

Research Article

This article is published by Jozac Publishers in the *African Social Science and Humanities Journal (ASSHJ)*. Volume 5, Issue 4, 2024.

ISSN: 2709-1309 (Print)
2709-1317 (Online)

This article is distributed under a Creative Commons [Attribution \(CC BY-NC-SA\) International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Article detail

Received: 10 June 2024

Accepted: 22 July 2024

Published: 05 September 2024

Conflict of Interest: The author/s declared no conflict of interest.



Language of power and control: A masculinist analysis of rape in Benjamin Séhene's *Le Feu Sous La Soutane*

Mabel Oriakpono^{1*} 

¹Department of English Language, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Nigeria, aimabbel@yahoo.com

 <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/asshj.v5i4.8>

*Corresponding author: aimabbel@yahoo.com

Abstract: This paper examines the language of power and control in Benjamin Séhene's *Le Feu Sous la Soutane*, through a masculinist lens. The paper focuses on how rape is portrayed as an act of dominance and authority where language is used as a tool of power and control. The aim of this research is to examine the subtleties of sexual violence within the text and explore the role of patriarchal language in reinforcing acts of domination. The objective is to reveal how linguistic expressions in *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* contribute to the perpetuation of toxic masculinity and institutionalized oppression through a close examination of the narrative. Using a thematic analysis method, the research employed a critical masculinist analysis approach to expose the underlying power dynamics, by dissecting the language and dialogue within the text. This approach allows for a distinct examination of how gendered language enables cruelty, authority, and the marginalization of victims. The findings reveal that Séhene's work demonstrates the convoluted system of power relations in which language is used as a weapon of compulsion to sustain gendered violence. The novel reveals the complicity of institutional structures, particularly religious ones, in fortifying these dynamics. The study concludes drawn suggestively, that Séhene's work not only draw attention to the pervasive nature of male dominance but also challenges the reader to confront the implications of such power dynamics in real-world structures. This research adds to larger discussions on gender, power, and justice in literature and society by highlighting these control mechanisms.

Keywords – Gender dynamics, Hegemonic masculinity, Institutional complicity, Religious institutions, Sexual violence

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature has historically discussed the pervasive idea of sexual violence and illustrated the underlying forces of power and control that permeates society within this premise. In many literary works, rape is portrayed as more than just a physical assault; it is also an expression of authority that is typically made possible by the oppressive use of language. This paper explores these relationships as captured in Benjamin Séhene's novel *Le Feu Sous la Soutane*, where he scrutinises the relationship between sexual assault, authority, and religion. The research uses critical masculinist analogy to investigate the use of patriarchal language in legitimising practices of domination and explores the role that linguistic expressions play in maintaining toxic masculinity and institutionalised oppression.

Scholars such as Sorli (2020) had since argued that the idea of "man-made language" accentuates the cunning language used in patriarchal structures to represent male authority and strengthen women's marginalisation. Sorli further stressed that Language is not neutral, as feminist theorists have long argued; rather, it is a powerful tool that can both reflect and shape societal perceptions of gender and power. This is especially true in situations involving sexual assault, as the language employed to characterise and excuse these behaviours is mostly filled with power relations. These perhaps explains why considerable scholarly attention, particularly in the domains of gender studies and masculinist critique has been focused on the ways in which language sustains gendered power relations has received in recent years.

Similarly, Peltola and Phoenix (2022) argues that language forms plays a profound role in reinforcing patriarchal power over women, which is in line with the theories of masculinist theory and centres primarily on the construction and maintenance of male supremacy. In view of this paradigm, it becomes imperative to examine the ways in which language marginalises and silences victims of sexual assault. In *Le Feu Sous la Soutane*, language serves as a control mechanism where masculine domination and religious authority intertwined and resulted in the continuation of violence against women, concealed under the pretence of institutional purity.

Therefore, the primary objectives of this paper are to examine how patriarchal language works as a tool for dominance and control through an analyses of the mechanics of sexual violence in Séhene's book. Since the power dynamics that are firmly ingrained in social and religious organisations are clearly illustrated in *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* where religious leaders abuse their power to control women using rhetoric that justifies these practices as explored in the novel. This, according to Graff and Korolczuk (2021), increases the institutional structures' and religions' support of violent acts. However, this research advances a wider conversation on the impact that literary depictions of sexual violence can have in both mirroring and subverting existing power structures by looking at these dynamics.

The study adopts a critical masculinist analysis approach as its methodology. This theoretical approach enables a clear examination of the ways in which institutional and cultural settings give rise to the manifestation of masculine dominance. In contrast to feminist critiques that centre on the experiences of women, masculinist analysis focuses on the impact patriarchal structures on male attitudes and behaviours, particularly as it relates to power and dominance (Graff & Korolczuk, 2021). The research closely analyse language in order to identify the causal power dynamics at work in *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* and also show how language usage contributes to victim marginalisation and unhealthy masculinity with more specific reference to settings where institutional authority, like the Church, legitimises and shields such behaviour. The critical masculinist approach provides a unique analysis of the ways in which male dominance is established and perpetuated in this context.

In examining the relationship between language, power, and institutional involvement, the study attempts to identify the ways that Séhene's use of words establishes gendered violence as a norm. *Le Feu Sous la Soutane's* depiction of rape is a reflection of the wider power structures that support and condone such brutality, not just a plot device. The study examines significant conversations and narrative mechanisms that highlight the use of language as an instrument of control through a close reading of the text. This analysis also extends to the examination of how the novel challenges or critiques these power structures and provides an understanding of how literature addresses social justice issues. The paper seeks to rationalise the complex relationship between language and power in the novel. Through a critical masculinist perspective, the paper will investigate how patriarchal language supports actions of dominance and control in both the text and the structures it represents in real life thereby contributing to on-going academic discussions surrounding gender, power, and justice, particularly within the framework of sexual violence in literature.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between language and power, particularly with respect to sexual violence, has been a major area of focus for literary studies and gender. Numerous academics have looked at the ways in which language can be used to relegate victims of abuse, reinforce patriarchal views, and establish control. With an emphasis on the contributions

of feminist and masculinist criticisms, this literature review examines important research on the relationships between language, power, and sexual violence. Through interacting with these crucial viewpoints, the review situates Benjamin Séhene's *Le Feu sous la Soutane* within broader academic discussions and frames the novel as a convoluted commentary on gendered power relations.

2.1. Language and power in literature

The basic claims about language and power have been strengthened by contemporary research through its examination of the intricate connection between language usage and gendered oppression. Alatrisme's (2015) argument that language does not only reflect social norms but also actively creates and maintains power dynamics and gendered identities reaffirms this. Through his work on Language and Psychoanalysis, Alatrisme pertinently demonstrates how language choices and texts, made by institutions serve to uphold patriarchal norms, a position consistent with the argument of *Le Feu Sous la Soutane*, in which the language of the masculine characters both manifests and upholds a larger dominance structure.

Similarly, a close reading of Séhene's book reveals that the religious figure in *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* uses language as a tool of control over his victims and views his authority over speech as equivalent to that of a physical force. Cerdán-Torregrosa, La Parra-Casado and Vives-Cases (2023) in their assessment of the use of language and limitations in gendered interactions, where communication that normalises sexual assault was their primary focus, had argued that patriarchal language signifies and serves as a tool for systemic power dynamics as captured in Séhene's book. Cerdán-Torregrosa, La Parra-Casado, and Vives-Cases' work on masculinities and femininities that intersect with sexual orientation is fundamental to appreciate the effects of language choice in gendered power dynamics.

2.2. Masculinist critique and sexual violence

Hegemonic masculinity, provides important perspectives on how language sustains and advances masculine authority, particularly as it relates to sexual violence. According to masculinist criticism Messerschmidt (2018), hegemonic masculinity is maintained through the use of language and social behavioural patterns that legitimise violence and encourage masculine authority. Messerschmidt's perspective is essential for understanding Séhene's *Le Feu sur la Soutane*, especially with respect to how the protagonist uses religious terminology and structure to justify his behaviour. Messerschmidt describes Language as both an active component of the performance of power and a reflection of it, due to his emphasis on the performative aspect of hegemonic masculinity.

Accordingly, Flood (2019) also addressed the connection between violence, masculinity, and language from an institutional and religious standpoint. Flood argues that violent acts are either downplayed or excused in religious or moral discourse, subtly implying that male supremacy is routinely articulated and maintained through the language of justification. This is clearly evident from the priest's mocking of his rapes in Séhene's book. Flood's work lays bare the significance of discerning religious language as a site of power where he emphasizes how male violence is both perpetrated and covered up.

2.3. Language and institutional complicity

The ways institutions use language to uphold patriarchal control has received enormous attention in recent gender studies research. For instance, Ahmed (2019) assessed the effect of institutional discourse in shaping and reinforcing gendered hierarchies, especially in religious settings. In her research work, "Complaint!" She contends that religious institutions have consistently framed the acts of marginalisation of disadvantaged groups, especially women, as morally justifiable in order to retain control over them through the use of language. Ahmed's assessment draws relevance from *Le Feu Sous la Soutane*, where the religious leader employed his position of power to control the discourse and provide an excuse for violent crimes.

Furthermore, O'Shea et al. (2024) also contends that the persistence of sexual abuse reveals elements of institutional discourse control. Their study, "Rethinking Sexual Violence Labels: Exploring the Impact of 'Victim' and 'Survivor' Discourse," reveals a tradition in legal and religious structures in which terminologies in language are employed to marginalise victims and shield offenders. The Church's discourse and how it silences the voices of the female victims of sexual violence, in contrast enhances the authority of the male offenders. The portrayal of this viewpoints in *Le Feu sous la Soutane* as argued by O'Shea et al. (2024) largely supports the criticisms of institutional complicity in gendered violence as captured in Séhene's book.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, a Critical Masculinist Analysis is employed to examine the language of power and control in Benjamin Séhene's *Le Feu Sous la Soutane*. The analysis centres on the use of means of patriarchal language as a tool to sustain toxic masculinity and gendered violence in the face of sexual abuse, using excerpts from the novel. The study is a qualitative textual analysis of Séhene's novel, specifically through close reading of significant passages that emphasise gendered power relations and linguistic expressions of dominance. This research design is adopted for its suitability in uncovering the primary theme of this research; "the impact of language as a tool of control and institutional complicity in enabling sexual violence".

3.1. Data collection

The data for this study consist of selected passages from *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* that depict interactions between the main male characters and the female counterparts. The text is scrutinized to identify language that bares power dynamics, dominance, and control. Particular attention is given to dialogues between the priest and Spéciose, in which the patriarchal language reveals both overt and covert forms of power.

3.2. Analytical framework

The Critical Masculinist analysis primarily guides the framework for this study. This theory advances ways in which male dominance is constructed and maintained through language. The study exposes the underlying power structures that sustain toxic masculinity through an in-depth of how male characters use patriarchal language to justify acts of control and marginalisation of women. The analysis incorporates discourse analysis to examine the specific language choices that show these traits and how societal norms of male superiority and female subordination fortify the narrative.

3.3. Order of analysis

3.3.1. Close reading

The novel is examined through close reading, focusing on relevant dialogues and descriptions of interactions between male and female characters. This reading identifies linguistic patterns and expressions that are symbolic of patriarchal dominance and control.

3.3.2. Narrative dissection

The study scrutinises the narrative to uncover how religious and moral discourse in the novel serves to consolidate male authority. The priest's dialogue, in particular, is analysed for its use of religious justification to maintain control over female characters.

3.3.3. Thematic categorization

The identified linguistic expressions are categorized into themes, such as patriarchal silence, verbal threats, and religious authority as masculine power. These themes are used to highlight how language normalizes male dominance and the marginalization of women in the novel.

3.3.4. Contextual analysis

The findings are contextualized within the broader socio-political and religious frameworks of Rwandan society, as depicted in the novel. This analysis links the personal power dynamics in the text to larger institutional and cultural systems of oppression.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Contextual analysis of *Le Feu Sous la Soutane*

Benjamin Séhene's *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* is a powerful literary work set against the backdrop of the Rwandan Genocide and the prevalent socio-political struggles in Africa. To analyse the novel through the lens of language and power, particularly regarding sexual violence, the historical, cultural, and institutional perspectives that shape the narrative are indispensable. This section probes the socio-political setting of the novel, the role of religious institutions, and the depiction of gender and power dynamics, framing the text within the broader discourse of post-colonial African literature.

4.2. Historical and political context

One of the worst tragedies in contemporary African history, the Rwandan Genocide, served as the impetus for *Le Feu Sous la Soutane*. The profound wounds caused by this tragedy, wherein control, brutality, and power have seeped into every sphere of society is vividly described in the novel. In this regard, sexual violence is not just assumed to be merely an isolated act of cruelty; rather, it is captured as an expression of the systematic brutality that infused Rwandan culture during the genocide. McDoom (2021) affirms this where he argues that "the genocide resulted in widespread sexual violence as well as mass deaths, the majority of which were approved by military and even religious officials". When rape is portrayed in Séhene's book as an expansion of the brutality that characterised the genocide, the fundamental history of the carnage that ensued becomes imperative for perspective.

Le Feu Sous la Soutane, also covered the political ramifications of control and power in post-colonial African cultures. The book, like other post-colonial works, examines the impact of colonial legacy on African institutions, especially those related to religion. Mbembe (2019) comprehensive research on the ways in which colonial authorities used religion as a powerful instrument of control to ingrain patriarchal patterns within African society further asserts Séhene's claims. In his book, Séhene's portrays the Church as a patriarchal organisation that controls its adherents and upholds the same hierarchical structures that were put in place during the colonial era.

4.3. Religious institutions and power

In the book, Séhene's portrays the Church as participating in the ongoing sexual abuse of people, arguing that religious authorities abuse their positions of authority by taking advantage of weaker people. Bartelink, Longman and Bradley (2022) have affirmed this claim concerning religious institutions' involvement in gendered violence. They contend that religious institutions frequently serve as patriarchal structure that silence the views of women and other marginalised groups in the bid to substantiate the authority of male leaders. Séhene aptly captures this phenomenon in his representation of the Church, as the priest in the book utilises religious terminology to defend his acts and keep power over his victims.

The novel also represents broader critiques of religious institutions that have become commonplace in African writing. Van Klinken (2020) makes the argument that African literature often capture religious organisations as being

strongly associated with patriarchal and colonial power structures. The Church, as shown in *Le Feu sur la Soutane* is a political and social power that upholds oppressive systems in addition to its role as a source of spiritual authority. This criticism mirrors Van Klinken's claim that African writers have consistently channelled their writing towards uncovering the ways in which religious establishments support the exclusion of women and to cast doubt on their legitimacy.

4.4. Gender and power dynamics

The main themes of *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* are gender and power interactions particularly as viewed through the lens of toxic masculinity. The book provides a clear illustration of how male dominance is established and maintained through the use of physical and verbal violence. Connell and Pearse's (2015) theory of hegemonic masculinity, is seemingly persuaded in the same direction as Séhène, positing that behaviour of dominance and control, especially over women is how masculinity is socially engineered. In the novel, Séhène appears to suggest that the acts of sexual violence committed by the priest are not only isolated instances of power struggles; rather, they are a component of a systemic, Church-supported, and hegemonic masculinity.

In addition, the novel compels the reader to examine the customs that support these power relations through its use of language. The priest in *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* uses language to control both his victims and his congregation, which is a vital instrument for him to keep his power. Because it highlights the critical role that linguistic practices play in the novel's establishment of male supremacy, this, according to Rose (2020), is commonplace in literature as sexual violence is consistently used as a metaphor to highlight more general social systems of control and power.

4.5. The Novel's contribution to Post-Colonial African literature

Post-colonial African literature has historically maintained a tradition of addressing the intersections of gender, power, and religion within a deeply traumatised society, to which Séhène's *Le Feu sous la Soutane* is a welcomed addition. Like other African writers, Séhène uses his work to critique the prolonged effects of colonialism and colonial power structures as well as its continued influence on contemporary African societies. As Aiseng (2022) opined, post-colonial African literature often struggles with questions of power and identity, particularly with respect to patriarchal and religious institutions. *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* is no exception, as it challenges the reader to consider the ways in which language and power interconnect to perpetuate systems of domination.

The novel fits into the expanding tradition of African literature that recognises gendered violence as a major problem in post-colonial society because of its emphasis on sexual violence. Icaza (2021) conceives that African writers have progressively shifted their interest to the ways in which gender and power intersect in the aftermath of colonialism and have consistently exposed and opposed oppressive institutions through literature. *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* stands out in this tradition for its explicit focus on the role of religious institutions in perpetuating sexual violence.

4.6. Contextual analysis of *Le Feu sous la Soutane*

4.6.1. Summary of the novel

Le Feu sous la Soutane (Fire Under the Cassock), written by Benjamin Séhène, is a deeply moving and troubling narrative set during the Rwandan genocide of 1994. The novel interconnects themes of power, guilt, violence, and the abuse of authority, all portrayed through the lens of religious and social hierarchies. It trails a Catholic priest's battle with his conscience over his complicity and inaction in the face of the atrocities surrounding him. The writer contrasts the exterior violence of the genocide with the priest's internal conflict that expose an even more expansive commentary on moral decay and institutional failure.

The novel begins with a focus on the interactions of the priest with Spéciose, a Tutsi woman he shelters in his presbytery. His sexual cravings towards her intensify as he becomes more and more devoted to her, and his

frustrations and shortcomings became bare, which will eventually lead him to a profound sense of self-loathing. Spéciose, however, remains emotionally detached, which may be interpreted as the typical silent submission expected of women within patriarchal and religious systems.

The plot unfolds against the backdrop of the genocide, as news of escalating violence filters through the radio. The priest's role as a spiritual leader contrasts sharply with his inability to take decisive action. He remains an observer rather than a protector, a position that is representative of the novel's larger criticism of the Church's inaction throughout the Rwandan crisis.

The novel is replete with themes of power, rape, and religious hypocrisy. It shows how the greater tragedy is exacerbated by the misuse of power, both sexual and institutional. The title itself, *Le Feu Sous la Soutane*, metaphorically represents the hidden desires and corrupt actions that lie beneath the surface of religious authority. This fire symbolizes both sexual desires, the burning guilt within the priest and the fiery destruction that occurred in Rwanda.

4.6.2. Cultural and religious context

The cultural and religious background of *Le Feu sous la Soutane* is integral to its narrative and thematic structure. The novel is set in Rwanda, a country deeply ingrained in both traditional African values and Western Christian influences, particularly Catholicism. The novel's assessment of religious institutions, especially the Catholic Church, is laced with the Church's historical presence in Rwanda, where it played a prominent role in education, social organization, and political life. As at the time of the genocide, the Church had been a pillar of Rwandan society for nearly a century, but its moral authority was called into question due to its passive or even complicit role in the violence.

During the Rwandan genocide, members of the Church involving priests, nuns, and other religious figures implicated in the atrocities. Some provided shelter to Tutsi refugees, while others aided in their persecution. Séhène's novel takes a critical stance on the Church's failure to protect the vulnerable, using the character of the priest to symbolize this moral ambiguity and failure. The wider criticism of how religious organisations frequently put their own survival and power above the lives of their followers is made clear by the priest's inaction and internal conflicts. The novel is situated within the wider framework of Rwanda's intricate social structure, where colonial practices intensified ethnic differences between the Hutu and Tutsi populations. These divisions turned into one of the genocide's main motivators. The novel's recurring conflict between the Hutu majority and the Tutsi minority highlights the structurally based social and political problems that led to the genocide. Séhène portrays the priest as a microcosm of Rwandan culture that is helpless to stop the approaching violence despite mounting tensions and, to some extent, unwilling to do so.

The novel goes on to examine the interaction between religious authority and patriarchal standards to oppress women in particular and foster a culture of silence. The results of this double oppression are visible in the character of Spéciose and other female characters in the story. She is made vulnerable to the priest's sexual inclinations and his ultimate influence over her destiny by her circumstance as a woman and a refugee in the presbytery. Her submission, without question, echoes the ingrained, traditional assumption that women should remain silent and submissive, even in the face of abuse and violence.

The work also criticises the widespread acceptance of male domination in other spheres of society beyond religion, such as in the political and social spheres. The militia's treatment of women during the genocide and the priest's dealings with Spéciose are both symbolic of a normalisation of toxic masculinity and the use of language as a tool of control. For instance, the threats made by the militia to "finish the work" are not only physical; they are a part of a larger language culture that views women as tools of oppression and violence.

The title of the book as phrase "fire under the cassock" is thus a reference to the implicit cooperation between patriarchal and religious institutions to create an environment that permitted violence to spread unchecked in

Rwandan society. The priest's immorality, the Church's inaction, and society's acceptance of male supremacy all weigh in on the novel's portrayal of a culture on the verge of collapse.

4.6.3. Analysis of patriarchal language in the french linguistic tools of control

As illustrates by Benjamin Séhene in *Le Feu sur la Soutane*, language, especially when viewed through a masculinist perspective, serves as a tool of dominance and power. The book, as explained by Sorli (2020), depicts a society in which gendered violence, power dynamics, and hierarchies are all embedded in language, and therefore, making it non-neutral. This perspective, thus implies that language becomes a tool for maintaining male domination, especially in institutions like the military and the church.

4.6.4. Linguistic tools of control

In *Le Feu Sous la Soutane*, the primary tools of patriarchal control are the use of authoritative language and the dictation of moral norms. The male characters use rhetoric meant to intimidate and silent others, especially women, in order to establish their dominance. This is especially common amongst the ones whose power is backed by an authority that legitimise it, like the priest and the militiamen

For instance, in the passage where the priest interacts with Spéciose, his words are loaded with a subtle yet overwhelming sense of control. When he speaks, his language leaves little room for resistance, as he couches his authority in religious and moral language that places Spéciose in a submissive role. His inquiry into her happiness in staying with him....:

"Are you happy living with me?"

...though seemingly benign, clearly shows his expectation of obedience. Her response, a murmured "Yes, Padre!" validates her passive acceptance of his dominance. Also, after he has sexually assaulted her, he asks her:

"Spéciose! Tout vabien?" Spéciose is everything alright?

Language also acts as a tool to strengthen male dominance within the community. The radio broadcast from the BBC, which the priest criticises for supporting the rebels, serves as a metaphor for the reinforcement of male authority through media and institutional control of narratives. His dismissal of the British narrative, while subtly enforcing his own viewpoint, suggest at the very least, the priest's belief that outsiders shouldn't question his authority. In trying to justify his action of sexually violating Spéciose and the fact that she does not have any reason to see his actions as wrong he says:

"Mais, aussi, de quoi pourrait-elle se plaindreréellement? Se figurerait-elle que j'allais l'héberger comme ça, sans exiger quelque chose en retour?" what can she really complain of ?did she think I will house her without demanding anything in return?P.9.

In this passage, the prieststructures his expectations as an inevitable transaction. The rhetorical question dismisses the woman's potential grievances for being sexually violated and reduces her to a position where her consent and freedom of choice are irrelevant. The language used here stresses the expectation that women must offer something in return for basic necessities, thus commodifying their existence and stripping them of agency.

This passageopens a societal can of worms in which women are seen as indebted to men, and where patriarchal structures are normalised through these transactional relationships.

4.6.5. Close reading of significant texts

The following passages reveal some of the strong patriarchal language used that perpetuates control and violence in the novel:

“Sa cuisine est excellente et je m'en délecte vivement. Vu la frugalité de mongarde-manger et l'angoisse qui s'étend de cefestin un dimanche de hachis de viande et rizparfumé.”p.9

The priest describes Spéciose's cooking here as 'something that delights him greatly', a clear indication of some sense of entitlement over her domestic labour. His entitlement over her cooking becomes a moral imposition on her to fulfil based on her circumstance. His praise for her compliance through food, framed in almost ritualistic terms, reaffirms how language is channelled to cement her role as a servant.

“Spéciose reste de marbre”p....

In this line, Spéciose is portrayed as emotionally detached, seemingly indifferent to the violence and political turmoil surrounding her. However, the language exposes a profound suggestion of control. Her silence and resignation can be interpreted as a form of self-preservation in the face of overwhelming male dominance. The priest's description of her as "marble" suggests an inability to affect her emotionally and frames her as an object rather than a person and denies her agency.

“Ils raillent, m'insultent et menacent de revenir demain pour 'finir le travail.'”p.43

Here, Séhene showcases the brutal nature of male language among the militiamen and how their threats are not just physical but also verbal. He also paints a toxic masculine culture where power is asserted through intimidation and violence. The phrase “finir le travail” strips away any humanity from the act of violence and reduces it to a mechanical duty carried out by men who see themselves as enforcers of patriarchal order.

“Je n'ai fait là que ce que ferait n'importe quel homme dans les mêmes circonstances.”p.43

Similarly, this statement serves as a justification for the speaker's actions, appealing to a universalized perception of masculinity that excuses or even valorises domination. The phrase "n'importe quel homme" suggests that all men, if given the opportunity, would behave in the same way, thereby normalising cruelty as standardised masculine behaviours and perpetuating cycles of abuse and control upon the weak. The language in this passage generalizes male cruelty as inherent in all men and removes individual accountability which reinforces harmful stereotypes about male behaviour.

“Vousteenez ma vie dans la paume de votre main commel'ontient un œuf.”

The metaphor of holding an egg in one's hand evokes a sense of fragility and control and points to a woman's vulnerability in the face of male dominance and the male character's recognition of this power over the woman's life, sum up patriarchal control in its entirety. The language here emphasizes how the woman's existence is precariously dependent on the man's impulses and exemplifies the extent of her subjugation under patriarchal norms.

4.6.6. Examples of toxic masculinity

Le Feu Sous la Soutane mainly expresses toxic masculinity through language that upholds male authority and subjugates others. The male characters consistently reduce their targets to objects of control or mockery by using words to assert their dominance over women and other males.

1. **Patriarchal Silence and Command:** In the priest's interactions with Spéciose, we see a form of toxic masculine control manifesting through silence and command. The priest's authority is unquestioned, and his commands are subtly infused into everyday interactions. When Spéciose speaks, it is always with esteem to an expectation ingrained by the power structures around her. Even when the priest does not issue direct commands, his position and indeed previous expression of power ensures that his will is carried out.
2. **Verbal Threats as Weapons:** The militiamen's use of language is overtly violent and misogynistic, and illustrates the most explicit forms of toxic masculinity. Their use of language is not just intended at intimidation but to also assert control over the priest and other characters. This typifies the ways in which the male characters in the novel utilise language to intimidate and threaten others so as to maintain their power through disparaging comments and threats.

3. **Religious Authority as Masculine Power:** The priest's language is intricately connected to his role as a religious figure. He invokes religious authority as a way to justify and maintain control and present his dominance as divinely ordained. This is particularly evident in his conversations with women, where his authority is never questioned. His language is subtle yet insidious and wields religious morality as a way to control and suppress dissent, especially from women like Spéciose.

"Sans doutes'estime-t-elle trop belle pour moi, trop distinguée pour un Hutu." P.44

Here, Séhene succinctly captures the speaker projection of his insecurities onto the woman where he frames her perceived attractiveness as a justification for his aggression. The language shows a toxic masculine mindset that views women's beauty and status as threats to male ego which subsequently leads to the assertion of dominance as a means of control. The precedent paints a picture of a toxic masculinity that seeks to diminish women who may be seen as "too good" for certain men. The language used to describe the woman's supposed arrogance attests to the speaker's own inferiority complex, which he compensates for through oppressive behaviour.

"Le silence, les pauses... font partie intégrante de son langage... A-t-elle vraiment le choix?" p.75

Furthermore the reference here, to the woman's silence and pauses as part of her "language" illustrates how male dominance designates and reinterprets women's non-verbal cues to fit a patriarchal narrative. The rhetorical question implies that a woman's silence is not a form of resistance but rather a lack of choice which consequently stripes her of agency and reasserts the argument that women's voices are either ignored or misinterpreted within patriarchal structures. Toxic masculinity in this passage is demonstrated through the dismissal of the woman's freedom of choice, and reduces her silence to mealy submission and a helpless acceptance of her subordination.

Le Feu Sous la Soutane's description of language serves as a critical tool of patriarchal control becomes clear through a close examination of significant passages and show the male characters, particularly those in positions of power, utilizing language to assert dominance, control others, and sustain toxic masculinity. Whether through subtle commands or overt threats, the linguistic tools employed in the novel climaxes the insidious nature of patriarchal power structures and reinforces the male-dominated status quo at every level.

4.7. Institutional complicity in perpetuating violence

4.7.1. Role of religious institutions in supporting oppressive power dynamics

Le Feu Sous la Soutane, presents a profound assessment of religious institutions, particularly the Catholic Church, and their role in enabling oppressive power tensions during the Rwandan genocide. In the novel, the Church is both a symbolic haven and a party to the brutality and moral decline that made the genocide possible. Séhene uses the character of the Catholic priest and his complacent participation in the tragedies around him as premise to criticise the Church for failing to provide a moral compass during a time of crisis. He accuses the Church in the book, of representing the institutional shortcomings that made the Rwandan genocide worse rather than serving as a symbol of optimism and fairness.

The Catholic Church had long before the 1994 genocide, been extremely influential in Rwanda. The church wielded tremendous influence in politics, social organisation, and education. This influence became problematic when it was employed to uphold hierarchical power dynamics rather than being channelled as a means of promoting harmony and peace. The Church is shown in *Le Feu Sous la Soutane*, as a symbol of the systemic oppression that made the genocide possible. Its incapacity to defend the weak points demonstrates a broader culpability in the political and patriarchal power systems that fuelled the disaster.

According to Séhene, the priest lacks moral strength and is unable to uphold the principles of his religion. The priest is completely aware of the atrocities taking place all around him, yet he does little to stop them and uses self-serving excuses and religious clichés to justify his inaction. His involvement can be seen as both institutional and individual; he stands in for the Church's inability to act decisively in the face of the massacre. In this sense, the book implies that religious organisations repeatedly uphold repressive hierarchies and put their own survival and authority ahead of the welfare of their followers.

Religious institutions have long been patriarchal enterprises that cherish the authority and power of men, particularly the Catholic Church. This is made evident in the narrative by the relationship between the priest and Spéciose, a Tutsi woman who takes refuge in his presbytery. Despite his responsibility as her protector, the priest harboured secrets and feelings that Séhene argues 'represents the greater Church's patriarchal conventions'. Spéciose's acquiescence to the priest's authority is consistent with the Church's expectations of women's submissiveness and quiet. In some way, the priest's internal conflict regarding the feelings he harbours for Spéciose accentuates the Church's complicity in the maintenance of a culture that values masculine authority and control.

Le Feu Sous la Soutane portrays the Church's involvement in the genocide as going beyond measly passive complicity. Even as some Church members chose to ignore the violence, others were actively involved in it. The inaction of the priest in the face of escalating violence exposes this broad failure. The failure of the Church to serve as a moral authority during the genocide also reflects in the priests' incapacity to safeguard Spéciose and, by implication, the other vulnerable people under his care. As an institution, the Church turns into a miniature version of the wider societal structures which were based on male authority and control; the patriarchy that made the genocide possible.

4.7.2. Narrative structures of power in the novel

The storyline in *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* is set up to mirror the institutional power that permeates the entire book. The account is told by the priest, whose inner monologue reveals his deep regret and sense of helplessness in the face of the devastation around him. The reader is instantly placed in the head of a person who is seemingly, both a victim and a perpetrator of the repressive power systems that governed Rwandan society at the time thanks to this choice of storytelling.

The external struggle of the genocide symbolises the internal strife of the priest. As the violence outside the presbytery's gates intensified, the priest felt more alone and removed from the reality of the situation. He dwells on his own moral flaws and struggles with his affections for Spéciose as he is distracted from the bigger problems at hand. Here, Séhene tries to show how the Church generally chose to ignore the pain of its members throughout the genocide. The contrivance of the story, which plays up the inner tensions of the priest, laid into how institutional authority typically prioritises its own needs over the needs of the weak.

The language that the characters employ in the book is also a reflection of the dynamics of power. For instance, the priest, in his conversation with Spéciose exposes his intense need for power and dominance. Even though he is supposed to be protecting her, the priest occasionally speaks to Spéciose in a way that shore up his power over her. Their relationship is somewhat, a manifestation of bigger power mechanisms that control language domination. The priest has control over Spéciose due to his position as a religious leader, but the power dynamic is complicated by his internal conflict. His inability to maintain emotional equilibrium in the face of his protecting duties reveals the Church's duplicity in not upholding its teachings during the genocide.

Throughout the book, Séhene's choice of language continuously provided more evidence of the interplay of power. The priest's ideas are primarily expressed in religious terminology, which could be likened to how the Church used its power to defend its silence throughout the genocide. The priest uses his duty and faith as excuses for his inaction, but these arguments ultimately come across as phoney, in the sense that institutional unwillingness of the Church to directly address the atrocities of the genocide can be seen in this use of theological language to excuse passivity.

The novel also employs silence as a narrative device to strengthen its claim on the inherent chemistry in power relations. For instance, Spéciose doesn't say much when she speaks to the priest. Her status as a helpless victim of patriarchy and religious systems that control her relationship with the priest may be inferred from her silence. She is submitting by remaining silent, but she is also, in a way, resisting. By refusing to submit to the priest's authority, Spéciose somehow weakens his hold over her. Silence as a narrative instrument is a perfect summary of the

techniques typically used to preserve power through the suppression of voices, particularly the voices of women and other marginalised individuals.

4.8, *Le Feu sous la Soutane*: A Critical Masculinist Interpretation of Power Relations

4.8.1. Power Dynamics in Dialogue: A Masculinist Analysis

Le Feu sur la Soutane examines masculine dominance and power dynamics mostly through conversation in the novel and considers how institutional and societal power structures are expressed by individuals wielding authority in interpersonal relationships. The book adopts a critical masculinist analysis to show how the male characters in authority channel language as a tool to retain authority and uphold patriarchal institutions in order to impose control over feminine characters.

The prominent character in the book is a Catholic priest, whose discourse is typified by his dual persona as a spiritual guide and an incarnation of institutional patriarchal authority. He is given institutional authority because he is a priest, and in a patriarchal society, this authority is strengthened by his gender. The power dynamics in his relationship with Spéciose, a female character who takes sanctuary in his presbytery, is best illustrated in their conversations. His statements, which are primarily cloaked in religious argot, serve to discreetly enforce his power over her as well as legitimise it. He also feels morally superior because he is a religious leader, and he utilises this to his advantage to control their interactions.

The supporting perspectives on these practices can be found in masculinist theory, which focusses on how societal systems give men excessive power over women. Séhene described the dialogue of the priest in *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* as constantly shifting from paternalistic care to moral judgement. Because women are typically supposed to be in positions of subservience and men should have positions of authority, he addresses Spéciose not as an equal but rather as a subordinate who must submit to his protection and supervision. This clearly reveals an example of a social structure that reinforces male supremacy. Hence, the debate between the priest and his ecclesiastical authority is symbolic of the societal belief in masculine superiority.

A critical masculinist reading also exposes the underlying power struggles within the male characters themselves. The priest's interaction with other male characters, such as Felix and Damascène also reveals their individual competitive desire for dominance that is common in patriarchal structures. In his dialogue with Felix, the priest consistently adopts a condescending tone, attempting to assert his intellectual and moral superiority. The conversations were marked by a subtle power play, in which both men seek to assert their dominance through language. Masculinist theory posits that such power struggles are inherent in patriarchal systems, where men are constantly vying for control and authority over one another (Chester, 2022). This is evident in the priest's interactions with Felix, as he uses language to undermine Felix's sense of self-worth and assert his own dominance.

4.8.2. Gendered Language and Authority: Marginalization and Male Dominance

One of the most striking elements of *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* is the way gendered language is used to marginalize female characters and accentuate male dominance. Because gendered language is an instrument of power, it sustains the patriarchal system by ingraining male dominance and female subservience in common discourse. Séhene aptly captures this most apparently in the conversations between male and female characters, where the men consistently use language to assert their authority and control over women. For example, his conversations with Spéciose, the priest consistently minimised her agency and autonomy with statements that includes overtones of religion and morality, implying that she should submit to and obey him. He presents himself to her as a father figure or protector who must, without seeking her opinion or consent, lead her through the horrors of the Rwandan genocide and in so doing, he uses language that dehumanises her to stamp his authority over her. A rhetoric that largely reaffirms the social norm that women need male protection and authority because they are weaker and more vulnerable than men.

Masculinist theory makes it easier to analyse the manner in which language, as used by the priest, upholds power disparities. Gendered vocabulary in *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* echoes social norms as well as deliberately debases female characters. When the priest speaks to Spéciose in a controlling and paternalistic manner, it weakens her sense of agency and encourages her to believe that she is dependent on him for survival. This is further compounded by the priest's internal conflicts with his own cravings, which slightly affect how he interacts with Spéciose. His interactions with her mirror social norms and also reveal his own issues with putting his emotions in check and maintaining control over his authority.

In addition, the novel emphasised the manner in which religious language that has historically been engineered and dominated by men, is channelled as a tool to justify and maintains male superiority. The priest constantly refers to Catholic doctrine and precepts, in his interactions with Spéciose and naturally positions himself as the judge of morality. The use of religious language serves to legitimise his authority over her and marginalise her through the portrayal of her actions and decisions as requiring his approval. The idea that men, especially those in positions of religious authority, have the right to govern women's behaviour and choices is thus appealed to when using religious discourse as a tool of patriarchal control.

The gendered language in the novel beyond silencing women, also serves to fortify the notion of male to male superiority. This is typified by the priest's interactions with other male characters, such as Felix and Damascène, where language of dominance and competition takes pre-eminence. In these conversations, the priest consistently speaks in a way that asserts his intellectual and moral superiority, perhaps in an attempt to buttress a patriarchal belief in male authority. This language echoes a societal norm and the means through which it is being perpetuated. The male characters in *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* typically uphold the patriarchal systems that control their relationships with both men and women by utilising language to demonstrate their authority.

4.9. Findings

4.9.1. Linguistic and Thematic Analysis of *Le Feu Sous la Soutane*

The study has uncovered the interconnection between language, power, and violence, especially as it relates to patriarchal systems by way of a critical masculinist reading of *Le Feu Sous la Soutane*. The novel's language, particularly in the dialogue of its male characters, serves as a mechanism to enforce dominance and control over female characters and reveals how deeply gender hierarchies are imbedded in both personal and institutional interactions.

The study, in its conclusion holds that language is used as a weapon to uphold patriarchal power structures. This is primarily achieved through the influence that masculine characters have over religion and morality. The priest who plays a pivotal role in the story, uses religious discourse, under the pretence of moral goodness, to establish his authority over Spéciose, the female character. His tone of authority and paternalism betrays an involuntary submission to social conventions that cast men as guardians and judges of women's conduct while the female characters are treated as inferior and have to submit to male dominance. *Le Feu sur la Soutane* thus, illustrates how language functions as a tool of masculine authority, especially within religious and patriarchal systems.

In addition. The analysis also demonstrates the use of silence as a resistance tactic as well as a means of control. For instance, Spéciose remained silent throughout her conversations with the priest, which may be interpreted as symbolic of how patriarchal discourse occasionally silences women and robs them of their agency. Nevertheless, her unwillingness to submit to the priest's authority, also shows a subdued kind of resistance that questions the power structures that sums up their connection. The dual function of silence in the book highlights the distinctive but crucial moments of resistance that upend the existing quo even under oppressive regimes while it also demonstrates the complexity of the power dynamics as captured by Séhene in the book.

Finally, the analysis shows that language, beyond simply just reflecting societal norms also actively promotes them. Men continuously compete with one another for supremacy. In the book, the use of aggressive and forceful language by the male characters in their dealings with one another serves to fortify already existing patriarchal hierarchical structures. This struggle for dominance is demonstrated for instance in the interaction between the priest and other male characters, where words are used as weapons to establish moral and intellectual superiority. In this setting, *Le Feu sur la Soutane* captures the ways in which patriarchal language contributes to violence against women and, to a large extent, even inside the structures of male dominance.

4.9.2. Institutional and Cultural Reinforcement: Patriarchal Language and Perpetuation of Violence

One of the most important conclusions drawn from this study of *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* is the way institutional frameworks, particularly religious ones, are used to reinforce patriarchal discourse. The priests' language use serves as a metaphor for how religious organisations support and condone patriarchal power structures. His discourse reveals a confusion between male dominance and religious authority, as he justifies his control over Spéciose with moral discourse and religious teachings. In the book, religious organizations—primarily the Catholic Church—serve as pillars of patriarchy and justify male dominance by their doctrine and behaviour. The priest leverages his moral authority over Spéciose as a religious leader to his benefit. This authority is both personal and institutional, since the teachings of the church on morality, gender roles, and authority are predominantly inherently patriarchal.

The cultural standards of the novel's setting further support the institutional fortification of patriarchal language. *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* portrays a very patriarchal Rwandan society, with gender roles that emphasise women's subordination to men. The book highlights the ways in which males are primarily expected to exert control over women by their words and deeds, and how cultural norms surrounding gender and power are ingrained in common language. This cultural environment fertilizes the priest's authority, as he doubles as both a figure of religious power and a product of a patriarchal society that values male dominance.

Additionally, the patriarchal language in *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* enables violence through its normalisation of the subjugation of women. The priest's despotic language, that frames his control over Spéciose as a form of protection, obscures the inherent violence in their relationship. His use of religious and moral language justifies his actions, and allows him to retain control while equally appearing to act in Spéciose's best interest. However, this typifies the traditional patriarchal norms as pointed out by Tanyag (2022) that patriarchal institutions have historically framed male dominance as protective or benevolent to mask the coercion and control at the heart of these power dynamics. Moreover, the novel clearly demonstrates how patriarchal language within institutions affects women and also enables violence even among men. The competitive dialogue between male characters, particularly the priest and Felix, denotes that patriarchal structures create hierarchies even within male relationships. These power struggles are predominantly violent, whilst men use language to assert their dominance over one another. This part of the novel draws attention to the way patriarchal institutions enable violence and control at all levels and intensifies gender hierarchies as well as hierarchical relationships among men.

4.10. Discussion

4.10.1. Implications and Challenges to Patriarchal Authority

Benjamin Séhene's *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* presents a microcosmic reflection of the power dynamics that exist within real-world patriarchal systems, particularly those supported by religious institutions. The novel's account of the priest abusing his position of authority, which is supported by religious authority, corresponds to how patriarchal societies organise gender interactions around dominance and control, and how these constants are frequently established through law, culture, and religion.

One major implication for real-world power structures is the setting of male dominance as a universal standard through religious and cultural legitimisation. Just as the priest in the novel invokes religious authority to justify his

actions, patriarchal systems worldwide consistently draw upon cultural and religious doctrines to sustain gender inequality. In many societies, religious texts and interpretations are used to uphold male superiority and dictate to women their supposed roles as subordinate to men (Ahmed, 2019). This institutionalised oppression is particularly ingrained within extremely religious communities, where male figures of authority, such as priests, imams, and pastors, have disproportionate influence over the lives and decisions of women. These power dynamics extends beyond religious settings into social and political spheres and create a system in which male dominance is deeply ingrained and difficult to challenge.

Séhene's narration shows how patriarchal language becomes a tool of control, especially in religious discourse. Chester (2022) echoes these sentiments in his submission that the manipulation of religious and moral discourse has historically been employed in real-world settings to uphold patriarchal hierarchies. For example, in many cultures, women's roles are circumscribed by religious laws that dictate everything from their dress to their domestic responsibilities, and are often reinforced by patriarchal interpretations of sacred texts (Daybell et al., 2021). Bennoune (2024) explains this further that institutional control manifests in various forms of gender-based violence, such as honor killings, domestic abuse, and forced marriages, which are often justified or excused through appeals to tradition and religion.

Furthermore, the novel depicts language as a means of domination and as a reflection of the broader societal norm of gendered communication. Alariste's (2015) position that language itself is gendered in many patriarchal societies with men mostly using assertive, commanding tones to exert control, while women are socialized to be more passive and compliant in their speech further asserts this. This disparity in linguistic power breeds inequalities in both public and private spheres, where men are perceived as natural leaders and decision-makers, and women are relegated to the background and their voices marginalised. This is evident in the practical relegation of women in politics, business, and other areas where leadership is male-dominated (Gillard & Okonjo-Iweala, 2022).

4.10.2. Challenges to Patriarchal Authority

While *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* exposes the subtle ways in which patriarchal authority is sustained, it also offers a powerful critique of these structures. The novel's portrayal of Spéciose's silent resistance to the priest's control suggests that even in the most oppressive systems, there are moments of defiance that challenge the status quo. This is consistent with general feminist and masculinist assessments of patriarchy, which argue that even as these systems are deeply entrenched, they are not immutable.

One major challenge to patriarchal authority presented in the novel is the recognition that institutional power is not absolute. For instance, it reckons that the priest's control over Spéciose, may have been potent, but was not without its limitations. Spéciose's refusal to engage with the priest's moralising discourse indicates that patriarchal power can be resisted, even in subtle ways. From a practical viewpoint, this supports the growing global movement for gender equality that has seen significant strides in recent years, particularly in challenging the institutional foundations of patriarchy (Fernández et al., 2021).

The novel also unearths the role of religion in upholding patriarchy, echoing real-world conversations around the complicity of religious institutions in enabling gendered violence. Religious institutions have consistently been slow to address issues of gender inequality and many have even actively resisted changes that would grant women greater freedom and authority within their communities (Lamb & Kougiali, 2024). Mannish (2024) argues that these structures are increasingly being challenged by feminist and progressive movements who are pushing for reforms within religious institutions to allow for greater gender equality. For example, the ordination of women in certain Christian denominations especially the Pentecostal churches and the growing acceptance of female religious leaders even in some Muslim communities is indicative of significant progress in the resistance against traditional patriarchal order.

Furthermore, *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* in its attempt to expose the fragility of male authority, appraises the patriarchal notion of male superiority. For instance, the novel reveals that the power exhibited by the priest is ultimately hollow,

as it is contingent on his ability to control others. His desire for domination exposes both his own fears and the flaws in patriarchal power structures on a wider scale. To further emphasise this, Mahmoudi et al. (2023) argues compellingly that patriarchal power systems promote restricted and harmful notions of masculinity that lay emphasis on dominance, control, and emotional repression, which negatively impacts both men and women.

The urgent need to dismantle these harmful traditions in many nations has culminated into initiatives that promotes healthier and more egalitarian definitions of masculinity that eliminates violence and power as markers of male identity. These movements which question the validity of male domination and advocate for a more equitable and inclusive society undercuts the fundamental foundations of patriarchal dominance.

5. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The implications of this research extend beyond literary critique to broader societal concerns. It exposes the patriarchal authority within cultural and institutional frameworks, particularly through religious institutions and the depth to which gender inequality is entrenched through language. This observation has practical relevance, as it accentuates the need for reform that can challenge the legitimisation of male dominance within these systems. The study also emphasizes the transformative potential of literature in addressing social justice issues and illustrate the crucial role that narratives like Séhene's in critiquing and disrupting oppressive power structures. The research further inspires marginalized voices through its clear revelation of subtle forms of resistance within the text, to sort ways of challenging and subverting entrenched norms, even in constrained environments.

The study contributes significantly to the discourse on gender, power, and justice though its examination of language operating as a tool of control in Benjamin Séhene's *Le Feu Sous la Soutane*. it adopts a critical masculinist approach to capture the ways in which patriarchal language is employed to sustain and substantiate dominance, particularly in institutional and interpersonal relations. The study also draws attention to how patriarchal structures leverage authority to silence victims and normalize gendered violence with a particular focus on the complicity of religious institutions. This analysis positions the work within the general tradition of post-colonial African literature, which customarily questions the intersections of power, gender, and cultural institutions. Furthermore, the application of a masculinist perspective enriches existing scholarship as it calls attention to the impact of patriarchal norms on both male dominance and toxic masculinity and offers fresh assessments of the systemic roots of these dynamics.

Additionally, the study provides a framework for the analysis of language, power, and control, making it a valuable resource for educators and policy-maker. Its findings also resonate with ongoing global action towards gender equality and offers bright perspectives on undoing these systems of oppression while helping to promote societal norms that are equally considerate of everyone's feelings. The study bridges the gap between literary analysis and practical applications and advocates for a more equitable future through its comprehensive critique.

6. CONCLUSION

Benjamin Séhene's *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* in offering a compelling examination of how language, religion, and cultural traditions uphold patriarchal control, questions the predictability of these power relations. The novel's critique of religion and institutional culpability in the continuation of violence during the genocide, strikes a chord with the antipatriarchal systems movements and advance gender equality. The story implies through its portrayal of covert and overt forms of opposition that patriarchal control is not unbeatable even as it may have been firmly established. This message is especially pertinent in a society where efforts to promote a more just and equitable future and challenge the dominance of patriarchal institutions are driving a growing movement towards gender equality.

The bigger societal concerns that contributed to the Rwandan genocide were also explored in *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* using the priest's inner agony as a microcosm, while also placing itself within a delicate cultural and religious

environment. A persuasive contemplation of the relationship between violence, control, and power in Rwandan society during the genocide can be drawn from Séhene's analysis of religious hypocrisy and patriarchal language. The book demonstrates from this vantage point that linguistic and institutional instruments of control contribute to the continuation of oppression and violence, in both private spheres of interpersonal relationships and society at large.

The findings show very important ways in which patriarchal rhetoric is employed in institutional and cultural contexts to justify violence. Religious organisations in particular, were shown to use religious language as a powerful instrument to uphold male supremacy, which is vital in preserving gender hierarchies. These processes are however, aggravated by societal norms surrounding gender and power, which are necessary elements of masculine dominance and normalisation of violence and control. *Le Feu Sous la Soutane* further reveals the manner in which language is used as a weapon to uphold patriarchal power systems in interpersonal interactions as well as at institutional level. In general, Benjamin Séhene offers a searing assessment of the role of religious institutions in perpetuating oppressive power dynamics. Séhene's emphasis on the failure of the Catholic Church, as an institution, to protect the weak during the Rwandan genocide through the priest's character sums up the novel's narrative framework. The Church's involvement in the atrocities, whether it is direct involvement or passive indifference, is, to a large extent, symptomatic of the socio-cultural paradigms that made the genocide possible. The novel's exploration of power, control, and oppression within religious and patriarchal institutions pose as a powerful commentary on the connection of faith, authority, and violence.

7. FUNDING

"This research paper received no internal or external funding"

ORCID

Mabel Oriakpono  <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-5777-1707>

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. (2021). *Complaint!*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1v7zdh2>
- Bartelink, B., Longman, C., & Bradley, T. (2022). Gender, religion and harm: Conceptual and methodological reflections. In B. Bartelink, C. Longman, & T. Bradley (Eds.), *Religion and gender-based violence: Global and local responses to harmful practices* (pp. 1–25). Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003246046-1>
- Alatraste, L. (2015). The myths of Mars and Venus: Do men and women really speak different languages? *Language and Psychoanalysis*, 4(1).
- Flood, M. (2019). *Engaging men and boys in violence prevention*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-44208-6>
- Mbembe, A. (2019). *Necropolitics*. Duke University Press.
- McDoom, O. S. (2021). *The path to genocide in Rwanda: Security, opportunity, and authority in an ethnocratic state*. Cambridge University Press.
- Messerschmidt, J. W. (2018). *Hegemonic masculinity: Formulation, reformulation, and amplification*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Aiseng, K. (2022). Linguistic dominance and translanguaging: Language issues in *Generations: The Legacy*. *Frontiers in Communication*, 7, Article 880452. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2022.880452>
- Bennoune, K. (2024). International obligation to counter gender apartheid in Afghanistan. *Feminist Dissent*, 7, 14–102. <https://doi.org/10.31273/fd.n7.2023.1506>
- Chester, S. (2022). Dominance, marginality, and subversion in French (post)colonial discourse. https://doi.org/10.31390/gradschool_disstheses.5173

- Daybell, J., Burke, V., Norrhem, S., Wiesner-Hanks, M., McShane, A., De Vries, J., Dinan, S., Nelson, K., Osherow, M., Scavenius, M., Andersen, E., Erlig, E. P. U., Jacobsen, G., Boswell, C., & Castiglione, C. (2021). Challenging women's agency and activism in early modernity. In *Amsterdam University Press eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048550937>
- Fernández, R., Isakova, A., Luna, F., & Rambousek, B. (2021). *Gender equality and inclusive growth*. International Monetary Fund.
- Gillard, J., & Okonjo-Iweala, N. (2022). *Women and leadership: Real lives, real lessons*. MIT Press.
- Graff, A., & Korolczuk, E. (2021). *Anti-gender politics in the populist moment*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003133520>
- Icaza, R. (2021). Decolonial feminism and global politics: Border thinking and vulnerability as a knowing otherwise. In *British Academy eBooks* (pp. 43–59). <https://doi.org/10.5871/bacad/9780197266830.003.0003>
- Lamb, R., & Kougiali, Z. G. (2024). Women and shame: Narratives of recovery from alcohol dependence. *Psychology and Health*, 1–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08870446.2024.2352191>
- Mahmoudi, H., Parpart, J. L., & Seaman, K. (2023). *Women and inequality in a changing world*. Routledge eBooks. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003281382>
- Mannish, S. (2024). Tracking identity in minority language policy: A reflexive approach to hybrid concepts in the language sciences. *Language Sciences*, 104, 101642. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2024.101642>
- O'Shea, B., Feicht, R., Brown, M., & Numer, M. (2024). Rethinking sexual violence labels: Exploring the impact of "victim" and "survivor" discourse. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 15(1), Article 2296329. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20008066.2023.2296329>
- Peltola, M., & Phoenix, A. (2022). *Nuancing young masculinities: Helsinki boys' intersectional relationships in new times*. <https://doi.org/10.33134/hup-16>
- Rose, K. (2020). Sexual violence, traumatic memory, and speculative fiction as action. *Dignity: A Journal of Analysis of Exploitation and Violence*, 5(1), Article 5. <https://doi.org/10.23860/dignity.2020.05.01.05>
- Sorli, M. (2020). Feminism and gender-neutral language: Between systems and effects. *Šolsko polje*, 31(5–6), 103–120. [https://doi.org/10.32320/1581-6044.31\(5-6\)103-120](https://doi.org/10.32320/1581-6044.31(5-6)103-120)
- Tanyag, M. (2022). A murderous plague: State hypermasculinity, COVID-19, and atrocity prevention in the Philippines. *Global Responsibility to Protect*, 14(4), 432–461. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1875984x-20220014>
- Van Klinken, A. (2020). Religion in African literature: Representation, critique and imagination. *Religion Compass*, 14(3), Article e12381. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12381>