

BOLA, SOLANGE AMANY. *Lianes de violence*. L'Harmattan, 2024. ISBN 978-2-336-43544-2. Pp. 101.

For readers concerned with gender equality, the stories in this book disturb and prompt inquiry. Four accounts, set in Mali, Africa, feature women victimized by men supported by a patriarchal and legal system that depreciates women. Malian men are considered superior to women who are legally bound to be subordinate to their husbands. Women are also constrained by inequalities and cultural values that may affect their mental and physical health and limit their education. The first story, "Anne Béatrice," presents a pregnant young woman, living in fear of her husband, yet trying to hide his angry, pugnacious nature from friends. The narrator reveals the inner thoughts and conflicts of both characters. Roland drinks heavily, makes imaginary accusations, exercises controlling behavior, vents frustrations upon her in vicious beatings despite her condition, once dousing her with scalding hot water. Finding solutions is quite daunting, as Mali does not have laws against partner violence, a common occurrence. In "Une confession de plus," we listen to a young woman's confession to a priest. She admits to stealing a baby because she is infertile. The stolen baby dies. Her husband, influenced by his mother, divorces her because she cannot produce a child. The stigma of sterility defines a woman and may cause psychological disturbances. "Ahou Clémentine" offers another account of a young woman, lacking education, married to an unstable man who lost his job. Her husband, Étienne, often inebriated, humiliates and beats Ahou even publicly. Indignities accrue from Étienne who has joined thieves, later resorting to occult practices and committing murder, with circumstantial evidence pointing to an innocent Ahou. The last story, "Visages d'Ange," features a male narrator who tells of Lana, who has a beautiful smile. She is the daughter of his employer. While working at the sawmill, he notices his employer staring intently at the river where his daughter, Lana, has gone to bathe. His employer masturbates while studying her. The young employee is sickened by all he witnessed. Returning home, he vomits; his father advises him to forget it all and leave matters alone. Lana has been deprived of education, suffered the pain of excision, and is confined to the home. These events enable her father's exclusive control of her life. The stories are fast-paced; settings are given cursory attention. Relentlessly the author provides the details of every case, strongly inducing a consensus that women—battered, abused, or demeaned—need legal recognition as well as programs of assistance. Characters are minimally drawn with essentials that support the plot and move it along. Some comparisons and contrasts in education and socioeconomic status are provided, e.g. Anne Béatrice versus Ahou Clémentine. A strong underlying theme of women as victims emerges in this collection, an absorbing page-turner of consciousness-raising. These profiles of abuse against women in Mali do not fully disclose each tale's total content nor

conclusion, both of which generate curiosity in a reader. The stories are short, testify to realities in French-speaking Mali, and hold potential for lively discussion in advanced French classes.

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