ABSTRACT

“THAT WHICH WE ARE NOT”: EUROPE AND THE REPRESENTATION OF GENDER IN NOVELS BY AFRICAN WOMEN WRITERS

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The concept of the Other has always played an important role in the establishment of a culture’s values and identity, of which gender definitions and relations constitute an essential part. Today’s Europe is no exception to that process and even after colonialism has officially come to an end, the African continent still figures prominently as the European « Other » at the onset of the twenty-first century. The image of this « Otherness » is partially constructed in Europe itself, but also by African artists, and through publishing policies which are, for the most part, politically charged, literature becomes an important means of its creation and distribution. The novels of Buchi Emecheta from Nigeria, Calixthe Beyala from Cameroon and Amma Darko from Ghana are all published in Europe and are among the most widely read and most successful texts by African women writers in their countries of publication (Great Britain, France and Germany respectively). Through the analysis and comparison of the presentation of gender issues in works by Emecheta, Beyala and Darko, we shall investigate the images of African women and men that contemporary Europe fosters through its publication policies. These images participate in the construction of gender definitions and relations in Europe.