Basing her evidence on literature review and field reports, she lamented that the practice is increasing and even getting to public institutions such as hospitals as lucrative practice for medical doctors (1981b: 416, 417). From the reports she gathered on the ground, Hosken particularly questioned the operations of traditional African circumcisers who 'have no knowledge of anatomy' but are performing the practice in dark huts occupied with struggling children, bad lighting system and no proper surgical tools (1981b: 416). She concluded that in such a situation, only harm will be done to young girls' sexuality and to women's health. Her appeals to the international community yielded fruits this time as it caused 'genital mutilation' to become a huge problem that required immediate action.

Hosken then called for a 'global sisterhood' with the goal to free Global South women from the claws of 'patriarchal' oppression. Her efforts to the expose horrors of the practice led her to coin term 'female genital mutilation', which she saw as more appropriate than female circumcision did to describe the barbarity of the practice (Njambi, 2004: 285). She henceforth vied for the opposition to the practice and eventual

eradication (Wade 2009: 1). Her strong quest to draw international attention and support against the practice led her to use terms like “most barbaric form of patriarchy”, “horror,” “brutal,” “cruel,” “torture,” and “inhuman” to describe the practice (Wade, 2009: 1). Adherents of the practice were characterised as ‘cruel’, ‘ignorant’ and ‘helpless’ (Wade, 2009: 1).

Among all her reports, the 1980 version is the most radical where she describes the practice as “Genital and Sexual Mutilation of Females.” Her radical passion for safe ‘sexually mutilated women’ led her to coin the words “eradication now!” (Gruenbaum, 2001: 22). Through this, she appealed for international intervention from aid missions, church groups and international organisations while calling for ‘forceful external interference’ (Gruenbaum, 2001: 22). Hosken’s radical analyses invited a broader audience into the ‘genital mutilation’ debates, and she eventually rallied a generation of radical feminists who used her reports to resist the practice as an extreme form of violence against women’s sexuality (Gruenbaum, 2001: 22).

Obermeyer (1999: 85) sees a problem with feminists’ usage of Hosken’s reports as a standard source of information to problematise the practices of ‘genital mutilation’. Basing her evaluations from concise reviews, Obermeyer comes to the conclusion that the evidence provided by Hosken to attract international support against these practices are of poor quality and their estimations are plagued with methodological shortcomings (Obermeyer, 1999: 85). For this reason, she refused to include Hosken’s reports in her concise review of the practices from 1966-1996 (Obermeyer, 1999: 85).

Daly’s (1978) analyses of FGM could be described as the most radical. In her work *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, she links ‘genital mutilation’ to patriarchal control of women’s sexuality in Africa (1978: 153-177). The title of her chapter “African genital mutilation...” is telling. This male control and even hatred of the clitoris are because of three reasons. First, the clitoris does not serve male purposes; second, it has no connection with reproduction. Third, and most importantly, it is an organ designed strictly for female pleasure (1978: 159). All three reasons which are highly rooted in Western conceptions of sexuality are portrayed by Daly as a threat to African patriarchy, hence the androcratic brutality on African women’s clitorises. She

also uses hard language to describe the practice in Africa such as sado-ritual, slicing, infibulation, maiming, genocide, atrocity, syndrome, castration and others (Daly, 1978: 163, 164, 165, 167). These barbaric African men have ensured the continuation of this sadistic ritual by mentally castrating and forcing their women to “silence under oath” and are using them to castrate their kind (Daly, 1978: 158, 168).

In the ‘spirit of universal sisterhood’ Daly lashes at all in international organisations working in Africa such as WHO, UN and its agencies, UNICEF, NGOs and missionary bodies in Africa for their complicity with African men to remain silent to the ravages of the practice on women (Daly, 1978: 157, cf Hosken, 1979: 368, 1981: 877). She urged her Western sisters to “become sisters to these women of Africa- naming the crimes against them and speaking on their behalf” (Daly, 1978: 172). Her pleas paid off as both UN agencies, WHO, local and international bodies, and ‘Western sisters’ rushed to Africa to offer ‘help’ that they thought Africa women needed.

African feminist theorists (Kalev, 2004: 345-46; Oduyoye, 1995; Oba, 2008; Nnaemeka, 2011) have put to task Western feminists’ condemnation of these cultural practices, which they judged from the perspective of Western social and sexual norms. They argue that the second-wave did not put enough time and effort to understand the norms of the respective cultures where these practices operate but quickly undertook to evaluate their moral implications. The second-wave presumed that all women needed their genitals intact in order to enjoy sexual intercourse. Women without clitorises were portrayed as ‘mutilated’ and ruined; they could not enjoy pleasurable sex because they do not have a clitoris, the ‘symbol of good sex’. In so doing, they set out on a rescue mission to the Global South.

We, therefore, argue that this could be the dragnet of the second-wave and Western intervention on the clitoris. They acted based on superior sexual epistemology and control as they translated Western concepts of bodies and sexuality to the Global South, specifically Africa. Their action could be judged in tandem with the colonial matrix of power, which is patriarchal.

2.7. Second-wave's intervention as the perpetration of colonial matrix of power, which is patriarchal

Hudson-Weem (2006: 40) has described Western feminism's effort to address gender problems in the African context in America and the rest of the world as another form of patriarchal power that seeks to be on top. This is because they seek power and equality based on sexual politics with white male power system but do not seek change for the system altogether to benefit other oppressed people by the same system. As long as they are integrated because of equality, the system can go ahead as it is. Hudson-Weem notes that feminism does not analyse completely patriarchal structures as wrong. As such, they seek power and not change (2006: 40). What Hudson-Weem seeks to notify here, is that it is impossible to address a people's concerns when the people are not part of one's agenda for change (Hudson-Weem, 2006: 42). That is, it is impossible to address sexual issues in a world system where race and class inequality are not prioritised as genesis to these issues (Hudson-Weem, 2006: 41).

Using her argument, one could suggest here that second-wave interventions in the genitals mutilation problem in the Global South came with similar patriarchal intent, the will to impose from a privileged position; and not to engage the problem based on existing knowledge and realities on the ground. This could be viewed in the light of the perpetration of the colonial matrix of power. Briefly put, colonial power matrix or colonial power matrix is a consistent but shielded paternalistic system of governing humanity based on the control that was set in place through Western power dynamics from the 15th century. This control is fortified by the notion that any concept, be it theology, culture, or sexuality, epistemology is authentic only if it emerges from Caucasian men from only five nations in Europe (Goba, 1988: 2; Grosfoguel, 2013; Mignolo, 2007:157).

When feminist intervention over 'genital mutilation' in the Global South just after the clitoral debates are looked at from the perspectives of such global power imbalance and control, their interventions could become a bit clearer in the context of ongoing global power asymmetry that creates opportunities for Western control of the genital mutilation discourses.

2.7.1. The operation of colonial power matrix

Ndluvu-Gatsheni (2012: 1, 2013: 11, 12) and Mignolo (2009: 2-3) explain the colonial matrix of power as a set of technologies of subjectivation that consists of control. As a racial system of social classification that orchestrated invented concepts such as Occidentalism, created the conditions for Orientalism, it distinguished the South of Europe from its centre (Hegel) and on that long history, remapped the world as first, second and third during the Cold War. While the first world was the *loci* of thought (epistemology, civilisation and development), the Third World was characterised by non-thought (people who are under-developed economically and mentally) who needed westernisation (Mignolo, 2009: 3). Mignolo (2009: 3) calls this situation “colonial wound”, through which the first world has maintained its hold on the other sectors of humanity through utopic ideas of modernity, ideals of humanity and promises of economic growth and financial prosperity (Mignolo 2009:3).

This separation of the globe into two unequal hemispheres has since put the entire Northern hemisphere in a privileged position. This hegemonic position gives it a monopoly and the ability to set the agenda, formulate and also decide the priority of which concerns it wants to tackle in the international political arena (Dellenborg, 2004: 90). Ndluvu-Gatsheni (2012: 2) thinks that along the years, this asymmetry has put Africa in a position of subjectivity wherein she has been consistently dealt with in the light of inferiority constituted by a series of deficits and a catalogue of lacks. This puts the West constantly on the pretext of developing Africa with “global imperial designs articulated in terms of ‘civilising mission’ and ‘westernisation’ of the non-Western world”.

In this position, the Global North decides what issues become problematised and what solutions are needed to solve the problems it creates (Dellenborg, 2004: 90). This endorses a situation of continuous Europe/Euro-American dominance and subjugation made possible by this colonial power structure. It also sustains coloniality based on the superiority of race, culture and epistemology that enable the Global North to maintain its grip on Global South and other parts of the globe.

Mignolo (2007: 156) explains that a colonial matrix of power operates in four interrelated domains, namely; control of economy (land appropriation, exploitation of labour, control of natural resources); control of authority (institution, army); control of gender and sexuality (family, education) and control of subjectivity and knowledge (epistemology, education and formation of subjectivity). Whenever the colonial matrix of power becomes operative in any land, this eventually means routing out or distorting every other existent form of governing (Mignolo, 2007: 157).

Mabhena (2017) explains how this pattern operates with the first control (economy) which in his opinion seems to be consistent with most settings of domination. The explorer who emerges as a visitor gradually evolves into coloniser. He invades and appropriates the land and then he conquers the people and turns them into free labourers. He then gives them currency as a means of exchange for goods and services and causes deliberate scarcity in the currency. Invisible forces called economic and market forces are invented to justify the scarcity of money, goods and services. This then renders the subjects forever economically dependent on the coloniser. This pattern becomes consistent with the colonial enterprise as operative in all settings of subjugation (Mabhena, 2017).

The second is *control of authority*, which includes the maintenance of empire (institution) through military superiority and monopolisation of the means of violence. Western hegemony and imperialism have been made possible through invasion, captivity, wars, bloodshed and genocide. When the trapped people begin to come to the knowledge of their exploitation and express discontent, they are accused of resisting modernity and then brutally subjected to bullets (Ndluvu-Gatsheni, 2012: 6). Brute force becomes the pattern of colonising African natives and distorting their previously existent social organisations to implant imperialistic development (Ndluvu-Gatsheni, 2012: 6). Where Western interest is threatened even in the modern era, it is possible to detect forms of violence.

The third is *control of gender and sexuality*, which involves the re-imagination of 'family' in Western bourgeois terms and the introduction of Western-centric education, which displaces indigenous knowledge. Colonial mind-set and enterprise in Africa were

sexualised from inception. The whole idea of colonial conquest was constructed in female sexual imagery to depict weakness of colonised people. McClintock (1998:1-3) especially shows that apart from using body parts of debased female body to depict the colonial treasures to be possessed, the colonial enterprise also exalted Western “reason”, the Western male, and military and technical aggression as the forces that must be bound together to subdue the resisting female body, the African continent (McClintock, 1995: 4). This then enabled the white male to release a new order of patriarchal sexualisation of bodies, control of the economic and the introduction of the political order of empire (McClintock, 1995: 4). British sexually saturated minds constructed in Africa and America as female subjects. While Columbus met America as a naked woman, Africa is nipple’, ‘Sheba’s Breast’, ‘Three Witches’ denoting the female vagina, the land of Africa as female “covered by male body fluids” denoting conquest, rape and looting (McClintock, 1995: 1,3).

This “explicitly sexualised” image of Africa, as well as the riches buried within, according to McClintock is what motivated colonialism. Hidden behind imperialistic agenda of ‘industrial modernity’ is also the “conquest of the sexual and the labour power of colonised women” (McClintock, 1995: 3). Thomas (2007:1) notes that in the case of imperial ventures whether in Africa or America, African presence often exposes the raw sexual terror that defines the cult of white supremacy and eroticism. This has been signified by the continuous assault on, “Black family existence, the obscene hysterics of apartheid lynching, the physical violations of direct and indirect colonisation, or the sadomasochistic torture of formal enslavement and its transoceanic trade in flesh...” (Thomas, 2007:1).

Since sex and women’s sexuality often preoccupied colonial minds, women’s subordination became the order of colonialism, and they were subjected to the basest chores so that they could easily be made the sexual objects of masters. Commons (1994:4) stresses here that, this sexual obsession with women and their body parts was only a reflection of the repressed sexuality of the British such that by describing Africans as lascivious beasts, the Victorians could distance themselves from the ‘savage’, while

indulging in forbidden fantasies with them (Commons, 1994:4). Slavery and slave trade, colonialism, capitalism have all followed this same pattern of sexual exploitation.

The last is *control of subjectivity and knowledge*. Grosfoguel (2013: 73-90) reveals that control of knowledge has occasioned major genocides and epistemicides in history made possible by racist/sexist divisions and paternalistic philosophical construction of the human person, human society and knowledge perspectives. Grosfoguel reveals that through the inauguration of the ego political philosophical constructions of Rene Descartes, knowledge was deliberately shifted from God to the Western white man, the “I”, the ego (Grosfoguel, 2013: 75). This “I” who exists, thinks and produces knowledge, also conquers and becomes the new god to replace the Christian creator God-Eye view (Grosfoguel, 2013: 75-77). This philosophy has been used to foreground Western knowledge systems used to subjugate other epistemological perspectives. The white male god-man imagery is restricted to five Western European nations that produce knowledge for the rest of the world. Those outside this sphere are construed in terms of inferiority, questionable humanity and not worthy of existence (Grosfoguel, 2013: 86, 87).

This Western god-man ideologue uses coloniality as an ideology to sustain its schemes. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013: 11) describes coloniality as “a global power structure that sustains asymmetrical power relations between the Euro-American world and the Global South; ... a leitmotif of global imperial design that has been in place for centuries.” Coloniality was there before official colonialism, it survived colonialism and it still thrives and maintains its hold long after the official judicial process of colonisation has ceased (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013: 11). Hence, the judicial process of decolonisation that happened from the 1950s onward has not succeeded to eradicate coloniality. Coloniality, therefore, is the Western epistemic ideology that prevents the possibilities of meaningful development in the Global South in general and Africa in particular (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012: 2).

As a global structure of power, coloniality controls world order as well as the minds of its subjects. It brings together governments, businesses, entities and even ideologies in a common interconnectedness to serve its stratagem (Mabheba, 2017). All subjugating

ideologies of the past centuries are products of coloniality. In the postmodern era, it persists through what Vellem (2018)⁴ calls “epistemological genocide”. This includes the propagation of carefully crafted, twisted, manipulative racialised knowledge system that continuously downgrades its subjects and their cultural epistemologies by causing them to question and then relinquish them. In so doing, they also relinquish their very foundation, identity and personhood for the ‘superior’ Western. It is for this reason that Maluleke (1996) advises cautiousness in research methods and methodologies⁵ that are used to study the continent. Continuous appropriation of externally generated knowledge and methodologies that are not informed by the contextual realities of the African do poison African minds and compel Africa’s younger generations to discredit their indigenous knowledge systems for the Western (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:12).

Coloniality is a dangerous system and must be contested and resisted through every means possible; hence decoloniality. Decoloniality, as a liberation philosophical strategy, seeks to disempower this inhuman philosophy. It does so through theorists, political thinkers and decolonial philosophers who attempt to explain what underlies the past, present and future economic and political order, as manipulated by the West (Ndlovu-Gasheni 2012, 2013; Grosfoguel, 2007, 2013; Mabhena, 2017).

We argue that these four controls are intermingled in feminist politics and interventions in the genital mutilation discourses as the Western structure of liberation. As already mentioned above, SWF played a vital role in influencing the international discourses and interventions that affect these practices as if it were innocent. Yes indeed, it is

⁴ Vuyani Vellem was speaker at a seminar hosted by Professor Rothney Tshaka and VukaniBantu TsohangBatho on Spirituality: Black Consciousness and Black Theology of Liberation at the University of South Africa on the 14th March 2018.

⁵ Tinyiko Maluleke (1996: 19ff) also elaborates on careful attention to methodologies as important step towards liberative knowledge creation in research for the African context. Madipoane Masenya (2004: 455ff) also sees the education Africans received from their western colonial educators as backbone for Africa’s suffering of intellectual/cultural alienation up to the modern era.

ultimately part of the colonial matrix of power. This is because SWF cannot read and translate its view of African culture cannot be read without denuding its geopolitical spaces of knowledge. Could this, therefore, account for some of the reasons for the difficulty that still characterise addressing the practice of 'genital mutilation in the Global South and Ejagham land in particular'? Local activists have mostly based their arguments on patriarchy and destruction of women's sexuality while largely overlooking the cultural orientations of Ejagham women.

2.7.2. A critique of Second-wave based on the geopolitics of knowledge

Noble as their interests might have been, feminist interventions become questionable when they turned attention towards women's genitals in other parts of the globe, specifically the Global South to judge them on the basis of 'patriarchal control of sexuality'. Such meanings were not often linked with clitoral practices by practising contexts themselves. Talbot (1926) and Ruel (1969) who did an in-depth study of Ejagham land in the 20th century do report *Nkim e Nkim* but do not state any concerns about the fixing as mutilation or deprivations of Ejagham women's sexuality. Ahmadou (2009: 14ff), Njambi (2004: 294ff) and Kenyatta (1965: 135) to confirm this from Senegal and Kenya, respectively.

From Casamance in Senegal, Dellenborg (2004: 88,89) report that feminist pressure on world bodies such as World Health Organisation (WHO) for action heightened during the 1970s and forced WHO to take action against the practice. This period "in fact coincided with the 're-discovery' of the clitoris in the West'. In this light, therefore, she evokes the understanding that feminists viewed patriarchal control of women's sexuality with a Western lens based on their contextual experience and not those of practising communities. Kenyatta (1965: 130-135) reports the same move among European missionaries and colonial administrators who tried to force an end to the practice, basing their arguments on their perspective and not those of the practising Gikuyu community. Based on such notions, the practices become 'barbarous' and violent mutilations' (Kenyatta, 1965: 135).

Western feminism tended to operate from the vantage point of epistemological privilege and power, making it a structure of control to women in the Global South in that; even

while making the move to fight for these women; they manifested paternalistic tendencies (Dellenborg, 2004: 90). Their motives could be placed in the light of control, coupled with superiority and ethnocentrism, which are practical manifestations of patriarchy. Could second-wave feminist intervention not therefore, be seen as the direct channel that helped inaugurate the genital mutilation problem, considering their intervention to salvage the clitorises of women of the Global South was unsolicited?

Hota (2017: 199) cautions that Western moves in general could take off on a premise of genuine compassionate intervention. Nevertheless, it should be evaluated carefully for often times; it may not entirely be a mission to rescue or civilise but an imposition of Western control. She stresses this view on the premise that from the inception of the orgasm debates, the problem of sex and clitoris was more the problem of Western sisters than that of the women in other contexts who were going through their surgeries (Hota, 2017: 199).

Moreover, before the clitoral discourses began in Euro-America, no 'epidemic' reports were raised concerning the practices by practising communities in Africa; even though some communities had been involved in the practice long before the 60s (Talbot, 1912, 1926; Kenyatta, 1965; Ruel, 1969; Arnfred, 2004; Dellenborg, 2004; Oba, 2008). As such, if the second-wave feminism discovered the clitoris in the 60s, while the practices of initiation suggest knowledge of the clitoris by Africans for hundreds of years before the 60s (Kenyatta, 1965: 135), then surely, it is African women who were supposed to be drilling Western feminists on clitoral usage based on their elaborate experience.

Feminist discovery and eventual translation of Western sexual clitoral knowledge do suggest a lot for the geopolitics of knowledge between the West and Africa. Making a Global South phenomenon a feminist concern has been judged more as a response of intuition, replicating colonial viewpoints that seek to wipe out barbaric practices (Hota, 2017: 199). This viewpoint is based on hegemony, power and control emanating from a specific context and this is patriarchal. One therefore could suggest here that from inception, feminist interventions in the genital mutilation discourses were rooted in the colonial matrix of power. This is because the connections they make in relation to the practices of patriarchy and the oppression of women does not absolve the second-wave

or the West from ongoing violence against black African people, specifically women on issues of race, class, rank and others.

2.8. Conclusion

In this chapter, we examined the understanding of patriarchy and its forms as operative in the study context. We specifically examined second wave feminism and its interventions in the genital mutilation problem in the Global South as patriarchy. We engaged some feminist theorists who pronounced themselves clearly by suggesting that without the clitoris, women are incapable of enjoying sexual pleasure. We concluded that second-wave feminist translation of knowledge and intervention in the genital mutilation discourses into the Global South could have been motivated by control as the colonial matrix of power, which is patriarchal.

Our next chapter takes us to the contextuality of the study. It engages the above feminist notion that womanhood is defined by the clitoris and sexual pleasure by turning to the socio-cultural context and practices of Ejagham women. The chapter will determine through Ejagham women's practices whether it is valid to uphold clitoral pleasure as the sole criterion for women's sexual pleasure. It aims to understand how women from Ejagham assert themselves as sexual beings even though their personhood and sexuality have been critiqued for dealing differently with the clitoris. Do they contest second wave's views of the clitoris and sexual pleasure? Could *Moninkim* and *Ngbokondem* dances and the other cultural practices be spaces where elements of womanhood, femininity, sexuality and identity are discernible in Ejagham community? If so then, could the liberation of the Ejagham woman be in her cultural anticipation. Could it be in her cultural practices that the Ejagham the woman attains liberation for womanhood?

Chapter Three

3. Ejagham women's initiation practices and patriarchy: Empirical data from the field

3.1. Introduction

Patriarchal suppression of women's sexuality through the shielding of the clitoris provoked a response from second wave feminism. Their response addressed the dignity of women's sexuality but then unveiled a new concern- that of clitoral pleasure. The second-wave feminist theorists turned their attention towards cultures that modified the clitoris to free women from what that they considered as patriarchal oppression through 'female genital mutilation'. In their efforts to 'help', they raised the outcry that has become the 'genital mutilation' problem. Amidst all efforts by feminists, the United Nations and its related agencies such as WHO, UNESCO, Amnesty International and others to address this problem, the practice of fixing the clitoris has remained ongoing in many communities in Africa.

Ejagham is one of the communities in Africa where the practice has endured many decades. Earliest written reports of the practice in this land date back to 1926 (Talbot); oral sources suggest even earlier, to "the olden, olden days of *wa mami* them" as an Ejagham woman relates. We went into this community, which is our native home to attempt a deeper understanding of the reasons for the practice in the area. We were concerned about its persistence amidst arduous efforts to combat it. We aimed at proposing a theological contribution, considering that such contributions had not been made before. We, therefore, engaged the following question: Could the persistence be that there is more meaning to the practice for Ejagham women than is known, or is it the result of patriarchal suppression of women's sexuality as postulated by second-wave feminist theorists?

This chapter begins with a presentation of empirical data gathered from the Ejagham community to show women's understanding of this initiation practice. The methods of data collection are shown to facilitate an understanding of the meaning of the practice

for Ejagham women. The second part is an investigation of whether patriarchy and suppression of sexual pleasure are motivation for the practice in Ejagham community.

3.2. Research environment

The Ejagham community is situated in the South West region of Cameroon. Cameroon has been at the historical and geographical crossroads of Africa for centuries (Wan-Tatah, 1989:17). The Sao civilisation and Nok culture are salient contributions made by the country to African civilisation in the Middle Ages (Wan-Tatah, 1989:17). As a country, it has earned the description “Africa in miniature” because of its diverse cultures, multiple ethnic groups and tribal languages, an encounter with four colonial powers, rich landscape, evergreen forests, varied seacoasts, numerous mountains, low lying plains and parks. The Ejagham culture is one of those unique cultures, which gives the country rich cultural diversity.

The Ejagham are found in present-day Manyu division. They make up part of the two regions that form the former British Southern Cameroons administered as part of Northern Nigeria after the Second World War. The Manyu division and Ejagham community, in particular, is unique in the country for housing some of the country’s best rivers, parks and forest reserves. The biggest virgin forest in the country, which supplies wood to the rest of Africa and the world, comes from the Ejagham area. The Eyumojock sub-division, the administrative area that houses the Ejagham community, is located in the South of Manyu. The West, Mamfe Central is largely made up of lowland and borders with Nigeria. In the Northern part of the Division is Akwaya which also borders Nigeria. The Bayang country comprises of 11 villages while the Ejagham occupy an estimated 150 villages (Pemunta et al, 2014: 15).

Banyang and Ejagham are the same people with the same ancestral roots and cultural orientations. Languages, keyaka, ngounaya, Ejagham and Njemaya slightly differentiate them. In the larger Cameroonian setting, they are hardly differentiated. All of them are referred to as “Bayangi”, sometimes with a derogatory connotation.

However, among themselves, the natives are able to easily differentiate between the two through their two main local dialects. A typical Ejagham native will speak keaka dialect and a Bayang will speak kenyang. One village in Ejagham, however, (Ossing) has defied this rule in that some of its inhabitants speak both keaka and kenyang at the

same time. As such, it is referred to as the only bilingual village in Ejagham. Keake is also spoken slightly differently between the lower Ejagham and Ejagham Njemaya people. The Ejaghams are the majority in the Eyumojock sub-division.

Manyu is also home to a myriad of ethnicities, which overlap in their territories and “are products of the colonial reification of more fluid identities” (Pemunta, 2011c:171). They share common “socio-economic and political institutions and have historic connections to the outside world by virtue of their trans-border location on the Cameroon-Nigeria frontiers” (Pemunta, 2011c:171). Wealthy members of these ethnic groups were slave masters and intermediaries in the long-distance trade that linked the Western and Eastern or Central Grassfields and the Atlantic Coast of Cameroon with the lower Cross River Basin (Pemunta et al, 2014: 17; Pemunta, 2010, 2011:35, 47, 2008; Röschenhalter, 2004: 241). This study, however, is concentrated on the Ejagham section of Manyu division, precisely the Eyumojock sub-division.

The Eyumojock Municipality houses three clans, 66 villages and five urban spaces with an estimated population of about 46,771 inhabitants. The Eyumojock sub-division is divided into three clans, namely; central Ejagham, Ejagham Njemaya (formerly Ekwe clan) and Obang. Beside these three clans, other groups of people resident in the area include North westerners and Nigerians⁶. The location of the clan along the border of West and Central Africa make it a centre-focal point that gives it easy access and contact with people from the rest of the country and neighbouring African countries such as Nigeria and Benin through Cotonou (Pemunta, 2011: 129). These all crisscross and interact with the Ejagham for trade purposes on a daily basis. Part of the clan is situated on the other side of the Nigerian border. This division of the clan between the two states occurred because of British colonisation, which ended in 1961 through a plebiscite. This saw the Ejagham region split into two halves, some bearing Nigerian citizenship and others Cameroonian. Both sides have largely maintained their cultural orientation, especially the Moninkim club and its *Nkim e Nkim* practice.

⁶ This information was given to the researcher directly from the Eyumojock council’s archives by the council clerk on 06/12/2015) when the researcher first visited the council to obtain permission to carry on a research in the area.

Economically, the Ejagham are an agricultural community who thrive mainly from farming, hunting and rearing of few domestic animals such as goats and sheep. Farming is strictly gendered since women carry out mainly subsistence farming for domestic consumption, while men deal with cash crops such as cocoa, palm and its products, and “bush mango” (*Irvingia Gabonensis*). Cash flow is slow but viability is ensured once a year during cash crop harvest and sale. The rest of the year is spent tending the crops. At such periods, men depend on subsistence farming products by women. Apart from this, men usually demand overdrafts from local cash crop merchants to deduct from their products during yearly sales. It is common knowledge in the area that many farmers do consume most of the proceeds even before the crops are ready, thereby living through the vicious cycle of indebtedness.

Politically, a locally elected Mayor and councillors who are themselves answerable to the central governing administration from the capital of the country, govern the region from Yaoundé. Most of the region faces underdevelopment, degrading poverty and marginalisation through lack of accessible roads, potable drinking water and electricity. The situation is exacerbated by the recent political crisis that has devastated the region, politically, economically and otherwise. In 2016, the two English-speaking regions rose to protest against their marginalisation and poverty. They threatened to secede and bridge the agreement made during the 1961 plebiscite and reunification. Since then, they are being brutally suppressed by the Cameroonian military. Citizens have been killed, houses burnt and people imprisoned in large numbers. Many Ejagham citizens are now living as refugees with their brethren across the Nigerian border and others have fled to relatives in the Francophone regions of the country. Women have been specifically hit by this crisis; some have been burnt alive inside their homes, others have given birth in the farms, while others have been raped and killed by both military and the freedom fighters.

Cultural affiliations remain strong among the Ejagham, in addition, the area is replete with associations and cults that are largely gendered. Women have the “Moninkim”, Ngbokondem, Ekpa and other associations, while men have the secret cults called Angbu” for young boys, “Ngbe” and “Ekpe” which is the leopard society for adult men

who often perform during the funeral and other rites (Bayen, 2016: 11). These are all ancestral cults with complicated rituals, which have endured in Ejagham community. Chiefs known as “ntufam” or “nfor” lead the various villages assisted by traditional council elders. Polygamy and levirate marriages are integral to Ejagham culture from its earliest history (Bayen, 2016: 11). Women’s initiation practices occupy an important place in this community.

3.3. Empirical data collection

We carried out two major visits for the field research. We visited the Ejagham clan of Eyumojock sub-division from the December 8th- 2015 - February 29th 2016 and from 5th February – 9th March 2017. Here we enquired on women initiation practices of *Nkim e Nkim* as our locus of study. However, we were interested in other initiation practices with sexual implications that go alongside *Nkim/Moninkim* to shape women’s lives. They included *Ngbokondem*, *Mbi ebe*, (literarily translated *marriage money*), *Nkekwet* (widowhood) rituals and burial of Ejagham women. The Ejagham Njemaya area is still widely known for the persistence of the practice of *Nkim e Nkim*. The last campaign to combat the practice was launched by Canada incorporation with CALBRIL (Chantier D’Appui, de Loisirs, de Bricolage des Lapinos), an NGO concerned with women and the girl child’s welfare. The stop campaign was chaired by the representative of the Canadian Ambassador to Cameroon from Yaounde from 26-28th January 2016. We participated in the campaign as observers.

While the practice has been checked in Central Ejagham and Obang areas, it thrives in Ejagham Njemaya, *albeit* to a lesser degree as opposed to 1926 when P. Amaury Talbot first reported the practice as integral to women’s identity. We learned that *Nkim e Nkim* is undertaken primarily in the *Moninkim* and *Ngbokondem* dances, and the practice clicks with other initiation practices that shape women’s sexual growth from adolescence (*Moninkim*, *Ngbokondem*) through marriage (*Mbi ebe* and widowhood) and death (burial of Ejagham women). As a result, we included the other practices, while privileging *Nkim e Nkim* as our primary practice of focus. All these practices thrive in Ejagham, except *Ngbokondem* that has died out in all three clans. The people of

Eyumojock still hold claim to the last *arem* that took place two years ago (2014 as per data collection date).

The first Ejagham Njemaya village we visited was Ayukaba village where we made a stop to inquire about the practice. Here we were told that they do not engage in the practice any more. We spent a day and moved to the divisional headquarters, Eyumojock, the seat of the local council. We were directed to the council chambers for authorisation to enter and gather research information from one Mr Mohmy. He immediately described the practice as an 'ancient' outdated practice that must be stopped. He agreed to provide every information we needed but informed us that authorisation to carry out the study could only be given by the divisional officer (DO). We headed for his office. Along the town, we saw signs that confirm the struggle against the practice in the area, a signpost erected by ABEMO, an NGO led by Ejagham elites. Their signpost read as follows: "FEMALE CIRCUMCISION IS DANGEROUS. Keep Women Intact. Causes lifelong depression, Is against human rights"- ABEMO CAMEROON. Posted also on household and office doors were pictures of young girls with the inscription "Female circumcision destroys our young girls"

Moving through the town, we caught up with the Assistant Divisional Officer in charge of the Eyumojock sub-division who openly welcomed us and happily expressed his desire to talk on the issues of female circumcision as they are of concern to him. He signed the authorisation that permitted us to go everywhere and get information that will help us. He also offered accommodation for the months following while we were at the region. Sensitisation against the practice, according to the Mayor, started as early as 1998 wherein the population received a series of lectures from Government and NGOs. He revealed that this has effectively reduced the practice by 70%. He is hoping with time, that the other 30% hits to zero during his term of office as Mayor.

We visited former and current fixers in order to get their opinion regarding the futile pressures to end the practice. We met eight fixers as a group and later on we had a close discussion with the two most famous and aged fixers at Mbenyan village and Mbenyan settlement. Our interviews with them were recorded. Generally, women are not taking the eradication campaigns lightly: first for cultural stigmatisation, which they

believe has many negative impacts on Moninkim dance and the modern generation's sexual decadence. Second, it has a spiritual handicap for women who cannot openly celebrate their heritage with ease.

3. 3.1. Methods of data collection

In trying to understand the practices, we designed two versions of semi-structured questionnaires for respondents⁷ considering that we did two field visits. The first visit focused on all the practices even though attention was centred on Nkim. The aim was to understand women's perspective of *Nkim e Nkim* as a sexual initiation practice, reasons for the practice and its connection to the other practices. While the second visit targeted solely women's response to *Nkim e Nkim* and sexual pleasure to investigate feminist claims of destruction of sexuality, which is largely applied by local activists on the ground to combat the practice.

Respondents ranged from ages 12 years to 84 years old. Some non-literate respondents accepted questionnaires and had their children fill on their behalf, while others solicited the help of the researcher on the spot. Gender balance was taken into consideration *albeit* many more women responded to their questionnaires than men did. Youth, married and single people responded. Fixed and unfixed women, as well as men who are married to fixed or have had sex with both fixed and unfixed women, responded to the first questionnaire. Many respondents acknowledged their Christian faith while others confessed adherence to traditional religion. Practices were numbered and responses matched according to the numbering. Responses were simple: either YES or NO, and spaces were provided for further explanation where needed. We made the questionnaire simple and accessible to all respondents, no matter their level of education.

Other sources of data collection included individual and collective qualitative interviews, video and audio recordings, photographs, council files and maps, news items on paper and radio, field notes and reports. Data were transcribed, and interviews were decoded and interpreted from the questionnaires. We went with an emic perspective since we

⁷ A copy of the questionnaire is in the appendix.

are indigenes of Ejagham who are born of Ejagham parents, fluent in the dialect and culture and constantly visiting the area. However, we were constantly driven to an etic positioning due to certain prejudicial perspectives held by the indigenes about those seeking information on *Nkim*. Our etic positioning could be reasoned from the following perspectives: first, we are geographically situated outside of Ejagham cultural confines, as we live in a cosmopolitan area with varied privileges. Second, as 'female' clergy studying in 'white man country' (*nteke b' Okara*), we 'should' be one of those who come with a prejudicial stance on *Nkim* tradition. Our emic/etic status interplayed with data collection in complex ways, thus affecting us sometimes positively and sometimes negatively in different magnitudes.

We met with both men, women and youths of the Ejagham clan, other settlers, and workers in the area, especially social workers, women work helpers and administrative officials. We gave out questionnaires to those who could read and write, many of whom responded and accepted follow up interviews. We also conducted recorded interviews for those who could not read or write, while we wrote down notes. We distributed 182 questionnaires for all the practices and received 139 returned responses excluding individual and group interviews. For the second questionnaire/interviews on sexual pleasure and *Nkim*, we selected a target group of 55 respondents.

The two questionnaires that were structured all focused on the research questions and objectives, one for written and another for an oral interview. They both answered questions relating to patriarchy, sexuality and the practices. We prioritised *Nkim e Nkim* and sexual pleasure in both, especially in the second questionnaire in order to engage feminist arguments. We distributed questionnaires to people from 17 villages and were able to visit only 11 of them due to inaccessibility of some of them. We had people from the other six meet with us at Eyumojock town where we organised private and group discussions and interviews.

3.3.2. A tabular representation of respondents' views

Our questions were simple and carefully interpreted to non-literate respondents. We used Pidgin English and Keaka dialect in most discussions. Below is a tabular representation of data collected from the field. The first table (Fig 1) reflects the entire

study captured in tabular form. We grouped the responses in line with the research questions and objectives and arranged them under themes and sub-themes. Fig 1 summarises the study according to themes and sub-themes arranged according to the research questions and objectives. The subsequent table (Fig. 2ff) is a representation of responses for sexual pleasure and *Nkim e Nkim*. We considered that simply succumbing to ‘yes’ and ‘no’ responses from Ejagham women may not be sufficient scientific evidence. Hence, we drew inspiration from a Pain Scale for clinical trials⁸ to enable us to design a pleasure scale chart to facilitate the interview process for Ejagham women. We used this during the interview sessions to give their experiential scientific backing. Below are tabular representations of emerging themes from the field and pleasure scale charts.

Fig. 1

3.3.2. Themes from the field and their relationship with research questions and objectives

Research questions and objectives	Emerging themes and sub-themes
• Why do women uphold the <i>Nkim</i> culture amidst pressure to stop? Is it because of patriarchy? • To examine how the cutting or removal of a clitoris is central to defining the femininity of a woman.	Theme • <i>Nkim</i> is women agency. Men do not have control or say over <i>Nkim</i>. • <i>Nkim</i> is a women’s school for beauty and empowerment. ▪ Women reported that it is without the ‘female penis’ that the woman is fully woman. ‘No clitorises’ is their identity. ▪ A woman becomes a sexual being after <i>Nkim</i> because sex only begins after <i>Nkim</i>. ▪ <i>Moninkim</i> is Ejagham sexuality school for

⁸This Pain Scale is used by doctors and medical experts to measure the rate of pain in a patient’s body through the numbers 0-10. Zero signifies no pain and ten worse of all pains. We redesigned this procedure to suit the Ejagham context in order to estimate pleasure level where a scientific estimate could be reached.

	several decades, taking care of the sexual needs of the land. ▪ <i>Nkim</i> is the primary criterion for entrance two major women's associations in the land; namely, <i>Ngbokondem</i> and <i>Moninkim</i> dance club. They train women for leadership, home and sexual skills. ▪ Both associations originally emerged as strategies to combat patriarchy and attend to the sexual needs of the clan. ▪ Women achieve the status of womanhood after <i>Nkim</i>; a mark of true strength among Ejagham. It is equalised as the strength to brace tough issues in women's lives. ▪ <i>Nkim</i> is definitive of women's sexual identity. <i>Nkim</i> women are beautiful to behold sexually. ▪ Women are venerated after fixing, as they become leaders among who can dance well. Sub-themes ▪ Confused identity especially among younger fixed women; their responses are paradoxical. ▪ The paradox between self-hate and cultural pride at play among middle-aged: changing identity through adaptation strategies (struggle for survival). ▪ Pride, remorse and nostalgia about the declining nature of <i>Nkim</i>, which is a symbol of self/cultural pride and not deformation/scaring of bodies as seemingly projected. ▪ The determination to love and to pride in their scarred bodies. ▪ Feelings of helplessness and nothingness at the gradual demise of <i>Nkim</i>.
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• Are women without (clitorises) not sexually satisfied? And if not, are they then not real women? • Is the removal of a clitoris destruction of female sexuality and femininity? • To examine how the removal of a clitoris through <i>Nkim e Nkim</i> in Ejagham community in Cameroon is central to defining womanhood.	Themes: ▪ Women profess sexual satisfaction and stability even without a clitoris. Fixed women report enjoying sex properly; They are sexual beings and have never been lacking in desire and pleasure. ▪ Satisfying marital sexual needs is impossible without self-satisfaction as well. ▪ Apart from the sexual, women pride themselves in other pleasures and purpose for their bodies such as spiritual prowess, beauty, fame and integrity through the <i>Moninkim</i> dance. ▪ Some women professed lack of pleasure but self-contentment with their bodies, no worries about urges or demands, or desire for sex.
• To investigate how patriarchy infringes on women's sexuality in <i>Nkim e Nkim</i> and other sexual initiation practices in Ejagham community	• <i>Ngbokondem</i> cult and <i>Nkim</i> culture emerged as a response to challenge gender imbalance, exclusion and scorn of women by male associations. • Patriarchy as male domination is not identified with <i>Nkim e Nkim</i>. It is women who undertake and undergo the practice, sometimes with no proper consent from men. • <i>Nkim</i> is not done to satisfy men sexually, but to make women sexually proper and ready for their own sake. • Women despise looking like men with the 'long thing'. • Some men do not know or bother about sexual difference in initiated and uninitiated women. • <i>Ngbokondems</i> were not to marry or have intercourse. Men did not respect

	this rule, hence their demise. • Women's association are exclusivist as well. • Children are exposed to early sex and marriage in Ejagham land through <i>Mbi ebe</i> leaving psychological damage. • Women's bodies were broken through prostitution plague to resist colonial and cultural patriarchy. Other practices • Widowhood rites expose women to levirate marriages and other demeaning sexual encounters. • Also restricts women sexually but leave men lax. • Ejagham women flounder between father and husband (male) control in life and in death. • Negative identity is affecting cultural heritage and women's sexual image and identity. • Creating a negative sex complex for women already experiencing cultural gender bias. • Younger generations are socially affected by prostitution stigma creating relationship difficulties. • Economic hardship forces women to succumb to pseudo-aid schemes in the pretext of combatting 'genital mutilation'. • Women tighten widowhood rituals for financial benefits.
Main Theme	Gender and sexuality • Gender discrepancies reveal flawed notions of masculinity and femininity. Sub-themes

	• Men are allowed extramarital relationships and polygamy as proof of masculinity. For women it is lechery. • Men do not mourn overtly as a sign of strength and manhood. But women must because wailing is femininity. • Men own family, the land, name, cash crop farming and inheritance. Many women depend on men economically. • Women should be sexually cleansed after the death of husbands but not men. Men engage in sex early. • Widowhood rituals are highly and consciously gendered. • Only men pay <i>Mbi ebe</i>. It is an abomination for a woman to even propose to pay <i>Mbi ebe</i> for a man.
Main Theme	Womanhood, femininity, identity And women empowerment Sub-themes • Practices, especially <i>Nkim e Nkim</i> are spaces for social interactions, agency and empowerment. • Women find fulfilment and womanhood in this powerful ritual, which gives them status as matured sexual beings, women of character and leaders among women. • Only courageous women and viable families undertake the ritual. • Achievement of recognition and association with men and the high in society. • It creates a bond and a mark of identity for all initiates in Ejagham land. • Initiation spaces are places for support and solidarity to deal with patriarchal pressures in women's daily lives.

	The conviction to get on and maintenance of <i>Nkim</i> amidst police surveillance and campaigns as a mark of determination and resistance against to safe <i>Moninkim</i>. This for many is a mark of strength and real womanhood.

Fig. 2.

Field statistics for pleasure scale

Statistic Results

Total number of respondents for the experiment	=55
The number that attended both interviews	=55, 44
The number that absented one interview	=11
<i>Nkim</i> women who confessed sexual pleasure in the first visit	=34/55
<i>Nkim</i> women who enjoyed sex in the second visit	=39/44

Fig.3

Field statistics for *Nkim* age range

Statistics Age range

Youngest participants	=12- 28 years
Middle-aged participants	=29-54 years
Older participants	=55-84 years
Youngest fixed	=12 years

Fig.4

Field statistics for fixed women

Statistics	Results
Women fixed before marriage	= 42
Women fixed in marriage	= 13
Women who had sex before and after <i>Nkim</i>	=14
Women who reported sexual pleasure before and after <i>Nkim</i>	= 9
Women who reported no pleasure at all	=6

3.4. *Nkim* and *Moninkim*: Ejagham women's aesthetic and sexuality school

The practice of *Nkim e Nkim* in the Ejagham community finds its fullest expression in the *Moninkim* dance, a dance that bears the same name as its dancer. The name *Moni-Nkim* literally translated means *Nkim* citizen. It has two syllables, 'Mon' which means child and '*Nkim*' which means a "cut" to fix. Women described *Moninkim* club as an initiation and sexuality school (Nzegwu, 2011: 263) which trains young women to maturity on issues of sexuality, home, marriage and society, with a chief identity marker being *Nkim e Nkim*. As such *Moninkim* means "fixed one", that is a female child who has been fixed (Takou, 2016). As a female teenager, having reached the age of

puberty, she is fixed after being schooled in character, home management and social morals expected of a good wife and mother. It is the institution that preserves, promotes, presents and transfers traditional values and customs of the Ejagham people from generation to generation (Takon, 2016). Only those who have been “fixed” are qualified to be referred, to dance the dance, and to belong to the *Ndem* cult and *Moninkim* club. It is believed the clitoris hinders dance steps because when heated, it could either itch or rub between the thighs. The dance is so crucial to women’s identity that traditional herbal treatments are sometimes applied to women’s legs to ease movement and gait. The dance is as old as the practice of *Nkim e Nkim*.

The dance is to nurture and display beauty, body, sexuality and pride of the Ejagham woman in all her royal attributes and style. It is a queenly dance not like any other in the Manyu division, with beauty attached to it and with the primary purpose to entice and sexually captivate its spectators. As a privileged royal club for women, it is organised to positively enhance femininity and empower womanhood. Entertainment and sexual arousal are vital features. The dance has survived, though timidly, with many modifications because of the declining state of *Nkim e Nkim*.

Brightly coloured costumes are used to beautify the *Moninkim* and increased visual appeal, an indication of the significant aesthetic elevation, prowess and awareness of the school. Conscious efforts and attempts are made to reveal her body in conformity with virtues such as “virginity, purity, fertility, fidelity, humility, dependability and ability” (Takon, 2016). The costumes which are usually very elaborate and require care and time to adorn, are made up of mainly symbolic fabric, dyed and woven raffia (signifying innocence, youth and peace) or woollen bands, beads, rattles, jingle bells, cloth belts, shorts and other bands and adornments. She wears them on a special hairdo, on her neck, shoulders, waist, bosom, wrist and ankle to add rhythm to the swaying body movements, thereby enhancing the fattening essence of the seclusion period and increasing the desirability of the *Nkim* dancer (Takon, 2016).

The *Moninkim* is special in all aspects of life and captivates attention at first sight. In a typical adult dancing setting, her beautiful well-adorned figure and her dancing styles all create awe among spectators. She uses arms, back, breasts, buttocks, legs, facial

smile in spectacular ways that command excitement to the point of hysteria in her audience. According to Ashuntantang (2010: 31), “beauty and gait” are indispensable to the club. *Moninkims* are known for using the power of dance to entice and subsequently captivate Ejagham men and woo them to the warm sexual embraces of their women (Nzegwu, 2011: 257).

Moninkim, just like the *Ngbokondem* dance, gives women and their families’ status and respect in the community. Such status comes with a number of privileges such as the role of leader among women, a high sense of belonging and responsibility, pride and self-esteem and social interaction with dignitaries. Marriage is an important goal of *Moninkim*; once a *Moninkim* is kept in seclusion, men scramble to get her hand. The one she chooses becomes peculiar among men just as his bride to be. Women thought the dance has received paradoxical views in recent years as its practice of *Nkim* has been critiqued for its violent grip on women. Nevertheless, in Ejagham, the dance is being hailed as the primary source of empowerment for the Ejagham women throughout the twentieth century and the entrance of the 21st century.

3.4.1. *Nkim e Nkim* as the primary criterion for *Moninkim* dance

People reported that the sole criterion for assuming this special status of *Moninkim* is the practice of *Nkim e Nkim*, as stated earlier. No reasons have been advanced as to why women chose *Nkim e Nkim* as a value-laden criterion for the *Moninkim* club (see Talbot, 1926: 391; Nzegwu, 2011: 262). Some older female informants of the clan hold that *Nkim e Nkim* was originally designed as a secret mark of strength to compete with or defy the secrecy that surrounded male cults like *Ngbe* and *Angbu*. These male cults were known to have sometimes tedious procedures that bind their members together in secrecy. Others hold that *Nkim e Nkim* revealed *Moninkims*’ power and their ability to courageously endure and overcome the secret mark of pain that is above that of childbirth common to all women. All women could give birth but not all could undergo *Nkim*.

Ejagham indigenes give other reasons for the practice of *Nkim*. The major reason given is the special care given to this young woman in the *NjuNkim*. Ma Clementine (Interviewed at Eyumojock, 15/02/2016) states, “if you see the way your friends are

treated, you would immediately ask that you should be fixed as well". It is when a sexually immature girl child is honoured into womanhood. After undergoing the practice, she is elevated to status in society as a mature and special woman. The fattening room period takes between three months to one year, or even longer, where she is fed with special food and rubbed with a special ointment made from special leaves and herbs. During this period, she is trained on how to dance the *Moninkim* dance, a dance that bears the same name as its dancer. *Moninkim* actually means "the fixed one" or female child who has been repaired. Their dance thrills people everywhere. Villages send for them and pay huge sums of money for the entertainment they offer.

The second reason is that the girl should not be like a man. Having her clitoris intact makes her just like a man, as her clitoris would soon become long and ugly. Only men need to have a protruding penis and not women. Third, as Jacob states, it is for some of the fixers a source of livelihood wherein they go from village to village circumcising women and having compensation. Now that the government is fighting against it, they have been left with nothing. She says, "now if the children give small food I eat, if not I stay. Is this not me sitting here and looking at places like a dog?" (interviewed 12/01/2016).

The Mayor of Eyumojock stated that *Nkim* started in the division "since creation, it is our way of life and the tradition of our people" (Mayor: 27/12/2015). For him, a female child must be well decorated or "fixed" to be attractive. If she is not touched, that part of her body will keep growing and make a woman look like a man. Hence as he states, "our 'intelligent fore parents' of the sub-division thought to reduce this part." For him, their interest was to make the woman beautiful by not resembling a man.

Talbot (1926: 391) endorses the Mayor's perspective. Some reasons given in his day include "cleanliness and old custom, though some say that conception is rendered easy". The conception phenomenon is still upheld today. Some natives explain "easy conception" with a supernatural worldview; they state that with the clitoris intact, demons take advantage of women through "dream sex" and block their wombs with bad water and fibroids. Others simply state that the clitoris has 'raw' (strong) power when in

contact with the penis that it overpowers and weakens its potential for proper erection and ejaculation.

In addition, *Nkim* has a spiritual value for Ejagham women and community. Their chaste status and their secluded nature groomed from virginity in the *Nju Nkim* usually accord *Moninkims* special spiritual responsibilities solicited by the living community when crucial spiritual needs arise. For instance, *Moninkims* are solicited to play the dangerous role of *Ma Njom*, the pseudo-wife⁹ of the dreaded masquerade cult leader of the mystical Obasinjom (God medicine) cult. This happens during witchcraft hunting in villages. She also represents the village on major events such as national festivities, beauty contests and village/clan social gatherings for entertainment.

Some Ejagham women regret and state that the threat of *Nkim*'s decline is taking along with it the cultural and sexual identity of Ejagham women and causing pain to the sexuality of young people who are disoriented because of lack of *Nju Nkim* impartations. The practice is proudly portrayed by women as traditional initiation ritual among the Ejagham, carried out for beauty, social training, sexual ethics and enjoyment.

3.4.2. *Moninkim* dance: the making of pleasurable bodies as women's agency

Women revealed that associations and rites in the Ejagham land are spaces where women have learned to assert and negotiate socio-political influence for themselves in a setting where male power is the norm. The *Nkim* culture shows that women undertake an active role in sexual matters and shift men more into the passive space in this vital domain. Reports indicate that Ejagham women are those who take their men into the sexual act, and in championing sexuality matters and the making of sexual bodies, women are able to penetrate the secret and sacred normative spaces in Ejagham land.

The making of sexual bodies differs according to cultural environments. In the Ejagham community, women assert that the scarring in the *Nkim* culture is a site of enhancement

⁹Her role at this time is to dance to calm down the cult leader not to become too wild and unrestricted in his witch hunting expeditions thereby causing untold havoc. As a result, every time she senses that he was too wild, she will dance softly and attractively to quieten him.

and not a deprivation of sexual pleasure (Ashuntantang, 2010: 36). Female sexual bodies are celebrated as the pinnacle of beauty and sexuality through the *Ndem/Moninkim* dances, while male bodies are largely ignored or coerced to scramble for women's beauty. This is not to say males do not dance; but their dances hold no significant social impetus, especially in connection to sensual matters. Male bodies are patterned to respond and fit into the sensational aura created by female bodies. The female body is often the site of attention, and the absence of it in the living community, as witnessed in the mid-50s prostitution plague, completely grounds the male body, spreading dullness and dejection throughout the land. In this light, *Nkim e Nkim*, *Nju Nkim* and *Moninkim* dance are always sites of sensual collectivity and erogenous attention in Ejagham land. They are a leeway where bodies, both male and female, are shaped to respond to the community's sexual needs.

Ejagham's contextual perceptions of dance (specifically *Moninkim*) and women's bodies bears some important similarities with other settings in Africa, like Kenya. Women revealed that dance accords female bodies' power and control in the sexual and eventually political realm. *Nju Nkim* practically produces bodies that fit into the concrete socio-sensual realities and demands of the Ejagham cultural society. These bodies are equipped with beauty, dignity, confidence and character from the very early years of girlhood, through the fixing period in *Nju Nkim* confinement. They are then released not "to be" ravaged by men, but "to" entice, scrutinise, captivate and get the best among men for utmost sexual gratification and fulfilment.

Nkim's sexual importance is also highlighted through male circumcision procedures. Ejagham women revealed that though male fixing (circumcision) was an old practice performed together with a female by local midwives of the clan, it carried no special significance. It was hardly celebrated or given a special meaning found in other African societies such as Kenya and South Africa. Even with the introduction of colonial medical facilities, it is male fixing that was quickly taken over medically, whereas female fixing remained the prerogative of local fixers largely maintaining this female sexual agency.

Moreover, *Moninkims* are peculiar for their shape, grace, charm, articulate dancing skills, gait and body gesticulations, well-built hips, beautiful legs, pointed breasts, gap

teeth (sometimes locally designed) and character, which keep men glued to them (Ashuntantang, 2010: 31; Nzegwu, 2011). These internal and external qualities are peculiar to Ejagham women even today. They are known and appreciated nationwide for their beauty, yet these same qualities have been used for their stigmatisation, especially in cases where their beauty has been understood to denote only sexual looseness.

Respondents revealed that *Nkim* fulfils two roles in *Moninkim* or *Ndem* dances; it denotes physical strength and sexual attraction. *Nkim* accords women space to prove physical bravery and autonomy through their will to endure pain (cf Njambi, 2004: 294). Women use this as bait to taunt men who often have no proper clue concerning their fixing. Aesthetically, from the inception of the training inside *Nju Nkim* by a senior *Moninkim*, the young *Moninkim* is massaged daily with locally lubricated with beauty treatments such as camwood, white clay chalk and kernel oil. Her hair is braided with style and she is taught bodily movements and gesticulations from swaying plantain leaves too the wide open arms of flying butterflies. She is taught how to “tap and separate her legs in enticing ways, to shake the back, while at the same time twisting the tummy and scattering her waist and hips like boiling water”, as described by *Moninkim* Polly Obi of Ayukaba (interviewed 29/01/2016).

On the day of her dancing, the whole community is invited together with people from neighbouring clans and villages. It is a full social event, which runs through the night with great celebration. Her dancing skills are captivating to the extent that “one can steal items from you and you may not realise it until the dance is over” says Ma Arrah Takang of Mbakem (interviewed 06/03/2017).

3.4.3. Women, sexual gratification and the *Moninkim* dance

Some women reported that during a typical well-trained dance, the audience is stirred to a frenzy to the extent that both men and women are heated up for ‘action’. At the end of such powerful performance, the heat generated by the dancer takes her directly to her fiancé’s house for the solemnisation of the marriage bond through full-blown sexual intercourse. She is carried by the age group of her fiancé and her own in jubilant procession. She goes in to put into practice the sexual tactics acquired from the *Nju*

Nkim. The remaining unmarried people in the dance hall will then burst into the jubilant song that invites marital intercourse with the following words:

Kpe bhagha n'enche a kwen ndum ewe a kwelle aah

Kpe bhagha n'enche a kwen ndum ewe a kwelle aah aah,

Kpe bhagha n'enche a kwen ndum ewe a kwelle aah,

A magha eben ezere were ben.

Meaning: Let every woman (married) take her man away (for the obvious) and leave the dance floor for us (the unmarried) to continue dancing.

This song expresses a sensual/ethical phenomenon about Ejagham sexuality. At the sensual level, the end of the hall dance shifts to a moment of the well-deserved, enjoyable night of coitus directly influenced by a good 'shake up' by the spectacular *Moninkim/Ngbokondem* dancer and her drumbeaters. While the married are taking leave for their well-deserved intercourse, the unmarried engage in courtships and *têtes-à-têtes* that usually lead to connubial engagements. At the ethical level, not everyone is allowed to have this well-deserved sexual intercourse night, except the married. Ejagham sexual history hardly concedes to premarital sex. Young people are groomed to respect sex until marriage. Any sexual relationship outside marriage is seen as a transgression of the sexual moral code controlling sexual purity. This may invite societal scorn, which could have repercussions, especially on the young woman (Mtenge, 2017: 7).

Once a man finds his bride to be on this dance-dating night, he goes ahead to introduce himself to her family. If the father is viable enough, together with her fiancé, they sponsor her in the *Nju Nkim* confinement in the *Moninkim* sexuality school. Some young women are less fortunate as their families are not able to afford *Nju Nkim* and are devoid of the *Moninkim* experience. For such, it is true misfortune rendered by poverty. From this point on, the fiancé begins to show his prowess by supplying daily provisions of meat and palm wine for as long as they can afford to confine her. This is how the

cycle of dances, courtship, marriage and sexuality continues, thus shaping new brides and grooms for the living community.

After the dance/sexual night, the *Moninkim* immediately changes communal identity and status. While prior to the dance she is just a young maiden, after the sexual night she transpires into a full-blown woman. Her dressing changes, she is respected as an adult, one who has tasted the 'good food' of grown-ups (*enyomle*). She ceases to belong to the class of the young, that is, the unmarried age groups. She is given the respect due to adults and her name changes from *Moh* (child, daughter) to *Nye ewere* (our mother). Every Ejagham girl yearns for the opportunity of becoming a *Moninkim*. *Nkim e Nkim* and its *Moninkim* dance are, therefore, vital ways in which Ejagham women assert themselves sexually and eventually socio-politically too.

This puts to task the idea that *Nkim e Nkim* is meant to restrict women's sexual pleasure. Some old women alluded to the prostitution plague, stating that even in their *Nkim* status; Ejagham women have always explored their sexuality to the fullest. Instead, they view *Moninkim* as a sexual agency that constantly shapes and transforms women into a beautiful, intelligent sexually domineering caste who command their own lives, take charge of their own minds and bodies and control their own sexuality (Mtenge 2017: 3, 8).

When questioned about sexual enjoyment for a *Moninkim*, Ma Etamba Ntetong of Otu (interviewed 11/11/2017) responded thus:

How woman fit make people enjoy dance wey hi sep sep no di enjoy something for inside? Before people want enjoy dance, na hi di first enjoy am.

Meaning: how can a dancer succeed to take people into such sensual frenzy when she herself feels nothing within her? She enjoys the dance first before enabling her audience to enjoy. Dance here is nuanced to include plain dance and sexual enticement. She argues that emotional feelings cannot be stirred by *Moninkim* solely for others. The woman herself feels deep sensations within her and they are good ones.

Ma Ntetong explained that in her dance days, *Moninkims* in a typical group dance setting could excite the crowd through body gesticulations that portray great sexual excitement by the women themselves. At an ecstatic moment of the performance, she describes a common sensation such as 'current di waka for inside your skin'; meaning current travelling through your body. This is when *Moninkim* (s) is giving the most spectacular performances non-stop. It is at this time that the age group of her (their) husband comes and ceases her (them) and carries directly to her (their) husband's home for the obvious. In her opinion, *Moninkkim* dance dispatches and at the same time creates maximum sensual experimentations that change both audience and dancer (s). This could be understood differently today; nonetheless, the original motivation for the dance, in her opinion, has always been to guarantee fulfilment in Ejaham beauty and sexual life. It is in the *Moninkim* club and its mark of maturation that women assert their sense of self, sexual identity, womanhood and femininity.

Physically, women highlighted corporal nurture (body-building) as integral to beauty enhancement for sexual enticement in the *Nju Nkim*. The foods prepared for *Moninkims*, the drinks, the ointment for her body are all carefully chosen. She uses the *Nsibidi* language to draw the various meals fed her on the wall of her room. Those entering her room know what she eats from here. When the *Moninkim* is catered for, she is emotionally stable for all the training impacted. The training embellished them with the physical features that keep men trembling on sight as soon as they are released from *Nju Nkim*. Ashuntantang (2010: 36) describes a typical *Moninkim* just released from *Nju Nkim* as follows:

...You are in full view. Those hips chasing one another, my eyes could not be stilled. Moonlight played my game, your leg keeping the beat... I felt you then in my waist as my man hit my thigh from side to side. So I touched my sanja and fixed my man in shape.... Your pointed breasts like arrows shot straight into my heart.... Today, I will tell your father I saw a hen in his backyard, today I will tell him there is a ripe orange in his tree. And all the cowries from distant lands I will bring. You are worth more than all I could find. Let me worship in your shrine my *Moninkim* dancer. Tomorrow, tomorrow let me rest at the gap between your teeth my *Moninkim* dancer.

Ejagham women groom female bodies for active sexual participation possessive intent to ravage the '*man inside the sanja*' and not as passive victims.

In our interaction with a cross-section of the community, we came to the discovery that not all women are qualified to be *Moninkim*, only those that are fixed. In some typical *Nkim* settings where many women pride themselves in *Nkim* culture, this could be a source of contempt for unfixed women as they are taunted with words like *etala atenghe*, *etenghe echifab*, meaning: long, protruded, or ugly genital. This causes shame, low status and low self-esteem. Such women could even be voiceless in certain social gatherings. Chief fixer *Moninkim* Rosaline still feels this way about unfixed women today. She describes them as: "you have no value; you cannot even be considered for one. *Moninkim* is more than you seriously, in everything. *Moninkim* is more than you by far".

3.4.4. *Moninkim* and *Ngwiko* of Kenya as spaces of sexual gratification

One feature common to most African cultures is the power of dance. Dance sites are communal cultural spaces for socialisation and leisure. The modes of presentation of particular dances convey specific messages. Respondents reported Ejagham *Moninkim* dance culture as specifically designed to enable initiated women to transmit the erogenous and aesthetic aspects of the culture from one generation to another. This culture does not stand in isolation; it simulates practices in other parts of Africa. To obtain a clearer understanding of women's view of *Moninkim* for Ejagham sexuality, we found some similarities in the *Ngwiko* practice of Kenya, which show how dances could be sites of enhancement of eroticism, sexual fulfilment and empowerment in contexts of female circumcision.

Njambi (2004: 296, 297) describes the *Ngwiko* practice as a "communal sexual practice" among the Gikuyu in Kenya specially designed for circumcised women and men after the healing period. *Ngwiko* is preceded by an elaborate stimulating dance that takes place throughout the day. At the approach of night, women and men break up into groups for sexual intercourse inside the women or men's huts (Njambi, 2004: 296). Njambi notes that:

During this time, both women and men were expected to engage in sexual activity where both would take multiple sexual partners in a one-night session so that they might attain the ultimate sexual excitement through the process of *ngwiko*.

Women and men enjoyed their bodies to the maximum, exploring several erogenous sensations throughout the night (Njambi, 2004:296), and such sexual activity could continue through their lives irrespective of their marital status (Njambi, 2004: 296). Ejagham *Moninkim* could be likened to the *Ngwiko* in some ways; first, as a sexual practice, *Moninkim* begins with elaborate dancing during the day that lasts into the night. In addition, it ends with the dancer at the arms of her husband. Last, it leaves its awed spectators with the sensation to go home and enjoy 'well-deserved coitus'; making both practices expressions of their sex in their various contexts.

One sensitive aspect in both dances is that they are reserved for heterosexual intercourse and leave no room for other gendered expressions of sex. In this light, one could say that they are socially exclusive of other forms of personhood and sexualities such as single women and other genders. Presently in Ejagham land, one hears practically nothing of other genders, save the official male and female and *Ngbondongs* or *Esokhotis*. The society's normative sexual ethics are strictly based on heterosexuality. Attempts to trace them in Ejagham land proved futile. Nothing is mentioned of other genders such as gay, lesbian, queer, transsexuals or bisexuals in Ejagham land. Women simply said, "we no know that thing for here"; meaning we do not know about that sexuality here.

Women nevertheless mentioned the *Esokhatis* and *Ngbondongs* but chose not to see them as gendered. *Esokhotis* are women who are naturally sealed at the entrance of the vagina by a mysterious layer of flesh. They are asexual in that they have no desire for sex and cannot be penetrated. They decline sexual advances and stay thus all through their lives. Yet, physically they are women; they participate in community activities and fulfil social feminine gender roles, but refuse to indulge in sexual

activities¹⁰. *Ngbondongs*, on the other hand, are impotent men. Both are known and acceptable by Ejagham society, though with some scorn for *Ngbondongs*.

3.5. Patriarchy and *Nkim e Nkim*

Moving through the villages, we sampled the opinion of both women and men on the role patriarchy plays in the *Nkim* culture. Information gathered shows in *Nkim*, men are not the ones performing the practices but women. Interactions, interviews and questionnaires reports showed that in Ejagham, women take centre stage in the fixing process; men are kept out, as opposed to other parts of the country such as the North where men fix women's clitoris. Ejagham women revealed that they are not "passive victims of the culture whose supposed life-giving aspects they still seek to protect" (Oduyoye, 1995:15); instead, they are active participants in the making of charactered sexual women. They hail *Nkim* culture as their means of imparting knowledge, cultivating and impacting beauty and sexual empowerment to the generations; domain men cannot easily intrude or control (cf Dellenborg, 2004: 83, 86).

Recent campaigns for *Nkim*'s abolition labels the practice as the result of patriarchy and control of women's sexual pleasure through the removal of the clitoris. Latest studies were prepared in the area (Pemunta, 2009, 2010, 2011; Bayen, 2016) especially implicating the phenomenon (male dominance) as the highpoint for the persistence of the practice. Such dominance fits Van Der Sijpt's (2014:4) description of the Cameroonian context wherein men hold material power and symbolic authority as household heads in a patriarchal system from which they control women and their sexuality.

Feminist theorists implicate this patriarchal form and its suppression of sexuality as pivotal for the persistence of the practice in Africa (cf Koedt, 1968; Hosken, 1976; Daly, 1978). Interactions with respondents in Ejagham shows that this form of patriarchy is

¹⁰*Esokhati* is considered a form of impotency. The condition is considered manifestation witchcraft attack against a daughter. It was cured in the past by herbalists and *Ngbokondems*. In present day Ejagham, these women just stay in the family compound as caretakers until their death.

prevalent in Ejagham community. However, respondents do not seem to make any clear or direct connection with this form of patriarchy to the thriving of *Nkim* in the land. On the ground, male dominance is not visibly identified with *Nkim e Nkim* because men have little or no say or influence in *Nkim* procedures. It is women, who perform *Nkim* on themselves with men far removed from the physical act itself (Monagan, 2010: 181).

The view that *Nkim* makes a woman sexually appealing for the patriarch and keeps her faithful and reserve solely for himself and reproduction of his progeny seemed to be much outside the thoughts and views of both the trainers and pupils of *Moninkim* sexuality school. Respondents felt that thinking this way was the result of misunderstanding the primary intent of *Nkim* culture and consequently, Ejagham sexual orientation, which is designed to fortify women sexually. Nzegwu (2011: 263) feels that such misunderstanding is the result of:

...the lack of knowledge about what exactly sexuality schools do and the hostility towards practices that are perceived to be harmful to women or dictated by men to control women and deny them sexual pleasure. Interestingly, such beliefs are based on an illegitimate substitution of European/Christian/Muslim sexual values, resulting in the demonstration of Africa through erroneous and negative projections.

They view *Nkim* as a socio-cultural school that possesses full curriculum on sexuality, home management, character-building, societal interactions and women empowerment issues¹¹. Women are its trainers, and they groom their students for the students' benefit, not to be ravaged by men. Women thought that the *Nkim* culture instead rendered the young women dignity to the level of equating them with men in that, during social gatherings, *Moninkims* and *Ngbokondems* were the only ones among women who sat with male dignitaries of the land.

Nonetheless, some sensitive respondents suggested that whether physically present or not, men should still have an indirect influence on the practice, first because it is their

¹¹ As early as 1926, Amaury Talbot (1926: 390-394) gives a concise description of the curriculum and activities as operative in the *Nju Nkim* and their importance to the life and character of an Ejagham woman throughout her life. The activities have endured.

daughters, who are honoured. Nonetheless, these men think that without men's consent and compliance, women cannot perform the practice. Men know exactly where, when and how the practice is taking place, and if they have not put a stop to the practice for almost a century, then it is either serving their interest or not threatening it. As such, their consent is crucial; for no woman can do anything to her daughter without the husband's or fathers consent. They think that though patriarchy could be far removed from the actual scene of *Nkim e Nkim*, it is aware of what goes on. Women could be in control, but they only operate with men's consent. It is in this sense that these respondents connect patriarchy to *Nkim* culture. It is this compliance, they argue, is like other acts on women's bodies, part of the continuum of the female body and sexuality control (Monagan, 2010: 181).

In addition, the families that sponsor *Nkim e Nkim* either in *Moninkim* or *Ngbokondem* could be doing so to elevate their social status at the expense of young women's clitorises. As such, they could be associated with patriarchal oppression and manipulation of daughters who may have accepted the practice at tender ages solely to please their families.

In response to the above, other respondents confirmed men's knowledge of the practice but insisted that even without their compliance, they still go ahead with *Nkim* as they think fit. Chief fixer, Moninkim Obika, had the following to say:

It is you who have your child who says am doing her *Moninkim*. The man is not concerned. It is us, women. Like this, my daughter (she points to her daughter standing nearby), I gave birth to her and I removed her own and she is a fine woman. It is us women who say remove my child that thing.

Some Ejagham male respondents accepted Moninkim Obika's stance. They showed knowledge of *Nkim* but simply did not show enough aptitude in their descriptions of *Nju Nkim*. They sought deeper *Nju Nkim* knowledge often from their wives if they were around during interviews. However, many showed apt interest in the outer dance as major social entertainment of the community that brings both sexes together in joyful celebration.

In addition, many Ejagham men we interviewed did not show a keen interest in sexual intercourse as an act that should be pursued with a passion to the extent of monitoring what women do in the *Moninkim* club activities. They listen to what women explain to them and have great respect for the *Moninkim* culture. In addition, many of them did not seem to notice any speciality in their women's sexual organs as a result of *Nkim*. They are just having sex and are fine with their wives. It is an interesting discovery here how the responses of both men and women are contrary to generally accepted views that patriarchy, as male domination and control of women's sexuality, is a primary motivation for 'genital mutilation'.

In addition, *Nkim e Nkim* operates in a peculiar manner in Ejagham land in that it is women and their families who scramble to be initiated. They pay a huge sum of money to fix their daughters and accord them a dignified social status that sets them apart as special among women in the clan. As such, *Nkim* is sometimes left at the preserve of viable families. Moreover, women manage this agency of beauty, dance, elevated social status, marriage and childbirth. A woman is *Moninkim* for life as she continues to be peculiar in beauty and character in the community, married or not married. *Nkim* is, therefore, integral to women's and society's sexual and moral well-being.

3.6. Sexual pleasure and the practice

Another area where respondents revealed information of *Nkim* was in the domain of sexual pleasure. Women were questioned on their experience of sexual pleasure considering that feminist theories stated that fixed women do not experience sexual pleasure. In this area, we received some very controversial responses from women. We group their responses according to various age ranges. The data in this section is a culmination of questionnaire responses and the personal/group interviews that were recorded.

3.6.1. Paradoxical responses from the generations

The questions to respondents were simple and straight to the point: as initiated women, do you experience sexual pleasure in marriage and relationships? The answers that emerged are what one could term *paradoxical responses* of the generations. All the

women interviewed were '*Nkimed*' women. Three generations were grouped from the responses.

First, the older generation women were from 55-84 years old, many now widow. Their responses are categorical: they enjoy/enjoyed sex and experienced sexual pleasure throughout their active sexual life. Some confessed that at their present age, they still have sex. For others, mostly the single or widows, the high prevalence of disease (AIDS and STDS) and the deaths of their husbands is what deters them from sexual intercourse, not absence of sexual pleasure. Pleasurable sexual contact with their husbands whom they love has always been a vital part of their sex life.

This generation depicts the sex as a strong motivation for *Nkim e Nkim* in their generation. It is still present and that is why they love and engage in intercourse. They confess that as mothers, they have never imagined the idea that *Nkim* hampers sexuality in any way, hence they might have thought otherwise about the practice. Instead, they stated that those who are not fixed have always felt sexually inadequate in many ways, especially because they did not receive the special *Nju Nkim* sexual training. The idea of the destruction of sexual pleasure is fun to this generation. Many women often burst into laughter when asked about this. Ma Tabe Otang giggles and responds when asked about sexual pleasure in the following words:

If wuna want kill the thing wuna just bekin killam. That one na wuna own reason for today. We we no bi get that kind thing for we head. This thing we doam for fix pikin fine for get hi married and enjoy hi thing (Interviewed 23/11/2017).

Meaning: if you people want to kill *Nkim*, just go ahead and do it. This is your own reasoning these days. Our generation did not imagine that. We did *Nkim* to fix the child to enter into marriage and enjoy her sex (she veils the word sex with 'thing'). Her assertion is supported by a fixed sister from neighbouring Nigeria¹², who states emphatically:

¹²The lady stated her views at a workshop organized by Professor Vuyani Vellem at the university of Pretoria on 01/07/2016 to commemorate forty years of the Soweto Massacre. The

You know, I am circumcised, I have three children, my clitoris is flat (heavy laughter). I enjoy sex, I enjoy it so much. If I stop my girl from going through this practice, it is simply because I do not want to see her go through pain. Not because of all the lies told today about the practice. (Interviewed 01/07/2016)

For this generation, therefore, with or without clitoris women enjoy sex. Removal of their clitoris does not impair orgasm in them. Her response is corroborated by Ngambouk Pemunta (...: 6-7) in his interview of an initiate Atabe. She responds when thus asked about sexual pleasure:

It has affected my life in no way because first of all, we are reasoning today that if you are circumcised if you are not careful, you cannot give birth to children. But I was circumcised before I ever saw my menses. I have since then continued to see my menses, given birth to my three children. I see nothing disturbing me. I have continued to have nice and enjoyable sex with my husband, very good for sixteen years at this material moment, if my husband says oya, [laughs], let us go [and have sex], we will. [Laughter.] I see no good reason in it. I felt that it was lack of circumcision that made a woman have interest in sex but now, the thing or not [meaning circumcision or no circumcision], you still want to have sex, do what you are supposed to do. [Laughter.]

When asked if they would perform *Nkim* with all the ongoing arguments and complications today, their answer is categorical 'yes'.

The second group of women are the middle-aged from 28-54 years. Many of them revealed that they have been having sex normally for many years, but did not classify it as 'sweet or not sweet'. "They enjoyed their husbands and their husbands enjoyed them". Sex was a marital duty which they fulfilled and happily possessed its proceeds - children. Some older ones in this generation confessed that they never had ideas about sex classification until they started following the abolition discourses, which insinuated that fixed women are missing some 'deeper sexual enjoyment'. What they have not grasped is how this 'deeper enjoyment' is, or how it is different from what they always

workshop brought women from Nigeria and South Africa on a partnership to combat patriarchy and its breaking of women's bodies. The researcher presented a paper where she presented Ejagham women's perspective, that *Nkim* may not be hindrance to sexual pleasure.

feel. This group pays considerable attention to activists and is the most paradoxical in their response concerning abolition or continuation of the practice. We observed that they have the tendency easily to play the victim and the hero. This attitude is especially prevalent when stakeholders come along with aids advocating a stop to *Nkim*.

One thing that stands out for this generation is their unchallengeable support for culture. They will still stand for the tenets of culture and praise their generation and their mothers' uprightness while damning the younger generation who refuse *Nkim* for their misuse of sex. Many agree that they enjoy sex very well without clitorises. A few do not understand sexual pleasure but still do have sex and are happy. Others confess that the advocates are right to stop the practice because they are not enjoying sexual pleasure because of the practice. This generation usually erupted into heated debates and arguments between those for and against the practice. Others were fed up with the excitement raised and condemned the arguments stating that "a woman is a woman whether there is enjoyment or not".

Considering the future of *Nkim*, some will undertake the practice with their children even with police surveillance. Others will spare their children because of pain, considering that "pikin them today na coco leaf. They no di fit bear small hot so", stated one respondent (pressing her right thumb and pointing finger together). Others will let their girls decide for themselves whether they want the practice or not.

The third group is the younger generation from 12-28 years. We succeeded in a total of eleven young women of this age group who accepted private interviews in a closed session during our first field visit and group discussions with one-on-one interviews during the second visit. The youngest girl we met, with the most recent *Nkim* fixing, is twelve years old in form two. She was fixed just before she came to secondary school. Most Ejagham young women in this group categorically feel ashamed or refuse to speak about their status, especially to 'outsiders'. They are the ones who bear the pressure of the intensive activism against the practice, as they hear them in schools, markets and advocacy. 'Stop' campaigns often project the negative consequences of the practice on their sex life. Many of them feel frustrated with their status, stating that their mothers destroyed their sexual life. However, some praise their mothers for letting

them go through such a rich culture of training in character-building, beauty and dance which is blessing them now as young women. Moninkim Ebot, young Ejagham woman attended our group discussions from Bamenda gave this response:

At the age of 10, my father's mother Moninkim Obira put me inside the room; it was holidays period, June, July, August. Inside that fattening room, she taught me so many things that are helping me today... She taught me how to set trap, she taught me how to respond to a man and how to respond to a woman; that is character. Inside those three months, she taught me many things; dance steps. When I am tired of staying in the room, she called me to come and stay in the kitchen. I learned so many ways to cook. The advantages are too many I cannot name all. She taught me how to sit in a place where people are, you do not sit anyhow (*ekpaka ne a ke kume k'ezi nzi anes arres, oka'a kume chakha chakha*). Even if we want to talk about the practice, I have not seen any disadvantages

Here, she outlines various advantages of *Nju Nkim* here and puts in even qualities that are considered 'solely' masculine in Ejagham land such as setting traps. In her opinion, *Moninkim* gave women the courage to delve into the masculine sphere and subdue it with *Nkim* strength. This group was paradoxical in response. Many indicated no pleasure, others mild and others, intense. Their responses are included in the tabulations in the next section.

3.6.2. Representation of women's views on *Nkim* and sexual pleasure

The women above are not unique in their insistence that they enjoy or do not enjoy sexual satisfaction with or without clitorises. Studies undertaken in other parts of the world have reached the same findings of pleasure as well as none (Lightfoot-Klein, 1989; Obermeyer, 1989; Grande, 2004; Oba, 2008). Abdulmumini (2008: 9, 11) states that responses from women without a clitoris, clinical considerations as well as the majority of studies on women's enjoyment of sex suggest that 'genital mutilation' does impair not women's enjoyment of sex. Ejagham women willingly agreed to add their experiences to the existing discourses on the clitoris and sexual pleasure. The primary aim of engaging the perspective is to understand if second-wave feminist theorists did make hasty conclusions in demanding eradication on the basis of sexual oppression by *Nkim e Nkim*. Could this be the reason for resistance to address the practice?

3.6.3. Analysis of field statistic on pleasure

We undertook two visits to Ejagham in order to enable us to make a comparative analysis of data collected for sexual pleasure. In our first visit, we asked questions on *Nkim e Nkim* and the other practices, while our second visit concentrated solely in *Nkim a Nkim*. We took into consideration the fact that sex, like every other sensational feeling, should not be static because of its influence by both individual and social factors. In both visits, we worked with a target group of 55 fixed respondents. These were selected randomly from among the fixed women from the three different generations. They were of different ages, educational levels and cultural ranks. During our second visit, we succeeded to reach 44 of these respondents with a shortage of 11 due to unavoidable circumstances.

The two visits were needed for the purpose of acquaintance. Sex is still an uneasy topic largely discussed in coded language among the Ejagham even today. Confronting respondents with such a topic as sexual pleasure for the first time was tedious. The taboo around sex discourses wears out only gradually. As such, one needs to understand insinuations carefully. For instance a woman who emphasises the repetition “*man, man, man!* What has man become?” actually mean “sex, sex, sex! What has sex become?” in protective language. This is because she cannot bring herself to call sex by its actual name either, in English or the local dialect in front of her children and grandchildren. She may be considered immoral, teaching her children and the researcher bad manners.

Respondents’ ages ranged from 12 to 84 as already stated, with three being above their 80s, and the youngest being 12 years old. Before the interviews, the researcher had spent considerable time in the villages to become acquainted with the people as well as the prevailing cultural mind-set. Acquaintance and discourse were especially easier in the second visit. Special features such as body movements, the tone of voice, use of proverbial sayings, winks, click of fingers and silences were given considerable attention; such actions often spoke louder than actual words.

In the months of fieldwork, several questions were asked pertaining to the five women initiation practices targeted; nonetheless, much focus was on women’s sexual welfare.

As already noted above, the first visit and interviews revealed many contradictions and/or paradoxes in the women's discourses, especially on *Nkim e Nkim* which happens to be the locus among all the initiation practices studied. Through cultural activities, meetings campaign rallies, awareness workshops the researcher was able to grasp deeper meanings of Ejagham women's stance on sexual pleasure as *Nkim* women.

During our first visit, we noticed that women could express one opinion in a particular forum and later contradict themselves again altogether without the slightest remorse, especially in cases where remunerations were concerned. However, during the second visit, most of the women were willing to explain some of their contradictory responses and capricious attitudes by exposing what they lived as basic tenets of culture. Their explanations brought to the fore many complicated socio-economic and cultural quagmires replete in the area concerning *Nkim* issues.

We used simple strategies to approach participants such as compound visits where we spoke to them one-on-one or as a little group if they were family members who needed to share experiences together. We also took walks with some along farm roads where we used tape recorders to capture discussions. We met some in their kitchens and others in offices.

Interviews lasted between 15 to 60 minutes and sometimes more. Questions were structured simply to accommodate all levels of education. The uneducated were simply explained to (regarding the questions). Interviews took place in the local Ejagham dialect, Pidgin English (broken English language common to the two English speaking regions of the country) as well as in British English. Research guides assisted in interpreting or translating broken English to local dialects in cases where the respondents could not clearly understand the researcher.

We limited interviews for the pleasure scale to fixed women but extended questionnaires to unfixed women and other non-indigenous women and men in the area who were willing to share knowledge on the practices, especially *Nkim*. These were social workers, women's work helpers, government agents and other settlers in the

area. We also interviewed Ejagham men and a few non-Ejagham men. Some of the fixed women were circumcised between ten and fourteen. Child fixings are not common in Ejagham. This is because, in Ejagham, the main motivation is to honour the girl child or woman by making royalty out of her and exposing her sexual prowess.

Fig.5

3.6.4 Pleasure Scale chart

Comparative Pleasure Scale			
Scale	Level	Score	Comment
No pleasure	0	Very bad. Hurtful =2	I am completely dead inside – no feeling at all. I hate having sex.
	1	Bad No pleasure =4	I am having sex but I don't feel anything. Nevertheless, I do have sex as a necessity.
Mild Pleasure	2	Okay Mild pleasure =5	I am having sex and sex is okay, just as I can stay without sex
Moderate Pleasure	3	Good Some Pleasure =3	I feel good having sex. I enjoy it
	4	Very good Real pleasure =18	Sex is sweet and exciting, I desire it.
Intense Pleasure	5	Exciting Intense pleasure =11	I click inside. I am excited about sex. I have sex always

	6	Very exciting Extraordinary pleasure =1	I feel super excited about sex, I cannot function normally without regular sex.
	Numbers to chose	1,2,3,4,5,6	

3.6.5. Analysis of the Pleasure scale

The pleasure scale was designed to transform women's thought into concrete visible manifestations of their sexual experience. From questionnaire and individual responses, we designed the pleasure scale chart to do a follow up of the first visit. In the second visit, we set the pleasure scale before them so they could select levels of feelings after the explanation of the chart and questions. We took 'no pleasure' levels from 0-1 and our 'Mild to High Pleasure' from 3-6. Level two remained the middle point. Results were as follows:

- Many middle-aged women who indicated sexual pleasure during the first visit still indicated between levels 3-5 in the pleasure scale in the second visit;
- A few middle-aged women who indicated no pleasure in the first visit changed their position to pleasure in the second;
- Some young women who indicated a complete lack of pleasure in the first visit indicated from 2-4 pleasure level in the second visit;
- Older women who indicated pleasure in the first visit still indicated pleasure up to level 3-5 in the second visit. However, many were talking in past tense as many are widows or sexually inactive. The few who are still sexually active indicated high pleasure levels up to level 5; and
- None except one of them chose level six. Generally, level six was viewed negatively as an excessive desire for sex, and no woman wanted to be identified with that level. The one woman who indicated this said that it was how she feels

and would not be ashamed of it. She explained the following when asked why she is still sexually active at her age:

My husband and I still have that urge oooh!. We really enjoy it. Even as he is lying there after the operation, he suddenly called me from the kitchen. I asked why he was worrying me when I do not have good feet again? He said come let me show you something. When I came he said, “see that your thing is standing, see!”. It has woken up oooh! I was happy he was healing fast, but I pretended and told him, “if you are not careful, I will starve you straight, I will starve you”. I asked him; “has it reached two months that they operated you?” He said, “that is old time”. In my own heart, I know people are of different category. They have circumcised me, but I cannot stop the thing (interviewed 8th March 2017)

For this woman then, her reason for continuing sex at her age (72) is the joy she obtains. She and her husband still enjoy themselves and even take time to joke about their sexual life.

- Some who indicated no pleasure attributed this to the absence of the clitoris. They said the lack of clitoris gives them no desire for sex and pleasure. A few complained that the lack of it caused them to go for long periods without sex. This point raised heated debates among the women during the group's interviews. When asked why one woman has up to fourteen children if she was not enjoying sex, she responded: “Sex to have children is a different sex, it is a different sex, is it a lie? ... But that sex that you are really enjoying is different”. (Interviewed 8th March 2017).

It is interesting here to note the differentiation between sex for pleasure and reproductive sex. She insisted that the sex to give birth can be done by women whether they enjoy it or not as long as they desire to have children or fear to die without children. Mbiti (1989:131) cites that fear when he reveals that:

To die without getting married and without children is to be completely cut off from the human community... to become an outcast and to lose all links with mankind... Everybody therefore must get married and bear children: that is the greatest hope of the individual for himself... and of the community for the individual.

The cultural taboo to be barren is a social stigma with a high price tag that frightens women, hence in her opinion, women will have sex at all cost to have children. However, sex for pleasure can be enjoyed only by women with the clitoris. She was asked what she was doing when she was having sex to 'produce' fourteen children if she was not enjoying 'the thing' and she flared¹³

Another woman tried to calm the atmosphere by explaining that she knows of women who have their clitoris intact but complain that they do not enjoy sex. She asked what is the cause of their problem in this case. Another explained the following:

Women are of different kind, some like sex, some they give birth too and they do not want sex, *esokhoti*, we call such ones here *esokhoti* (an impotent woman). Even if a man comes close to her, she does not want him. But even if they cut you that thing, if you were born with an appetite for men, you will still desire a man more than a woman who has it. I am like this they have cut me; I have given birth to many children and I enjoyed the thing well. It is me who decided to stop it. There is nothing bad there sexually...What made me to stop sex is only because of too much sickness that have emerged, if not I have not reached even a small quota not to sleep with men, why? It is this sickness. (Interviewed 8th March 2017).

- The pleasure chart was handled in two ways: first, it was shown to one woman in private interviews after clear explanations and later, it was shown during joint group discussion. Many of the women who indicated pleasure or no pleasure maintained their stance during the group session. A few, however, shifted their positions or swayed in between;
- Interestingly, some of those who indicated a total lack of pleasure and frustration in the first fieldwork had switched levels during the second. We have attempted

¹³ The particular lady in point is one of the local women who is now used by local NGOs and government agencies to talk women out of the practice. She was a *Ngbokondem*, but is now integrated into the activists team because she is moderately educated. Her efforts to convict women against the practice is usually interpreted as betrayal of culture by local adherents. She flared because she thought they were 'intruding' into her privacy.

explanations on their changing moods in the proceeding section. The older and middle generations are often appalled at their capricious moods and consider this generation as 'black legs' of culture. They also retort their 'free use or misuse' of sex and its ensuing negative consequences as moral decadence;

- Women expressed their experiences of orgasm through the description "that sweet time". They used words, body movements and expressions such as "electric feeling", "current walking through my body", "ticking, kicking, clicking inside", "talking nonsense", "short sweetness", "losing senses", "scratching wall", and "holding tight"; to portray the excitement of this sweet moment.
- Interestingly, in all these responses, one comes to the realisation that sexual pleasure signifies different emotions and different responses to different women. Many women enjoyed vagina penetration, which they confessed gave them deep orgasm. Some explained that the absence of clitoris has not affected their pleasure levels because it is outside their zone of pleasure- the vagina. Others explained that pleasure is a "mind thing" and is not reliant on any body part. In their opinion, as long as one is in love and loved in return, all sex becomes pleasurable. Others revealed that their sexual levels could fluctuate; sometimes they enjoy and other times not. For others, too much or too regular sex fluctuated with their pleasure levels positively and negatively. Others indicated that certain body parts awaken their sexual urges such as their breasts, neck and others. The younger generation especially indicated this last tactic.

Summarily, reactions and responses to sexual pleasure among Ejagham women are varied and sometimes contradictory. Eighty percent of the respondents confessed sexual pleasure without a clitoris. Others wanted to understand more about orgasm/pleasure to widen their sexual experience. Another group does not know or bother about the 'sweetness' of sex. They are having sex and sex is okay. Others are not experiencing any orgasm and would like to have it if it is better. A few fixed women state uncontrollable sexual excitement, which sometimes renders them helpless because it gives them an excess and continuous desire for sex. Conversely, in our questionnaires, we received responses from non-Ejagham women (some social workers

working to end the practice in the area) who do not identify having had an orgasm before, though they have their clitorises intact. The last group sees recent overemphasis between *Nkim* and sex as pure nonsense and moral decadence.

3.7. Implications of field results for the study

The chapter began by engaging the Ejagham community on the practice of *Nkim e Nkim*. We graphically represented people's responses and positions based on their experience as received from field data collection on the issue of patriarchal control of women's sexuality and sexual pleasure in *Nkim* culture among Ejagham women of Cameroon. The chapter was a direct response to second-wave feminists' views that genital mutilation is the result of patriarchal suppression of women's sexuality. Having examined data collected, the following implications could be drawn:

First, that second-wave feminist theorists' reports of patriarchy and its control and/or suppression of women's sexuality as reported in 'female genital mutilation' discourses in Africa does not corroborate with field result of *Nkim a Nkim* in Ejagham community. Ejagham women using their practical experiences do reject patriarchy and control of women's sexuality as a motivation for *Nkim a Nkim*. Contrarily, they state sexual motivation, gratification and agency as the driving spirit behind the *Nkim culture*. Patriarchy is in their opinion, only insinuated but not actually operative in *Nkim* culture.

Moreover, Ejagham women think that feminists' allegations are the result of lack of knowledge of the vision of this cultural vitality and the religio-spiritual implications of these practices on adherents on the ground. They think that feminist understanding does not grasp the relationship between the initiation vision and practices of people with their spirituality. First, *Nkim* carries religio-cultural implications as a foundational practice that opens up Ejagham women's appropriation of and interaction with other religious worldviews such as Western Christianity and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Ejagham women think that improper understanding and alienation from these practices as they are today in Ejagham only drifts women more from their spiritual base as religio-cultic superintendents in Ejagham community. Ejagham community is patrilineal, but one that accords women considerable autonomy with regard to religious, cultural as well as social issues. They, therefore, refute patriarchy as motivation for *Nkim e Nkim*.

In addition, women's responses show that Ejagham women do experience sexual pleasure even as fixed women. This puts to task the next claim of second wave theorists that 'genital mutilation' does hamper sexual pleasure. Ejagham women's views have been shared by Ahmadou (2009: 14), women of the Bondo community in Sierra Leone and Njambi (2004: 294, 299) of Kenya, respectively. These are theorists that have in hand their personal practical experiences and do contend feminist claims as well. In addition, other theorists such as Obermeyer (1999: 80, 95, 96), Dellenborg (2004), Lightfoot-Klein (in Ahmadou 2009: 15), Oyefara (2015: 1539), Nzegwu (2011: 26) and many others have carried similar studies in practising contexts in Sudan, Nigeria and other parts of Africa¹⁴ that reflected similar outcomes like the Ejagham community. Ejagham women are thereby, adding their voices to women in practising areas whose motives for undertaking the practice are empowering and liberating.

Last, Ejagham women's experience with the clitoris adds credence to the theories that propose understanding cultural practices, sexuality and pleasure as contextual personal experiences that may not be translated or similarised (cf Pui-lan Kwok, 2004: 8; Njambi, 2004: 294; Hota, 2017: 199; Noa Ben-Asher, 2009). Ejagham women have shown that they find more expression of their sexual self without a clitoris. Hence, contrary to popularly held views that patriarchy controls women's sexuality in *Nkim a Nkim* (female circumcision), the Ejagham context portrays contrary motivations for the practice as it operates in *Moninkim* and *Ndem* cult. They, therefore, refute the feminist claim of lack of sexual pleasure as hasty and lack of engagement with other perspectives on the clitoris. 'Sans' clitoris is Ejagham women's way of enjoying sex.

3.8. Conclusion

Conclusively, we have so far examined data on *Nkim* culture in Ejagham community in Cameroon as gathered through field studies. Statistics show that *Nkim a Nkim* in Ejagham community is replete with varied motivations that seem to be empowering to Ejagham women as opposed to second-wave feminists' claims that the practice

¹⁴ We share all their views in details in chapter five where we engage both theorists on sexual pleasure and the practice.

disempowers women sexually. Ejagham people through data analysis from the context refuted primary claims such as the suppression of sexuality and patriarchy advanced by second-wave feminists. However, patriarchy is also a Global South phenomenon, and data collected does show that the other initiation rituals that go alongside *Nkim* to shape women's sexual life are laced with varied forms of patriarchal violence. We, therefore, move to the next chapter to engage with the other initiation practices, and how patriarchy, as male domination, Western control and triple patriarchy do influence them and by implication, women's sexuality, to the extent of breaking women's bodies.

Chapter Four

4. Patriarchy and the other initiation practices

4.1. Introduction

Reports on the ground state that women's initiation practices erupted from pre-colonial Ejagham community as spaces of empowerment to enable women to gather and socialise in a society where only male cults operated and accorded no membership to women. The chapter is a continuation of field data analysis on the other women initiation practices among the Ejagham. The practices are connected in two ways: first, they all ritualise the life of Ejagham women in stages of growth from youthfulness (*Ngbokondem*), through marriage (*Mbi ebe*, widowhood rites) and death (burial of Ejagham daughters. From *Nkim a Nkim* in the *Moninkim* and *Ndem* cult, the Ejagham woman goes into the realm of marriage through *Mbi ebe* and connects to widowhood when a marriage ends. Finally, she herself succumbs to death and her life cycle is over. Second, all these practices are connected by the fact that patriarchal has a grip on all of them, thus affecting women's sexuality in varying magnitudes.

4.2. Continuation of empirical data analysis

The chapter is a continuation of chapter three; as such no new methods are added aside to what has already been substantiated in chapter three. Data collected shows that male domination thrives among the Ejagham and has immense implications on women's sexual lives. Sometimes women have mustered resistance against patriarchy, which has assumed subtle or severe forms resulting. For instance, the prostitution plague of the mid-20th century is a vital manifestation. In this chapter, we report the rest of the four initiation practices, namely: The *Ngbokondem* cult, *Mbi ebe*, Widowhood rituals and last, burial of Ejagham daughters. We attempt to establish an understanding of how patriarchy as male domination, Western control, and triple patriarchy operates in these practices and how it influences women's lives to sexual dimensions.

4.3. Patriarchy as implicated in the chapter

4.3.1. Male domination and flawed versions of true femininity

Data showed that Ejagham women are familiar with male domination, a phenomenon that is a general Cameroonian phenomenon. Women are generally perceived differently as a result of gender discrepancies. If one were to move along the quarters and streets in every village, town and city in Cameroon about sixty years ago (Kaberry, 1952), one would hear the same comments made about woman today. One hears them at home, in “*mimbo* parlours and off-licenses”¹⁵ (Coheen, 1996:71). ‘Women’, say the men, should always listen to the man. They cannot reason correctly because their hearts get in the way”; meaning women reason with their heart and men with the head (Coheen, 1996:71). “Ruling is for the man. If you catch trouble, will you send for a man or woman? A woman has farm work. You can call her the mother of the farm...” “Women are like God”, for they are “child and food producers” (Kaberry, 1952:150). Another man says, “I’m always right because I’m a man and men are superior to women...” (Kayser & Djabateng, 2012:68).

These images are social constructs of a true woman. She is soft and weak, passive, powerless and shy, one who stoops low and gives men utmost space and respect no matter her status. In addition, she readily gives in to passionate sensual advances from men without feeling slighted and lowers the eyes in respect when a man looks and accepts secondary status. On the contrary, as Arnfred (2004:51) notes, this notion of woman is “opposed by that of a hegemonic masculinity that emphasizes strength and virility”.

Women and young girls then who defy these powerless statuses and resist the norm by being independent are given frightful descriptions. Coheen (1996:180) states that some of them:

¹⁵ These are local drinking places where men usually gather in the evenings to drink beer and locally brewed drinks. These comments are also made consciously or unconsciously in homes, schools, offices, at political debates, church sermons and women forums

Find husbands, get married and settle down like normal women...love for sale girls... Engaging in commercial flirting...it seems we have bred a nation of whores with this sinister generation...These days, the girls have stepped into the shoes of men, with the ardent belief that what men can do, women can equally do.

These perceptions are still alive and thriving today. For any respectful and meaningful image of the concept woman, there ought to be a male attachment in some way; either as a husband, boyfriend, father, uncle, boss, or 'sugar daddy'. Society attaches to women who are not in some way hooked to men a stigma of ontological inadequacy.

The single or self-made woman is in many ways a threat. Oduyouye (1995:5) notes that this kind of "single woman who manages her affairs successfully without a man is an affront to patriarchy and a direct challenge to the so-called masculinity of men who want to "possess" her". Again, a woman's quest for independence and lesser grip from male dominion is associated to a wayward life and sinful sexuality by men and women alike. On the contrary, a married woman who shares her sexuality with one man, a virgin, or a single woman who stays chaste until marriage is lauded by society. Female chastity then, as Arnfred (2004:67) notes, becomes the very mark and emblem of civilisation. Uncontrolled 'free' female sexuality is the most dangerous threat to patriarchy. It is seen as the root of evil, sin and disease specifically because it cannot be controlled by a single man. A woman who sells sex for money is the worst woman. This is the reason why Ejagham women are still stigmatised even in the modern era in Cameroonian society after the prostitution plague from the 1950s. Not much thought is given to any justifications for losing sexuality, be it for a livelihood, a revolution, pleasure, enjoyment or desire.

4.3.2. Ejagham women's specific experience of the phenomenon

Data collected from the Ejagham cultural setup show that Ejagham society accords the male privilege over female in many respects from as young as childhood years. The boy-child becomes future heir through the bearing of the family name; he owns the family property. As a man, he could marry many wives, have extramarital relations, give sexual solace to a dead brother's wife and marry shortly after the wife dies and collect marriage money for all his daughters and brothers' daughters. Many women still have

none of these privileges except they make such achievements at their own personal levels as self-made women.

Home settings in Ejagham reveal clear-cut demarcations in domestic chores and language. Men and women have basic duties: women cook, clean and nurture children and men. They carry out subsistence farming while men head the family, do socio-cultural duties and own cash crop farming. Dependency rate is high as most Ejagham women still need male support to survive or thrive. Ejagham pre-colonial and colonial history show that male dominance adapted well to colonial patriarchy, which privileged the male-led structures and institutions and tightened women's lives economically, religiously and politically. Effects of this phenomenon are still glaring in women's status on the ground. Father-rule is the dominant feature in an Ejagham patriarchal setting. We see this form of domination coming out forcefully in the initiation practices of widowhood rites, *Mbi be*, burial of Ejagham daughters and the *Ndem* cult.

4.3.3. Triple patriarchy

Triple patriarchy is another phenomenon implicated in the chapter. In the context of home-based and foreign oppressors, Boesak (2017: xi, 47) has also lamented the emergence of new pharaohs who "...indeed physically look like us". While the white oppressor persists in oppression, a middle class has emerged from the oppressed community who have become silent and non-critical of the *status quo* but are acting just like it. It is these that Boesak calls pharaohs who look like us (Boesak, 2017: 59). These pharaohs have become the new oppressors; they well grappled for liberation, but have turned out to be just as oppressive in their dealings (Boesak, 2017: xi).

Often, this situation pops up in struggling contexts when a new middle-class emerge from among the oppressed who become complacent of their plight treating them in similar ways as the oppressor. Boesak (2017: 60) summarises this attitude of putting self-first before the plight of the people as a sheer betrayal of the people. Upon observation of Ejagham women's struggles with patriarchy, the term *triple patriarchy* is coined from the study out of Ajayi-Soyinka's (1993) double patriarchy, Oduyoye's (1995) triple suffering and Thiam's (1978:118) "multiple jeopardy" to attempt some understanding of her present state of suffering and complacency at the same time.

According to Ajayi-Soyinka (1993:162), African people experienced patriarchy by their subjugation through the race and its colonial imperialism. The experience of women in this subjugation was however different. First, they were subject to indigenous patriarchy in their cultures before foreign domination. Thiam (1978: 118) uses multiple jeopardies to explain African women's plight in light of such global and home-based patriarchy. She specifically describes a situation wherein:

“...the black woman of Africa suffers threefold oppression: by virtue of her sex, she is dominated by man in a patriarchal society; by virtue of her class she is at the mercy of capitalist exploitation; by virtue of her race she suffers from the appropriation of her country by colonial or neo-colonial powers. Sexism, racism, class division; three plagues...” (Thiam, 1978: 118).

Her exposition takes coloniality and cultural male domination into consideration just like Ajayi-Soyinka and Oduyoye. Nonetheless, they all leave out a vital aspect of African women's oppression, women themselves. Among women, some are more powerful and privileged to be close to male power than others are. In the modern era, Ejagham women who face coloniality and cultural male domination also oppress one another by exercising stringent cultural control on themselves. This is done complacency and silence over norms enforced in connection with some initiation practices, which largely strengthen patriarchy. The study labels this form of patriarchy because of the threat it poses to Ejagham women's cultural and sexual well-being.

Ogundipe-Leslie (1994: 27-36) is an African scholar who comes closest to this idea of triple patriarchy in African women's oppression. She describes six mountains of oppression meted on the backs of African women, namely: oppression from the outside, especially the ravages of colonialism, some African cultural traditions, the backwardness of the African woman, men, race and last, the African woman herself (Ogundipe, 1994: 36). She sees this last mountain as the most important and most oppressive because it consists of a woman fighting against her own self with forces such as negative criticism, fear, self-defeat, negative complex and others. While citing both external and internal factors of her oppression, Ogundipe-Leslie does not leave out the African woman as a contributing agent to her own pain. Her participation in own

oppression, in the Ejagham context, is seen in women enforcing certain sex norms which oppress vulnerable women.

It is in light of this predicament, that the study coins the term 'triple patriarchy' to express a phenomenon, which showed that Ejagham women, who already suffer double domination from culture and Western imperialism, are seen to subjugate their kind. Oduyoye (1995: 154) throws light on how this happens. She explains that patriarchy generally privileges a few women who stand to sustain the system by enabling that their kind is constantly toeing the patriarchal line. Hence, they uphold certain patriarchal rites as passive victims because of certain life-giving aspects they seek to protect (Oduyoye, 1995: 15). Their action only fosters the false concept that "women against women is part of our female heritage" (Oduyoye, 1995: 97). This form of patriarchy is replete within widowhood rites and *Mbi ebe* in Ejagham land.

4.4. The *Ngbokondem* cult

The *Ngbokondem* cult is described by Ejagham women as one of the earliest expressions of religious consciousness and interaction with the spiritual universe in Ejagham land long before the arrival of colonial Christianity. Ejagham people view the cult as an indication of the fact that women in the pre-colonial society stood at the hem of spiritual leadership. Their involvement in this cult gave them considerable control since every community is directed through its interaction with the spiritual. Their nurturing of society was void of hierarchical intent. The survival of this powerful cult signifies that women from pre-colonial times dispensed their spiritual authority with honesty and vigour. The cult assured the community's religious and spiritual well-being through women's interactions with the paranormal.

4.4.1. The cult as an early expression of religion in Ejagham land

Some people have rightly noted that Africans are 'notoriously' and 'incurably' religious (Mbiti, 1969:1; Oduyoye, 1995: 109). Religion forms the backbone of African ontological consciousness. African cosmology is plagued with rich religious expressions and experiences. Religion penetrates every sphere, both physical and the spiritual. Women often take religion or are taken by religion seriously. Oduyoye (1995: 110) calls them "religion's chief clients". This seemed to be the state of *Ngbokondem*.

While moving across Ejagham villages, especially Ossing, Ndekwai, Ntenako and myriads of others, we came across graves that stand in front of compounds with statues of women on top of them and Baeta's (cited in Bediako 1996: 216) words came to life; "Africans live with their dead". We learned that these statues were built in honour of prominent women known as *ngboko-ndem* or *Mbokondem* as Ruel (1969: 203) calls them. Talbot (1926: 130) gives more appellations as *Ngbokondem*, *Mbok-ndemm*, *Mbokk ndamm*, *Nenkai Nimm*; these names were all used to refer to the priestesses of the prominent female deity called *Ndem*. Ruel (1969:204) points out that these effigies- formerly in mud within a protective hut' and later in cement- were built in commemoration of a dead member of the *Ndem* association (Pemunta et al, 2014: 11). *Ngbokondem* and other cults with extramundane worldview are described by some Ejagham indigenes as, 'we own church before Whiteman's church for we land'; signifying pre-colonial expressions religious consciousness in Ejagham before the arrival of missionaries (Bediako, 1996:212). Through its cultic orientations, the cult is thought to have created easy access for subsequent religious bodies like Christianity and Islam to reach out to already spirit-minded people. Bediako (1996:212) also thinks that through the religio-cultural commitments of agents like *Ngbokondem*, the salvific activity of the "Supreme Being" was already available in Africa. Human agents such as *Ngbokondems* who represented the Supreme Being were already present in African communities "prior to the historic proclamation and reception of the gospel" (Bediako, 1996: 224). They were then used as a preparation ground for the gospel through their cultic orientations. Bediako (1996:212) describes their cultic interventions in the community as the first expression of "African primal religions", they were "the womb out of which Christianity was born" in Ejagham and Africa as a whole, as Maluleke (1997: 10) sweetly puts it.

Ngbokondems and the cult were not just 'passive traditional cosmologies', but were dynamic institutions that were able to adapt as well as respond to new situations as they grappled with human needs in society (Bediako, 1996: 212). Bediako (1996: 227-228) rightly states that they, like the Biblical ancestors, at critical points in their lives and careers, made choices which went into shaping the destinies of our traditions till in the

fullness of time our histories became merged in Christ, with the history of the people of God.

More so, their cultic interventions could be visualised more as prefiguration and anticipations among Africans and Ejaghams of the coming Christ brought through the gospel by Christian missionaries (Bediako, 1996: 225). Hence, missionaries only did not make Christianity possible in Africa as most have thought. Cultic participants and interventions such as those of *Ngbokondems* strongly support “the many-sided manner in which the ancestors have been part of the story of the making of Christian Africa” (Bediako, 1996: 228).

The skill and mastery of indigenous knowledge that *Ngbokondems* had, blending the supernatural and natural, could be compared to the powerful medieval women in European lands who were burnt alive as witches in the 16th/17th century together with ‘heretics’ because they threaten the androcentric authority of the Christian church at the time (Grosfoguel, 2013:85). *Ngbokondems*, like these women, were empowered with the possession of ancestral knowledge and they played leading roles in the communities where they were accorded a high status (Grosfoguel, 2013: 85). Their effective supernatural knowledge is what all Ejagham indigenes marvel about. It is believed to come from the sky (Niger-Thomas, 2009: 171) where the Ejagham believe the Supreme Being resides. Among both the male and female cults and associations that operated in Ejagham land, the *Ngbokondem* cult grew into prominence as a result of its religious affiliations.

4.4.2. Traditional Initiation into priestesshood

Respondents could not trace any particular origin for the *Ndem* cult. Some simply said they grew up and found it existing, and others said that *Ngbokondems* was born with mysterious signs and acted differently. Niger-Thomas (2009: 171) states a popular belief that reports that the first *ngboko-ndem* fell from the sky into a large *Boma* tree; she wore strange dancing attire and spoke to awed spectators in a queer language. Later, she was married in the area and taught some women her secrets. Thereafter, parents started initiating their first-born daughters who became known as *ngboko – ndem* and so the cult developed. Ruel (1969: 204, also see Talbot, 1926: 130)

witnessed some of the initiation ceremonies and states that during these events, a series of small cicatrizations are made down the arms, across the chest and back; and a member took a series of special names such as Bessem, Enika (Eneke), Ebana (Ebangha), and Erere (Eyere). These names still command respect in Ejagham land today and children who bear them are still believed to possess special powers.

Some respondents noted that not every girl qualifies for this role of priestess. Before being chosen by the parents or community, such young girls are first believed to have manifest special mystical traits of the deity in their personal character or are first born daughters in their family. This then sets them apart for this sacred vocation. Priestesshood is a lifetime commitment. Once in, a child does not have the power to opt out except when the *Ndem* spirit leaves her.

Talbot (1926: 130) reports that several seven-day trips are made into the bush throughout *Ngbokondem's* life where she seeks knowledge and power. The women of Eyumojock village cited these trips as some of the most mystical undertakings of the *Ngbokondem*. She will not pack a bag to leave for the trips but will just disappear from sight even while sitting among people and reappear again after seven days anywhere she pleases. She will then begin to recount all the things that were said and done in her absence, stating that she was just nearby. *Ngbokondems* were not supposed to have intercourse with any man hence their supernatural eyes (seeing powers) will be closed by the *Ndem* spirit.

4.4.3. The cult and women's status and empowerment

4.4.3.1. Women and the priestly prophetic

The cult is being hailed in and out of Ejagham land for the uplifting of women's status (Niger-Thomas, 2009). The cult concentrated on the very essence of clan's survival as it ensured procreation and hence multiplicity of society. Ruel (1969) describes it as a prominent women's association with some form of powers associated with fertility and procreation. The *Ndem* priestess mediated between the community and the *Ndem* spirit of fertility and procreation in the land. Pre-colonially African religious mind-set understands her as a 'messenger' of the "Supreme Being who is the ultimate Source and sustainer of life and the universe" (Oduyoye, 1995: 111).

Ejagham people also revealed her prophetic role. Some stated that she had the ability to predict and report future events that could affect the community negatively or positively. This often happened after unconscious and spectacular spiritual experiences. Her prophetic utterances were taken seriously because of their eventual fulfilment. This goes to support the myriad of testimonies that in Africa, “God did speak to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways” (Bediako, 1996: 225).

When evil is too strong in the community, she will shout and fall unconscious, going into a trance. Then she would be revived with some herbs. When she becomes conscious again, she will recount the sort of evil or good she saw and measures that should be taken to ward off such evil or welcome the good. At other times, her mediations would bring good things into the land such as children, food and other good tidings. It is for this reason that the current living community still accords her spiritual status just as Biblical priests.

Some Ejagham indigenes revere them as God’s agents in the land because they were pro-life. Ma Jemmy of Mbakang explains their spiritual role in the following words:

This is a gift that you are born with; the gift is given by God. Just like this people who carry Obasinjom, not anybody can carry it... It is those people whom God has given them gift originally, a gift to see. And that is because God had originally given you the powers. That is why some people see their dreams and they become real, even the Bible talks about it.... Ngbokondem is that kind of a person...So Ngbokondem is that, they give birth to you with a gift...When she falls, immediately they know something is wrong in the village. So then they will take precaution on what to be done. She is like an announcer, she prophesies, like a seer... You will be prophesying, they will show you medicines and you will cure people. None of these people are evil. They do it according to their own life how they could see it. All these gifts are given by God.

In her opinion, Ngbokondems were powerful messengers of “Atah Obassi” on behalf of the living community. She describes their prophetic gift of seeing, as coming from God for no one is able to bestow such gift on human beings except God Almighty. In her

opinion, God chose prophets and priests in Africa and Ejagham land even before the introduction of Biblical prophets to the community.

4.4.3.2. Women as cultic superintendents

From its inception, the *ndem* cult was a prestigious club for women, even though it was mystical. *Ndem* priestesses were prominent in their communities as they could foretell the future and cure mystical illnesses, avert misfortunes and even prevent defeat war by alerting the entire village beforehand (Talbot, 1926:132). During initiations into the cult, members are believed to be transformed into the supernatural through certain traditional medicinal processes. After this process, the *Ndem* spirit deity then comes to *Ngbokondems* constantly. Spectacular scenes wherein they shout and then fall to the ground unconscious (dead) signify her presence. Those around will immediately understand that '*bha gbo Ndem*', meaning she has fallen *Ndem* or has been caught by *Ndem* spirit. At this point of the dead (unconsciousness), they are translated to the spiritual realm where they connect with the *Ndem*.

She is then revived or 'woken up' (Ruel, 1969: 203) by other members of the cult through the same medicinal process to deliver her messages for the community. They also use certain herbal concoctions and plants that have been shown during their 'dead' experience for the community's healing and welfare. This phenomenon is the origin of the 'die wake up' syndrome labelled on Ejagham daughters as a stigma. It is now common knowledge that Ejagham women die and rise again not as a temporary *Ndem* experience, but as ghosts (*benem*) to haunt people.

This religio-mystical affiliation of the cult priestess prompts her description by Margaret Niger-Thomas (2000: 171) as "mami water" (mermaid spirit)¹⁶. Ejagham people contests this Niger-Thomas' description because the 'mami water' appellation has a negative connotation in Ejagham land as a beautiful but malevolent female spirit that is feared for her vengeance when disobeyed. However, if one deciphers some of the reports of the

¹⁶ Mermaid spirits are commonly believed to live in watery spaces and mystically penetrate the physical realm to influence human activities, especially the sexual, through fertility and procreation.

Ndem as a jealous spirit who punishes rivalry or disempowers the *Ngbokondem* after disobedience, then Niger-Thomas could have a point. Nevertheless, *Ngbokondems* are revered than feared in Ejagham society. Their services were heavily sought until they were discredited by Christian missionaries and the cult stigmatised as witchcraft.

4.4.3.3. *Nkim a Nkim* as a cult mark of strength and status

Because of the mystical challenges that were replete in this cult, *Nkim e Nkim* was a primary criterion. Only women who accepted to undergo the fixing process were allowed into the *Ndem* cult. It is after the fixing that the priestess was kept in a special house and initiated fully into the cultic process. An expert is summoned into the fixing room to shape her clitoris with a small sharp knife called *akarang*¹⁷. The *Ngbokondem* is expected to manifest strength and vigour during the fixing process to show that she is able to brace the elaborate and complicated mystical process of cultic activities. With these, she earns the title 'leader among women' (Ruel, 1969: 204). The fixing and initiation all invest the priestess with supernatural potentials for religio-cultic services to the community and dancing. She handles this position until she dies or becomes too old to serve. Even at this stage, she is constantly consulted for advice on community or clan issues.

When *Ngbokondems* die, elaborate funeral rites are conducted for them and a statue built over their graves. The statue is decorated with feathers from a cock. These are feathers worn on the head by priestesses when they are alive to show their traditional rank in the cult and community. The number of feathers could signify the level of leadership. During ceremonies, she sits among dignitaries and male cult leaders. Her stool is carried for her everywhere she goes.

¹⁷ *Akarang* is a special knife used by Ejagham women to fix the woman's clitoris to make it smoother. *Akarang* actually means O K'a lang; meaning you should not touch. The name originates from the fact that fixers always forbade people from touching it. After someone was fixed, the knife was cleansed with herbs and water and carefully kept far from sight because of its sharpness. Its sharpness could be compared to a blade. It only resurfaces again when the next fixing is to take place.

As it is today, the cult has declined all over Ejagham with barely a few of its members still alive, and even fewer still involved in *Ngbokondem* activities. Yet the strong status and personality it accorded women in a solely male-dominated society is a mark that never departs. Even today, women bearing *Ngbokondem* names are still believed to be special in some way, bold and imposing in their interactions with people. This potential is a liberating factor in a context where women are subject to varied patriarchal challenges. Their graves and dilapidated statues still survive as monuments to wail their declining status and memory. How then has the hand of patriarchy influenced this cult?

4.5. *Ngbokondem* and patriarchy

Ejagham people blame patriarchy both as male domination Western imperialism for influencing the rise of women associations generally in Ejagham land. Early pre-colonial society encouraged the formation of various male cults and associations, which completely forbade women's participation. Colonial society largely encouraged and even used these male associations for religious purposes (Hamilton, 2013). Women responded to this by grouping together in separate gatherings with similar structure and norms. Respondents' reports showed that patriarchy as male domination and Western cultural imperialism juxtaposed to weaken this women's cult to its demise. In the following section, we examine how patriarchy in its dual form as male domination and colonial patriarchy (Western imperialism), have imparted the cult.

4.5.1. The cult and cultural male domination

Ejagham people just like Margaret Niger-Thomas (2009: 169-184) speak highly of this cult and its priestesses. They occupied the highest positions together with *Moninkims* among women in Ejagham community. Only *Ngbokondems* and *Moninkims* could sit with 'men' or be given special places of respect among men. Apart from these, women could not and still do not have much influence on traditional matters. However, their powers among men were limited by male domination in the following ways:

First, though powerful in their own rights, *Ngbokondems* were not granted membership into the other powerful, solely male associations of the land such as *Ngbe*, *Obasinjom*, *Angbo* or *Nfam*. Gendered cultural divide produced such deep gulf between the two sexes that became an almost a natural phenomenon. On the contrary, men succeeded

to penetrate the most sacred realm of the *Ndem* cult through initiations of Obales. When the cult's activities became so powerful and threatening, first-born sons were gradually introduced as initiates to become members of this female cult. Though their role ended at playing the drums during dancing, they succeeded to become part of the cult and pierced through women's secret circle.

According to Ruel (1969: 204), the founding of this association was a direct response to the "system of status achievement and competition among the men of the community". Women who were permitted no participation in the male associations of the land responded by forming similar cults where they could wield similar authority among themselves. *Ndem* cult became a forum where women's voices could also be heard in their own right.

Moreover, patriarchy ensured that it was only the father of the girl who registered her into the cult by paying her fees as a young woman (Ruel, 1969:203). No woman could enrol on her own or enrol another woman. A girl could also not refuse to become a *Ndem* priestess since she was initiated while she was still underage and could not make her own decisions. Moreover, her father and husband had an advantage in her membership in that "small fines" were often paid to them in the case where anyone in the community flawed the rules against their *Ndem* (Ruel, 1969:204). Importantly, "...bridewealth for a *Mbokondem* was higher than for other women; and a heavier fine could also be demanded in the case of adultery". This father/husband benefit played more to the advantage of the men rather than the young girl, later a woman.

Similarly, the fact that almost all traces of this prestigious women's cult are disappearing while male cults such as *Ngbe (Ekpe)* and *Njom* that existed at the same pre-colonial period are still thriving today, could be an indication of a patriarchal society that revered male-oriented cultic activities as against women's. It is claimed that the last *arem* in the area took place at Eyumojock two years back (that is 2014 from the date of this study). Nevertheless, one of our informants only referred to it now as 'when they fall that their nonsense'. This description is a result of the influx of Pentecostal-style worship that targets, especially *Ngbokondems* in the area as evil women. Another respondent claims to have been delivered from that 'demon cult' by 'Jesus and prayer'. She reveals

that she used to fall into unconsciousness and get up again dancing, seeing and revealing mystical things and speaking strange languages. She exclaims, “thank You Jesus I am delivered”

Contrarily, Pa Ekamba Ntui of Eyumojock differs with these women. He laments the demise of this powerful cult when he explains that they, in Ejagham, have made a huge error by outlawing their *Ndem* cult. This is because neighbouring Nigerians are making great use of theirs today by using them as prophetesses in almost all the churches. In his opinion, these women are the ones making the churches in Nigeria prominent as they are using their foretelling powers to solve people’s mystical problems.

According to Ma Oben Emblar of Kembong village, patriarchy came to its meanest point during their era. One woman’s daughter who was a prominent *Ngbokondem* in Nchang village was buried alive as a result of patriarchal jealousy. While the woman was on the farm, her daughter who was visited by the *Ndem* fell unconscious. The men of the village refused the administration of the revival herb. Instead, they quickly declared her dead and quickly buried her before her mother returned. When she returned, she immediately detected a ploy and retaliated by planting *betok* (a creeping yam). Every time one of its yams fell, one person in the village died, until all the people who hatched the plot were eliminated.

Last, the statues on the graves are another site of interest. Even though they are designed to honour women, they are practically built in the shape of men with male faces except for the notable women’s breasts hanging on the male-form statues. In other words, nothing shows that the people inside the graves are women, except the breast hanging on the statues and the names on the grave boards. They have no resemblance with their owners inside the graves but could have been copied one from another. They have general similarities in the varied places in which they are erected. Some respondents suggested that this is due to the fact that a singular artist was invited from neighbouring Nigeria to build them. Since he did not know the women in person, he built the same statue in all the places he was invited to and added breasts.

The remnant of this prestigious female cult that has held villages and people together are broken effigies above the graves of its priestesses, most of whom have been forgotten today. Some of their surviving 'Christian' relatives either do not know them or refrain from identifying with their activities today.

4.5.2. The cult and colonial patriarchy

In her collection of poems titled: *A Basket of flaming ashes*, Joyce Ashuntantang (2010:36) dedicates a section on *Ngbokondems*. Here she laments the demise of this prestigious cult in Ejagham land. Citing the dilapidating state of the statues, she blames brutal Western imperialism that ravages not only *Ndem* but the whole Ejagham land. She states the following:

The absence of your hands tells the story of your rape, the rape of your land, the rape of your people. But your beauty is legend.... This morning the mist cleared, your right leg was gone too and that pretty face has lost an ear... Maybe when I return you will be gone completely.

In Ashuntantang's (2010: 36) opinion, the broken statues in front of the houses and inside the bushes tell the same story; the rape of culture and land by a Western imperialistic enterprise that manifests itself; religiously, politically and economically in Ejagham land. Religiously, we have stated that *Ngbokondem* was considered the first religious expression of the people with the priestess as an intermediary between the people and the supernatural being. However, Talbot (1926: 117-138), who is one of the earliest European sources to report on the cult could describe it only as 'juju' or minor deity. *Mfam*, *Obasi Njom* (God medicine), *Ngbe* and *Ndem* were all *jujus* or minor deities (Talbot, 1926: 126-28).

Maluleke's (1996: 41-43) insight could be used to question how much "privilege, interest, control and knowledge" researchers such as Talbot, Ruel, and their peers including early missionaries had over the researched as they describe their religio-cultural world in such simplistic terms? Considering, that the 'juju' appellation carries with it a negative connotation in Ejagham mind-set and should not fit the description of their cults. If colonial Christianity saw these cults only in such light while they are of fundamental religious importance among Ejagham, then their stigmatisation and

subsequently being ostracised by missionaries are understood. These probably are the messages that were transmitted back home to colonial headquarters, such that missionaries who penetrated the area sought only to destroy the 'jujus' so that they could implant a more 'civilised' God.

Ngbokondems were treated with similar scorn by colonial political Christianity in the same manner as those European women who were branded witches in the 16th/17th century. This was a "strategy to consolidate Christian-centric patriarchy" (Grosfoguel, 2013: 87-88; Daly, 1978). Grosfoguel (2013: 87-88) explains that the "...autonomy, leadership and knowledge of these women threatened Christian theology, church authority and the power of aristocracy... in the colonies...." One could compare the situation of *Ngbokondems* with these European termed 'witches' in that they independently liaised with the supernatural Being for the living community was a threat to colonial Christian authorities who struggled to weaken indigenous allegiance to the ancestral cults. These needed to be ostracised to create space for Western Christian influence.

The *Ndem* cult could not survive labels of witchcraft launched by the missionary church but especially by its converts. The very people the cult spiritually had nurtured for several decades before they became Christians were its murderers. When women began to fill missionary churches, the main criterion for conversion was to leave the cult and other traditional practices, and it is these new converts who stood in the mind-set of the missionaries to ridicule fellow sisters who held on to cult activities.

Ashuntantang (2010: 36) mentions the operation of colonial political economy through the exploitation of forests and vegetation, which are vital, features for *Ndem* activities. From the reports of Ruel and Talbot above, *Ngbokondems* made several trips into the forest during their lifetime to increase their power. The women of Mbenyan confirm this report by stating that *Ngbokondem* could see her own way through a dense forest without the guidance of anyone when she goes to collect whatever was kept there for the community. Niger-Thomas (2009: 171) mentions *Boma* tree, water and earth as crucial elements for *Ngbokondem*'s survival.

Eyumojock women explained that the *Ndem* spirit lives in trees and could manifest in the form of a reptile or human on a *Boma* tree. Her dwelling is always in the nearby forest close to the village. As such, nature such as trees, water and forests were vital for cultic practices. As the area with the biggest virgin forest in the entire country, Ejagham proved suitable for *Ndem*'s survival. Creation and nature, lavish in this area, became the resting place of God where He walks in the fresh evening breeze to have communion with man (Genesis, 3). Here *Ndem* priestesses could penetrate nature's womb to get instructions from the 'Supreme Being' for the welfare of the community.

All this was destroyed by the colonial political economy and exploitation. The continuous pulling down of forests for timber exportation to foreign markets is an example of the ruthless exploitation of Western imperialistic patriarchy. Even though dwelling in the land, the people have become landless through marginalisation. They are powerless to question the heavy French vehicles with foreign labels ploughing the bad roads directly to the sources of wood without noticing the dilapidated villages along the roads. They pull down everything along their path, even dragging along the legs, ears and arms of *Ngbokondems* to foreign markets.

Last, colonial politics has always shown a preference for the male sex. While male cults such as *Ngbe* (*Ekpe*) were used for political administration, the *Ndem* cult is remembered by society only as a cult of witchcraft and mystery. Imperial Christianity even used *Ngbe* as a disciplinary weapon to summon people to church on Sundays when the *Ndem* cult was outlawed and deserted as witchcraft (Hamilton, 2013). This shows that colonial patriarchy as it operated in Ejagham could have well contributed to the demise of *Ndem* and the survival of male cults such as *Ngbe*.

4.5.3. The cult and women's sexuality

Cults survive by vital and sometimes secret rules and regulations that have to be strictly adhered to. One such rule that Talbot (1926: 132) states as a precautionary measure guarded the sexuality of the *Ngbokondem*. Most early African communities usually set apart certain special individuals to perform particular religious and social functions for the community. One of the criteria for the survival of such individuals was a form of ritual

celibacy that upheld sexual purity through leading a single life (Mbuy Beya, 2005: 162-63).

For the priestess to stay powerful and the cult to survive, she was not to have sexual intercourse with any man “else the *Nimm (Ndem)* in the bush will close her eyes and she will not see the road again” (Talbot, 1926: 132). However, because of their high status, popularity and peculiarity, some power-hungry men took advantage to defy the rule and preyed on their celibacy status through marriage and eventually, sex. This then impinged on the sacred non-intercourse law to weaken the cult. Exactly forty-three years later when Ruel (1969: 204) wrote about the same cult after Talbot, he stated:

The association came in this way to reflect indirectly the system of status achievement and competition among men of the community: community leaders bought status for their daughters (and thus indirectly for themselves) through the association; while in turn those men seeking community status sought also to marry these ‘leaders among women’. It was not a matter of chance that in both Tali and Besongabang when I inquired about *Ndem*, I was sent to the senior wife of the village leader.

Male domination in the form of status acquisition, the quest for power, prestige, influence and sexual control had a direct hand in the demise of the *Ndem* cult. Power-hungry men flawed the sexual norm.

4.6. *Mbi ebe* (Marriage Money)

Just like its name signifies, *Mbi ebe* is marriage money paid by Ejagham men for women to have the consent of their family accompanied by traditional procedures to have and live with them as a wife. This is a vital procedure to be undertaken in order to accord every man and woman status and respect from both families and Ejagham community. The rite has maintained its significance; without it, a man has no claim to his wife no matter how long they cohabit, and a woman and the children she bears for the man have no respect or status from her family and society at large. *Mbi ebe* is the first bond that unites two families. It guarantees the concreteness of a marriage union even before children are born. Children born in marriages void of *Mbi ebe* are considered outsiders in both parents’ families; the parents are considered unmarried even if they have a marriage certificate. *Mbi ebe* gives a man full socio-cultural rights

and authority over his wife whether they end up legalising such unions through state institutions or not. Many respondents confessed that their *Mbi ebe* is all that they possess as a guarantee for their marriage considering they have no legal backing or marriage certificate.

The practice of *Mbi ebe* is not only old but vital throughout Africa. In Southern Africa, Herbst (2008:1-15) names the practice among the Zulu, Xhosa, Swazi and Ndebele as *Lobola* or *Lobolo*. Among the Sesotho, it is *Mahadi* and *Roora* in Shona. They all refer to the same thing -- the property in cash or kind, which a prospective husband or the head of his family gives to the head (s) of his prospective wife's family in consideration of a customary marriage. For the Ejagham, apart from the money, items like clothes, hot drinks, tobacco and goats accompany the money. These gifts are not imposed on the groom's family. However, they are well appreciated, and create a lasting impression in both families and subsequent interactions as in-laws.

Still, in some parts of Southern Africa, payment of *Mbi ebe*, is primarily made with cattle. However, in the passage of time, it has evolved to cash though cattle still retains its cultural impact. In such cultures, there is the combination of cattle and money and the aim is to create lasting bond between the two families¹⁸. Among the Basotho for instance, cattle are important because they are associated with divine attributes. Dealing with them in whatever transactions creates a stronger bond and even defines one's essence. Krog (2009: 30) explains the following:

It is important to understand the role of cattle in matters of marriage.... In this part of the world, cattle were called *Modimo o nko e metsi* (God- with- the- wet- nose). Cattle were believed to have souls and to be a personal extension of the self. Exchanging, raiding, paying with and sacrificing cattle built one's personhood, made one a human being. One became irremovably woven, through these exchanges, into the herds and therefore personhood of others.

¹⁸ This is general information available at (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/lobolo>).

The exchange of cattle, therefore, instilled a deeper bond between the two families who are destined to remain together in deep soul ties concretised by God-cattle. God, signified through the presence of cattle becomes an integral part of the marriage bond.

In the Northern part of Cameroon, cattle are still vital for any kind of transaction that involves two families, marriage inclusive. Nevertheless, heavy accusations are being levied against this manner of *Mbi ebe* because of its expensive nature. This is reducing many women to positions of servitude in marriage. Often, some husbands do milk the life out of women to make up for the huge *Mbi ebe* they gave.

4.6.1. *Mbi ebe* and women's status in marriage

Marriage is a celebrated event in Cameroon. It is the foundation of society and brings together not only two individuals, but also their families and the whole community of the living and departed. On the part of the woman, marriage is crucial as a status achievement, respect and assurance of the family/community's survival. Oduyoye (1995: 132) defined the marriage union for a woman as the transitional rite that establishes and solidifies relationships that enable her to function as a channel by which the ancestors can return to the community.

Marriage begins with the agreement of the two individuals concerned, but may also happen because of external arrangements made on behalf of the couple concerned by either parents or relatives. The money and gifts given mainly by the man and his family to the woman's family, followed by other religio-spiritual rites and rituals are what the Ejagham refers to as *Mbi ebe*. *Mbi ebe* also permits the woman's family to let go of her while enabling her husband's family to integrate her fully.

A man can never marry in the sense of the word if he cannot pay *Mbi ebe*. *Mbi ebe* this accords Ejagham men a good measure of privileges and rights including that of ownership his wife. He becomes "massa" (master), meaning one in command. Marriage among the Ejagham is gendered in roles in that from the beginning of the engagement, the woman is domesticated to take charge of the home and her husband's needs while the man is exposed to the outside world as he goes out to fend and supply her physical needs.

The completion of *Mbi ebe* is followed by subsequent rites of incantations of blessings, singing, dancing, preliminary show casing of false brides for financial extraction, ululations, and finally, appeasement of the ancestors through the blessing of palm wine. All these take the woman through a transition to the realm of adult and motherhood. All unions in Cameroon, be they customary, customary and inherited, customary and church, customary and civil are validated by the passage of this marriage money (Ardener, 1996: 230). Without this traditional rite, no marriage is considered valid 'either in the physical or ancestral realm'.

Recently, *Mbi ebe* is raising an outcry in many parts of Cameroon as the amount asked for the gifts and actual marriage fee is constantly increasing. This raises the concern that families are turning women more into commodities, but also, young men who cannot afford *Mbi ebe* are turning into *Ngbondongs* (remaining unmarried and reckless) or *safari boys* (who move from woman to woman and have children without marrying them). Given a chance, many self-made women are willing to redress this situation and change the face of marriage in Ejagham land forever.

It is believed that the Ejagham do not demand much money and items as *Mbi ebe* because they do not "sell their daughters" but give them temporarily during their lifetime to live with their husbands. As a result, daughters are returned after death, for burial by the father's family. This tradition is peculiar to almost all Ejagham villages, save for a few exceptions. An interesting phenomenon is that it is not common among other ethnic groups in Cameroon.

4.6.2. *Mbi ebe* and patriarchy: male domination

The issue of *Mbi ebe* is becoming problematic in most settings due to its expensive nature and sometimes tedious negotiations. In some cases, there is bidding as though the woman is being sold by her family and bought by her husband's family. Often times, this is done with no consultation or consent from the bride. Although the Ejagham are noted for not demanding exorbitant *Mbi ebe*, strong patriarchal influence has been noticed in this realm.

One of the crucial patriarchal aspects that women respondents reported in *Mbi ebe* in Ejagham land is the act of using the *Mbi ebe* paid on female children to sponsor their male siblings to school. This has turned *Mbi ebe* into a ruthless practice and rendered many Ejagham women uneducated as opposed to men. The zeal to sponsor male children caused some fathers to give their girl children out at very tender ages. In some cases, monies were received in advance even before daughters were born to enable the boys to go to school. Two sisters from Ayukaba (interviewed 24/01/2016) particularly decried the fact that their father convinced them that their younger brother will finish school and work for money to take care of them and their children, but their brother never did. He did not accept that it was their *Mbi ebe* that facilitated his college education.

Moreover, it is only an Ejagham man who decides to marry and subsequently approaches a woman and never *vice versa*. Many have criticised this act as making marriage one-sided and patriarchal. Patriarchy has ensured that no matter how much a woman loves and desires a man, she should never propose to him or marry him, or else she is looked upon as abnormal and 'cheap'. However rich and capable an Ejagham woman is, *Mbi ebe* will never be accepted from her. It would even be considered an abomination and abuse on a man's part if a woman proposes to pay his *Mbi ebe*.

A man who accepts such *Mbi ebe* from a woman is given the same status as a lazy bachelor who refuses to get married through his own resources. He is referred to as useless (*ngbondong*). Many single women respondents expressed grief at the inability to pay their own *Mbi ebe* enabling them to marry *men*. They think this is a handicap, which renders them single, lonely and sometimes concubines to married men. They confess that they can afford to marry men just to have the cover around them, even if they pay men's *Mbi ebe* and take care of them with their own resources (see Isaiah 4:1).

Similarly, patriarchy prevails that it is the father and uncles of the girl who receive the marriage money. Women do not receive marriage money for their daughters because traditionally, children belong to the father. If the girl is born out of wedlock, her mother's brothers or her grandfather receives *Mbi ebe*. Some single women decried this

phenomenon as faulty and evil. After struggling single-handedly to raise their daughters whose fathers may have abandoned them from childhood, they cannot even be present to negotiate their *Mbi ebe*. They are calling for a revisiting of the tradition.

Moreover, the girl given in marriage has no say on the amount of *Mbi ebe* or items to be given to her father and uncles. She must also not know the amount to avoid her returning it when there is a problem and walks out of the marriage. This begins from the period of *ekparembi* literally translated, half money, first money, “knock door” or introduction. A few members of the groom’s family first approach the bride’s family to state their intention to marry. During *Mbi ebe*, items such as goats, clothes, money, hot drinks and oil may be presented. In the case where the demand from the bride’s family is above the capacity of her husband, the bride stands to lose either her marriage or becomes vulnerable to her husband and his family. This may also strain the relationship between in-laws

The day of the paying of *Mbi ebe* is peculiar. It is done in the evening for feasting and dancing, but the scene of the event is interesting in that the bride’s father, brothers and uncles meet with her husband and the men of her husband’s family. She, for whom the negotiations are made, is far removed from the scene. Men are the main actors to decide in an inner space away from public view the amount to be paid. If a few women must be present by virtue of their age, they stay silent throughout the negotiations (cf Nyangweso, 2017: 366).

Sometimes there are heated debates between the families, and this could drag on until late in the night, to the consternation of invitees set to ravage the food and drink which they fear may become sour because of the lengthy negotiations. In one occasion particularly witnessed by the researcher, the *Mbi ebe* paid in cash to parents and family of the bride was laid in separate spots on a mat. The girl’s father grabbed all the money stating that the money was enough only for his family. He then asked that her mother’s brothers demand their share from the girl’s husband and family. They refused, stating that they have given all they have. The girl’s mother, who desperately wanted her daughter to get married, feared retaliation from her family. She went ahead to use some

of her personal money to give to her brothers and other relatives in order to avert any anger and misfortune.

In connection to this, Weinger and Akuri (2007: 55) have opined that danger can be perpetrated from within one's own family as well. If the bride price is not distributed to all the expectant relatives, the offended relative may "cause you to be sick, even lead to death or even kill your children." In so doing, this mother indirectly paid part of her daughter's *Mbi ebe* in order to maintain peace. Patriarchy took an upper hand and forced the woman to resort to a bizarre form of peaceful settlement that could be considered an abomination if it were done against a man's family.

Such peaceful tactics by women to comply with patriarchal demands abound in marriages and still influence the way women are given and received into and treated in marriages. Marriage still empowers men in these aspects and leaves most women either as property or without a voice. It is common to hear some typically proud Ejagham man saying to his wives, "I paid my money on you, under my roof you will do only what I want". This makes *Mbi ebe* more a trap than the sweet bonding it was originally meant.

4.6.3. *Mbi ebe* and patriarchal control of women's sexuality

4.6.3.1. The case of child marriages

Two aspects of *Mbi ebe* have been charged with highhanded patriarchal manifestation among the Ejagham, especially pertaining to control of women's sexuality. These are the giving away of children by their fathers/uncles in retention of *Mbi ebe* from suitors while they are still young, and the transfer of a woman to her dead husband's surviving male siblings to make up for *Mbi ebe* paid by the deceased. These aspects of Ejagham tradition have come a long way.

Accounts from respondents show that sometimes, *Mbi ebe* was paid for female children in their mother's womb, soon after birth, or at their youthful stages of growth. Some have commented on this phenomenon as the cruellest aspect of patriarchy. According to Ma Jemmy of Mbakang (interviewed 06/02/2017), this is one of the most disastrous aspects of the practice not only of Ejagham and Bayangi tradition but also around the

Manyu division. Taking, in particular, the case of child brides, she reveals that in some instances, children were reserved as soon as they were born through the payment of *Mbi ebe*. Thereafter, the husband took charge of the child's growth and welfare until such a time as it was fit for her to perform her marital responsibilities. Often, children have sex at very tender ages to aged men whom they grew up knowing as their fathers.

Here *Mbi ebe* is received in complete disregard of the child's consent at both the moment of payment and the future. Among all the patriarchal practices of Ejagham, Ma Jemmy sees this as "the evil of all evils". She laments the moment when these children's husbands are revealed to them in the following words:

Look, that papa (father) Peter paid money on you and we have eaten. And if you do not like the papa who is sitting there saying I am your husband, is that not bad? That is what was bad in our culture of the Ejagham and even the Bayangi land, early marriages, unknown marriages.

The consequences such *Mbi ebe* marriages were immense upon the young child turned woman. Pa Bate of Nkpot village (Interviewed 25/03/2017) states an implication of this form of *Mbi ebe* marriage being young children having sex, as well as giving birth at very tender ages. He states that this left huge psychological damage for a child who suddenly realised the man she has been living with as a father was never one but a husband. He cites a case in point in his family where a mother had only a slight age difference with her daughter. He revealed that in some villages, this is known to cause domestic havoc where a father sleeps with the wife and sexually abuses his daughter.

However, while this practice is devastating for some women, others confessed that they take pride in it. This was common especially among polygynous women where a co-wife could taunt the other's children with the words: *Nse ewene a ko kah, abes a nyine nyim; ndum'e mo'nche!* Meaning: your father married me when my breasts were still pointed. This is meant as a provocation to a co-wife's children whom her husband may have married later in life after other sexual experiences.

Masenya (2013) cries out against child marriages in whatever form they appear, even when some women it. She uses a *bosadi* (womanhood) perspective to scrutinise the

marriage appreciated between Ruth and Boaz where she sees Naomi's role simply as that of a woman poised to use the female body as security through marriage. Expressing the same concern, Kanyoro (2002: 37) worries that:

The age margin between Ruth and Boaz is an issue of concern when related to child marriages and sexual abuse of women by men in power. How about when such a biblical story is used as a justification also for African families who marry their young girls to old men? Thus, these questions generated by the life experience of African women, pose a dilemma for basing liberation theology on cultural practices that have the potential for denying women possibilities for 'abundant life'

Ruth's marriage to Boaz was arranged to enable two poor women to defend themselves against hardship. Their agreement bears similarity with those of Ejagham uncles and fathers who readily send their young children to a marriage in order to obtain *Mbi ebe* to sustain the family and education. Oduyoye (1995: 136) thinks that this practice is a thing of the past. However, the recent case of a twelve-year-old girl forced into a marriage with an old man in Akwaya in Manyu division disputes Oduyoye's assertion. This indicates that in spite of the influx of modern thinking, some traditional practices are still persistent. Some Ejagham women revealed that *Mbi ebe* marriages were the main cause of the prostitution plague of the mid-20th century, as opposed to *Nkim e Nkim* in Ejagham community. Other respondents corroborated her account.

4.6.3.2. Child marriages and the prostitution plague in Ejagham

Respondents recount that from the mid-19th century, an outbreak of prostitution occurred in the Ejagham area (cf Pemunta, 2011; Niger-Thomas, 2001) which Naaneen and Amaury Talbot refer to as Cross River area (1991: 58, 61-62; Talbot, 1926). During this time, Ejagham was inclusive within the Cameroon Province administered under British mandated territory of Northern Nigeria. Naaneen (1991: 58, 61-62), Pemunta (2011: 51) and others have highlighted factors such as *Nkim e Nkim*, British colonial imperialism, forced labour, 'Whiteman' factor as primary causes of the plague, Ejagham women reveal that the primary cause of the plague was women's riot against patriarchy and its harsh treatment of from early marriages through *Mbi ebe*. Men owned cash crops, land, lucrative secret associations of the land and other lucrative ventures

caused men to put women under economic strain. Naaneen (19: 6918) records one complaint launched by Ejagham women against the men as follows:

Our men have forgotten that women have not voluntarily and naturally acquired the habit of prostitution. It is the careless and harsh ways our men handle their daughters which caused this harlot [sic] to exist (Naaneen, 19: 6918).

It is for this reason that women's first action after bolting out of matrimonial homes was to return the *Mbi ebe* after seven days. According to respondents' reports, young women who were married as children or youths faced three struggles. First, they went into these marriages without any knowledge of their spouses or their consent, or mutual loving engagement; second, they were marriages of convenience. Third, the women came in as children and had to find means of sustenance. The wide age gap left the woman more like the husband's dependent children than wives.

These marriages succeeded up until the young women got to the age of maturity, then they suddenly realised the error and bolted. Without any proper educational or vocational background, they were left with just one option, prostitution, in order to earn the exact *Mbi ebe* that was used by their parents to reimburse their husbands. It is only after this that she can become free. The first women who ventured this move became independent and successful, building corrugated zinc houses in the villages and sponsoring their children and siblings without financial support from their husbands. This became enticing to others and soon, many Ejagham women were bolting out of their husbands' houses and filling all the towns and cities in Cameroon and leaving their homes empty.

When this became a plague, men started refusing the returned *Mbi ebes* on account of children born and the unwillingness of the husbands to freely let go of their young wives. In such a situation, the woman could remain under the husband's service forever. However, this did not deter the plague; instead, Ejagham women filled all the towns of Cameroon and soon, hence their household name for harlotry in Cameroon (Naaneen, 1991: 68). This caused stigmatisation and sexual stereotyping that led to the degrading of Ejagham women's bodies up to the present day.

4.6.3.3. The case of levirate marriages

The reports of respondents, especially in Ejagham Njemaya, showed that levirate marriages are still thriving. With the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, studies have demonstrated that these marriages increased in prevalence tremendously in the area (cf Abemo, 2004). Wives of infected husbands who died of the disease were given to their brothers who ended up with the disease as well. A tragic 'traditional' dimension of levirate marriages was reported in Ejagham Njemaya. Some widows revealed that after the mourning period, to resume normal societal interactions, a widow ought to have sexual intercourse with a man chosen from her late husbands' family. Some accept this to benefit from the physical care of their brother-in-law and husband's family.

Another important reason given for this intercourse is to ward off the haunting spirit of the deceased husband from tormenting the widow. The Bamilekes of the West of Cameroon practice a similar tradition. This could be once-off intercourse that leaves no emotional bearing on both partners, yet it could also end in marriage, which is hardly the choice of the woman to make. The consequences of such intercourses are immense emotionally, psychologically and physical on the women but leave many men indifferent.

Another crucial patriarchal aspect of a levirate marriage, which has a direct bearing from *Mbi ebe* is the handing over of the wife of an impotent husband to his brother for intercourse to bear children for the brother. The researcher is a product of such a union. My paternal grandmother married a man who turned out to be *Ngbondong* (impotent). She was then handed to a young man in the neighbouring compound who made seven male offspring for the impotent man. My father happened to be the first boy in this levirate union. He grew up knowing who was his real father, but was never permitted to have any proper relationship with him except in hiding. Needless to mention here the psychological damage this marriage brought at a later age as replete with jealousy and hatred from the man's real wife, and the family of the impotent man. Six of those boys bowed to mysterious deaths. My father survived because he was taken away.

The prostitution plague of the mid-20th century is believed to be the product of such marriages. Respondents who reported the plague said that when child brides became mature in their reasoning, they immediately realised the mistakes of their parents and

bolted out, thus leading to rampant divorces and returning of *Mbi ebes*. This left many children victims as often, the fathers took other wives who were unwilling to nurture them. Unfortunately, the Manyu division is not bereft of this practice even today. While putting up with fieldwork, a case was reported of a twelve-year-old orphan who was dragged to marry an old man in the Akwaya sub-division because her uncles had used the old man's *Mbi ebe*. With no one to stand for her, the young girl was unwillingly dragged into the old man's house powerless to do anything.

Nonetheless, not all Ejagham women actually detest levirate marriage. Some welcome it as a joyful solution to their loneliness after their husband's death. Some widows, who are still sexually active, confessed that they find comfort in having a brother of their husband in their bosom than a strange person from without the family; this reminds them of their beloved husbands. Masenya (2016b) makes similar findings in the South African society where she used the Book of Ruth and single women's sexuality. She noticed that 20% of the respondents reported that they agreed to levirate marriage as a solution to the meeting of their sexual needs. They were thus not compelled, but willingly agreed. However, it is only women who are left open to such negotiation -- a man whose wife dies is never proposed to his wife's sisters for the same agreement.

4.7. Widowhood (*Nkekwet*) Rituals

The plight of the widow has often evoked concern in most African contexts. The tedious nature of widowhood initiation rituals is preoccupying in most cultures in Cameroon. When a woman loses her husband, the first thing she fears is how she will cope with loneliness and second, how his family will treat her. Widowhood is a frightening experience. Among the Ejaghams, the system has strong patriarchal strings, because, it is the widow who suffers the ritualistic initiation procedures, not the widower. *Nkekwehood* sexual norms are even tighter.

The patriarchal discrepancy in this traditional rite is alarming, yet Ejagham women and men have not considered the practice. Interaction with the context shows that women (that is mother, aunts and sisters of the deceased) are the ones who tighten the rule by making sure fellow women undergo demeaning rites to the latter. Failure invites stringent sanctions including rejection. Idialu (2012:6) contends that most of these

treatments given by fellow women are geared towards dehumanising their victims. This causes painful psychological experience that can affect the individuals throughout their lifetime. Some widows revealed that the recurrent maltreatment occurring in widowhood circles reproduces a vicious cycle. This section of the study argues that amidst the highhanded triple patriarchy prevalent in widowhood rituals, male dominance is the main force that benefits from widowhood rites especially sexually.

4.7.1. Widowhood and patriarchy

Ejagham concept of widowhood signifies simply the period that a man or woman who loses the spouse is taken through some traditional cleansing rituals to enable them to assume normalcy among the living community. Many changes take place during this period in the lives of widows and widowers. However, for widows especially, such changes are mostly unpleasant. In a context where poverty still bears a woman's face, and women must be married or have male sustenance, to lose one's spouse may be a real misfortune and an incomparable woe.

Masenya (2011: 178) agrees with this view. She explains that often, women's social, religious, economic and cultural lives are tied to those of the men in their lives. As a result, it makes sense that the institution of heterosexual marriage is crucial for women, particularly younger ones. Widowhood in most parts of African is still at that stage of women's life where patriarchy prevails at its most. It is therefore, no surprise that most widows become economically poor when they lose their husbands in a patriarchal context, where they have no liberal authority.

Masenya (2012: 210) looking with a (*bosadi*) lens, blames certain religious-economic and cultural reasons that bind not just widows but African women into the most violent abusive patriarchal relationships even before widowhood. In her view, patriarchy influences many of the initiation rites pertaining to widowhood. Suffice to say that along the decades, women themselves on their own kind as an agency have sustained these rites.

4.7.2. Widowhood and male dominance

Going through the Ejagham clan, one can easily identify widows but not widowers. Widows are known through their dressing and comportment. Black gowns, (recently white) gowns, hands hooked above the shoulder, pan with items on the head to the market enormous financial expenditure and others. As old as can be, Ejagham people faithfully mourn their dead. However, the mourning of a spouse is peculiar, since it is the relationship with the closest sexual spiritual bond in the living community. As a result, certain rites are socially designed for both men and women.

Nevertheless, women often seem to follow these rites to the letter while men just flaunt over them. The arduous fate of widows makes widowhood the woe of all woes for some women. No one wishes to get to this state at the early stages of marriage. Unfortunately, with the current political state of affairs in the country, life expectancy is becoming short for many, especially men. Our interviews with men and women in Ejagham on widowhood rites and rituals give clear-cut expectations from widows but no static rules for men. Some of the rules that apply to widowhood centre on dress code, comportment, length of mourning period and remarriage.

4.7.2.1. Dress code

For decades, the Ejagham clan has been best known for the 'black cloth' tradition wherein, widows and women wear pure black specially sewn dresses to mourn their dead husbands and relatives. In the early days, it was just one gown for the elaborate mourning period, some of which could last from six months to two years. A widow was expected to stay in this robe until she had enough funds to throw a grand funeral celebration. During this celebration, she could change as many dresses as she could afford after which she could dress normally again.

Much has not changed today in the dressing code except the move from black to the white gown, specifically by Christians, or a specially sewn fabric meant for the purpose. Some widows can have many different dresses made from this special fabric. The mourning period has been considerably reduced because of economic hardship, also because people do moderate church memorial services in place of those elaborate funeral celebrations. This dress code is non-applicable for the widower. After the death

of his wife, he may go to his normal dressing as soon as the burial is over. No one expects or puts pressure on him to dress in a particular way signifying mourning.

4.7.2.2. Comportment

Ejagham widows are expected to comport in clearly defined ways, and failure to do so attracts scorn and sometimes fines from family members and friends alike. Such comportment includes constant wailing when people come in to mourn the deceased. A widow who does not wail is seen as not having loved her late husband and is now happy that he is gone. In addition, she must not greet people with her hand or look happy, and her speech must be limited throughout the funeral period. She carries her hand right hand upon her shoulder when going around, sleeps on the floor and eats sparingly. She drinks no alcohol during this period and puts on no makeups. She also baths sparingly and must not attend any parties for a long time or at all until the mourning period is over.

Pa Oben of Mkpot village (Interviewed 25/03/2017) states his experience of the observance of his mother's widowhood ritual as follows:

When he... passed on ... he was survived by two wives; now obviously they had to go through the typical *women things*. Rolling on the floor, always walking around with their hands like this (lifts his right hand and holds right his shoulder), and so on and so forth. I think they went for weeks even before they had their first shower. Yes, so they went through- it is true that it is still hard on women. The expectation typically is that the man will die before the woman, and women will go through these rituals.

Widowhood rites are typically women's things, as he calls them and punishment for them as well. Since it is assumed that men will die first and women will stay longer to enjoy life, widowhood rituals are carefully promoted as a means of consolation to living men and husbands.

On the contrary, when it comes to the death of a wife, the same procedures are not observed by the husband. Gender stratification is strictly enforced here; this ought to raise concerns among women but it hardly does. The first reason is that husbands are of the male gender and must not be subjected to similar treatment. The widower does

exactly the reverse of what the woman does. Strong masculinity is applied here; if he is found crying or sitting on the floor, he is chided with the words '*bi nyo ema mu, o ke li okpak se oke li eku*'; meaning 'close that your mouth, you are crying poverty and pretending to mourn'. Most male respondents state, "men's mourning is in the heart while women's mourning is in the mouth".

At the funeral ground, one does not easily identify widowers because they are dressed normally and do not sit in any conspicuous position except in church if they are Christians. This is seen as a strength for the man when he tries as much as possible not to show outwardly that he is in mourning. He is encouraged with the words: *abebhele ne-ndum a'tep k'oghia mbenghe*, meaning: "when a man cries his tears go inside the heart". So a man does not shed tears visibly because tears are seen as a sign of weakness.

Pa Oben Oben (Interviewed 25/03/2017) again remarks: "when you cry then you are either crying because you are weak, you are a woman, or more recently because you are poor". Society associates presumed masculine attributes such as wealth, strength, courage and authority to a man when he does not visibly mourn his dead wife. Mourning is a weakness and reserved for women.

4.7.2.3. Mourning, celebration and sexuality/remarriage.

Subsequent remarriage or sexual re-engagement dampens all practicalities for a widower's engagement into full mourning. This period varies from village to village. Nevertheless, a widow mourns her husband averagely between six months to two years. This is largely dependent on her emotional attachment and financial strength. The more financially viable a widow, the shorter the mourning period, which is mostly not less than six months. If it is shorter than six months, it may be considered a lack of love and disrespect for the deceased husband. Poorer widows take a longer time to mourn in order to enable them to gather enough money for a fitting memorial. Throughout the mourning period, the widow dresses in mourning and avoids makeup and contact with men, especially for sexual intercourse. This would be considered an abomination for a widow in mourning.

At the end of the mourning period, a funeral celebration is organised by the widow according to her financial viability. After this period, many widows, especially middle-aged and old ones, may remain unmarried for the rest of their lives, while young ones may remarry after a lengthy period. Any sensual relationship begun immediately after the mourning period is a disgrace to the widow as it could signify that she did not love her husband and may even have plotted his death.

In some cases, sensual relations are totally banned for the widow and non-compliance on her part may be fatal. Weinger and Akuri (2009: 54) describe the following consequences of non-compliance

Illness or death may overcome a woman if she goes out or sleeps with another man before the mourning period for her husband ends. In such a case, the woman might be bewitched by her in-laws or by the spirit of her dead husband. Similarly, if she has the audacity and curiosity to peep at an all-male juju practice that is off limits to females, an outbreak of scabies will cover her body. Madness awaits her if at menopause she does not submit herself to a communal washing carried out by tribal women in a particular river and then offer sacrifices to the mermaids.

All these stipulations put widows in tight spaces before their in-laws and community. Except, as mentioned above in levirate marriage, if sexual advances are coming from within the deceased husband's family, then the widow has to give in without resistance even against her will. On the other hand, a widower outwardly mourns for a fairly shorter period, mostly during the time when his wife is in the mortuary and on the day of the funeral. Some women revealed that most men do not have any concrete mourning period because severally, they have a girlfriend shortly after their wife's death. Such a replacement could even be sitting somewhere in the crowd right at his wife's funeral.

Ma Ayuk Tanyi (Interviewed 18/02/2016) makes a joke of this fact when she states: "On the day of your wife's funeral, your girlfriend is the one coming to tell you *eya'a, nseh ewere, eh eh eya'a! Yee mo eri ewa. Ri, nseh ewere, ri*". Meaning: "sorry our father, oh sorry! This is small food for you, eat our father, eat! This happens right on your wife's deathbed". As such, during the period of mourning, widowers may date other women from as early as possible. It is possible that some widowers would already have

potential replacements for their wives even before the funeral celebrations begin. Remarriage takes place for the widower from the period of three months to a year after the death of a wife. If a widower takes a longer period before engaging in sensual relationships or remarriage, he is either considered as exceptionally moral or having a medical problem.

4.7.3. Widowhood and triple patriarchy

Triple patriarchy is described in the study as domination meted on women by their own kind after that suffered from Western imperialism and local cultural male dominance. This is consciously or unconsciously practised in this context to enhance or complement patriarchy as the patriarchal *status quo* accords a few women power and privilege. The implementation of widowhood rituals is strictly enforced by women; mostly fellow widows, mothers' in-law, female siblings and relatives of the deceased. Often, men have the authority to stop or reduce the strain of these rituals. Some do, but some claim non-interference. Mrs Ayuk Tanyi states the following:

...And you know as Kembong is like this with seventeen or eighteen quarters, every quarter has their own way to treat widows. Some are harsh, some are a bit mild especially when it comes to the demand of articles to give the in-laws. Mine was mild because I had a good brother-in-law who kept telling them not to molest me, but to make things easier for me (28/01/20016)

Sometimes brothers-in-law who can calm the stress silently stay at the background and allow family women to take the lead. Patriarchy is most visible in this ritual because men understand clearly what is going on at the background, but profess less concern with the excuse that it is women's affair. It is only when the rules are flawed that one discovers the actual persons in control. The men usually surface then to ask the widow to comply or face consequences.

In cases where a widow is hated by her in-laws, they may strip her bare of dignity, property and worth as they encourage their fellow women to molest her to nothingness. This happens specifically to those women who paid less or no attention to village life when their husbands were alive. In such a case, a widow becomes what Oduyoye

(1995) refers to as “a disinherited species” who is treated shabbily to ensure her dehumanisation.

Widowhood rites are becoming vicious cycles that never end in the Ejagham community. Women make huge benefits through the various stages of the ritual. Ejagham land has varied stages, which all have their particular procedures to be fulfilled. There is the cleansing/bathing part, the shaving of hair, the hitting of the knife on the head, the hoeing of the farm, the visitation/selling in the market, preparation of food for the in-laws and the funeral celebration. Before a widow completes these procedures, she is literally exhausted physically, mentally and financially.

It is a frightening paradox when some women consider that their lives have literally come to an end at the death of their husbands. This ought to be the period when women get the deepest psychological support and comfort from the community around them. As a lament against this form of domination, Ma Ebangha Ayuk of Ndekwai had this to say:

“Can you treat yourselves well”? Instead, when you see a woman in pain you want to crush her. I do not know why we keep on fighting ourselves. So that is it, whether we talk until tomorrow... What are you saying, woman! And that is why, whether the man is what, he remains up (she laughs). We are the ones who are doing this to ourselves. (Interviewed 27/01/2016)

Stated clearly, according to her, women have remained the very source of their own pain and oppression. Widowhood rituals thrive everywhere, not only in Ejagham land. With the increase in the death rate in the country, widowhood rites are fast becoming lucrative enterprises not just for Ejagham but for Cameroonian society at large. Consciously and unconsciously, women usually prefer to uphold rituals that venerate men by suppressing their fellow women to nothingness.

4.8. Burial of Ejagham Daughters

Masenya (2010: 5) recounts a South African Northern Sotho proverb, which states that “woman’s grave belongs to her husband’s home village”. The implication of this proverb for her context is that a woman is bound to stay in a marriage no matter what she faces,

and she must be buried at her husband's backyard at the end of her life to show that she belongs to the man (Masenya 2010: 6). Some ethnic groups in Cameroon such as the Bali also hold this view of marriage, but here, being buried at one's husband's backyard also signifies that one was a good housewife all through one's life.

If a woman is not buried at her husband's compound when she dies, it is a disgrace to her family. This may have negative implications because as Oduyoye (1995:68) explains, in most African cultural settings, society demands that she stays married because a woman has no dignity outside marriage. Not being buried at her husband's compound signifies that she was a wayward woman and could not make a good wife. If she is buried there, it is a great pride to her family. A worthy woman for such cultures would be one who stays in a heterosexual marriage until the end of her life (Masenya, 2010: 5).

The Ejagham are not like this. Theirs is the reverse. They have particular cultural traditions as far as the burial of their daughters is concerned. In other parts of Cameroon, marriage permits a couple to live together, die together and buried close together as the situation permits. Among the Ejagham, marriage permits couples to live together, they can die together but they must be buried apart in separate places. The Ejagham woman belongs to her father, just like many daughters in Cameroon, from childhood through maturity. However, as soon as *Mbi ebe* is paid for her, she becomes the wife of her husband physically and sexually until she dies. Thereafter, she again becomes her father's daughter. A husband and his family have rights and ownership of an Ejagham daughter only as long as she lives. When she dies, she is returned to her father's compound for burial. Respondents often summarised their reports of this practice with the old Ejagham saying, "you married na woman, no bi na hi die body". Meaning: you have married a wife but not her corpse".

During field visits, we attended four such funerals, the last one was of the wife of a clergy. All the women were buried at their fathers' compounds. When we asked both men and women why this was, carried out in this manner, many of them were dismissive. Others tried to explain how the practice originated and others were simply surprised that someone could bother to enquire of/or question the rite. One woman

quietly told us, “we do not negotiate some things”. Ejaghams bury their daughters whether married or unmarried, whether married within or without Ejagham. Moving through the villages of Ntenako, Ndekwai, Ossing, Mamfe Town and myriad of others, we sampled the opinions of Ejagham women and men, as well as non-natives origins and practical implications on women’s sexual well-being.

4.8.1. Origins of the practice

It is important to note that written sources for this practice are rare, probably because of its uncontested nature for many decades or lack of interest due to its complicated nature. Hence, we mostly solicited oral sources to trace the origins. Ma Tanyi Ayuk (interviewed 11/02/ 2016) stands with those who trace the practice back to the days of slavery and the slave trade. At this time, men used to leave from neighbouring Nigeria to get married to the Ejagham daughters whom they took along to their native lands in Nigeria. After a while, the same men would return to inform the girls’ fathers that their daughters are dead and buried; whereas they had been sold to slavery far away from home. They were given another girl as a wife.

When this became rampant, the men of the Ejagham clan took a collective decision that the corpses of their daughters who die with their husbands must be brought back to them to be certain that they actually died. It is only after such proof that another daughter could be given. Not even the father of the girl or any member of his family was allowed to go to the husband’s home to see the corpse because the ‘tricky cunning Nigerians’ could cajole him with money and gifts. When this became obtainable for an elaborate period, it assumed traditional status and became normative.

This troubling phenomenon came at a time when even some Ejagham fathers were beginning to sell their ‘stubborn’ daughters to slave merchants from the grass field, to neighbouring Nigeria or overseas. In addition, sales in body parts of slave girls or young girls, were desperately needed at this time to fuel the power of male cultic associations in the area (Röschenthaler, 2006: 79; Fomin & Ngoh, 1998: 45–6). These all made young women ‘precious commodities’ in the hands of men.

At the demise of the slave trade, the decision to bring back corpses of Ejagham women was not revoked; instead, it became the norm and forged on smoothly until Ejagham

women began to marry men from other tribes of the country. Some of these men whose traditions ran contrary to this phenomenon began to contest the norm. With such contestations, the rule was tightened even further to become an identity practice inseparable from Ejagham identity.

Other respondents situated the origin primarily to the *Ngbokondem* cult. These assume that the rite began from the initiation of first-born daughters into the *Ndem cult* while they were still young. Their exposition to certain mystic-spiritual rites and rituals gave them special powers during their lifetime and when they died. Some of these rituals enabled them to rise after death as *benem*. As such, their corpses need special ritualistic burials. Only a father or his family was qualified to perform such a burial. 'Outsiders' such as husbands or in-laws even within Ejagham could not perform these rites. Ruel (1969: 203-204) explains some of these rites and why the father's role is implicated:

Ndem or Ngbokondem was entered by a girl before marriage: the fees were paid by her father and membership gave her a high status; she became...like a 'leader' among women. A number of rules applied to members of the association and regulated their relationship with non-members: it was forbidden to shake a member by the hand (if so a small fine was paid to her father or husband), and a member was not allowed to eat beans (*bako*), sweet potatoes (*bereme*), or fufu (*ebae*)...The association had its own special dances which was held especially on the occasion of a member's death...a dead member was commemorated by building an effigy...to her name.

It was the father who enrolled the girl by paying her fees. During this period, fees could signify various items, even metaphysical ones. He ensured that the rules for her peculiar status were respected. Talbot (1926: 131-132) further explains the intensity of some of the rules when he explains that a Nimm girl never left the house without feathers in her hair and a knife in her hand. Ruel (1969: 204) situates this distinctive feather at the back of her hair, and she was to be buried with them. She was usually covered with camwood dye and wore special ornaments around her neck and arms. All these decorative features had metaphysical undertones that were engraved into the fathers as they enrol their girls.

The above explanation, therefore, gave the father of the girl and her siblings the power to perform rites on her body when she died, that her husband could not perform for her (*benem, barem*)¹⁹ may rise to embarrass her husband's family, to the utmost disgrace of her father. This phenomenon was reserved solely for *Ndem* priestesses but gradually, it turned out to involve all Ejagham women. Some have stated this as the most practical reason why *Mbi ebe* among the Ejagham is supposedly low.

Burial rites of Ejagham women are known to be raising problems in families today, as many modern husbands and/or their families are unwilling to let go of their wives' corpses. Some have argued that the practice is thriving only as a result of the material benefits that are derived by the women's families. This school suggests that there may not be any mystical undertones to the practice; as such, it should be revoked.

Ma Sarah Etaka of Kembong states another potential origin of the practice in the following words:

Netong, netong, placenta! Where her navel and placenta were buried; the old people considered this very important. That is why when a woman gave birth- netong, they call it in Bayangi that netong- if that her netong gets missing they can swear medicine in those days; how comes her netong got missing? Because they will take that navel and go back to where she is coming from and bury it. As they bury it there, that is where they will also bury her corpse, around the area where they buried her navel. The mentality of our first people is that where they buried my placenta that is where I also will be buried (interviewed 06/03/2017).

Asked why such a rule of the placenta is applicable only to women and not men, she explained, it is the woman, who leaves her father's land and goes out, while the man stays. The family does not want to give their in-laws the impression that they bought

¹⁹ *Benem* is one who dies and rises as a ghost. The Ejagham/Banyang people are believed to possess mystical herbs that they use on their dead to rise after death as ghost either to revenge their death or move to other places/countries to continue with economic activities to sustain their living families. They are dreaded and stigmatized for this nationwide for this phenomenon (cf Otob 2007).

their daughters. She only gets married, that is why her corpse needs to follow her *netong*. She cannot get lost.

However convincing or unconvincing these arguments are, the tradition persists. Ma Sarah has no hope that the practice will disappear anytime soon. Nevertheless, expressing the need for a change, she pours out her hope in the following words: “I think it is going to take a long time; our children are going to be the ones to change it because even us now, we do not see any reason again why they want our bones” (interviewed 06/03/2017).

4.8.2. Contestation of the practice

This burial norm among Ejagham is one of the controversial issues, but that surprisingly, it has not been engaged with or contested for many decades both within and without Ejagham. Many people have accepted this rule during the marriage but then resisted during burial. Sampling varied opinions in and out of the clan, we grouped the following responses.

4.8.2.1. Ejagham men react to the practice

Ejagham men gave varied responses to the practice. Some acknowledge that they and their women have been caught in their own tradition as they express their willingness to have their wives buried with them. However, they are not willing to contest this tradition of the land; at least not yet. Others explain that they have honestly never given as much thought to the whole tradition. They have an open mind to engage if the opportunity arises. Some marvel that the tradition is still so strong and no one has ever bothered to question or contest it. Others were dismissive and did not want to engage this tradition. They planned to question it sometime in the future. Another group did not bother as to what happens to women. They can be buried anywhere they wish. Some blatantly refused to respond to the issue, stating that the researcher ‘even has the guts’ to question tradition because she is a clergy. They see even the thought of taking the topic up for study by a woman as rebellion. They do not see the need for any change in this rite. They proudly hailed it as “uniquely authentically Ejagham”, and as such, do not wish for the practice to be contested.

4.8.2.2. Reactions from men married to Ejagham women

Some explained that the topic did not arise on the day of their marriage. Maybe they might have had other ideas then. However, they are in it and are still thinking of a way to swim out. Others were informed on their wedding day but were not concerned then by the phenomenon as they are at present. Others have never given a thought to it, but plan to have genuine conversations with their in-laws on this. Others are willing to begin negotiations with their wife's family as soon as they can, in order not to be trapped at the end. Others plan to resist if they happen to bury their wives first. If not, their families will resist because they will not let their wives go.

4.8.2.3. Ejagham women against the practice

Some Ejagham women hotly contest the practice. They state clearly that they want to be buried close to their husbands whom they have lived with and loved all their lives. They also need their children and grandchildren to trace their graves together and identify their common origin and the legacy they have built during their long marriage years. These view the tradition as strict, wicked, and obsolete and are willing to brace all odds to contest it. They even threatened to write a will before they die, where they will already choose their place of burial close to their husbands.

Similarly, other Ejagham women, especially those married to men from other tribes and regions, view this practice as a form of highhanded double patriarchy meted on them. They argued that because of this norm, they do not have much respect from their husbands' families who are mostly patriarchal in their treatment of women. This practice has given their husbands an excuse to treat them as outsiders. Many confess that their husbands are restricting their interactions with and/or keeping their children away from their families even while they are still alive, what about when they die and are taken away with no trace of their presence. They lament that their death may be the end of any trace of them with their children.

4.8.2.4. Ejagham women contest for the practice

While many women contest this norm, some are comfortable with it and defend it strongly. These respondents base their reasons on family interconnectedness, a kinship bond that is usually strong among Cameroonian families (Weinger & Akuri, 2007: 58).

Families generally support their daughters even in their marriage in the form of monies, other material possessions, emotional support and raising of their children. Such interconnectedness is the reason some respondents support the practice. These reveal the support and love they get from their fathers' family, which calls them back during burial. They want to be buried in their fathers' compound for they believe that is their first family before marriage.

Others who are separated from their husbands but are not divorced confess that it is their brothers and uncles, who are their husbands. As such, this is their opportunity to be laid in their fathers' compound without any resistance. Still, in line with interconnectedness, some respondents revealed that in their lifetime, they have made comparisons with their families of origin and their husbands' families in their treatment of the dead, and realised that they will be given better treatment by their families of origin. Ma Ayamba Eli of Ntenako states her views as follows:

I love this tradition so much and I want my children to know that I will be buried with my family and not with my husband. My family will take care of my grave very well but not my in-laws. So marriage is for life but not after life. I love it like that and I appreciate it (Interviewed 18/02/2016).

Married to a non-Ejagham man from a neighbouring tribe, she states her point clearly with no room for compromise. She will be buried with her father and not her husband because she thinks her father's family will treat her grave better.

Ma Tanyi Agbor of Nfuni (Interviewed 20/12/2016) takes the same stance; she uses the 'holy book' to back up her stance when she states that, "... The Bible tells you there is no marriage in heaven, so there is no marriage too even here after death. We just give you a child to go and make your family. After that, your family is you and your children, not your wife." In her opinion then, the marriage ends here but kinship relationships never end.

4.8.2.5. A middle perspective

Others like Ma Elisa Oben of Ndekwei (Interviewed 01/28/2016) are open-minded and non-partisan, stating that anything can prevail. In her opinion, "when you are gone, you

are gone. The living will take decisions in this matter”. She argues that not even one’s written will is strong enough to challenge this tradition as some mystical powers could prevail if one defaults practice. Nevertheless, she still sees the possibility for negotiation that may appease the people in place when one is no longer alive. Ma Jemmy of Mbakang (Interviewed 06/03/2017) explains such negotiation as follows:

People whose children have money, who are well to do; they can convince the family where the woman comes from and she will be buried on her husband’s land. I see that this particular tradition can change depending on who the woman marries and who her child is. If the children are strong, coming from a well to do family from the side of the father, they can convince the people from where the mother is coming from, educate them that they do not have anything to do with the body. I think civilization can change this one and even Christianity.

She sees three things that can affect a change in this practice in the modern era: first, if the deceased woman brings to the negotiation table able children who are backed financially, they can convince their mother’s family. Second, the influence of Western civilisation... when Ejagham children become ‘westernised’, they will forget about such ‘archaic’ traditional norms. Third, the influence of Christianity and the fostering of the gospel can effect positive changes in this practice. Pertinent as some of her suggestions are, they face a challenge in the context because all these three have been present in the past, and yet the practice has persisted. The last woman the researcher witnessed being buried is the wife of clergy whose son is also a clergy. He stood by quietly watching his uncles bury his mother separately from his father. The end point is that as at the present moment, Ejagham women still have no say over their mortal remains. The study is setting the pace for dialogue with the Ejagham context on this norm whose consequences are enormous.

4.8.2.6. Consequences of non-compliance

What many women fear most are the repercussions that are believed to pursue those in a situation of non-compliance to the norm. Even though the preaching of the gospel has weakened many powerful traditional beliefs, this one has stood the test of time. Some think its persistence is because it venerates patriarchal power, while others hold its

persistence to the fact that it is a worthy tradition. Whichever way, several negative implications are reported in connection with those who defy the practice.

First, those who deliberately flaw the rule and forcibly bury their wives are believed to encounter evil predicaments. Ejagham women are most vulnerable in this traditional norm as they try to play peace by encouraging spouses to comply with the rules in cases where negotiation proves impossible. Just as Weinger and Akuri (2007: 54) explain, they “believe that if they do not rigorously comply with gender roles and tasks prescribed by tribal norms, they will be bewitched into illness or even death”. As a result, they try to pacify their marriage preferring their straight-jacket gender roles than terrible calamity will befall them.

Ejagham people themselves explain some of the misfortunes that have befallen non-compliers. An example is given of clergy from another region who flawed the rule and forcefully buried his wife. In return, he incurred negative repercussions: accidents, recurrent mental disorders in his children, and his eventual heartbreak and death. Another is given of uncles who rose against their sister’s children with cutlasses and sticks causing bloodshed and disorder almost at the point of burial of their sister in her husband’s compound. Other consequences include long-term curses and sicknesses on both the husband and children of the deceased. Most Ejagham women try to avoid such misfortunes for their family and so encourage their husbands to comply with the tradition.

The tradition endures due to these presumed repercussions, which breed fear. Many women lamented that they have no opportunity to ever assert their real personality or make decisions concerning their mortal remains. This is because while they live, they belong to their husbands, but when they die, they belong to their father and his family.

4.8.3. Women’s sexuality and the practice

The most tragic revelations come from some Ejagham women and family members of deceased Ejagham women who married to non-Ejagham indigenes. Some of these women faced heartbreaks and a betrayal of their sexual bond when their husbands of many years suddenly started cheating on them and eventually got second wives from

their own tribes at very advanced stages of their marriage. These husbands stated that they need women who will be buried beside them when the other is taken away. The few families we spoke to revealed that usually, their sister could not handle the shock of her husband's betrayal and relapsed into psychological torment, sickness and eventual death. They feel that their sister was cheated and betrayed on both sides during her life and death. Their husbands ended up owning the children and everything their sister worked for while enjoying himself with another woman. They, on the other hand, have ended up only with graves behind their backyards.

Some family members strongly feel that their sisters were deliberately tormented, or in rare cases, poisoned to death by their husbands or his family; knowing full well that they will be taken away to their fathers with no trace left. The husbands, on their part, accuse their wives' family of killing their daughter so that they should come and give them much food during her funeral rite. This evokes flawed relationships, bitterness, anger and enmity in some families. Other hard liner Ejagham women confessed that if the tradition refuses to bend, they would engage a legal resolution while they are alive. Others simply proposed a dialogical approach to engage this tradition on the pain it is causing some Ejagham women.

4.9. Implications of field results

In this chapter, data analysis has traced how multiform patriarchal influences shape women's lives through various initiation practices even to sexual dimensions. Various results have been arrived at that replicating the general trend of the study, that is, patriarchy's impositions on Ejagham women's sexuality. First, the chapter unfolded on the premise that in as much as second-wave feminism manifested patriarchy by trying to define Ejagham women's sexuality through imposing a particular method of attaining sexual pleasure, patriarchy is also a Global South and specifically Ejagham phenomenon which oppresses women's sexuality as well.

Moreover, Ejagham women's cultural spaces are generally full of zest for life and committed to cultural veneration, initiation practices being pro-life spaces for association, empowerment, agency and interaction with the general society. However, these spaces have been invaded by a multiform patriarchy ranging from men-women to

women-women oppression. Patriarchy, as male domination, invades initiation spaces and implicates women's sexuality in the following ways:

First, children and young Ejagham women's sexuality has been put to task by patriarchy against their consent through the traditional practice of *Mbi ebe* and its subsequent early marriages in Ejagham society. The implications of which are still bearing on Ejagham women today leaving them with a sexualised image.

Second, women complied with levirate sexual intercourse or marriages with or without their consent and other demoralising rites in compliance with widowhood rituals to satisfy patriarchal demands.

Third, the *Ndem* cult priestesses succumbed to sexual encounters through patriarchal motivated marriages (royal) against the rules of the cult, thereby precipitating its demise. While Western religious-cultural imperialism generally disfavoured women's cults and labelled them demonic, it was a sexual invasion, that put a death nail on *Ngbokondem*.

In addition, some husbands are taking advantage of Ejagham women emotionally through cheating and/or polygyny as a result of their normative burial rites. The entire life span of Ejagham woman from birth to death is under male control, be it fathers or husbands. Women still have no control over their mortal remains. The physical and psychological implications are varied and causes women to be confused, sometimes retrogressive psychosexually.

Though generally oppressed from without and within, data portrayed that in light of their initiation practices, Ejagham women also take active roles as participants in their oppression

4.10. Conclusion

Data could summarise the life of Ejagham women as culturally-grounded, sexually oppressed, but also oppressive through initiation spaces that are supposed to be pro-life. We saw that in the *Ngbokondem* cult, *Mbi ebe* and burial of Ejagham women, Ejagham women have endured patriarchal violence through coloniality and local cultural

male domination. However, in *Nkekwe* (widowhood) and some aspects of *Mbi ebe*, women themselves have reproduced patriarchy on their kind. The study labelled this phenomenon triple patriarchy. These are all taking a toll on the sexual life of Ejagham women. With the persistence of 'genital mutilation', and pressure on *Moninkim* and *Nkim* culture as major causes, the very identity of Ejagham women is at stake. It is in this light that the study returns to the issue of patriarchy and destruction of sexual pleasure.

Our next chapter, which is patriarchy and human sexuality, takes us back to the genital mutilation discourse. The chapter is an engagement of various feminist and womanist theorists on the issue of sexual pleasure and the clitoris, which we noted earlier as the springboard for the problem of genital mutilation in Africa. Their beginning point is Ejagham women's categorical declaration through grounded experience, that sexual pleasure is possible without a clitoris. Through their discourses, the chapter hopes to contest existing problematic definitions of womanhood, sexuality, gender, and cultural identity framed through Western notions of the clitoris, while proposing new inclusive contextualised definitions.

Chapter Five

5. Patriarchy and human sexuality?

5.1. Introduction

In mid-20th-century second-wave feminists rose against patriarchy and its suppression of women's sexuality through the shielding of the clitoris in the American context. They stated that women, and not only men, deserve to enjoy sexual pleasure. Soon after, they turned their attention on Africa and advocated the same for African women and men, sparking what has become the 'female genital mutilation' problem worldwide. Ejagham women of Cameroon have refuted second-wave feminists' claim, stating that even without clitorises, they do enjoy sexual pleasure.

The chapter, therefore, argues that the permeation of patriarchal violence seen through feminist disrepute of Ejagham women's cultural practices does create a convergence between second-wave feminist and womanist theorists. Feminist theorists see the clitoris as the sole important organ of female sexual pleasure, hence women's liberation. Womanist theorists, on the other hand, contend that while the clitoris is an important female organ, it is not a universally defining symbol for womanhood and femininity. Both theorists engage the Ejagham woman and her experiences of sexual pleasure, without the clitoris, as a departure point to argue out their perspectives.

5.2. Feminist theorists on 'genital mutilation' and sexual pleasure

5.2.1. Second wave theorists on the destruction of pleasure

Feminists theorists, beginning with first generation second-wave feminists like Anne Koedt (1968: 5), Daly (1978: 153-177) and Hosken (1978: 150, 155) as already mentioned above, put Ejagham women's experiential reality to task by stating categorically that the clitoris is defining organ for women's sexuality and hence women's liberation from sexual oppression by patriarchy. They associated female circumcision to patriarchy and deprivation of sexual pleasure. Their studies generated a wave of feminist contributions, all giving 'academic and medical' backings to reports that put the clitoris back in the limelight (Bell, 2005: 134). Their theories have been endorsed along the years by various feminist theorists world over.

Jensen (2013: 70) thinks that the clitoris serves no other role in the human body than that of providing sexual pleasure to women. Tapping from feminist theorists such as Luce Irigaray, Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart and their view of the clitoris, he stresses that the clitoris is uniquely the symbol of women's *jouissance*, women's joy and women's delight (Jensen, 2013: 70). What he means here is that, with no connection to reproduction or other biological functions, the clitoris functions and facilitates "play" during sex. The act of the play, in his opinion, is crucial in love-making and sexual intercourse in women's lives. Without this play, sex becomes a burden rather than a delight to women (Jensen, 2013: 70). The deprivation of the play factor through 'female genital mutilation' is what makes this practice horrifying. This makes sex pleasurable only for a man while the woman becomes man's "ultimate sexual possession" (Jensen, 2013: 70)

Second and third generation feminists also take a hard stance against the practice. Morrison (2008:125) states that it "mutilates" millions of women and girls each year and disfigures the female body. However, it specifically destroys the sites of pleasure mapped unto that body and challenges to the phallic economy (Morrison, 2008: 127). In her opinion, bodies like those of Ejagham women that have undergone FGM are "systematically damaged, mutilated and/or destroyed" because the clitoris in the woman's body is "pleasure- pure pleasure" (Morrison, 2008: 125, 26). Its removal, which is motivated by dominance, "permanently obliterates one of the sites of pleasure that constitutes the female body" (2008: 126).

Monagan (2010: 160-181) follows Morrison's line of argument. She compares the practice to other acts of violence against the female body such as foot binding in China, corsetry and breast ironing in Cameroon (Monagan, 2010: 160). Concerning sexual pleasure, she notes that the practice is the "extreme physical repression of the female body and sexuality" in that it totally cuts out the female desire in the sexual act (Monagan, 2010: 169). She questions Ejagham women's position when she points at patriarchy as the primary motivation behind the practice in that it is encouraged by men who set standards for marriage. This for her has made women become for men what

Simone De Beauvoir describes as “sex absolute sex” with no actual benefit on their part (Monagan 2010: 162).

Mountis (1996: 121-122) paints a chilling picture of female circumcision in practising communities and the implications it has on the female body in the context of infibulation. She explains that the process is usually carried out in “very technically primitive” societies where women are sometimes not informed about the procedure but simply snatched from their beds in the middle of the night (Mountis, 1996: 123). All these leave women sexually unstable and emotionally damaged.

Alice Walker takes side with feminists and targets sexual pleasure when she presents Tashi in her *Possessing the Secrets of our Joy* (1992). Tashi, before her circumcision, enjoyed breathless pleasurable intercourses with her boyfriend in the fields of Olinka, her village (Walker, 1992: 27, 32). After circumcision, she can no longer experience such (Walker, 1992: 120, Lauret 2011: 153). To emphasise her clitoral mindedness, Walker dedicates her book to the ‘blameless vulva’ (Walker, 1992: i) and presents Tashi as a westernised young woman whose ‘soul has been dealt a mortal blow’ by the practice of ‘female genital mutilation’ (Walker, 1992: 65). It is not just Tashi, but also “ninety to one hundred million women and girls living today in African, Far Eastern and Middle Eastern countries have been genitally mutilated” with the number ever on the increase (Walker, 1993: 266).

In her *Warrior Marks*, she describes the practice as sexual blinding of women in Africa. As defining organ of womanhood and sexuality; the removal of the clitoris is the total destruction of woman’s sexuality. A mutilated genital becomes “the hole”, or “a yawning unhealable wound” as a result of genital mutilation (Walker, 1992: 59,61,64). She thereby magnifies Western assumptions about African barbarity and wages political activism against this ancient African practice (Cogeanu, 2011: 65). It is not only Western feminist theorists who feel this way, but African feminist also share this view on the destruction of sexuality.

5.2.2. African feminist theorists on the destruction of sexual pleasure

Cameroonian born French citizen, Calixthe Beyala is one of the radical feminist protagonists and critic of the practice with a focus on women's sexuality and especially denial of sexual pleasure. She targets the ills of the practice, which she portrays as violence to female sexuality. In her opinion, the practice kills women's sexual urge and forces young women to premature sexual relations with older men. In her novel, *Your Name shall be Tanga* (1996) she condemns excision through a young woman who images young women destroyed by their mothers who force them to undertake excision. She lashes at the mothers who offered her daughter to be circumcised in the following words:

I can see her still, my mother old one, shimmering in her immaculate kaba, a black scarf in her hair, crying out to every god: 'She has become a woman, she has become a woman. With that', as she taps her behind, 'she'll keep any man.' I didn't weep. I didn't say a thing. I felt heir to the blood between my legs. To a hole between my thighs. All that I was left with was the law of oblivion. Time passed, I was becoming accustomed to that part of me that was gone (1996: 12).

Tanga's mother forces her to undertake excision for a single purpose so that her sexual desire may be numbed to allow her to get into prostitution and entertain as many sexual partners as possible (Beyala, 1996: 23, 37, 52). This will then enable her to make money to sustain her mother and the rest of her siblings. Refusal by Tanga to do this invites a curse from her mother (Beyala, 1996: 37-40). Beyala comes close to the school of thought that proposes female circumcision as a reason for the prostitution plague that hit Ejagham land from the 1950s (1996: 20-21, cf Pemunta, 2012). Beyala (1996: 12) also portrays the practice as an act of pain, shame and brutality on the female body that destroys a young woman from childhood through her entire life.

Early in her career, El Saadawi (1980: xxxiv) takes on similar stance as Beyala. She states clearly that she is against female circumcision for physical and medical reasons as well. She describes the practice as a 'retrograde' and 'cruel' rite that deprives millions of women all over the world of one of their basic human rights: the right to bodily integrity (El Saadawi, 2005: 22). She rejects not only female circumcision but

male circumcision which for her, though not as detrimental as FC is still harmful and may cause serious complications (El Saadawi, 2005; 22). She states, “to cut away any part of a human body for non-medical reasons should be considered a crime” (El Saadawi, 2005:22).

El Saadawi (2016) stresses the importance given to virginity and an intact hymen in practising societies as the reason why female circumcision remains a very widespread practice. She compares circumcised women to eunuchs who are totally dead to sexual desire (El Saadawi, 2016).

It is in her book, *Woman at Point Zero* (2007), El Saadawi comes out clearly linking the practice and sexual pleasure. Using the mouth of her protagonist, Firdaus, she describes her circumcision and eventual loss of sexual pleasure as follows:

Then she brought a woman who was carrying a small knife or maybe a razor blade. They cut off a piece of flesh from between my thighs. I cried all night. Next morning my mother did not send me to the field again (El Saadawi, 2007:12).

In the field, Firdaus when playing “bride and bridegroom” with a boy called Mohammadain, with her clitoris intact, enjoyed pleasure (El Saadawi 2007:12). Lamenting the complete loss of sexual sensations and pleasure after removal of her clitoris, Firdaus states her sexual experience with another man:

He was doing to me what Mahammadain had done before...but I no longer felt the strong sensation of pleasure that radiated from an unknown and yet familiar part of my body...It was as if I could no longer recall the exact spot from which it used to arise, or as though a part of me, my being, was gone and would never return.

Hence, El Saadawi (2007: 13) asserts the clitoris and sexual pleasure as the essence of a person’s being, or a ‘woman’s being’. Loss of it then signifies the loss of one’s being, one’s essence.

Nyangweso (2002: 287) calls the practice “the mutilation of the clitoris” and states that it destroys the sensitive part of the reproductive organ and diminishes sexual enjoyment for the woman. In her study of the Nandi rite in Kenya, she notes that the practice is

meant to control female sexuality by enhancing chastity. Hence, it limits the possibility for women to enjoy sex. Here she blames directly patriarchy for such restriction on women because men have the possibility to take as many wives as they can (Nyangweso, 2002: 287). What she sees as particularly oppressive to women's sexuality is the fact that the practice "reduces women's desire for sex and most importantly sexual pleasure and orgasm during intercourse" (2005: 589).

Studying the Sabaot community in Kenya, Chebet (2014:61, 64) describes the practice as a preparation for housewifery and adulthood and to instil bravery in women. This bravery is to harden a girl so she may endure hardships and difficulty that she might undergo at the hands of her husband or his family. Moreover, as a pastoral community, it is done because husbands travel long distances in search of pasture and water for their animals without worrying that their wives will have sexual urges that could be satisfied by other men. Her research supports a reduction in women's desire for intercourse in that, Sabaot girls then do not have the opportunity negotiate sex and do not enjoy sexual encounters because sex is used only at the dictates of the man. This is mutilation not only of their sexuality but the very essence of their being (Chebet, 2014: 64).

Machera (2004:162) insists that women's sexual pleasure is a universal yearning when she states that sexual arousal is a life force and the clitoris the female which people should not sit by and watch others maim or mutilate (Machera, 2004:162). Female circumcision, therefore, in her opinion has no justification because of the immensity of its inherent violence against female eroticism and pleasure.

Feminists who pursue this line of thought on the practice may probably have had good intentions. However, their advocacy to address the practice seem to some to mask motives constructed on the bases of misjudgement and misrepresentations; thereby transferring Western contextual understandings of sexual oppression to the Global South. All these feminist theorists do refute Ejagham women's experiential claim of sexual pleasure without clitoris by appealing to patriarchy, control, pleasurelessness, especially the barbarity and violence that lie in the removal of the clitoris. While their appeals are worth consideration, one notices a common trend in their arguments; none

of them makes mention of the voices of the researched or brings out of their perspective. This trend has caused Carla Obermeyer to notice that feminist gaze focuses well on the 'Other' with 'disembodied bodies' and 'mutilated organs' (1999: 90). Ejagham women paint a different picture, that of sexual fulfilment, dignity, pride and joy. In the forthcoming section, we examine womanist theorists who share similar views as Ejagham women based on experience or otherwise.

5.3. Womanists counter-assertions

In the early 1960s, American women of all races and walks of life rose to challenge sexism in America. Patriarchy had suppressed women's bodies and sexuality for several centuries, causing women to rotate between physical and psychological stress circles. Middle-class white women who came to be dubbed second-wave feminists championed the insurgency against patriarchy. A decade later, another insurgency arose within feminist rank itself, led by black women and women of colour who questioned its authenticity as inclusive liberation perspectives. They had taken major roles in the fight against patriarchy and sexual politics only to be confronted by feminist politics of exclusion a decade later²⁰. Their exclusion caused women of colour to indulge in a new form of thinking and theorising that takes into account multiple subjectivities and locations in analysing women, especially those based on differences of race and class²¹. They sought for a perspective that could address their concrete experience of oppression, not just as women but also as black women. In this context, womanism was born. This new form of theorising was championed by black women from different parts of the world such as Alice Walker, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, Cleonora Hudson-Weems.

The origin of the concept is attributed to Alice Walker. In her 1984 publication *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens A Womanist Prose*, she rebels against prevailing objective

²⁰ Black Womanhood: Encyclopedia.com

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/philosophy-and-religion/.../black-womanhood>

²¹ opcit.

views of black women as dictated by American society by insisting that every proper woman should be a womanist. A womanist is one who is “acting womanish,” i.e. like a woman” (Walker 1984: xi). Such womanist is one who manifests:

outrageous, audacious, courageous, or willful behaviour. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one ... Interested in grown-up doings... Responsible. In charge. Serious. ... loves other women... Loves men... Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the folk. Loves herself. Regardless... (Walker, 1984: xi–xii)

Walker here uses black folk expression denoting the opposite of being “girlish” which signifies a state of irresponsibility or non-seriousness (Walker 1984: xi). African American mothers used the expression on their daughters who aspire a lot more than their age or experience permitted them (Walker, 1984: xi). Walker deliberately used the concept to detach a womanist from a feminist.

She had succeeded to strike this difference in her 1979 work *Coming Apart*, where she first used the concept (Phillip, 2006: xix). Here, she differentiates a womanist from a feminist with the single word “common”; *Common* here signifying lowliness, lesser sophistication, down to earth such as to reach out to and accommodate everyone, a grass root person (Walker, 2006: 7). Commonality becomes the new way of theorising that prioritises black women’s “everyday” experiences, struggles against oppression, and quest for full humanity. This gives womanism the unique quality that defies, and/or resist the academic and ideological roots that make feminism exclusive (Phillip 2006: xix). To commit herself to black people’s cultural survival, Walker accords womanism community/cultural orientations by adding qualities such as love of men, women, music, dance, moon, the spirit, the self, food and roundness. These are qualities, that are integral to black contextual realities founded on *Ubuntu* philosophy (Gathogo, 2008: 275ff).

Walker (2006: 7, 19, 1984: xii) also sees womanism as a concept that takes the suffering of black men in particular to heart. In so doing, she shows a womanist as one who will not be separated from her black suffering male folk. In her opinion, the black man is the most brutalised and oppressed human being on the face of the earth (Walker 2006: 7). Feminism as women liberation movement is connected to the background of

racism that has lynched and tortured black bodies for centuries. Since it overlooked this history in its theorising, Walker reasoned that it could not sufficiently liberate black people in its current form (Walker, 2006: 7).

Walker is not the only progenitor of womanism. Two of her contemporaries are Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi and Clenora Hudson-Weems who endorse as well as differ with her perspective. Chikwenye Ogunynemi of Nigeria stood for similar tenets of womanism, targeting largely race and class oppression almost simultaneously with Walker. Her perspective came to assume the name African womanism to differentiate it from Walkerian (Phillip, 2006: xx). Very early into the concept, she split from Western feminism and eventually from Walker for three reasons: First, Ogunyemi came to the realisation that both feminism and Wakerian womanism “overlook African peculiarities” (Arndts, 2000: 711). Second, in her opinion, only African women may be African womanists (Arndts 2000: 711). Third, she expressed disagreement with Walker on the concept of sexuality, especially the issue of lesbianism (Arndts, 2000: 712).

Nonetheless, Ogunyemi (1985: 64) herself acknowledges that African and African American womanism can, in some ways, thread on similar grounds in spite of the differences that separate them. She identifies these similarities as follows:

As a group, they are distinct from white feminists because of their race, because they have experienced the past and present subjugation of the black population along with present-day subtle (or not so subtle) control exercised over them by the alien, Western culture.

Here she cites racial similarity and experience of subjugation as a common bond for African and African American womanism. The phenomenon thrives on Western culture and feminism, hence, the unsuitability of Western feminism as a concept of liberation (Ogunyemi, 1985: 64).

In addition, Ogunyemi (1985: 64) differentiates her perspective from feminist on the basis of the geopolitics of knowledge and privilege. A womanist, in her opinion, “will recognize that, along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate

racial, cultural, national, economic, and political considerations into her philosophy". It is, therefore, a perspective that chooses not "to view global realities in the eyes of the powerful and privileged, but rather through the eyes of the suffering, the weak, the vulnerable, the dehumanized and the demonised, the outcasts and excluded" (Boesak 2017: 82). Feminist epistemic theorising on liberation has privileged discourses on sexism above others based on their contextual realities. However, as Ogunyemi explains, while gender inequality and sexism are salient issues, race and class oppression are even bigger issues that merit equal attention. Feminism has mostly glossed over these issues in its theorising.

Clenora Hudson-Weems is another progenitor of the concept. Her perspective came to assume the appellation *Africana womanism*. Her 1993 publication titled *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* set the tone for her perspective. It is a combination of papers and articles, which propagate the concept based on the struggles of her context (Phillip, 2006: xx). Hudson-Weems rejects feminism and black feminism as inadequate channels for addressing black women's plight because of its exclusion, racism and quest for power. She also sees many shortfalls in womanism, that is not African.

Some theorists (Aniagolu, 1998: 96-100) are of the opinion that these three progenitors did not altogether create something new in the concept. They were simply giving a name to a concept that earlier progenitors had shaped, though they were little known because of their situation outside academic, activist circles and dominant histories of consciousness (Phillip, 2006: xx). Citing womanists such as Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Zora Neale, Rosa Parks, they show that women had engaged in the fight against oppression long before second-wave theorising.

According to some theorists, feminism's academic and ideological claims, its prioritising sexism, while overlooking white domination as a form of race and scholarly restrictiveness all make it exclusivist in its praxis (Phillip, 2006: xx, Izgarjan & Markov, 2015: 304). Womanism, on the other hand, targeted racial discrimination by upholding ethnicity and culture as basic tenets that enhanced human knowledge. Compared to race, culture proves richer, life affirming, dynamic and constantly changing. Proponents

are admonished to be familiar with their cultural and ethnic roots. They become cultural/ethnic beings who are peculiar because of their ability to begin locally but then easily fit themselves within the larger global community, as opposed to exclusive racial beings (Phillip, 2006: xxxvi).

Although its beginning point is black humanity, womanism becomes peculiar because it vies for inclusiveness of all human race in handling the relationship between women, social change, struggle against oppression, and the quest for full humanity (Phillip, 2006: xx). As such, it refuses to succumb to what Allan Boesak (1976: 143) describes as 'absolutist claims' wherein blackness and oppression become "the ultimate criterion for all theology" and the only plight the gospel message must address.

Moreover, as a liberation perspective, it takes a special interest in the problem of the geopolitical spaces of knowledge that have complicated cultural discourses in Global South and especially the genital mutilation discourses in Africa for several decades. Generally, Grosfoguel (2013: 88) and other Global South thinkers (Mignolo, 2009, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013) are advocating the continuous critique of Eurocentric modernistic epistemologies that limit the Global South, while at the same time promoting critical Global South epistemic traditions that decolonise or change.

Global institutions include Democracy, Human Right, Women liberation, Economy and others (Grosfoguel, 2013: 88). Because its beginning point is a commitment to liberating oppressed black people, specifically black women, womanism as a movement for women's liberation is not Western-oriented in its intellectual and epistemological commitments. It also does not romanticise culture, especially harmful aspects of culture but rejects the external imposition of epistemologies that perpetuates the oppression of black people.

Oduyoye's (2001) cultural hermeneutics fits in well with womanist religious-cultural hermeneutics that privileges African ways of knowing and doing. She begins with self-critiquing, where she cautions against romanticising African culture with its multiple undersides that need continuous "fine tuning" in order to arrive at a hermeneutic of liberation (2001: 12). Nonetheless, she also suspects any hermeneutic that rejects,

downgrades or discriminates against African culture on the basis of inferiority as in the case of genital mutilation discourses (Oduyoye, 1995: 86-87). Her three-dimensional approach to culture is vital to womanist hermeneutics, especially as pursued by the study. First, the upholding of African cultural integrity. Second, not allowing that same culture to dictate the pace of peoples' lives to the level of oppressing them. Last, her conviction that as Africans one should not let others use African cultures as a downgrading tool against Africa and Africans (Oduyoye, 2001: 12). These cautions enable the perspective to critically examine the epistemological structures that have been used to engage the genital mutilation problem in Ejagham as structures that have complicated the debates as a result of imposition and labelling.

Womanism, as pursued by the study, lauds feminism's quest for women's liberation, but may not specifically identify with the tenets of Western feminism. It can walk on the same path with black and African feminism but has dragnets when it comes to Western feminism and its methods of liberating women. This is large because of what Arndt (2000:709, 711) describes as its continuous manifestation of patriarchal domineering tendencies. This is especially seen in its struggle for equality with white male power, instead of dismantling the entire oppressive structure. As such, its ideological tendencies, which replicate control make it unsuitable for black women's contextual realities. Womanism does not overlook or take advantage of the sufferings of other women, but continuously addresses the fact that black/African women still bear the brunt of oppression in the twenty-first century (Arndt, 2000: 711). In the quest to create dialogical space for Ejagham women's sexual-cultural experience, as expressed in *Nkim a Nkim*, womanism seems to be the better option to explore. With the above explications, we then explore various womanist theorists' counter-contest feminist notions of sex and pleasure.

5.3.1. Womanists contest lack of sexual pleasure without a clitoris

Ejagham women are not unique in their claim of sexual pleasure as fixed women. Other women are backing up the claim with their personal experience. Wairimu Njambi is one of those who contest the claim that female circumcision is done to deprive women of sexual pleasure as an act of patriarchy. She uses her own context and personal experience to reveal that the rite is sexual, just as it is undertaken to confer womanhood

(Njambi, 2004: 295) and that women like herself are not compelled but willingly demand the procedure to achieve such desired status (Njambi, 2004: 294).

Arguing for sexual pleasure, Njambi (2004: 294) states that women's experience of circumcision differs widely. In her case, the clitoral hood was cut to its apex, which caused the hood to split open and the clitoris to become more exposed. This exposure enhances rather than dampens sexual gratification as it exposes her clitoral structures even better (Njambi, 2004: 294). Njambi sees feminist theories that look at female circumcision solely in light of barbarity, primitively and sex deprivation as still constructed with colonialist mind-set. She discourages theories that try to universalise commonality in women on the basis of sexual pleasure through a single organ, the clitoris (Njambi, 2004: 299).

Ahmadou (2009) also uses personal experience to contest the destruction of sexual pleasure and compulsion of women as a motivation for female circumcision. Their experiences are similar to the Ejagham in many ways. She states that she and her sister went through the process as an integral part of their maturation to womanhood and celebrated, as is the case of all initiated women of Bondo in Sierra Leone. Generally, her Bondo culture sees initiation, which involves the removal of the external clitoral glans and hood as a sort of matriarchal power. This is the power that constantly reminds men of the close divinity of women who birth them and are special channels after God for ensuring humanity (Ahmadou, 2009: 14). Specifically, this process activates better the penis that lies deep within the female vagina known in Western discourse as the g-spot (Ahmadou, 2009: 14). This enables women to possess the penis while at the same time dominating it sexually to attain sexual pleasure and reproduction (Ahmadou, 2009: 14).

Ahmadou (2009:16, 17) reveals that sexual pleasure is taught to initiated women in her context as a right in marriage relations which they must own, just as in Ejagham. Women are taught not to fear but to possess and at the same time ravage the phallus for their maximum satisfaction. Initiation spaces fortify this right, as women are taught other accompanying features such as erotic songs, sexual foreplay, good food and sexually suggestive dances just like *Moninkim*. All come into play to sweeten the sexual

act and not the work of a specific organ, namely, the clitoris. All these tactics are impacted in the transition process in the maturation room, which bestows young women with enough tact to effectively get the best of sexual experience. It is for this reason that initiation spaces are considered crucial in the bestowal of qualities of womanhood and femininity.

Ahmadou and Njambi may not intend to make their experiences universal or normative as feminist theorists did. Carla Obermeyer (1999: 80) opines a single-sided portrayal of the evidence may hardly suffice to understand the issues. What they are, however, attempting to convey is that the discourses on female circumcision and related concerns such as sexual pleasure or other phenomena associated with it should be understood according to various the prevailing realities, people, cultures and even individuals concerned.

Their report is corroborated by Hanny Lightfoot-Klein (1989: 25-26) who carried out a five years' study in Sudan where several feminist studies have reported severe forms of the practice such as infibulation. Lightfoot-Klein (1989: 25) began her study on the popular assumption that circumcised women do not enjoy sexual intercourse. In her quest to endorse this view, she received responses that greatly changed her thinking. The reactions she had from women were first heavy laughter, and later this remark from a woman through Lightfoot-Klein's interpreter:

She says that you must be completely mad to ask her a question like that! She says: 'A body is a body, and no circumcision can change that! No matter what they cut away from you- they cannot change that'!.

Lightfoot-Klein (1989: 26) remarked that this was a sobering experience for her. For she came to the realisation that in many cases, those described as genitally mutilated women were "real human beings with real lives and real relationships with a multitude of dimensions, not simply with female genitalia in various states of mutilation". She (1989: 80) reported that up to 90% of infibulated Sudanese women interviewed, reported reaching regular orgasm, in various degrees of frequency and intensity. She went ahead to present several studies done in Sudan and Africa with mixed results on

orgasm (1989: 82-84) and concludes with little doubt in her mind that orgasm exists even among these drastically mutilated women to a surprising extent (Lightfoot-Klein 1989: 81)

Oyefara (2015) confirms this view in a similar study he undertook more recently among married women of Oworonshoki community in neighbouring Nigeria where he makes similar findings. Even though his study was carried out to discourage FC, his findings concluded that 89 women (33%) out of his 266 respondents confessed having a regular orgasm even with severe forms of the practice. A greater number (101) always enjoyed sexual intercourse, and an even greater number (168) found full satisfaction with their sexual life as fixed women (Oyefara, 2015: 1539). On the contrary, some women with intact clitorises confessed no sexual pleasure or satisfaction in his findings (Oyefara, 2015: 1539). Though their number is not as significant as the uncircumcised, his study gives credence to proof that the removal of a clitoris is not a hamper of pleasure; at least not in all fixed women.

Asked the same question about orgasm and activists' allegations that it is lacking among fixed women in Mbakang in Ejagham, Ma Etaka Arrey responded thus:

All lies, lies because they have not been circumcised. I have been circumcised and I have the feelings of a woman. In that area of life, I have the feeling of a woman when I feel that thing. I have that urge, there is nothing like that, no. There is no change there, nothing has been taken away from you nothing; because it is the outer part of the woman that is removed. They have not taken the inside of you; that feeling comes but from inside of you when you are doing it. How can the outside part affect inside? Enjoyment comes from inside not from outside. Those things they are talking are not right. (Interviewed 6th March 2017)

Obermeyer (1999: 79) carried out a study on based on an elaborate review of available literature of the practice from 1966 -1996 to evaluate prevalence rate, harmful effects and implications on sexual pleasure. In her findings on sexual pleasure, she cites studies in Sudan (El Dareer, 1982; Lightfoot-Klein, 1989), Egypt (Asaad, 1980), Gruenbaum (1996) and others who all reported sexual pleasure in initiated women

(Obermeyer 1999: 95). Some of these orgasms were intense even at the level of infibulation.

As a result, Obermeyer cautions that be it in the West or in practising societies, matters of sexuality are often vast, contradictory and influenced by a culture, which makes a static view of sexual matters problematic (Obermeyer, 1999: 96). Nzegwu (2011:263), supports her explaining, that sexual desires, fantasies and pleasures focus on the totality of the being and tend to avoid the domination/subjugation complex of patriarchal ideology, which infuses a current understanding of the erotic and eroticism,. She advocates contextual understanding of pleasure as pertaining to the individual and not outside the influence of the sexual (Nzegwu, 2011:263).

Obermeyer's final submission on the subject is telling when she states that "...the assertion that female genital surgeries unequivocally function to destroy sexual pleasure appears to be scientifically inaccurate, as well as superficial from a symbolic point of view" (Obermeyer, 1999: 96). She describes most of the findings of the studies that report negative consequences on sexuality and reproductive health as "clearly insufficient" (Obermeyer, 1999: 97).

She arrives at the same findings in a more recent report (2005). Here she cites a study done on women from the Horn of Africa to endorse Ejagham women's claim that sexual pleasure is possible after initiation. She shows that 91% of respondents get pleasure from sex, 73% find penetration pleasurable or very pleasurable, and 86% are having regular orgasms (Obermeyer, 2005: 456). Circumcised women in Somali give a similar report, that all these women give vivid descriptions of orgasm (Obermeyer, 2005: 456, 457). In her opinion, such reports may puzzle cultures that do not share similar notions of sexuality, but that does not make them false (Obermeyer, 2005: 457).

Last, one should implicate Daly (1978: 164) with her own study of 'African genital mutilation'. Here she mentions the powerful and seductive amorous relationships of Cleopatra with Roman military generals such as Julius Caesar and Mark Anthony; these sexual exploits were through *sans* clitoris. She indicates that when Cleopatra's mummy was exhumed and examined, it was found that she underwent circumcision (Daly, 1978:

164). One can only wonder how Cleopatra succeeded to seduce such great military generals with her charm if she herself felt nothing within her sexually. Her adventures should only give credence to the fact that some women without clitoris still possess unique sexual prowess.

5.3.2. Womanists suspect feminist focus on sex and genitals

Some African womanists have read the genital mutilation discourses as part of the ongoing ploy by the West to continue to expose, ridicule and degrade African women's genitals. Sexuality has always posed as perennial for power in colonial discourses. When the sexual is conquered, it becomes apparent that the rest will follow suit. As such, feminist take on, 'genital mutilation' has been interpreted by some womanists as the ongoing imposition of coloniality of the sexual through objectifying of African sexual practices and consequently genitals.

For instance, Dellenborg (2004:79) wonders why this ritual and not others receive so much attention and outrage. She asks why the 'genitals or lost genitals' of women become so much international concern, and why their treatment attracts such intense debates internationally, whereas there are so many other 'harmful practices' and alarming situations that cause people suffering. She suggests that the female circumcision debates could be seen more as another imposition of Western cultural and historical notions of sexuality into other cultures and not so much the sexual and health complications of the practice (Dellenborg, 2004: 88). This means it is a means for the West to show its worthiness by exposing Africa's baseness through the mutilated genitals of its women. Her suggestions are shared by Obermeyer (1999, 2003, 2005).

Nnaemeka (2005: 30) thinks the same. In her opinion, the female circumcision discourses are visible ways in which African genitals continue to face ridicule and degradation in the international arena. She exposes a paradoxical situation in that, while Western feminists' claims are to salvage African women and stop violence meted on their bodies by 'genital mutilation', they tend to cause bigger violence by exposing those body parts, namely, genitals in shameful ways.

Such expositions have worsened along the years as pictures, books, magazines, films made of women and young girl's genitals have been broadcasted shamelessly and heartlessly on social media worldwide. She notes that such pictures coming from those who come as "saviours" of women are disturbing and at the same time insulting (Nnaemeka, 200: 30). One such example is Walker's description of Tashi's genital after circumcision. It is incapacitated by endless menstrual cramps, a tiny aperture fastened by thorns and straw to stop the traumatised flesh from growing together. Moreover, it has odour caused by lack of flow of blood and urine, an odour which can only be cured in America (Walker, 1992: 64,66).

Briere (2005: 9) thinks that such a level of degradation of FGM by Walker could be seen in light with an obsession with Western culture. She explains that focusing on 'genitals' through 'genital mutilation' enables the West (be it Daly or Alice Walker) to view itself in a positive light, just as Keith Richburg's obsession with all that is wrong with Africa enables him to view US culture so favourably as to be thankful that slavery brought his ancestors to the New World. Such positions reveal deep Western cultural superiority that sometimes confuses even some of the people it enslaves (Daly, Walker & Richburg), turning them into oppressors as well. Thus, in oppressing Africans with their writing, they create the impression that they are actually doing them good. In binding people, they create the impression that theirs is an effort or a culture that liberates (Briere, 2005: 9).

5.3.3. Womanists view 'genital mutilation' debates as a misguided priority

The target of African culture and women's genitals and the emphasis on sexual liberation through the clitoris has been understood by some African women as a misguided priority (Oduyoye, 1995; Arnfred, 2004, Dellenborg, 2004; Nnaemeka, 2005; El Saadawi, 2005). While it was understandable for feminists to wage fierce combat for clitoris, sex, orgasm in their context, it became a concern, if not an embarrassment to women in other parts of the world that the same energy was channelled to these places where the primary concerns were neither the clitoris nor sexual pleasure. Dellenborg (2004:90) gives an example:

At the United Nation's Second World Conference on Women in Copenhagen in 1980, ... Western feminists vexed women from the Third World countries by debating on the quality of clitoral versus vaginal orgasm. Finally, representatives of the Southern hemisphere protested, pointing out that the acute problems concerning the majority of women of the Third World are lack of clean water and fuel, and high maternal and child mortality.

In this light, El Saadawi (2005: 22) later revisits her discourses on 'genital mutilation' to address this concern. Her stance on female circumcision was rejection and eradicated. However, having perused Western motives a little further, she states the following:

I cannot agree with those in America and Europe who draw a sharp distinction between their own situation and that of women in the region to which I belong ... They tend to depict our lives as continual submission to medieval systems, and point vehemently to some of the rituals and traditional practices such as female circumcision. They raise a hue and cry in defense of the victims, write long articles and deliver speeches at congresses. Of course, it is good that female circumcision be denounced. But by concentrating on such manifestations there is the risk that the real issue of social and economic change may be evaded and forgotten and that effective action may be replaced by a feeling of superior humanity, a glow of satisfaction that may blind the mind and feelings to the concrete everyday struggle of women's emancipations (1980: xxxiv).

From the above explanation, El Saadawi suggests that no fight against female circumcision can succeed in isolation of the practical realities and causes of the suffering African women encounter on a daily basis. In other words, one cannot detach cultural practices from the degrading socio-economic contexts upon which they operate. When discourses refrained from mentioning the later and focus solely on the barbarity of the former, they become problematic, subjugated and exploitative. Dealing with sex as women's sole means of liberation void of socio-economic others may mask the real priorities and pressures that women are exposed to because of the patriarchal class system (El Saadawi, 1980: xxxiv).

Nnaemeka (2005: 31-32) agrees with El Saadawi. She discusses the book, *The Day Kadi Lost Part of her Life*. Here she alludes to the gruesome images portrayed by the authors concerning Kadi's circumcision. Her clitoris, as well as "the razor that eliminates it" and the blood that flows are the sole focus of attention for these authors. She notices that the background of the pictures reveals the complexity of Kadi's real contextual realities. The authors practically ignore this surrounding of ardent poverty and dryness, one that is clearly reflected in the outlook of the old hungry looking circumciser who cuts Kadi (Nnaemeka, 2005: 31).

More importantly, one may ponder how these authors could brace themselves to well witness, and take pictures of circumcision, which they claim is horrendous and should raise some concerns. The implication is that colonial patriarchy could disguise in exploitative ventures that take advantage of the 'genital mutilation' discourses in the continent. Nnaemeka (2005: 31) like El Saadawi comprehends the pain of magnifying circumcision in isolation from other socio-economic conditions of African women as giving the impression that imperialists have good intentions. Ela (1994: 137) especially laments the fact that this phenomenon is recurrent and disturbing in all African countries. The fact that people stagger in misery "without access to drinking water, a balanced diet, health and hygiene, education, or self-determination", but yet stakeholders overlook all these and centre their reflection and action solely on religious rites and customs (Ela, 1994: 137).

While not endorsing brutality on the female body, these theorists seem to suggest that sometimes, socio-economic pressures could render women vulnerable and porous like in the case of Kadi above to open up to varied means of survival. Nnaemeka (2005: 32) gives the example of Bilaela in Prathiba Parma's account in their book *Warrior Marks* with Alice Walker on the practice in the Gambia. Bilaela takes money from Western (New York) journalists to pay for young women to be excised live on camera, in order to be televised for Western consumption. Such accounts bring to light some of the real intent of those who profess to combat the practice. This could be a continuation of coloniality and exhibition of African women's genitals (Dellenborg, 2004; Machera, 2004).

It is this continuous overlooking of the socio-economic plight of African women, while magnifying the suffering of their 'presumed victims', which El Saadawi and Naemaka draw attention to. El Saadawi (2005: 23) cites the case of Kasinga of Togo who flees to the US to escape being circumcised in Togo but then, the US incarcerates her for a long time. Even while she is fleeing to freedom, Kasinga faces a greater threat, lack of freedom. El Saadawi concludes, that "sometimes, the family rites are less cruel than denial of alien rights" (El Saadawi, 2005: 23). Sometimes the rescue missions, videos, movies, news broadcasts on 'genital mutilation' could be enslaving missions.

In this light, Nnaemeke (2005:5) again shows foreign-Western *modus operandi* for interventions in the Global South concerning the practice generating resistance, which impedes developmental work and undermine true collaboration to address the practice in order to promote transnational agenda. Such resistance crops in when the marginalised begin to unveil hidden agenda behind interventions, especially those of profit and ethnocentrism. She states:

...at the heart of the failure to effect any significant change in the practice is the continued marginalization of indigenous women in crucial issues in their lives and in their capacity and unwillingness of Western feminists to create a site for true collaboration and partnership (Nnaemeke 2005:5).

She opines that adherents feel cut off, imposed upon or completely left out of eradication efforts that they in actuality should champion (Nnaemeke, 2005:5). The solution for African problems is constantly made to lie in Western intervention.

5.3.4. Womanists think African women could better tell their own stories

Oduyoye (1995: 86-87) adds her voice to the discourses. After reading Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology*, she had this to say:

... Reading Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* "was fascinating until I came to chapter 5 and read "African Genital Mutilation: The Unspeakable Atrocities". This material cries out for response by African women.

She thinks that Daly's outcry seemingly professing empathy for African women 'mutilated' turns out to be demeaning than liberating. They are nothing but silenced

tools blinded by patriarchy and used to mutilate their kind; a picture far removed from practical realities on the ground. Oduyoye (1995: 87) addresses Western sisters by stating matter-of-factly: "...our well-meaning sisters should consider that African women should be empowered to tell their own story, or be left alone". She thinks that African women's stories are written with a tendency to elevate the Western ego when magnifying their degradation.

In this light, she also calls to question the works of those "Euro-American women and a few African men" who generate proposals and receive grants to study "the African woman" under such rubrics as marriage, family, or population but hardly ever "as a person" (Oduyoye, 1995: 82). She suggests giving such opportunity to African woman to express herself rather than have people constantly telling her story and saying what she thinks. Letting her express her views on such cultural issues would be the only genuine "expression of solidarity with the oppressed" (Oduyoye, 1995: 82). Masenya (2016) encourages Africans on the African continent to answer the questions that are posed by themselves as pertaining to the daily life experiences of ordinary people.

Spivak (1998: 272-273 in Morton 2007:1) comments on Western cultures and their literary and philosophical studies for the continuous ideological support they give to justify European colonialism. Spivak is generally interested in taking up the plight of subordinated people in the world, especially those that are reduced to such a state by inherent in colonialism and its depiction of the colonised subject (Spivak, 1988: 273). The colonised subjects cannot tell their story based on their 'naïve' knowledge; their history is only by colonialists and their elite informants. In the process, she notes that epistemic violence takes place wherein knowledge produced constantly disfavours the colonised subject (Spivak, 1988: 280). Spivak then demands that the native colonised subject speak for themselves and rewrite their own history (Spivak, 1988: 275)

She uses Antonio Gramsci's "subaltern" to describe this group as people that have been rendered weak by elitist systems and as such are not able to represent themselves (Morton, 2007: 96, 97). She also narrows the term to denote 'women' as a subaltern group and the specificity of their oppression in a general system of postcolonial exploitation (Morton, 2007: 105). In her work, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, she reveals

that a crucial form of oppression of this disempowered group is their representation by 'the radical Western intellectual' who posit to speak on their behalf (Spivak, 1988: 273; Morton, 2007: 106). Her argument is that even while these thinkers claim to criticise the West for its oppressive schemes, they end up inaugurating the West and not the oppressed as 'Subject' of their representation (Morton, 2007: 106).

It is in such light that Spivak contributes to contemporary feminist thought on the genital mutilation discourses. She cautions against feminist theories that delve into this cultural domain in light of "superior theory and enlighten compassion" (Spivak, 1988b: 135). She demands that feminism seriously considers the material histories and lives of 'Third World' women in its account of women's struggles against oppression (Morton, 2003: 71). In particular, she challenges the universal claim of some Western feminists to speak for all women, regardless of cultural difference (Morton, 2003: 78). In her opinion, the academic feminists must 'learn to learn' from disempowered Global South women and not always attempt to correct their historical experiences with '... superior theory and enlightened compassion' (Morton, 2003:79).

She questions Eurocentric assumptions that clitoridectomy is exclusively a ritual imposed on Global South women in primitive societies. She chooses to understand the practice as the symbolic repression of all feminine sexual pleasure, thereby suggesting like clitoridectomy is a general condition of women's social and economic oppression (Morton, 2003:83). These conditions should be given urgent attention and consideration rather than how women treat their genitals.

5.3.5. 'Sisterhood' sentiments or ethnocentrism?

When second-wave feminists railed against genital mutilation in the Global South, they attributed their actions to universal sisterhood wherein they are committed to saving their Global South sisters from patriarchal oppression. Daly (1978: 172) especially called Western women to "become sisters to these women of Africa- *naming the crimes against them and speaking on their behalf*- seeing through the reversal that is meant to entrap us all" (Emphasis mine). Walker calls for "female solidarity...in the struggle to eradicate FGM" (Lauret, 2011:154). Nevertheless, at the end of her work, she acts alone by killing M'Lissa, the circumciser (Walker, 1992: 274). This signifies that African

women are not only ignorant of the crimes committed against them, but most importantly, do have no voice to speak on their own. Such a quest to represent the 'other' has caused some to see the circumcision discourses as the ongoing efforts to construct the African woman in light of the 'Other (cited in Lauret, 2011: 153, Nnaemeka, 2005: 27-46, 2005: 34-35)'.

Others suggest that feminist sisterhood concern is more in light of ethnocentrism; it was the will to project African women and their cultures as 'others' who need be rescued by a better cultural worldview, the Western. Veronique Mottier (2008: 73) suggests this view when she argues, "Western feminists were...focusing on Third World cultural practices; while largely ignoring the fact that surgical interventions on women's genitals such as 'laser vaginal rejuvenation' and 'designer laser vaginoplasty were currently among the fastest growing cosmetic forms of surgery in Western countries". The fact that they could label Third World cultures and ignore practices with similar implications in their own context could only signify ethnocentrism on their part.

Ben-Asher (2010: 75) substantiates Mottier, revealing that while the American Congress allows genital surgeries inside America, it justifies its banning of Third World cultures by saying that, "cultural practices cannot justify genital surgeries". In his opinion, this "ignoring or belittling" African cultures is because they are not backed by scientifically medicalised procedures (Ben-Asher, 2010: 74). He describes the banning of female circumcision as "complete marginalisation of African traditions", made possible through the "science-culture distinctions" (Ben-Asher, 2010: 74),

It is this attack on African practices from the United States and other countries, which ended in the sweeping criminalisation of all kinds of female circumcision (Ben-Asher 2010 73-74). The reports of Hosken (1976ff) and the work of Daly (1978: 153ff) that is critiqued today for their questionable methodologies are some of the primary sources that were used to put pressure on International bodies to criminalise the practices in many Western non-Western legislations (Mottier, 2008:72).

Therefore, one may conclude here that although sexual pleasure is a universal experience, it has varied contextual undertones that could be given consideration before

static claims are made. Static claims could even be discouraged with the reason that there is more to human, women's, people's sexuality than can be imagined. Considering that research has rendered most of their facts now questionable (cf Obermeyer, 1999, 2005), one could suggest that SWF may have misled the trend of the discourses based on their uncritical evaluation of what they considered baser barbaric cultures. Ben-Asher (2010: 74) thinks this still affects the discourses African practices today.

5.4. Distilling the arguments

The various arguments above enabled one to acknowledge the convergence between feminism and womanism as social justice movements that champions the plight of women and liberation. Their contributions target different aspects of women's oppression though understood for different perspectives. Nonetheless, the two movements have been immense in championing women's cause along the past decades. Feminism has made many strides in the modern era while some theorist suggests that womanism has been operative from the days of Sojourner Truth, even though it had not assumed a name (Phillip, 2006: xxi).

Their divergence is obvious as well. They cannot be conflated and neither can be said to be the other; they have separate motives and interest. While feminism is more ideological and political and exclusive, womanism seems to drift more to commonality and inclusiveness. This has affected their approach towards a way of approaching social justice issues of race, class and gender and others. This aspect dichotomises the two movements. We use these issues to distil the arguments raised above by both theorists in order to make suggestions on concepts of womanhood, sexuality race, gender, sexual pleasure, and identity. We engage the research questions and objectives to propose that all these concepts should be opened to multiple contextual expressions and interpretations according to women's prevailing realities. Any static expression as reasoned by second-wave theorists promotes exclusivism and hence, ideology.

5.4.1. Who is a woman, what makes womanhood?

Universalisation of the clitoris as women's new sexual organ raised new concerns about certain definitions of personhood and especially the being 'woman'. In examining the

clitoral debates turned 'genital mutilation', some theorists have wondered if Western feminists considered the concept "woman" or "womanhood" before attempting to universalise sex and pleasure and liberation of all women (Alcoff, 2006). This is because the concept of *woman* could be broad, multifaceted and sometimes even confusing. We examine different strategies used by feminists to engage universal liberation of a woman and the shortcomings of their choices while proposing other alternatives.

5.4.1.1. Patriarchy as a universal plight for all womanhood

In their contextual struggle against women's subjugation, second-wave feminists see universal male dominance as a primary form of oppression for all women. Women shared a common characteristic in this form of oppression. Nonetheless, it is the experience of middle class white American women used as the standard for womanhood and patriarchy. In so doing, they are using Western women's parameters and their contextual experiences to set standards for women universally. They are not taking into consideration other forms of oppression as experienced by women in other places.

Juma (2015: 34) stresses this view in her discourse of Stephanie Mitchem. Mitchem (2002:4 cited in Juma 2015: 34) argues that the experiences of women are diverse and dynamic, depending on time and context. As a result, one ought to take seriously the different, diverse and dynamic experiences of women as an important aspect of reflections. In her opinion, early feminists mainly identified patriarchy as male control everywhere as the centre of gender oppression (Mitchem, 2002:4, in Juma, 2015: 34). Universal patriarchy meets white women's needs and their histories in that when sorted, it accords equality with white men while not all other races and people are addressed (Mitchem, 2002:4 cited in Juma, 2015: 34). It restricts the vitality of feminism to other experiences such as those of black women and other genders who experience different forms of domination. Second-wave feminism could have missed an important aspect when it failed to include cultural, racial, ethnic, religious and contextual differences in its discourses and analysis of women's problems (Mitchem, 2002:4, Juma, 2015: 34).

Alcoff (2006: 152) thinks similarly. She states that in 1960, feminists spoke and made political demands on behalf of all women when they themselves could not accept the category *woman* even at the level of their contextual experience of race and class. She rejects any universal category for womanhood as she states the following:

I believe then and I believe today that we can make many accurate claims about women, as women exist here and now in particular locations, and thus we can make demands that reflect women's needs. The problem is not an absence of content for the category "women" but an overabundance and inconsistency of content, given the multiple situations in which women find themselves in various cultures (Alcoff 2006: 152).

Alcoff accepts multi-contextual realities for womanhood as applicable to immediate contexts and not outside that particular context. Therefore, Ejagham women can make their claim as they experience womanhood here and now; but cannot be bestowed womanhood based on realities from America. Ejagham women may also not apply their understanding of the concept to Kenyan or Brazilian women. Alcoff's standpoint is that pertaining to the varied needs and situations that shape women's lives and livelihoods, one cannot easily make claims on who is a woman or what is authentic womanhood. As such, multi-prevailing realities of the concept 'woman' could be a better way of arriving at a closer satisfying definition.

Speaking about the African context, Oduyoye (1995: 13) sees the term 'woman' as generic and suggests there could be no agreement even among Africans on who is an authentic (African) woman. This, in her opinion, is just as good and can be empowering and "truly healthy and liberating, for all women are not one" (Oduyoye, 1995: 13). She suggests that in whatever context and situation, which they operate, women should affirm they're proper being and begin to weave a new pattern of womanhood from the threads in which they feel most comfortable (Oduyoye, 1995: 16).

It is important to note that Oduyoye and Alcoff are not suggesting that because women are different, one should say nothing about them. Instead, they advise that anyone who needs to submit such claim should not silence, but take into consideration the inherent difficulties that accompany it. There is, therefore, a need to acknowledge for contextual differences needs in all attempts at the unified identity of womanhood.

5.4.1.2. Universal oppression/liberation as uniting force for womanhood

Some theorists have expressed concerns about the feminist theory that universalises the oppression of women; that is, the fact that women everywhere are facing sexual and patriarchal oppression and as such, should be liberated as a whole. This is because women's oppression varies from country to country. Even in one country, different groups may have different forms and magnitudes of oppression. For instance, in the Cameroonian setting, Ejagham women's poverty, underdevelopment and marginalisation causes them to understand sexism and patriarchy in a different light from Beti women who have all the luxuries and can fly abroad twice a week for holiday and shopping. Oppression and liberation will obviously entail different things for these two groups of women, though they live in the same country. It will also entail different things to white privilege middle-class women and those other parts of the world who face not only sexual but race and class oppression.

Linda Alcoff (2006:152) cautions feminist theorists to "refrain from universal pronouncements about the nature of women's oppression or the content of their political goal". Generally, she sees the need to locate and limit the scope of the presumed applicability of issues of oppression and liberation (Alcoff, 2006: 152). This is what is considered oppressive sexually or otherwise by women in one context and could be a force of liberation in another, as the clitoral/genital mutilation debates are portraying in the American and Ejagham context. It is in such light that women's liberation could hardly be uniform or universal.

Arguing against Daly's claims that African women are dehumanised, Oduyoye (1995: 82) states that the meaning of full humanity for women "cannot be defined only by one sector of humanity, without listening to the voices, the hurts, and the delights" of other women. As such, Daly, Hosken, Walker and other feminists are not in the right position to prescribe what is human for women, especially those in practising areas. In her evaluation, what constitutes the fetters of oppression should be defined by those who experience it and not by those who simply observe it (Oduyoye, 1995: 82).

She thinks that second wave feminists were not "sensitive enough in their bid to globalise the oppression of women" (Oduyoye, 1995: 86). In their zeal to speak and

represent Global South women, they focused on cultural manifestations that they do not have sufficient knowledge and understanding. In so doing, they are alienating the very people they set out to include (Oduyoye, 1995: 86). The discourses on *Nkim* clearly puts this to the limelight.

Taking race as an example, one could note here that blacks are different from whites and whites are different from Asians. Moreover, in their singular groups, there is still a significant difference in ranks, class, gender and status. Cone (1984: 127) illustrates this, using black and white feminisms in America in the 1960s and 70s. Though all of them were women fighting against oppression, oppression meant different things to these separate groups. Here Cone states the following:

For black women, however, white feminism was not always adequate or appropriate, partly because feminism was sometimes racist and partly because patriarchy had distinctive characteristics in the struggle for racial freedom (Cone, 1984: 127)

While white women had patriarchy (white male domination) as an oppressive force, black women had not only this form of oppression but also sexism and classism that were propagated by whites in general, but also from black men (Cone, 1984: 130-31). Indeed, for black women, white feminists were so racist and their black males were so sexist (Cone, 1984: 135). White feminists were also patriarchal and racist in other ways, especially when they turned blind eyes on issues of racism and classism and yet expected black women to take side with them in the struggle.

That is why even though the clitoris and clitoral debates had many sexual benefits for American women, it is not a driving force for Ejagham women and others (Obermeyer, 1999; Arnfred, 2005; Dellenborg, 2004; Nnaemeka, 2005). There is great risk therefore in attempting to universalise liberation, oppression and patriarchy or speak on behalf of all women.

5.4.2. Gender, a criterion universal womanhood

The many gendered identities in the world today are a reflection of the resistance people are putting up against a static definition of their personhood or normative views on how to express their sexuality. Gender theorists analyze some feminist theorists who

advance gender, as portrayed in a woman's physical representation (female sex) as a criterion for defining common womanhood. Feminist theorists see *woman* or *female* as an obvious universal gender that suffers male oppression, especially in connection to physical and natural qualities shared by all women. Since all women have breasts and genitals as organs of sex and nurture, they are all domesticated and sexually oppressed by men everywhere. Physical features could apply, therefore, as qualities of womanhood (Young, 1994: 719-729).

However, some gender theorists think that even these features are variable and subject to scrutiny and could be dealt with only on an individual basis in cases of enforced normativity. For instance, not all women who menstruate would consider themselves women. The same applies to breasts and genitals. There are women who possess these features but refuse to identify with the female gender; the same applies to men with penises who refuse to identify with maleness. This is clearly put by Butler (2009: 9) when she states the following:

“not every person born under the male or female anatomy is in possession of proper masculinity or femininity. These could be innate, symbolically assumed, or socially assigned and people are free to deal with it according to their convictions”.

Butler encourages self-constructions of personhood even if they go against social norms. Variance in genders in modern times poses a challenge to any normative idea of sex, sexuality or sexual identity. The varied genders today are signs of resistance to conventional standards of sexuality that have prevailed for a long time.

Steinmetz (2017: 40) notes that the American context alone is home to more than 200 “regular or recurring” genders which include gay, lesbian, queer, transsexual, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, aromantic, genderqueer, two-spirit and others. Facebook alone has about 60 options for users' gender to cater for the gender needs of its almost 1 billion users (Steinmetz, 2017: 40). She insists that it could be important to allow people to deal with their sexuality in the way it makes sense to them. This is because very often, the terms imposed by one context may not reflect the reality of another (Steinmetz, 2017: 42).

Gender theorist Butler (2004) again uses her life and personal experiences to contest gender theories that attempt a specific definition of woman or personhood based on physical representation. She agrees with Beauvoir (1972: 301) that one is not born a woman; rather, one is socially constructed to become one. Nevertheless, she also suggests that one ought to resist socially imposed models by redefining one's own personhood (Butler, 2004: 2). In her opinion, one can possibly make oneself a woman or any other gender or person one wishes to be. This may not signify humanness or personhood to others, but that too may be critiqued in order to reveal "new possibilities of different modes of living" and "resist modes of assimilation" (Butler, 2004: 4). The reason why she switches her gender at will; from feminine(ist) to queer, and then to transgender (Butler, 2004: 4).

In a concise sense, Butler holds that gender is a choice one creates when one is willing to fiercely resist the social constructs imposed on one's personhood by a gendered and sexist society. She insists that anyone struggling with personhood and humane-ness such as Ejagham women should not depend on the "outside" to lay hold of such claim. Instead, one ought to dispossess oneself from socially imposed forms of self, combat false forms of universalism that service a tacit or explicit cultural imperialism, in order to take possession of one's own self (Butler, 2004: 7, 9). In connection to sexuality and womanhood, Butler reviews Western feminism for sidelining sexual difference as the primary difference while ignoring the racial or ethnic difference. She insists that one cannot comprehend sexual difference outside of the racial and ethnic frames by which it is articulated (Butler, 2004: 11).

What one could conclude from all the above illustrations is that women should not be imposed what entails womanhood, sexuality or pleasure, but be given equal opportunity to practice their unique forms of personhood, womanhood and humanness as suitable to their contextual realities. This puts them on the same trend with second-wave feminists who resisted American sexism to define their own unique personhood and identity using their clitorises. 'Sans clitoris' is a form of identity and pleasure that some women find fulfilment in.

5.4.3. 'Woman' a being that must be sexually satisfied?

Feminists agree with Machera (2004:162) that female eroticism, sexual arousal, pleasure and orientation are not 'Western thing', but a 'life force' inside of every individual. However, womanists have questioned the reducibility of such a life force solely to a particular part of the female body namely the clitoris; such that its removal is capable of obliterating or destroying and even maiming the female body. Ejagham women refute the claim of such a life force. They ask how *esokhatis* survive as women without this life force. Would one say they are not women? Are they only women because they have sex or achieve orgasm?

Hosken (1993:24) associates all African women who adhere to the removal or fixing of their clitoris as 'not human beings enough'. She states that "it is high time African women claim their rights as human beings, not second class citizens, brainwashed to accept that sexual pleasure is restricted to men only". Her advocacies against 'genital mutilation' comes clear with the emphasis that a woman without clitoris is no woman, not even a human being. If even a human being, then she is the second class of such. This is because she does not enjoy sexual satisfaction. In her opinion then, the clitoris is indispensable for women's sexual pleasure and fulfilment, and sexual pleasure is a criterion for being human.

Hite (1976: 128-130) gives a description of clitoral orgasm as the sole means of sexual pleasure in her Hite report. Nevertheless, evidence from her own report raises eyebrows about her theory. Many of her respondents contradict her notion of clitoral orgasm and sexual pleasure as the life force for being. When questioned on what they think about orgasm, some of them responded thus:

...Women are made to feel that they must have orgasms more to please the man than to please themselves. ...I *perform* and boost his ego and confidence and love for me with an orgasm. I do not like to think of myself as a performer, but I feel judged, and also judge myself, when I don't have an orgasm (Emphasis mine). ... There's this pressure there is something psychologically wrong with you if you don't have an orgasm...An orgasm is not necessary to make you 'normal,' but men do expect it, so I often force myself, especially because he enjoys watching...The idea of having orgasms is

important to me, but I can certainly enjoy sex without having them. Worse than not having the orgasm is the feeling that I've failed or that I'm frigid or unsexy. I feel a lot of pressure, both from men and from women's liberation, to have orgasms. ... (Hite, 1976: 130).

The pressure the clitoral orgasm debates introduced in America became hard on many women who probably may have been having better sex lives prior to the strong emphasis on the clitoris. One is not suggesting here that pleasure and clitoris are less important. Nevertheless, when these become criteria for being a woman or human, it is bound to isolate many women. Even if this were not the case, Ejagham women think that they do not lack this life force as a result of the absence of a clitoris. They experience pleasure with their vaginas, clitoris or no clitoris.

5.4.4. 'True femininity' as a criterion for womanhood?

Womanhood has often been linked to wifehood and motherhood as two natural feminine roles. In most societies, especially in Africa, it is bringing children into the world that accords, or should accord woman respect and acceptance as a woman (Mbuy Beya 2005: 169). Throughout the early 20th century, some Western gender theorists linked normal womanhood, femininity and sexual pleasure to motherhood and nurturing. A normal woman was one who accepted these feminine roles. Marynia Farnham and Ferdinand Lundberg (already cited above) illustrated this view. Their work *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (1947) is a prescription and endorsement of what normal womanhood ought to be. In their opinion, normal womanhood is tied to motherhood. A woman will never be sexually satisfied until she accepts her feminine roles of wife and mother (Gerhard, 2000: 459).

When a woman refuses to perform these roles, she refuses her femininity and destroys her offspring who grow up deprived for lack of nurture and care. She herself will also remain sexually deprived because normal pleasurable sexuality goes with reproduction and nurture. We already mentioned that Sigmund Freud inspired Farnham and Lundberg and that most Freudians propagated theories that sustained heterosexuality, married status and family.

Some Western feminists view female circumcision especially in Africa as a practice done to keep women from pleasure so that they could have numerous children to feed African patriarchal pride and workforce (Daly, 1978; Hosken, 1976; Morrison, 2008). Their theories have been given impetus by some African studies (Nyangweso, 2002; Chebet, 2014). They, therefore, build a picture of an African woman who can only be described in Oduyoye's (1995: 85) terms as:

...beast of burden walking behind her husband, carrying his children, one inside, one on her back, and many more following in a long procession of children whom she brings forth from puberty to menopause. She is clearly an inferior creature to the Western woman... (Oduyoye, 1995: 85).

While her man is sexually oppressive, she is reduced to nothing except a tool to slavishly serve patriarchy. Such degrading pictures painted of African women often play a vital role in Western solidarity; hence their suggestion to preserve their clitoris so that they can 'enjoy sex without necessarily having children'. They can do so through masturbation and be 'self-sexed' just like Hosken (1976: 58-122) suggests or by shunning heterosexuality altogether and loving other African sisters "sexually" as Walker (1983: xi) advises. There is no doubt that the social imperative to be mothers may cause some African women to endure some forms of patriarchal struggles. It could also be noted that African women's obsession to have children as Ogunyemi suggests is generally for their own pleasure and not so much a slavish compulsion by patriarchy (Arndt, 2000: 712).

While not tying women's humanity with motherhood and sexual pleasure, most African/Ejagham women still consider motherhood a "virtue". As Phillip (2006: xxix) stresses, African motherhood should not be likened to Western notions because African motherhood is replete with meanings that are usually not considered or even recognised by Euro-American contextual realities. Sometimes, motherhood may even signify a "set of behaviours based on caretaking, management, nurturance, education, spiritual meditation, and dispute resolution" than actual biological birthing of the human species. Anyone who manifests such behaviour becomes a mother in an African hospitable sense (Phillip, 2006: xxix). However, it should be optional and not be

synonymous to womanhood. Ejagham women view the state of opting against motherhood as unwise and pitiable and consequential for women's mind-set and well-being. They continue to call to question any ideology that considers motherhood a burden to the extent that it should be solved by clitoral preservation, which encourages masturbation and lesbianism.

5.5. The clitoris, indispensable for sexual pleasure?

Sex and all that it is linked to such as sexuality, sexual pleasure, sexual orientation, sexual practices have often been a site of controversy. Often, people's perception of themselves and others and how they are perceived, their identity and personhood are intricately linked to their sexual orientation and practices. The sexual is, therefore, powerful. Anarfi and Owusu (2005: 2) define human sexuality as 'the sum of the physical, functional, and psychologic attributes that are expressed by one's gender identity and sexual behaviour, whether or not related to the sex organs or to procreation' and 'the genital characteristics that distinguish male from female'. They hold that human sexuality usually transcends genital sex to include 'gender-role socialisation, physical maturation and body image, social relationships, and future social aspirations'. It is for this reason that people and cultures should attribute meanings to the sexual, according to the prevailing norms of what they consider appropriate to sexual behaviour (Anarfi & Owusu, 2005: 2).

Foucault (1990: 155) exalts the vitality of the sexual act when he states, "it is through sex... that... each individual has to pass in order to have access to his own intelligibility, as sex is both the hidden aspect and the generative principle of meaning, to the whole of one's body . . . to one's identity..." While he sees the sexual act as crucial in defining a person, Masenya (1998a) prefers to see sexuality as a 'discourse', which deals with sex, the sex organs and the sexes. She considers the vitality of cross-cultural and interactive discourse on all sexual matters in our current world. In her opinion, "sexuality talk" takes an important place among all people, races, classes, ages, and creeds in all settings. People do not have to be 'civilised' or 'primitive' or come from a specific race to be able to engage effectively in it. In this light, all peoples' sexual thoughts and expressions are important and should be given consideration, given that the sexual is

experienced and expressed differently among cultures, people, races, and classes - which then invites mutual understanding and respect.

Some feminists such as Susan Gage (1991: 46) agree that it is possible for some fixed women to experience vaginal orgasm. She agrees with such orgasmic experiences by explaining that women who have had their clitoral glans, hood and shaft removed surgically are still capable of having orgasms because the thrusting of the penis is capable of erecting the clitoral structures that are implanted deep within the vagina. She accepts the occurrence of vaginal orgasm but then stresses that it occurs only with the assistance of the clitoral features that have not been destroyed. Hers, however, is a scientific experiment. Ejagham women stress their experience and explain that they do have pleasurable orgasm without their *etchi atenghes* and even without their *mi-nteds* (labia majora and minora) and that sexual pleasure has never been absent in Ejagham's sexuality.

Machera agrees with them. She states that there may not be sufficient evidence to show that the suppression of female sexuality takes place universally (Machera 2004:161). For a while in some ethnic groups, the clitoris may be perceived differently for varied reasons as circumcision recommended, in other contexts, clitoral stimulation is encouraged. Machera (2004:161, also cf Obermeyer, 1999) states the example of the Baganda in Uganda where young girls are taught to carry on the practice known as 'pulling of the labia minora' aimed at enhancing sexual pleasure.

Arnfred (1990:71-107) reports a similar case in Mozambique, which she describes as follows:

...the women's initiation rites would be preceded by the small girls (some 8-10 years) learning how to manipulate their small vaginal lips in order to pull them longer. This preparation previously was an integrated aspect of becoming a woman all over Mozambique.

Hence, women in various contexts deal with pleasure differently according to their contextual needs and experience. In Cameroon, while the Betis encourage pulling of the labia, the Ejaghams and the Nordis prefer to fix it. While large sizes of the vagina and

clitoris symbolise ultimate power and fecundity with spiritual power among the Betis of Cameroon (Toman 2000: 18). For the Ejagham, it symbolises 'the long ugly thing' the 'itching thing that becomes heated and itchy disturbing the *Moninkim* dance' 'a penis on the female body' that needs smoothening to make the female sexual and beautiful.

Pleasure could be concretely an individual as well as a contextual experiential phenomenon. No people or organ can define, bestow, or determine sensuality for others. In whatever way people find fulfilment in sexual expression, they should be engaged dialogically much more, rather than lambasted. As a result, contextual understanding, expression and experiences should be given considerable thought in an attempt to universalise pleasure, be they cultural, experiential or scientific. That notwithstanding, Ejagham women are super active and are known thus wherever they are. They initiate and take possession of their sexuality in dynamic ways. The passive sexuality, slavish adherence to patriarchal sexual control does not apply to *Nkim* women. Their concrete experiential manner puts to task feminist notions of mutilated women.

With these suggestions, we come to the knowledge that sexual pleasure as a contextual experience may not have been absent in practising communities in Africa before the clitoral debates turned into the 'genital mutilation problem'. It was only conceived differently as people acted to suit their needs. Therefore, the clitoris should be treated as a "contextual" and not a 'universal' organ indispensable for female sexual pleasure. Multi-cultural and contextual readings could be tied to clitoral discourses in order to avoid any hegemonic, ethnocentric and patriarchal dimension to the discourses.

5.6. Could it be an obsession with Sex?

The names attached to *Nkim* a *Nkim* such as 'mutilated', 'destroyed' 'cut' 'maimed', 'sliced', are meant to portray the severity of the practice on women's genitals and obviously their engagement in sex. These words are used constantly in the Ejagham community to caution and discourage young women from *Nkim*; if not, their sexuality will be destroyed. Fixing the clitoris is equal to killing the woman, and stopping her from achieving an orgasm, which is equal to death. However, such words have been understood by some adherents as judgemental and derogatory.

In a conversation with an Ejagham woman on this, she blames the language of activists on the 'over importance' attached to sex. She charges activists with bringing to the context of sexually saturated ideas that have not been experienced by the context before. This is the only reason why the assumption not to enjoy sex is considered only as mutilation or destruction. Ma Tabe Ebob (interviewed 08/02/2016) mimics: '*Man, man, man, man bha ket arrey ze?* Meaning 'Sex, sex, sex, what has sex become'? *Man* here stands for 'sex' because she shields the actual word from children. She asks the question with surprise when we mentioned the issue of women missing sexual pleasure after *Nkim e Nkim*. She questions those who have elevated sex to the extent of 'weakening' a vital practice.

Her critique on sex ties with those who have blamed the clitoral debates to the sexually saturated minds of Western feminists. For such, the clitoral debates are a transfer, if not an imposition of Western notions of sexuality, a culture replete with sex-mindedness to another people who do not lack knowledge of sex *per se*, but who treat sex with more cautiousness and dignity. This kind of transfer is seen as derailment or pollution of culture.

Parker (1995: 520) argues, "Western responses to the perceived 'death' of female sex life are grounded in the modern Western notions of sexuality as intrinsic to self, and the requirement of particular kinds of sexual gratification for well-being, which are not universal". As for feminist discourses, she insists, "Western feminists and researchers are often influenced by Euro-American discourses which have little or nothing to do with the study populations". Words like *mutilation* may not be clear to a *Moninkim* or *Ngbokondem* dancer who accepts her mark of maturation proudly. Parker's arguments show that Western constructions of sex are sometimes far from the conceptual frameworks typical to an African mind set.

In the Ejagham community, sex is not 'free'; neither is it open for access. Ejagham women consider sex as the "sacred secret" zone that should not be undertaken lightly or licentiously, neither should it be introduced to young people carelessly on the basis of contesting traditions that deprive them of enjoying sex in future; for the future is taken charge of within *Moninkim*. This sacred secret package is carefully bestowed by

Ejagham sexuality school, hence the importance of initiation rituals to carefully nurture and usher young people with a proper introduction from non-knowledge into the precious sexual zone.

Last, Ejagham women insist that sex has never been a primal concern in the land. They have always, and still do enjoy it as a marital responsibility or in relationships. However, they are not obsessed with it to the extent of elevating it as a primary activity. It is for this reason that fixing a particular part of their bodies should not prompt other people to bring their “*atenghes*” to the world as Nnaemeka (2005) decries. Instead, they see other issues such as their socio-economic and political plight; the recent killing of their people in the recent socio-political crisis in the South West and North West regions, burnings of their villages, imprisonment of their children, displacement of population, oppression of women, as more preoccupying for world attention than sex or their clitoris. Too much concentration on sex for them could only mask a flawed mind-set.

In their opinion, one may also see feminist intrusion here as not only limited to degradation of genitals but even includes notions of sex that could best be considered as foreign to some practising contexts. We use one of the arguments Daly (1978: 160) puts forth as the reason why ‘African genital mutilation’ must be resisted with intensity. She cites Emily Culpepper’s findings, which state that:

...these genitally reconstructed women are designed to offer their masters a kind of sexual experience comparable to that obtained by anal intercourse with other men. These “tight” women are never allowed to become too loose, for this would decrease the strong stimulation of the penis which men experience in anal coitus.

Walker reports the same; she states, “a proper woman must be cut and sewn to fit her husband, whose pleasure depends on an opening it might take months, and even years, to enlarge. Men love and enjoy the struggle...” (Walker, 1992: 217). Walker (1996: 213) even states that men like it when women are tight because they like fighting during intercourse, while the women too like their tight genitals because it enables them to attain pleasure when their husbands have intercourse from behind. In another situation, Daly (1978: 169) states that a girl will be defibulated with a knife and starts having sex immediately with her husband in blood and bleeding. Such description

portrays African men as heartless beasts who have no consciences and African sexuality as void of any form of tenderness and passion. Their concept does, for the most part, demonise African men, most of whom may have no idea of 'tight' or anal sex as a norm.

All these degrade the African and their sexuality to elevate the Western as the ideal. Such notions of sexuality are foreign to Ejagham sexual thoughts. However, they also contradict Walker who argues throughout the work that pleasure is absent without the clitoris. From all evidence explored, such sexual models are not part of the Ejagham *Nkim* culture. The sentiments attached behind Daly's and Walker's idea are, at best, foreign to Ejagham concepts of sexuality.

5.7. Conclusion

Conclusively, second-wave feminism and its stream of proponents in their struggle against patriarchal grip in their context endorsed the clitoris as sole organ for women's sexual pleasure and self-determination. This move led to labelling and later banning of cultural practices associated with its removal in other parts of the world. The move has since problematised the 'genital mutilation' debates leading to persistence and intractability in Ejagham community. This means that proponents underground continue with the practice, which they hold as expressions of sexual and cultural identity.

Womanists add their voice to the discourse by proposing engagement with the practising contexts for inclusive dialogue. The study then adopts multiple experiential expressions of the sexual according to prevailing contextual realities as part of this engagement. This chapter has been realised by using the Ejagham context to engage Western and womanist definitions of sexuality, pleasure, gender, womanhood and identity. Conclusively, one could state that the Western feminist's move was an imposition of a one-sided view of womanhood, sexuality and identity. Respect for multiple contextual constructions and definitions of womanhood may be a better option.

Grosfoguel (2013: 88) explains this in another way, as diversity in knowledge, "epistemic diversity that provides the potential for struggles of decolonisation and depatriarchalization" not restricted anymore on Western-centric ways of knowing and

viewing the world. Spivak (1988b: 253) is of the opinion that all people, especially the subaltern, woman, black, should be allowed and also given the opportunity to participate in the production of knowledge about themselves and not just rely on what is produced about them which perpetuate what she calls “ontological errors of the past”. As a result, any single absolute construction or translation of womanhood and femininity, sex and orgasm, culture and identity that defies other contextual realities and experiences could be equated to patriarchy and liable to suspicion.

It is for this reason that the study has a preferential option for womanism instead of feminism as the concept that will have implications on Ejagham women and their context in light of the multiple challenges produced by patriarchal oppression. Womanism proposes a better way forward for the Ejagham woman and her practices, Ejagham men, feminism and the global context at large. The next chapter engages the implications of womanism for Ejagham women, their context, and the global context.

Chapter six

6. Implications of womanism for Ejagham women and the global context

6.1. Introduction

Having examined the life of Ejagham women as mirrored through their multi religio-cultural practices, one grasps the point that culture and religion are integral to Ejagham women's daily experience. One also notices that Ejagham women's practices are pro-life and replete with spiritual life-giving aspects. However, in exploring some of the practices deeper, one comes to the realisation that they are laced with violence that reproduces patriarchy and reveals multiple challenges for Ejagham women's sexuality and well-being. This chapter posits as womanist liberation ethics to address Ejagham women and their context of multifarious challenges posed by patriarchy on the practices and women's lives and sexuality. It also takes womanism forward as the paradigm for the liberation of base communities such as Ejagham and the global context at large.

The chapter begins with the implication of womanism for Ejagham women and their practices in light of the challenges posed by patriarchy. It addresses excesses of *Nkim a Nkim* and the other practices while liberating Ejagham women and men from aspects of patriarchy in the culture that is destructive to women's sexuality. Second, it assists feminism to move away from ideas of sexuality attached solely to the clitoris that promotes ideology through control and exclusivism. Last, womanism is taken further as the concept that informs the entire global community in light of women's sexual challenges and well-being, which are part of God's good plan for humanity.

6.2. Implications of womanism for Ejagham contextual challenges of initiation practices

6.2.1. Womanism as coming of age for Ejagham women

Ogunyemi (2006: 28) discusses Alice Walker's concept of womanism as denoting the metamorphosis that occurs in an adolescent girl when she comes to a sense of herself

as a woman, that change that signifies maturing, a change of stage and mind and coming to age (Ogunyemi, 2006: 28). She thinks that this stage does not just occur *sans incidence*. Something brings her to this womanist consciousness and the thing is not pleasant. It could be an epiphany or a traumatic event such as racism, rape or death of a family member (Ogunyemi, 2006: 28).

Yet her grappling with the event transforms the womanist from a self into a communal member of society, one who struggles for the benefit of the commonweal. She fully becomes a womanist when her concern for the needs of others supersedes her own. In a nutshell, womanist consciousness comes to a woman or a people when they have a great challenge; when their struggle with the challenging birth a womanist consciousness in them which helps them to sail through the problem. When sailing through the problem makes them communal, they do it not just for themselves but also for the good of everyone in the community.

The challenges of Ejagham women's lives are enormous in the context of multiple suffering being the result of patriarchy. Women have various strategies to cope with challenges, sometimes with controversies, intentional hypocrisy, paradoxes, schism and greed. We have already mentioned a number of positive implications of the practices in Ejagham community in chapter three and four which are motivations for the thriving some of the practices. We mentioned status acquisition, women agency, leadership role-play, cultic authority, sexual prowess, beauty and aesthetics, sexuality training school, spiritual dignity, women bonding and others. These motivations have kept the practices alive in Ejagham.

However, these practices have also revealed numerous complexities in the lives of women. It is these complexities that womanism hopes to bring of age. The Ejagham community is opening up to womanist perspective to instruct their practices with a new consciousness, a coming of age, a maturity that breathes new life into all Ejagham people, Ejagham culture and the international community. Womanism becomes women's lamp, which illumines their path to see the future of their practices. With this, we move to womanism and the practices.

6.2.2. Womanism informs complications in *Nkim e Nkim*

Williams (2006:117) discusses some vital qualities of a womanist; she is one who is “committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.” She is no separatist, “except for health.” As such, anything that threatens the commonweal and its health is not in tandem with the concept. Health here is in dual perspectives; a womanist will separate in a case where health is threatened and with those who threaten her health. With this in mind, womanism is committed to addressing the Ejagham context in light of the challenges of the practices on women’ health.

The Ejagham community began to feel the heat of critics against the practice *Nkim* in early 2000. Since then, the context has not been the same in its undertaking of the practice. Respondents admitted that they came to understand certain aspects of *Nkim* that they had not been open to before. The eradication campaigns exposed certain undersides of *Nkim e Nkim*, which many Ejagham natives agree are worth reconsidering because of their health implications. One of them includes reproductive complications caused by *Nkim*. Some women reported difficulty during childbirth. In a workshop done for women, one nurse and women empowerment worker connected *Nkim* and difficult delivery as she witnessed in some women in the following words:

A clitoris is made in a way that when you are delivering, the clitoris expands. Now that it is cut, there is a scar there and it can no more expand. Instead, it puts you a wound, even if you are having ten children, you have to tear that scar ten times. It is so painful; it makes delivery painful... And there is this woman here, when she was circumcised at an early stage of pregnancy, the pregnancy came out and that was her end; she has never had any children again. So, I told her that they were circumcising her clitoris in the physical, but in the spiritual they were cutting her womb

She cites three major reasons that in her opinion warrants immediate stop to fixings. First, the complications that ensue during childbirth; second, witchcraft afflictions from families, and last, miscarriages due to painful or mysterious fixings. Most respondents are familiar with the event she cites since this happened in their village. It opens women up self-criticism of some of the pain caused by *Nkim* for eventual renovation.

Another respondent also recounts her experience during the delivery of her child as follows:

Like the first child, the doctor at the time had to do a lot. When I started going to the clinic, the midwife noticed that my vagina was joined and reported to the doctor. It could lead to operation. So the doctor put me on a regular treatment that he would send his hands inside my vagina to increase the length. It was very painful... At the end, they still did but forced delivery and I had some wounds. But after the first birth, it normalised.

Some arguments broke out when other respondents demanded whether it was through the clitoris that women gave birth or through the vagina. They argued that their difficulties could have resulted from different reasons because the vagina expands during delivery whether the clitoris is there or not. Oba (2008: 15) also comments on findings that connect circumcision as a cause for sterility or infant mortality. He sees this as an ideological weapon used to discredit those involved in the practice.

A crucial aspect, however, is haemorrhage experienced by some of the young women after been fixed. Respondents claimed that Ejagham women's experience of haemorrhagic complications are minimal because of the traditional strength of various *okims*²² However, despite these herbs, a threat to life sometimes occur when herbal power fails. This was especially before the advent of medical units.

Some fixers and fixed women recount the pressure that erupted on them during a haemorrhage:

Fixer: I always felt terrible, terrible!

Her sister: Like me, I bled until I fell (went unconscious), it was the grace of God.

Fixer: My own daughter bled until! It was this time of hospitals; they gave her an injection. The doctor started to quarrel with me why I did the *Nkim* in the first place?

²² *Okims* are herbal plants to curb hemorrhagic complications in *Nkim e Nkim*. Many of the fixers confessed that they were given this knowledge by God Almighty who showed them such herbs (*okims*) either through a spectacular experience or during divine encounter during a crisis moment.

Fixer 2: The place that people criticize in this *Nkim a Nkim* is, for example; this my child (pointing to the younger woman beside her), when I fixed her, I did not see a vein, so I cut it and blood was flowing. We were worried the whole day. But God inspired me immediately and I went and cut an *okim* and dropped and it cut. Those *okims* that we drop on wounds are about four kinds

Fixer 3: And even this one that they are saying that when they circumcise children are dying, both boys and girls die in fixing if God says they should die. What makes them to die is that the fixer who does not know how to do it well will put a wound and the child will bleed till death. This happened mostly where there are no hospitals. But with hospitals, we take such children there immediately (All interviewed 8th March 2017).

The advent of hospitals has helped to address both reproductive complications and haemorrhagic deaths, for those who have access. Yet taking into consideration Oduyoye's (2001: 12) caution not to romanticise culture, one may demand, like Maluleke (2018) if it is worth it? He reviews current political religio-cultural settings for the price they let young people pay for toxic compulsive 'nities' (that is, masculinities or femininities), especially those that are harmful to women, men and children; "those that pretend that there is only one way to be a man or woman, for all times and place" (Maluleke, 2018).

In his article: *Of Wounded Killers and 'Failed Men': Broadening the Quest for Liberating African Masculinities* (upcoming), he uses the character Lumkile Vumindaba in Thando Mqgolozana's book to engage some of the tragedies experienced in the initiation schools that are set to bestow manhood and womanhood to African young people. He portrays the hurt and shame that become the living reality of these young people in the case where initiation turns ugly. This could even turn the initiates into deadly human beings as in Vumindaba's case.

Using his findings and the above cases cited among the Ejagham, one might ask the following questions: Should young women lose their lives, or endure painful haemorrhagic complications in order to attain womanhood? Should one not question sexuality schools that risk the lives of young women just to acquire certain forms of socially constructed womanhood or manhood even if they put people's lives at risk?

(Maluleke, 2018). Should one not put to task Ejagham women for toxic femininities if one reviews the history of these young women who bled to death when *okims* failed while the community shockingly watched?

Often, reproductive difficulties or haemorrhages that resist the power of various *okims* are dreaded. In haemorrhagic cases in Kenya for example, blame was readily shifted to the bleeding girl labelling her a weakling or an evil phenomenon. In that case, her death is placed on her own head or on an evil misfortune in her family. Nyangweso (2002: 584-585) particularly states that:

In most cases, little bleeding takes place but there are cases when considerable haemorrhaging occurs, especially when blood vessels have not been properly tied. This could easily lead to death. Such deaths remain secret. Initiators together with the parents of the girl bury the corpse secretly as this is considered a bad omen.

Ejagham fixers do everything possible such as using all the “*okims*” available to contain the blood flow. If nothing else can be done to avoid the ordeal, they surrender with great pain while considering the loss as God’s will or witchcraft attack to discredit the work of the fixer. One respondent backs the witchcraft allegation by stating that “Some people when they hate a practitioner they can pass through and kill their daughter or son and say it is the fixer” (Ma Clara Ebob, interviewed 08/03/2017). Respondents stated that haemorrhagic deaths are not many, “it is *only* one out of ten girls who develop bleeding” (emphasis mine) says Ma Teresia Bate. Yet even one in ten is way too much. The Lord Mayor of Eyumojock lamented that those who passed on may have included future leaders of Ejagham and the nation.

In this light, Oduyoye (in Nyangweso, 2007) cautions against the painful sides of the practice that cause harm and even death. She thinks that the practice together with all other religio-cultural practices that inform women’s attitude is embroiled in patriarchy (Oduyoye in Nyangweso, 2007). Then, she cautions that before pronouncing judgement or trying to transform on female circumcision, in particular, efforts should be made to interrogate the prevailing realities of the social contexts. If not, such a move will only prove futile (Oduyoye in Nyangweso, 2007). In addition, she cautions against strategies

that try to isolate FC from the many other gender-related issues and oppressive continental and inter-continental hazards that surround women's lives. All these must be addressed as one whole. Her final submission is that God does not will humans to suffer. If women suffer because of *Nkim*, then it must be stopped (Oduyoye, in Nyangweso, 2007).

6.2.3. Womanism reconstructs Ejagham sexuality in light of reaffirmation

While through the prostitution plague they have been marginalised, unrecorded and unmeasured (Niger-Thomas, 2001: 45), womanists consider Ejagham women's efforts to combat patriarchy with their own locally devised means of 'bottom power' as no new phenomenon. It could be extreme, but it is not an isolated event, considering that Biblical women such as Tamar, Leah, Rahab, Ruth have all devised similar strategies to cope with the pressures of patriarchy in their various settings. At such times, women's motivations to break their bodies were economic, such as accepting planned marriages that sustained disempowered women (Masenya, 2012b: 129) as in the case of Biblical Ruth, Leah and young women in *Mbi ebe*. In such a situation, Ejagham women acted within the ranks of what Mosala (1989: 10) describes as the *lumpen-proletariat*; those who have been dispossessed by the patriarchal capitalist exploitations of the *status quo* and must struggle to survive through whatever means available at their disposal, including radical or criminal. In this case, then, it could be considered a sexual insurgency waged by Ejagham women against the exploitations of colonial administration and local male domination, just as other women's riots in Cameroon against oppressive male systems (Wipper, 1987: 13-14).

Whichever way it is looked, womanist theorists look at the prostitution agency with a double lens. Seeing that early marriages through *Mbi ebe* were one of the primary motivations of the plague, Masenya (2012b: 129) pities Ejagham women whom she considers like Leah (Genesis 29: 16-30: 24) who is forced by her father into an unloved marriage to feed his male ego and agenda. People do not always read the plague as signs of gender discrepancy, consciousness and women's resistance in Ejagham community, because women should not manifest such attributes. Patriarchal setup ensures that women always portray economic dependency and sexually submissive.

Ejagham women defied all these; they refused to fit into what Masenya (2012b: 131) describes as “prescribed specific female sexual roles”.

Pui-Lan Kwok (2005: 100) sees the Ejagham plague on women in the light of Biblical Ruth who is forced out of homeland as a result of economic hardship (absent sustainer husband) and resorts to extraordinary measures, including using her sexuality to sustain herself and her famine family (Naomi). Their story captures that of Rahab the Canaanite prostitute and the border crossing phenomenon in Ejagham community from the mid-20th century (Kwok, 2005: 101). British colonial administration opened up border crossings, which offer Ejagham women the opportunity to offer sexual services to feed the economic hardship influenced by a sexist colonial system. Nonetheless, though Masenya (2012b: 139) and Kwok (2005: 101) laud their efforts to combat their predicament, one should caution that sexual revolutions especially the prostitution plague is one of the ways that women’s bodies have experienced irreparable brokenness in Ejagham community.

To reverse Maluleke’s (upcoming) question then, from Lumkile Vumindaba’s plight to reflect the situation of *Nkim a Nkim*, it could be asked like this: can a woman with a scarred or abnormal genital still be a *woman*? Barry answers in the affirmative. Considering that some Ejagham women see themselves and are seen as mutilated and destroyed sexually because of their scarred bodies, Barry (2006: 66) admonishes Ejagham women not to see themselves as victims, for they have never been victims. They should decorate themselves and crown their beautifully scarred genitals (womanhood) (Barry, 2006: 66). They are beautiful and exceptional just as they are with their “*Nkimed*” bodies, and they are whole in their own peculiar way. They are products of their time and are forging ahead with dignity; and in their peculiarity, they hold the flag of Ejagham culture high. Ejagham’s history in the last century is inscribed in their bodies. They are Ejagham’s monuments and pride as they point back to the intelligent enterprise and expertise of their intelligent, though uneducated foremothers. Moreover, as fixed women, they should celebrate their bodies and feel proud about it exactly the way it is today. They must be courageous enough to defy definitions of ‘mutilation’, ‘maimed’ ‘sexualised’, as not their own. Makuchi (1997: 6) urges them to

“claim their right not only to name themselves but also to define from the point of view of what they have and do with their lives, rather than the point of view of what they lack...” They lack clitoris, but they have many other qualities that are worth celebrating. On these, they must focus and celebrate life.

Last, in Barry’s (2006: 67) admonishing words, they understand well the art of sexual pleasure; it is an art of the heart and not an art of the clitoris or any other part of the human body. She (2006:66) suggests that contrary to seeing themselves as wounded women with broken bodies, and damaged sexualities, younger generation Ejagham women should “...chose not to wear that garment of bitterness so easily fitted to the wounded body...” Ejagham women’s scars should be crowned and celebrated even if they are not neat or pretty to behold sometimes. Like Odooye admonishes, Ejagham women should affirm their being and begin to weave new patterns of womanhood from the threads they are most comfortable with; that is their scarred bodies and their endearing Nkim culture.

6.2.4. Redeeming the whole: womanism and Ejagham men

Snail (2008: 55) has noticed from past experience that for the powers that be to operate in a concrete domineering manner, they distorted the prevailing communal life of the people through a form of divide and rule pattern. This pattern enabled domineering systems such as colonialism, racism and other systems to thrive well in places where there is racial, class or sex disharmony between the oppressed people (Snail, 2008: 55). Snail notices that the black body has suffered immensely from this system. It is for this reason that Ogunyemi (2006: 25) encourages black women in the midst of the forces that oppress black bodies as a whole to empower the black man by believing in him and constantly create a world where the two sexes are together. She thinks that the ultimate aim of womanism is to unite black men and women under an enlightened leadership where both sexes are leaders (Ogunyemi, 2006: 28).

Williams (2006: 120) calls for a womanist community that constantly remembers black women have a historic connection with the men through their common history of shared love and shared struggles for social, economic and spiritual survival in their quest for a productive life. Such community building and maintenance method should transcend

black people's humanity to involve the entire Christian community and beyond that to the larger human community (William, 2006: 120). Her support for the commonweal causes Williams to insist that it will be impossible to build any genuine liveable community where men as sex are kept out (William, 2006: 120). She thinks that men should also learn by not burdening women so much to the point of sacrificing their well-being to ensure community (William, 2006: 121).

One of the allegations commonly levied against feminism as a movement, especially by African men, is its division of the black body into male and female, a phenomenon which to most was absent before feminist struggles began to yield strong effects upon Africa and the Third World (Oduyoye, 1995; Arndts, 2000; Landman, 2000; Kobo, 2016; Makuchi, 1997). They assert that generally, feminism championed solely women's plight from its inception. Makuchi (1997: 10) accepts this critique and cites it as one of the reasons that turned many African women away from feminism. She states, "These women are also suspicious of feminism that lay claim to radical separatist tendencies. They claim men as part of their struggle..." Some African women have come to the realisation that rather than constantly concentrating on all that divides the two sexes, it is necessary to rethink projects that assist the whole to deliberate and correct their differences.

Having learned from some of its shortcomings and specifically, that those who oppress are often themselves lacking in some aspects, the study suggests that the two sexes be addressed through new approaches that project equality and complementarity. Such may include re-writing or re-interpretations of basic studies such as the androcentric philosophies of ancient patriarchs. As important as Aristotelian and subsequent philosophies, world religions, church and evolutionary histories have been, they have as well been biased in their constructions of human origins. In addition, they have spread authoritarian concepts of male and female by constantly pitching one sex against the other in light of superior/inferior for eventual subjugation.

Feminist struggles attempted to reverse the trend by focusing solely on restoring women's well-being while ignoring the distorted humanity of the male sex in itself. Womanism assumes a more humane approach by taking the plight of both men and

women into consideration. It understands that the patriarchal superstructure that has controlled the world and Africa from slavery through the modern era of neo-colonialism has built a patriarchal legacy that may not be broken down if only the plight of one sex is addressed.

Focusing specifically on black bodies, Koyana (2001: 65) understands this well when she advocates for a womanist consciousness that incorporates the well-being of black men who are also victims of the world power structure that subjugates black bodies as a whole. This is a consciousness that takes seriously not only gender concerns but also race and class factors (Koyana 2001: 65). It prioritises women's plight but seeks holistic liberation for all, no matter race or class or sex. One that understands that the forces that occasion black women's suffering is not isolated from those of black men's (Kobo, 2016). Similarly, it is a consciousness that targets the forces that oppress the whole community and not particular sexes or individuals.

Nevertheless, the same consciousness does not cease to contend the fact that empire has possibly privileged black men to a better level, which enables them to become just as oppressive to their women. Studies made in Ejagham context specifically illustrate this phenomenon (Talbot, 1926; Ruel, 1969; Brain, 1979; Adams, 2006; Niger-Thomas, 2009). Ruel (1969: 204; cf Hamilton, 2013) specifically notes that British rule favoured male cults and associations and used them both for political and religious purposes. This led to the thriving of male associations and consequently male power, to the detriment of women's. Normative proceedings implemented by male associations had direct socio-economic implication on women's well-being.

As the situation stands even today, women are still not members of male associations where all political and economic power centres. It is also here that decisions concerning ownership and sales of land are made. Similarly, it is in the male associations that all the good meat killed in the village is eaten. Today, a male-dominated setup still places political and traditional leadership into largely male hands and this time labelling of Ejagham women is done not abroad but at home when leaders signed accords and agreements with foreign bodies and allow women to portray pseudo versions of culture to funders.

Knowledge about culture without a corresponding grasp of its sexual and cultural impact on a people's well-being is tantamount to oppression. It is for these reasons that we proposed the deconstruction of ancient constructs of and reconstruction of new knowledge of man and woman in light of equality and complementarity that uphold Ejagham women's dignity through political inclusion.

As a liberation paradigm, its particularity is the ability to walk side by side the marginalised, but at the same time giving them opportunities to understand, express and confront their plight by themselves. Moreover, it advocates a liberation that puts side-by-side men and women walking on the journey home, a journey of wholeness under the umbrella of faith, hope and love (Oduyoye, 1995: 185). It's potential to fearlessly expose and call to question all forces of domination outside of and within itself; that oppresses black people and their societies, has made it a suitable tool in tackling Ejagham women's plight (Ogunyemi, 2006: 28-32).

To bring down the power of patriarchy then, the very concepts man and woman have to be revisited and/or deconstructed and given a new interpretation based on mutuality and equality and not on power or duality. Often the disunity that exists between these two sexes has far reaching consequences on both and their progeny. The two species are bound together for the earth's survival and continuity of the community. No society is yet known to comprise of only one of these species. In a situation where one suffers, the other is affected directly or indirectly. In the situation where one dominates the other, both suffer some form of inhumanity in that one is drained of humanity and the other suffers a lack of humanity. As such, both are bound together.

6.3. The implication of womanism for feminism

6.3.1. Womanism liberates feminism from control

In her short essay, *Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Jackson (1981)*, Alice Walker (2006: 12ff) relates Rebecca Cox Jackson's spiritual journey where she begins as an illiterate housewife who overpowers her inner fears and becomes committed to God. She lived by His command as she hears from Him through dreams and her "spirit eye", that is the spirit within her (Walker, 2006: 12, 13). The journey takes her to literacy

but then separates her from her brother and husband who both marginalised her in different measures. She takes on a celibate life and moves on to join a group of devoted Christian women called the Shakers (Walker, 2006: 16) and later lived with her female friend Rebecca Perot until the end of her life.

In an editorial process of the book, Humez compares the close relationship between these two spiritually bound Rebeccas to lesbianism. Walker sees this as unfounded and worrying considering that Jackson had declared herself dead to sexuality and lust for the sake of Christ (Walker, 2006: 17). The concerns Walker raises from Humez's description could be related to Ejagham contextual challenges of *Nkim a Nkim* as comprehended by second wave-feminism. One of the concerns Walker raises is that, even though Jackson had stated severally her chaste state, Humez attributes lesbianism to her solely on the basis that she lives with another woman in the same house and shares her life. Walker (2006: 17) then poses the following questions:

What I am questioning is a nonblack scholar's attempt to label something lesbian that the black woman in question has not. Even if Rebecca Jackson and Rebecca Perot were erotically bound, what was their own word for it? (What would be the name that must have been as black and positive...?) Did they see it as a rejection of men? ... Was the "lesbianism" the simple fact that Jackson and Perot lived together? And would this mean that any two women who lived together are lesbians? ... But the women did not accept this label when it was made, and I think we should at least wonder whether they would accept it now, particularly since the name they *did* accept, *and embrace*, which caused them so much suffering and abuse, was *celibate*. ... (Walker 2006: 17).

Here Walker comments on those labels that are meted on people based on others' contextual understandings of race and sexuality. Often, the labels or name calling do reflect more the perspective of the caller than the one labelled.

Bringing Walker's reasoning to the context of *Nkim e Nkim* in Ejagham community, one could state here that in their quest to combat 'harmful' practices, second-wave feminists resorted to name-calling by labelling people and their practices. The concerns one could raise for second-wave feminist theorists are as follows: Even if Ejagham women were mutilating their kind, do they not have their own word for it? Should others who imagine

from outside what they are doing with themselves tell them? Does their word for the practice pose negative or positive connotation? Is mutilation the fact of the negative global view of the practice or the fact that Ejagham women do actually mutilate? Is their practice, patriarchally bound, as stated by feminist theorists? From the exposition of Ejagham women and their contextual understanding, the answer to these questions is non-affirmative.

As such, Thomas' (1998) advice for feminism, that of "stepping aside to let the community speak for itself" could be fitting for the context. Feminists' speaking and acting on behalf of the oppressed has been critiqued as a manifestation of patriarchy. Because womanism accords consideration to women's particularity and experience, it becomes a preferable channel to tackle the present 'voicelessness' of Ejagham women and at the same time bringing their plight and experiences to the limelight. It creates space for, in Tlali's (cited in Makuchi, 1997: 8) words "the voice of the African woman who is oppressed politically, socially and culturally...who is oppressed by her man, by the white woman, of course by the system....".

'Mutilation' will, therefore, not be the a suitable or equivalent word for Ejagham women, based on the premise that their practice is done with a motive of love for the kind; love that projects the kind for the best possible motives (Walker, 2006: 18). The word *Nkim* carries multi religio-cultural meanings to Ejagham sexual consciousness; a phenomenon, which puts women at the fore, not as victims or mutilators, but agents of honour, beauty and love committed to the society's wholeness. Clenora Hudson-Weems (2006:41) talks of their own "self-naming and self-definition", one that is consistent with their own religious-cultural integrity and freedom lest they surrender their sense of identity by succumbing to the "cultural genocide" that usually comes with sexual and racial oppression (Hudson-Weems, 2006:40). Oduyoye (2001: 10) thinks that women should not only have a desire, but also be given the responsibility to do their own thinking and to speak their own words about God as well as all other religious and cultural concerns.

Pursued on these paths, Ejagham women's word becomes consistent with Ejagham religiosity and spirituality, one that acknowledges cultural values, consciousness and

personhood as part of God's loving agenda for the living community. These may have shortcomings but still have worth for Ejagham people (Walker, 2006: 18). Naming their practices in their own way and rejecting the labels that others tag on them as Walker and others suggest, is the least Ejagham women can do; therein this could entail not only their freedom but also that of those who label their practices and the rest of the global community (Walker, 2006: 18).

Moreover, it is through their own word that they are able to transmit their unique knowledge of who they are and then work in participation with others to engage this knowledge for the genuine liberation of women and community (Hudson-Weem, 2006: 41). Since they possess the knowledge and a well-defined culture, they cannot be entirely excluded from the genital mutilation discourse on labels of barbarism and primitivity. That *Nkim* has survived to the present and still thrives, as a cultural practice should rest that awareness, that it is vital to its adherents. Just as Hudson-Weems (2006: 44) suggests, Ejagham women should be given the opportunity to prioritise their needs, which include their cultural integrity; even if those needs are not of primary concern for the dominant culture. This could assist in addressing the intractable records evoked by police surveillance in that, women would proudly come out in the spirit of dialogue and not fear of intimidation. These questions are repeated to create a rethinking of these practices in ways that involve and engages Ejagham women in finding a lasting solution for the so-called 'female genital mutilation' problem'

6.3.2. From imposition of Western cultural/sexual values

Womanism discourages any form of cultural and/or sexual imposition upon any people based on epistemological superiority and knowledge and norms not consistent with theirs. As already argued, the genital mutilation problem in Africa is the result of the imposition of a certain contextual knowledge based on the superiority of a particular culture and its notions of sexuality. As Oduyoye's (2001: 27) opines, this is the error committed by Euro-American, as well as colonial endeavours in Africa. Because they understood African culture and sexuality only on the basis of debasement, they assumed that cultural practices could be judged at European courts and be dismantled, validated or enhanced according to European moral, sexual, and ethical norms

(Oduyoye's, 2001: 27). Though many Africans showed that they have appropriated Western culture and religion, many of their cultural practices have remained intact long after the struggle to ostracise them. This is because Africans are their culture; they are born into a culture, and culture engulfs every sphere of communal life be it sexual or otherwise. Culture shapes worldviews, religion and the entire living human community (Oduyoye, 2001:24, 25).

Moreover, a sexual imposition has arisen from the feminist notion that patriarchy as primary source of women's oppression manifests only as sexism. Chikwenye Ogunyemi advocates womanism that takes into consideration patriarchy not only in its sexual dimension but holistic subjugation. Hence, contrary to a feminist, a will also recognise and integrate sexual, racial, cultural, national, economic, and political issues into her philosophy (Ogunyemi, 1985: 64). Her refusal to treat patriarchy apart from other social and global ills such as racism and classism is a feature that all womanist theorists endorse.

For instance, aside from gender issues Phillip (2006: xxiii) cites race, local and international culture, national and global politics and economics as features that need equal emphasis as sexual oppression (cf Hudson-Weems, 2006: 40-42). Second-wave feminism prioritised sexual oppression as the ultimate injustice against women. Just as she suggests, no genuine portrayal of patriarchy should fail to take into consideration these multifaceted forms; hence, the gender question can be dealt with only in the context of other issues that are relevant for African women and that limit their day-to-day living. Hudson-Weems (2006: 42) considers race and class biases as the key issues that must be resolved even before gender issues if there is any hope for human survival. It is at this point that many have found Western feminism to be wanting. Buchi Emecheta, Mariam Tlali, Tsitsi Dangaremba and other African women simply prefer to be identified as African womanists rather than feminists (Makuchi, 1997: 9). Tsitsi Dangaremba (cited in Makuchi 1997: 9) specifically states that "the White Feminism does not meet my experience at a certain point, the issues of me as a black woman. The black America female writers touch me more than the white ones". Makuchi gives a reason for such a stance by African women as follows:

Some African women tend to see feminism as a form of imperialism with a woman's face, an imperialism that has come to impose or dictate its views and visions on "African" or the "Third World" women. It is therefore the neo-colonial tendencies that these women see as intrinsic to feminism that they are actively rejecting.

Kishwar (cited in Makuchi 1997: 9) cites imbalance of power and Western dominance inherent in feminism. She thinks that the general flow of ideas and of labels is one way, West to East. Even its ideas, assumptions and forms of struggle have too often, masked cultural imperialism as they are exported from West as echoes of more advanced women's movement.

Ajayi-Soyinka (1993: 161) gives credence to the feminist movement's voice in bringing the plight of women worldwide to the limelight and push the world to think about it. Yet she criticizes the movement for being a monolithic voice "based mainly on the history of white women's experience and gender construction". Another aspect is the domination of the movement by white women and the omission of the experiences and works of other women of colour in feminist theories (Omofolabe 1993: 161). These all sprang up as contributing factors that provoked the quest for a more inclusive movement that gives black women in all settings a place where they could share their contextual experiences.

Moreover, Ogunyemi's (1985: 64) non-compliance with lesbianism as African women's expression of sexuality also gives credence to a preference for her womanism as appropriate for the study's context. Up to this point in time, traditional Ejagham sexuality has not been seen to include women expressing love for others sexually and in our opinion, their views should be respected. Expressions of deep concerns are never lacking as they show themselves through women's closeness in times of woe and of joy. Ogunyemi's womanism has differentiated itself with Western feminism as well as Walkerian womanism, which may not have fulfilled or appropriately addressed the issues of African women. However, it shows respect for other women's sexual expression. Hence while the study may move along with Walker, it adopts Ogunyemi as preferable for her critical but productive womanism, to engage in a dialogue aimed at liberating Ejagham/Cameroonian women and men. This also entails the pursuit of a theological agenda that includes secular voices as well.

6.4. The way forward for the global context

6.4.1. For patriarchy

Every predator tries to condition the mind of its prey to accept that it has the right to be preyed upon. The same goes with all dominating systems from the slave trade through colonisation, neo-colonisation, apartheid, globalisation and all the 'isms'. Many of them were founded and sustained, 'in the name of God', and under the guise of religion. Women along history have occupied the basest position in the domination spectrum. Domination in all its forms is not God's will for people, not for oppressed disadvantaged humanity, and specifically not for women. As a result, all patriarchal systems should be demolished. Such an evil system should not be allowed to thrive unchallenged anymore (Boesak, 2017: 84).

Varied suggestions have been made then on how to deal with patriarchy as a persistent phenomenon. Some have suggested integrating as many women into patriarchal systems to give them equal access to power. However, this has hardly worked because the oppressor only relinquishes a minor degree of power but still remains in control. Often, the oppressor relinquishes power only to the extent that his authority is not threatened. Landman (1991: 145) opines that often this strategy of assimilating women into an already patriarchal structure solves the problem of sexism but does not distort the power base. This strategy has often turned out to be psychologically detrimental to women and the oppressed in general. Vellem (2014a: 4) goes even further to argue that without concrete liberation from, or genuine equality with, inclusion into any oppressive system could be deadly as it might simply lead to assimilation and "ultimately the death of consciousness". This leads the oppressed into silence, though their plight has not been redressed but simply manipulated. Therefore, simply integrating women into the patriarchal *status quo* does not advance but exposes them to superior forms of subjugation that drain worth out of them and drifts them further into powerlessness.

Others have suggested reversing the entire patriarchal system and taking it over and ruling, the men (oppressors) just as hard as they have ruled the oppressed (women) and the rest of creation. The same suggestion has been made for black/white, rich/poor, slave/master, and all other forms of domination. However, an evil system may not be

demolished by reproducing or replicating it. If women are to assume a patriarchal grip on male oppressors, they may only reproduce systems that cause more hurt and destruction. Landman (2013: 145) suggests that such a measure may only repeat the mistakes of which it wishes to replace, that of serving exclusive female power and interests.

The study then advocates the breakdown of the patriarchal superstructure, but this time not by integrating women into the *status quo* or replicating patriarchy through a few women's ascension to the top of the patriarchal ladder. With inspiration from Maluleke (2009), it encourages women themselves to 'bring it down like a colossus'; to render it powerless to the point where it hurts no one. How then can this be possible? We explore Maluleke's insight.

6.4.2. Bring it down like a colossus, terminate support its schemes

In Maluleke's discourse on Etienne de la Boetie's concept of domination (2009:32ff), one theme stands out clear; if patriarchy thrives in every society, it is not only because of the clever schemes of the oppressor. It is also because the oppressed give in their full support either consciously or unconsciously. As such, according to Maluleke, the most potent weapon against patriarchy will be to withdraw all support from it. He uses a colossus as an example to illustrate this concept. A colossus is a very large and imposing statue erected either as a monument of a person or thing of honour. The Greek historian, Herodotus, used the word to refer to the enormous statues of Egypt. At one time, Russia was referred to as the colossus of European politics (NOAD: 2005).

In our reasoning, the illustration of a colossus is appropriate here because of three reasons: first, it survives because of strong support from its foundation, be they 'pedestal', stones, pillars or rods. Without these tools, the colossus cannot sustain itself. Second, it is just a lifeless statue though enormous and imposing. It is not a living thing and so does not have to frighten one in spite of its size. Third, a colossus is usually set up to honour or revere a system. Hidden behind every colossus are its makers and their desperate need to be in control.

As a result, to bring down a colossus could mean exposing and destroying the dangerous oppressive institution hidden behind it. It is the same with patriarchy. Maluleke suggests that it is possible to bring it down because, though it imposes itself it is just a powerless structure void of human dignity, life and God's support compared to the united front that could be put up by its oppressed victims who have respect for life and have full divine support. Maluleke (2009: 36) wants the people it oppresses to see patriarchy for what it really is, that it has no actual power but a pseudo-power, a lie, it is a statue, an imposing mass. The mass is powerful only because of the support given it by those it oppresses, and the ploys and lies it uses to keep them under its grip-the mind-numbing lie that without colossus, its victims cannot survive. It is for this reason that Maluleke suggests that the solution lays in the hands of the oppressed not the oppressor to bring oppressive patriarchal systems down.

Maluleke is joined here by Allan Boesak (2017: 5), who sees the one fact of history, as the inability to contain the oppressed. He thinks that oppressed people cannot forever be contained in their predicament. Sometime or later, their yearning for freedom bursts out and they can do no other than stand before Pharaoh and cry like Moses "Let my people go". Some time or later, they become the "hopeful *sizwe*" whose minds can no longer resign to oppression but rise to challenge evil for what it really is (Boesak, 2017: 84).

Vellem (2016: 6) expresses similar views about the participation of the oppressed in their liberation in his dialogue with Amartya Sen on his theory of capabilities. Here he analyzes Western dependency theories and their pseudo developmental schemes that ensure the continuous dependence of the oppressed even while purporting to liberate them. He suggests that for real liberation development to take place, marginalised people must themselves "seek to become subjects of their own history rather than objects of someone else's story" (Vellem, 2016: 6). We agree with his perspective here because the preying capitalist political economies ruling the world today are specially designed to provide the marginalised only with half freedoms, and half-truths that are never completely liberating. Hence, the marginalised should begin to dictate the terms

of their own liberation by detaching themselves from the pseudo liberative schemes that keep patriarchy thriving and its victims constantly dependent.

Ejagham women are able to demolish the patriarchal grip on the land by terminating their support for the system. According to the various initiation practices examined, one could see that patriarchy is thriving in the Ejagham context because of the mutual support given to the system by women themselves. Ejagham women have been unwilling to call to task patriarchal schemes that use their name and image as portrayal for barbaric culture. They are allies to their own oppression as Boesak (upcoming) states and are accomplices to the monetary schemes of Western funders who come to take videos of mutilated genitals to portray the evil of Ejagham culture to raise more funding abroad. These funding ventures are used on them as an opiate (Vellem 2012: 77) to numb them for a while while subjecting them to even deeper forms of degradation and subsequent exploitation.

Similarly, they are accomplices to other hurtful aspects of culture such as widowhood rituals, they are the mothers who watch their husband receive and give out *Mbi ebe* for their young girls to become child brides. They are mates who do not challenge patriarchal systems that bring in wives of deceased brother-in-laws as co-wives even if their husbands died of an infectious disease. They are staunch sustainers of solely male political cults and male family headship, and there are daughters who refuse to see nothing wrong with having no say even over their corpses. There is much fear of the colossus, that lifeless ancient unchallenged statue called patriarchy has a grip on women to the point of resignation,

Oduyoye (2001: 11ff) therefore calls Ejagham women to rise and confront the patriarchal aspects that taint their cultural systems by no longer lending their support. This could be achieved through “fine tuning” culture by reviewing it from within. In so doing, they denounce and refuse to lend support to oppressive aspects that put women’s sexual lives at risk and general well-being into question (Oduyoye, 2001: 12). In addition, they should directly confront the solely male patriarchal hegemony that promotes the continuous exclusion of women in political decision-making bodies of the

land such as *Ngbe* in order that women together with men may be part of the body that proposes life-giving solutions to problems plaguing the cultural community.

A crucial challenge for Ejagham women is how to fence off those who use the *Nkim* culture more to under-rate than uplift them (Oduyoye, 2001: 12). The phenomenon manifests in Ejagham community in the form of aid schemes and funding bodies that come with the aim to stop genital mutilation. These usually end up as one time occasions that give people food and drinks, then collect as many photos, videos and testimonies to go swell their market abroad, leaving the community forever hopeless as ever. Considering that, this phenomenon is common with *Nkim* settings (cf Nnaemeka, 2005) and replete in Ejagham community, Oduyoye suggests that women apply the hermeneutics of suspicion and commitment (2001: 13). This theory helps them to assume new critical stance first against the ills of culture and against any dehumanising, exclusivist and victimising schemes, whether they be from within or without.

6.5. Conclusion

So far, we have engaged womanist perspective to propose suggestions on way forward for Ejagham women and context in light of the multifarious challenges caused by patriarchy upon their practices and sexuality. Womanism acknowledges that no matter the motivation for Ejagham cultural practices, if they jeopardise the well-being of the people they seek to elevate in whatever manner, then they should be called to task. Moreover, it acknowledges that Ejagham women cannot be freed in exclusion of their men. As a result, it calls for the redemption of the whole, from which the entire human community could be reached.

Last, the chapter has called for the demolition of patriarchal power over women and all oppressed. It sees this possibility through the subsequent refusal of the oppressed to accord support to the oppressive system that degrades them. Together, and determined to restore their humanity and dignity stolen by patriarchal manipulating schemes, they could be able to bring down the colossus called patriarchy.

Chapter Seven

7. General Conclusion and recommendations

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we again briefly revisit the basic tenets of the study to summarise key findings. We will briefly explain the methodological approach we used to arrive at such findings. We will then compare and contrast our findings with those in existing literature. We will state findings that are peculiar to the research context and the study. We will proceed by discussing what we consider could be a way forward for Ejagham women's initiation practices based on the context of Biblical initiation. We end the chapter by

recommending fields that could be investigated further in academia. Such recommendations are based on input from the participants as well as literature and the researcher's own personal reflections on the subject matter of the study and research findings.

7.2. Summary of key findings

In exploring women's initiation practices as a channel to unveil patriarchal bearings in the lives of women and specifically Ejagham women of Cameroon, six basic themes have emerged as findings that throw light into Ejagham women's religio-cultural and sexual life from pre-colonial to the modern era. They are summarised thus:

First, that patriarchy and suppression of women's sexuality is not a motivation for the persistence of *Nkim e Nkim* in Ejagham land as previously assumed by studies in the area. The thriving of *Nkim a Nkim* has cultural motivation that needs to be engaged to chart a clear way forward with adherents on the ground. Using qualitative data collection methods, we sampled the opinions of Ejagham indigenes about various prevailing motivations for the practice. One stood out as primary; the prestigious Moninkim/Ngbokondem dance clubs that have shaped Ejagham historical/cultural sexual roots for close to a century. Many feminist theorists (Hosken 1976; Daly, 1978; Walker & Morrison, 2008; Beyala, 1996; Oyefara, 2015) implicate patriarchy and control and/or destruction of women's sexuality as the primary motivation within various contexts in Africa. Abdulmumini (2008: 13) describes their stance as "calling a dog a bad name in order to hang it". Our findings of attaining sexual pleasure and cultural integrity have been corroborated by similar findings among the Bondo in Sierra Leone (Ahmadou, 2009: 14ff) and in parts of Kenya, (Njambi, 2004: 294ff) Sudan (Lightfoot-Klein 1989: 25-26), and Nigeria (Oyefara 2015).

Second, the 'female genital mutilation' problem could be described today as the creation of second-wave feminism based on the uncritical transference of history, culture, sexuality and epistemology from Global North to Global South context through the geopolitics of knowledge; and not an actual crisis that erupted in the Global South seeking international redress. SWF plays a vital role in that it influenced some of the

international discourses and interventions that affected these practices as if it were innocent. Yet, it is part of the colonial matrix of power. SWF's views or intervention in African culture cannot be, or should not be, read and translated without denuding its geopolitical spaces of knowledge. Its intervention, was thus guided by notions of control of bodies and sexuality, which is consistent with Western historically cultural imperialism.

Kwok (2004: 8) has noted that throughout the colonial period and thereafter, the encounter between colonial and African cultures has raised crucial issues pertaining to women's sexuality; especially when it comes to issues such as polygamy, child marriages, female circumcision and others. Often, colonial culture painted indigenous culture as inferior and uncivilised, and women's sexuality in light of subjugation, ignorance and passivity which then needed colonial intervention to salvage it (Kwok, 2004: 8). Njambi (2004: 294) reveals that specifically, the myth of passive and active sexuality has greatly reinforced the genital mutilation discourses as understood by the West. Western portrayals as we have already seen above show that women are passive victims forced to comply with these practices to sexually satisfy the patriarch and numb their own pleasure. It is in this light also that Hota (2017: 199) sees the problem of genital mutilation even today as more the problem of the West than practising communities. She cautions that Western moves in general could take off on the premise of genuine compassionate intervention. Nevertheless, it should very often be evaluated more carefully. For, it may not entirely be a mission to rescue or civilise but an imposition of Western control. Hota stresses that from the inception of the orgasm debates, the problem of sex and clitoris was more the problem of Western sisters than that of the women in other contexts going through the surgeries (Hota 2017: 199).

Third, that sexual pleasure is not restricted to a particular part of the body, namely the clitoris; as such, it should not be the sole criterion for defining womanhood and femininity. Women without clitorises such as those of Ejagham do report regular experiences of undisturbed sexual pleasure (Obermeyer, 1999; Njambi, 2004; Dellenborg, 2004; Oba, 2008; Ahmadou, 2009; Oyefara, 2015). Through their cultural

initiation practice of *Nkim a Nkim*, they showed that there is more to the practice than 'mutilation'. Ejagham women are not simply trying to defend their "*totos*" which have been put on the global curriculum now for several decades as Obioma Nnaemeka (2005: 3) opines. Instead, they have used their concrete personal experiential to engage feminists' view that *Nkim a Nkim* destroys sexual pleasure.

Through the presentation of the practice as operative in *Moninkim/Ngbokondem* and their dance culture, Ejagham women, show that they are sexual beings; and that fixed '*totos*'²³ does not deprive women of sexual pleasure. As a sexual initiation practice, *Nkim a Nkim* in *Moninkim* and *Ngbokondem* dance is designed to respond to the sexual needs of the Ejagham community. The art of dancing is a vital sexual strategy that has sustained women's socio-cultural identity for decades. They qualify feminist agitations and labelling of *Nkim a Nkim* as either the result of misunderstanding or ethnocentrism and control which is patriarchy. Sexual pleasure, therefore, is a personal experiential phenomenon, not dependent on a body part. Hence, multiple experiential contextual expression of sexual pleasure is suggested.

Fourth, the stereotyping of Ejagham women as sexual deviants through the prostitution plague which erupted in Ejagham community from the mid-20th century is largely the result of their belonging to the dispossessed segment of society that Mosala (1989:10) calls the *lumpen-proletariat*. These are those whom colonial capitalist greed and manipulation has rid them of material worth and dignity, pushing them to the fringes of society to scramble through stringent means to survive (Mosala, 1989: 9, 10). In their struggle for survival then, Ejagham women put up subtle but deliberate resistance against colonial patriarchy and local cultural male domination by refusing to assume carefully assigned roles of dependent housewifery.

²³ "Toto" is the name used for the female genitalia in local Pidgin (broken) English. This name is used in almost all Anglophone towns and villages in Cameroon. The same name is widely used in neighboring Nigeria as well. These two countries share lots of other expressions because of the use of the Pidgin language.

The plague is therefore not the result of the dampening of sexual pleasure by the practice of *Nkim e Nkim*, which provokes excess sexual activity as previously understood (Pemunta, 2011: 53, Naaneen, 1991: 58, 61, 62, 65). Colonial administration introduced economic, socio-cultural and sexual reforms that privileged the male and disadvantaged women. Moreover, such male privilege also put to task children's sexuality by old men in the practice of *Mbi ebe*. When these children and young women came to maturity, they walked out of marriage and without basic skills to hang on to entered prostitution. The implications are bearing on Ejagham women's sexual image even today as they, all bear the stereotype of licentiousness.

Fifth, women comply with levirate sexual intercourse, marriage and other demoralising rites in compliance with widowhood rituals, with or without their consent to satisfy patriarchal demands. This increases the prevalence of diseases and emotional/psychological stress. This is the heart of triple patriarchy as women themselves are the ones who enforce these norms through rites on their kind.

Sixth, the demise of the *Ndem* spirit and eventual decline of the *Ngbokondem* cult is first of all the result of breaking of sexual norms by the *Ndem* cult priestess through patriarchally motivated marriages (royal) and sexual encounters against the rules of the cult; and also its stigmatisation by colonial Christianity. Colonial religious-cultural imperialism generally disfavoured women's cults and labelled them witchcraft and demonic.

Last, triple patriarchy is the main force behind the sustenance of the dehumanising widowhood rituals in Ejagham community that the entire life span of Ejagham woman, from birth to death, is under male control, be they fathers, husbands or brothers. They do not have control even over their mortal remains.

From the onset, the study was birthed from a gender-sensitive motivation of a theologian to liberate young women who were 'presumed' to be trapped and victimised by their own mothers to undergo the practice of 'female genital mutilation' against their will. Through this traditional practice, the Ejagham woman was labelled violent and oppressive regarding women's sexuality. Previous studies of the area (Pemunta, 2011:

53, ABEMO 2004) had supported this view, stating that Ejagham women posed as instruments of torture to subject and inflict pain on their kind through the violation of their sexuality to serve patriarchal benefits. However, after investigations on the ground, the study has come to the discovery that, patriarchal influences thrive in Ejagham and are being propagated by both men and women through androcentric constructs of society and sexual norms. Nonetheless, they are not motivated by the *Nkim* practice as previously assumed.

The study then took a womanist critique of feminist models of defining human sexuality and culture to make proposals on the way forward for Ejagham women's practices. The study set out to understand the motivation for *Nkim a Nkim* and patriarchy in all its forms in Ejagham sexual life and cultural mind-set. It found that through initiation rites and practices, women play a vital role in sexual identity construction of Ejagham society through the passing on of sexual norms from one generation to the other. However, some of these rites such as *Mbi ebe* and widowhood rites cannot be romanticised because they have sustained patriarchy's hold on society supported also by women with varied consequences. Methodologically, womanism was used as a liberation theological perspective to chart the way forward for the Ejagham community. As a hermeneutical tool, womanism does not romanticise culture by uncritically embracing its undersides as Mosala (1989: 8-9) would suggest. Nonetheless, it rejects, or fence off external impositions of knowledge that perpetuate the oppression of black people and specifically black women (Oduyoye, 2001: 12).

7.3. Proposals for further research

The study proposes some areas for further research that are vital for both Ejagham society and theological reflection in general.

First, the study suggests a theological investigation into the difference between sex for sexual pleasure and reproductive sex. Hot but interesting and lively debates arose on this topic in most of the villages during group discussions. A theological reflection on this topic could reveal some interesting discourses for human sexuality. In addition, it proposes a look at the life of esokhoti women (Impotent women) among the Ejaghams,

and how they deal with the sexual environment around them could be another opening for research on human sexuality.

Second, the study proposes a look into the issue of the transition of some *Ndem* priestesses into the spiritual realm of churches as prophetesses and Manyis. This is common in most of the Pentecostal churches in the area. While some Ejagham people see this as witchcraft in the house of God, others rejoice that God is using the voice of the native ancestresses to speak to His people. Some even blame the mainline churches as those who killed the cult in the first place. The whole phenomenon is interesting and could be a fertile ground for theological reflection. More interesting is the fact that this phenomenon is a cross-border phenomenon. Some respondents saw the churches in the area as playing the fool. They allow neighbouring Nigerians to come to Ejagham and take away their *Ndem* priestesses to upgrade Nigerian Pentecostal churches, while they sit around with spiritually dry churches refusing to use what they see as God's gift to them. Further reflection in this area could prove vital to ongoing discourses on ATRs and Christianity. This can help Ejagham context to decipher God's stance on traditional cults and Christian worship.

Last, a theological reflection is suggested on cultural versus a modern approach to sexuality discourse and behaviour. Some respondents lamented the fact that the open discussions on sex brought into the area by *Nkim* discourses and HIV/AIDS sensitisation is more bane than blessing, especially for the younger generation. A deeper look into this area could help society deal with the growing sexual autonomy among youths and increased rate of teenage pregnancy and disease.

7.4. The contribution of study to knowledge

We saw the following as some contribution made by the study towards the advancement of knowledge in academia:

Sexual pleasure is not limited to a particular part of the body namely the clitoris. It is a matter of the heart. Hence, some cultures are comfortable with its fixing and others not.

Triple patriarchy is the most dangerous form of patriarchy that keeps women grounded under patriarchal societies. Women are the solution to their liberation; they could dismantle patriarchy by terminating all support for it.

A womanist rethinking of cultural identity, sexual consciousness and African sexual morals is crucial in the study as a better means to reach generations of Ejagham and Africa youths today who are rapidly becoming rootless as a result of neglect of African cultural values for Western.

Universal sisterhood/womanhood as sexual liberation for all womenfolk could be desired, but it is still a myth. Multiple contextual experiential expressions of the sexual according to peoples prevailing realities is proposed as way forward for an objective expression of sexuality and womanhood.

7.5. Conclusion: Emerging questions and discourses

7.5.1. Ejagham women and the future of initiation practices

One of the salient issues here for the context and academia is the future of initiation practices. Presently, the dominant internal and international positions portrayed on the ground in Ejagham are skewed, thereby leading to controversial responses. In such an atmosphere, one may want to ponder on the place of initiation practices in Ejagham women's religious-cultural world seeing that the spiritual and the physical universe are still conceived as joint. An important point to note here is that almost all Ejagham people, including myself, are products of the *mélange* of cultural and Western Christian forms of initiation; that is *Nkim a Nkim* and the Christian rite of baptism. My mother and my people have gone through the *Nkim* culture and are fervent members of the worshipping community. This provokes important questions such as: is it possible for Ejagham women to erase their initiation practices as suggested by stakeholders, and successfully maintain solely Christian rites such as the rite of baptism and others as their sole spiritual identity. In other words, would the spirituality of Ejagham/Black African women be complete without initiation of their practices?

Initiation practices occupy a vital spiritual place in both African cultural and Christian mind-sets. Most African communities make provision for rites of passage into various

stages of growth and existence in the living community. Religion is a fundamental aspect of this growth as it shapes the African mind from birth to death. Mbiti (1969: 1) rightly notices, “Africans are notoriously religious”; this holds true for almost all Africans. Each African community has its specific ways in which they relate to forces beyond their power and comprehension. Initiation rites and rituals form an integral part of this relating. It has been noted in African traditional mind-set that no one gets to know the world, the society or religious body where one belongs just by being there. To “belong” one needs a formal introduction. Initiations rites are the means through which one is introduced and begins to receive knowledge and belonging into any specific body be it cultural, cultic, or religious (Ikwuagwu, 2004: 61).

Quenum (2017) notes that in African traditional societies, initiation at various stages of life is required for socialisation and smooth integration into the flow of life of one’s community. Birth, puberty, marriage and death are associated with specific rites that integrate the individual members into the whole way of life of the community. On the other hand, Unwumere Ikwuagwu (2004: 61), highlights the importance of initiation. In her opinion, initiation into anybody represents one of the most significant spiritual phenomena in the history of humanity. Coined from the Latin word *initiate*, meaning to begin or beginning, she explains the meaning of “initiation” as to ‘enter upon’, ‘to introduce’, or ‘set going’. It also means to admit with necessary introductory rites or forms into some society or observance, especially, of occult character. As people living in a religiously charged world, everyone is bound to some form of initiation rite at certain points in life.

The importance of African initiation rites is specifically emphasised by Oduyoye (1979: 114). She defines them as an initiation into full responsibility in one’s cultural community. She sees these rites in light of an elaborate process of socio-political education. She particularly highlights some of the rites of passages, which are of Christian origins but have also found firm roots in African cultures such as marriage, naming ceremonies and burials. These ceremonies with purely African foundations have been woven into Christian liturgies in the form of thanksgiving and memorial

services. She encourages such blending of Christian and African understanding of initiation practices in concrete ways that we think pave the way for discourses that could prove beneficial to recent dialogues on the subject.

Quenum (2017) further sees initiation not only as a solely an African phenomenon but one that characterises all human societies, including those described in the Bible. He notes that Jesus Himself went through initiation rites. Being a Jew, Jesus subjected Himself to the basic Jewish initiation rituals of naming, presentation into the temple, circumcision, baptism, and death. His baptism especially prepared him for his new role of Master of initiation and Elder brother within his new community of followers, the church. It forms a fundamental aspect of Christian initiation for all time. Hence, in Quenum's view, initiation practices are first of all people's personal roots before a religious experience.

In fact, even Fransella and Frost (1977: 113) in the Western context have identified the importance of African initiation practices. They regret that there are no such initiation practices in Western societies that give guidance and usher women from one stage of existence into another. They see this as the reason why many middle-aged Western women are depressed because they have no proper orientation on how to deal with their changing physical and emotional moods at various stages in their lives. Their insight shows the vitality of initiation practices on women's religious-cultural life and hence its inevitability.

Some African women theologians have noted that "African religion gives a major role to rites of passage and some of these key rituals and festivals can truly give an insight into how religion informs and shapes women's life" (Oduyoye & Kanyoro, 2006:11). We see this assertion as true for the Ejagham woman because initiation spaces are places where she receives basic teachings towards socio-cultural responsibilities and sexual orientation/fulfilment in marriage. As already stated, in Ejagham, *Nkim a Nkim* is the initiation practice that introduces a young girl from puberty to the new state of womanhood. It is an integral part of female maturation and womanhood; every woman aspires to take part when they have the opportunity. It is sexuality school with religious/spiritual and socio-cultural implications for Ejagham women and the community as a whole. Many religious rites are performed during this period, including "fixing" of

the young woman's clitoris, which is "a socially justified mark of maturation dramatising the break with childhood and incorporation into adulthood" (Nyangweso, 2002: 579). These rites create religious meaning in women's daily interaction with the physical and metaphysical which are deeply interwoven, be they at home, farm, market or church setting.

Their experiences are similar to other traditional African societies. For instance, in Kenyan society, Mbiti (1979: 119) notes, "without being initiated, a person is not a full member of the...people...no matter how old or big so long as he is not initiated, he is despised and considered to be still a boy or a girl". Similarly, Marc Ela (2001: 14) sees the ceremony of initiation as more than a language of gestures and symbols. In his opinion, this is a decisive experience that changes the initiates' state of being, granting them a mode of existence in the larger world of the ancestors. As a result, cutting off from initiation rituals would also signify separation from one's ancestral links, which may make one rootless and hence, non-existent even if one were a Christian initiate. The place then of initiation/maturation signified by a cut from childhood to adult, and of maintaining a link with the ancestral realm are religious stages that are integral to Ejagham women's religio-cultural universe.

Takon's (2016) discourse on Moninkim dance culture portrays that Ejagham person, just as most Africans do celebrate initiation as human advancement and achievement. As such child-birth, new crops, manhood, womanhood and death and the afterlife are all vital stages with religious connotations. This is informed by their cosmic belief in the duality of human existence on the physical and spiritual planes. Phenomena like *Benem*, *Ndem*, *Nkim*, are all indications that the physical, is inhabited by humans and the spiritual by gods and ancestors, who *collectively* influence the affairs of men. Their influences/blessings are catalysed by supplications, incantations, libations, rituals, sacrifices and dances, to establish sacredness of the relationship and efficacy (Takon, 2016).

What then does womanism as the school for liberation says to all these? Womanists ask if Ejagham women will be authentic spiritual beings if they are denied their cultural legacy of initiation to be solely dependent on their Christian heritage. Would their

Christian legacy not be affected as well, since it is the product of their cultural heritage? Could Ejagham women easily absorb Christianity without their initiation experience, based on their religious-cultural interactions within the *Moninkim/Ngbokondem* culture? Can one deny them initiation practices while accepting water? Is this not denial of African initiation practices based on inferiority and paganism; and acceptance of Western Christian initiation because of civilised or superiority? These are reflections exposing the reality of initiation practices within religion and Christianity itself.

Pa John Ako of Mbeyan thinks that it could be the present declining state of practices of *Moninkim* and *Ngbokondem* and their *Nkim* culture that is causing women today to be spiritually unstable, 'one foot for inside church and one foot for *ngamb*^{24,25} and young girls to morally lose. He remembers in the past how women used to be physically powerful, morally grounded and emotionally stabilised after the *Nkim* experience. All this is changing rapidly, and leaving women empty and unstable within. In this light, one may ask that; could the undesirable elements in the practices be scraped off rather than the vision and intent of initiation itself, which affirms life?

7.5.2. Initiation practices within the context of empire.

The stigma of the 1960s prostitution plague and the present capitalist schemes operative within *Nkim* culture in Ejagham is only fortifying Mosala (1989: 9, 10) description of Ejagham women as *lumpen-proletariat*. Drawing inspiration from the book of Micah, he describes this group as those who have been reduced to base living through poverty made possible through consumerism and dispossession by the exploitative bureaucracy of the day. These dispossessed who include the landless peasants, labourers, unemployed, petty criminals, bandits (Mosala, 1989: 10) and others such as prostitutes and the poor whose lives of struggle could sometimes include petty dubious activities. In the context of *Nkim a Nkim* and empire as operative today in Ejagham, women are lulled by frightening poverty and marginalisation to indulge in petty

²⁴ Local name for apothecry or divination where people go to seek solutions for problems that the church has not been able to provide solutions.

schemes with funding agencies that mask exploitative interest. This encourages what Boesak (2017: 62) discusses as consumerism that “encourages commercialised cultural and religious practices” that expose attitudes of lack of commitment in a people’s life, even on salient issues such as human sexuality, education and others (Boesak, 2017: 62); the struggle for survival that thrives at the expense of the cultural practices.

An example to illustrate the above phenomenon within the *Nkim* culture is seen in Ejagham women’s acceptance of Western-funded micro developmental projects aimed at fighting genital mutilation. These projects are supposed to drift women’s interest away from *Nkim* toward alternative ones that could fight poverty. Many of the NGOs and funding agencies that visit the area come with the notion that the practice is the result of poverty and backwardness; hence, the best possible means to stop it is through the introduction of petty schemes to deviate women’s attention from *Nkim a Nkim*.

However, closer engagement with women during fieldwork revealed multiple complications and contradictions with these projects. We give a practical illustration of this by using the most recent visit of the Canadian ambassador’s representative to Eyumojock (from the 26th to 28th January 2016) to end ‘female genital mutilation’ in the area. A Francophone NGO called CALBRIL, (Chantier D’Appui, de Loisirs, de Bricolage des Lapinos), facilitated his coming to the area. It is an organisation concerned with combatting all forms of discrimination against women and girl children. The Canadian embassy in Cameroon took a project to sponsor this NGO to fight ‘genital mutilation’ in Ejagham land. The divisional officer permitted us to follow the group as a matter of knowledge acquisition and experience. We accompanied the group as observers for a period of three days. Sensitisation began from the 26 January in all primary and secondary schools where staff and students were drilled on the negativity of ‘female genital mutilation’ and encouraged to report to the police if they discovered hidden cases. The second day was dedicated to the indigenous population, and the last day was the official signing of an accord to end the practice in Ejagham land accompanied by a celebration.

The first surprise was the contradiction manifested by our research guide who, prior to this visit, had given us vital insights on *Nkim e Nkim* and travelled with us from village to

village to meet women and men considered to be pioneers and sages of *Nkim*. She became the local interpreter for the NGO during this visit and passed on messages to terminate the practice. Their principal message was that *Nkim* was bad and kills young girls and destroys sexuality; hence, it must be stopped. As a translator and interpreter, one could justify her stance as the result of her interim job. But then we asked why she spoke for the NGO if she is convinced that *Nkim* is a cultural practice that should be preserved jealously. Her response was, “I am for *Nkim*, but *sometimes* I am against”.

We noticed similar contradictory responses in other villages during the study period. The interpreter’s response above pitches ‘for’, before ‘against’, and this could be intentional. During the lengthy period of interaction with her, we came to understand ‘for’ as signifying that she endorses *Nkim* and upholds *Nkim* culture one hundred percent. However, ‘against’ is a pseudo-answer influenced by financial gains that some of these NGOs bring with them when they come to the area to validate their field projects. At such moments, the fixers and *Moninkims* would be summoned to give vital information needed by these organisations. This happened only *sometimes* and then life returns to normal and *Nkim* culture thrives again.

The question that preoccupied the researcher was; what image was these women painting of and what impact were they making of *Nkim* culture by succumbing to such periodic pseudo financial gains. This question particularly begged for attention after the women acted a brief sketch in front of the Canadian ambassador’s representative called Mr Francois on the day of the accord. A particular scene began to throw some light on the researcher’s concern as to the shifting positions of the women. Some fixers were shown to the audience in the process of fixing a young woman. One fixer stepped forth to explain why and how they performed *Nkim*. Their reason (or pseudo-reason) was that they made their daily living from the practice. They did this through forcefully constraining young girls and women to the practice.

They threw some thick bloody red substance on the floor to show the amount of blood that comes out from the young girl while she raises wild cries of pain. Then one woman stepped forward and told Mr Francois in the Pidgin English that “you get for help we women them so that we fit find other small market them bekin do’am and stop this

practice wey eh di hot we girl pikin them”. Meaning: you have to help us financially so that we can deviate from this practice that hurts our young women so that we can instead undertake petty businesses. Certainly, the funds were given as we could detect from the back door fights that ensued later during refreshment. Arguments broke out as to how the ‘proceeds from Canada’ were distributed. Some local women who felt cheated accused the NGO agents of using them. They vowed to boycott subsequent events organised by them.

What one could detect from this is that local NGOs and other activists had considerable support from funding bodies and other foreign donors, but ended up spending only meagre amounts on the women for entertainment but nothing on actual development. This perspective was corroborated during a closed session we had with some fixed young women who took us for a funding body. One of the women who was refusing to talk throughout the session finally burst out with these words:

My concern here is that when you people have an issue you come and take information and it would just end like that. Like what you are doing now. When you get what you want, you go and we never see you again.

She is insinuating here some of the exploitative schemes of the people who come to get suitable information about the practice to meet up with the wants of their organisations, then they disappeared for good. Nnaemeka (2005) notes the same phenomenon above in the story of Kadi.

As a preoccupying and enslaving phenomenon, Marc Ela (1994: 141) implores African people to refuse the crumbs that the West sit in their comfort and throw to poor blacks to enslave them even further. Vellem (2012: 6) suggests a possible solution, which could be that every developmental scheme designed for people should ensure their complete liberation as well. This becomes even more practical when such people are trained to participate in or take charge of their own development. For as Guy-Sheftall (2003: 31) stresses in the words of Ama Ata Aidoo:

Africans should take charge of African land, African wealth, African lives, and the burden of African development. It is not possible to advocate independence for the African

continent without also believing that African women must have the best that the environment can offer.

However, this is not the case in Ejagham. These developmental schemes are, for the most part, economically and politically motivated farce that generally serves a few interests and satisfies brief hunger, while overlooking the people and especially women's daily struggles against poverty and oppression.

One could state here that in the view of cameras, agencies project schemes that are hardly implemented. In this light, one could suggest that local NGOs and funding agencies that purport to combat 'genital mutilation' should be subject to scrutiny. The implications that such scenes have on culture is that they paint violent and oppressive pictures of *Nkim e Nkim* to the outside world. These views are taken by media houses, newspapers, articles, journals and newsagents at home and abroad and broadcast with pictures of Ejagham women and community. They, later on, return home to haunt the very women who made them and the entire community, as they are looked upon as barbaric on their own.

The quest for gains then is taking *Nkim* discourses deep into the realm of "empire" referred to by Plaatjies (2011: 2) as a 'patriarchal top-down system' that plunges the oppressed into deeper misery while exalting the oppressor. Boesak says,(upcoming) as "a calculated coalescing of global forces pooling their economic, political, military, ideological, and cultural resources", i.e. powers together in unprecedented and frightening ways.

These manifestations of empire are all combined and are operational in *Nkim* discourses as they unfold today through domination, enslavements, destructive self-interest, greed and worship of money, propaganda, colonisation of consciousness, a spirit lacking compassionate justice and showing contemptuous disregard for the gifts of creation and the household of life (Plaatjies, 2011: 2). *Nkim* discourses are fast turning into the market, which Boesak (2017: 63, 69) sees as the most successful religion of all time, especially in the current system of globalised neoliberal capitalism. It commercialises culture, colonises consciousness, and blunts the conscience (Boesak, 2017: 64) while taking advantage of the poor and exposing them to even superior forms degradation. In proposing to supply women with money for petty businesses in order to

eradicate *Nkim*, could Western civilisation (Canada) not be seen as concealing its real intent; that is, the continuation of the empire with schemes that gear towards deliberate domination and subjugation and even eradication? (Boesak, 2017: 81, 82). It is in this light that Oduyoye (2001: 12) urges oppressed people to peruse with suspicion, and if possible, “fence off” schemes of liberation that come from the oppressor.

Could one, therefore, suggest here that because of poverty Ejagham women are getting comfortable with their status as *lumpen*-proletariat as they enter a partnership of convenience and sign pacts of death by commercialising the very core of their identity and personhood? Could they not be placed within the spectrum of what liberation theology detects as an expression of the trenches of impoverishment? Is their situation not sustained by the contradictions of ethical questions and paradoxes that arise as a result of the perpetuation of the impoverishment of and the stereotyping of a people by the powerful within and without African cultural realm? Could their commercialisation of culture and degradation of self not be the expression of the ugliness of the cross, which is often hidden by the sophistication of Western forms of knowledge and civilisation?

Should one then not endorse Oduyoye’s (1995: 82) advice here for Ejagham women? That to suspect the many Euro-American funded projects of solidarity that view African women constantly as objects rather than subjects? Oduyoye, says only when such interventions are thorough and empathetic do they become valuable as expressions of solidarity. Ejagham women cannot vindicate themselves from this double-faced picture being painted of *Nkim e Nkim*. Could their shifting attitudes not be the reason for the complications and dilemmas that hinder suitable solutions to address *Nkim* discourses in the Ejagham community?

7.6 Conclusion

This study was birthed under the desire to address the persistence of and liberate the women of Ejagham from the practice of *Nkim e Nkim* as they were projected nationwide as destroying their young women and violating their sexuality. Reports that circulated indicated patriarchy’s control of women’ sexuality as the primary motivation. On getting to the field of study, we were privileged to listen to the voices of Ejagham women as

contributors on different motivations for the practice including sexual. We discovered that patriarchal domination is motivation in other women's initiation practices but that in *Nkim e Nkim*, patriarchy in its multi-forms posed no sexual concerns.

The study has therefore, explored the womanist liberation perspective as a channel to peer into the paradoxes and controversies replete within *Nkim* discourses and other initiation practices to propose possible suggestions for healing. It saw womanist perspective as better than its counterpart feminism because it addresses not only sexual matters but also takes race, class and other contextual realities of oppression into consideration. Womanist perspective sees the injustices provoked by a patriarchal society as evil and proposes various means of liberation.

The study especially calls on fixed women in both *Ndem* cult and *Moninkim* to celebrate life with their scarred bodies for they are the most beautiful of women, and as such should be poised to live in hope. In line with, Allan Boesak's (1984: 17) exhortation, Ejagham women, the *Nkim* daughters who suffer varied forms of oppression and labels, "do not want to hate themselves any longer"; they do not want to wish that they were men or whites, rich or educated, they do not want to define themselves through any of those terms. They would rather, move towards their own authentic "womanness" as *Nkim* daughters who are scarred, broken, but beautiful.

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A Questionnaire Compiled by Rev Tabe Jennet Otab Epse Benoni-Wang. A Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon on PhD Studies at the University of Pretoria in South Africa on the Topic: Initiation Practices among Ejagham Women of Cameroon and Patriarchy: A Womanist Perspective.

1. Institutional information:

Name of Institution	University of Pretoria
Town/Province	Pretoria, Gauteng Province
Country	South Africa
Address	Hatfield Campus, Corner of Lynnwood Drive and University Road. Private Bag X20, 0028, Hatfield.

2. Field statistics of Questionnaire Participants

What is your name?	-	-	-	
What is your age?	Above 10	Above 20	Above 50	Above 70
What is your gender?	Male	Female	-	-
What is your level of education?	Primary	Secondary	High school/Above	Not educated at all
Are you married?	Yes	No	Polygamist	
Is your spouse educated	Yes	No	Well Educated	
Which one of these faiths are you?	Christian	Muslim	Traditionalist	
Questions on Initiation Practices 1) Ngbokondem cult	2) Mbi ebe	3) Funerals for women	4) Widowhood rites	

1) Have you ever heard of any of the above practices/rituals before? YES NO

2) Which ones are you most familiar with? 1 2 3 4

3) Can you describe how they are practiced here?.....

.....
.....
.....

4) How are these practices good to women?.....
.....

5) How are they destructive to women?
.....
.....

6) Why do you think women still carry them out?

7) Do you have any personal experience with any of the above practices? YES NO

8) If yes, describe briefly here
.....
.....

Who are those who carry out these practices? Christians Traditionalists Both

9) Are men (patriarchy) in any way responsible in the continuity of these practices? YES NO

Explain your answer.....
.....

10) Do you think these practices benefit men sexually?
.....

11) How do these practices deal women's sexuality?
.....

3. Questions on the practice of Nkim a Nkim

For men and women. Answer the ones that suit

1) Have you ever heard of the practice that deal with women's clitoris before? YES NO

2) Is it practiced here in your community? YES NO

a) How is it called here?.....

b) What does that name mean?.....

3 What is/are reason (s) for the practice here?.....

4 What is your view of the practice?.....

Why do you think it is persisting in the area despite efforts to stop it?

5) Have you undergone the practice? YES NO

5) At what age did you undergo the practice? Below 5 Above 5 Above 10 above 20

6) Was it partial of complete removal of the clitoris? Partial Complete

7) Who encouraged you to do the practice? Mother Father Relatives Friends

8) What does this practice mean for you as Ejagham woman?.....

Why do women in this area undertake the practice?.....

9) Are you happy/proud you did it? YES NO

b) State your reason

10) Would you encourage others to do it for example your daughters, sisters etc? YES NO

11) State why?

INITIATED WOMEN ONLY:

1) Are you married, single, widow? 1 2 3

- 2) If unmarried, do you have a boyfriend? YES NO
- 3) Are you sexually active as an initiated woman? YES NO
- 4) How many times do you have sex a week? 1 2 3 4 More
- 5) Do you know about sexual pleasure/satisfaction? YES NO
- 6) Explain what it means to you.....
.....
- 7) Do you enjoy sexual pleasure as an initiated woman? YES NO
- 8) If NO, then why?
- 9) If YES, describe the feeling (s) you have when experiencing sexual pleasure?
.....

MEN ONLY:

- 1) Have you had sexual contact with initiated, uninitiated woman or both? 1 2 3
- 2) Do you desire an initiated or uninitiated woman? 1 2
- 3) What is your reason for this choice?
.....
.....
- 4) Would you like you encourage this practice to continue? YES NO
- b) Why?.....
.....
.....

Questionnaire completed by:.....

Date:.....

Village/Town:

A Follow-up Questionnaire Compiled by Rev Tabe Jennet Otob Epse Benoni-Wang, Pastor Presbyterian Church in Cameroon on Studies at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. Topic: Nkim a Nkim ('female circumcision') and sexual pleasure.

Institutional information:

Name of Institution	University of Pretoria
Town/Province	Pretoria, Gauteng Province
Country	South Africa
Address	Hatfield Campus, Corner of Lynnwood Drive and University Road. Private Bag X20, 0028, Hatfield.

Statistics of Questionnaire Participants

NAME:

Age:

Sex:

Marital status:

Faith:

Questions on the practice of *Nkim a Nkim*

1 Have you undergone the practice? YES NO

2 If yes, Can you describe how it was done on you?

.....

3 Are you married? Do you have a boyfriend? I have a Husband Boyfriend(s)

4 Are you sexually active as an initiated women?

Questions on Sexual Pleasure

5 Do you know about sexual pleasure/satisfaction or orgasm? YES NO I DON'T KNOW

6 Do you agree with those who say initiated women cannot enjoy sexual pleasure? YES NO

Give reason for your answer.....

Questions on womanhood and sexual pleasure

7 Who is a woman to you, one who enjoys sex? YES NO BOTH

8 Do you agree with those who say *Nkim* women and are not fully women.

If yes why do you agree?.....

.....

.....

If no, why do you disagree?

.....

.....

9 How do you feel about the campaigns to stop *Nkim* a *Nkim* and the sexual liberty among young people today?

.....

.....

10 Are you worried the *Nkim* is losing its cultural impact? YES NO

11 Explain briefly your worry.....

12 What do you think the future should be for *Nkim* a *Nkim*?

.....

.....

.....

Questionnaire completed by:

.....

Date:.....

Village/Town: