

*“Breaking the Mold”*

A Media Kit for M.H.A. Menondji,  
Author of  
*Beyond Those Hills: an Officer and a Lady*

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**I- AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY (from [www.mhamenondji.com](http://www.mhamenondji.com))**



M.H.A. Menondji was born in Cotonou, Benin in 1976.

The daughter of former political refugees, Ms. Menondji spent her first years between Cote d' Ivoire, Benin and France. She then enrolled in the University of Orleans School of Law, France, at age seventeen. One of the youngest students of her class, she was encouraged to pursue a brief military career and join the French Navy for two years as an officer to strengthen her International Relations credentials. She settled for a move to exciting Paris instead, attended the University of La Sorbonne and graduated with a Licentiate in International Law.

If her decision turned her into what she describes as a failed French sailor, her fascination with the military never faltered, and the first chapter of a three-hundred-and-forty-page novel was completed soon after, in French. The work was titled "*Au-Dela des Collines*" (Beyond The Hills).

A strong desire to study humanitarian law and refugee protection prompted her to migrate to the United States in 1999. A year dedicated to learning the intricacies of the English language facilitated her transfer to Whittier College, CA from where she obtained a B.A. in Political

Science with an emphasis on Human Rights. She was inducted into *Pi Sigma Alpha*, the National Political Science Honor Society shortly thereafter.

Ms. Menondji spent her post-college years writing free-lance for women (AMINA Magazine, France) and local news publications. She also translated "*Au-Dela des Collines*" in English, a language she learned as a third, which makes *Beyond Those Hills: an Officer and a Lady*, a fourteen-year labor of passion...

Her only ambition in regards to writing is to 'break the mold', instill positive multiculturalism in the fount of creativity from which most African writers have drawn over the years. She believes globalization both entitles and enables today's writers to focus on subject matters other than the mere description of familiar cultural settings. She hopes her background will teach her to not just write in different languages but also 'write in different cultures.'

Ms. Menondji lives in Los Angeles, where she writes and works.

## II- BEYOND THOSE HILLS: OLD CONCEPT, NEW PERSPECTIVE

A literary agent recently commented on the uniqueness of *Beyond Those Hills: an Officer and a Lady* by stating that “there aren’t many books that combine military themes with romantic suspense.” Although very flattering, the statement is not accurate as there is at least one author who made mixing romance and military themes a specialty (Susan Brockmann). However *Beyond Those Hills* tackles this concept differently and here is how: it is a meticulously documented military drama which might appeal to women and men keen to discover a female perspective on the military. Unlike the works of Tom Clancy, Chuck Pfarrer or even Susan Brockmann, whom Ms. Menondji admires, it depicts three years in the life of an actual female soldier, not merely a woman involved in the life of men in uniform, as it had been the case in military drama published to date. There are currently too many American women on battlefields or others involved in one way or another in the military-some of whom have given the author useful insight- for a female in the military to be ignored by a broad audience.

The novel has been read by both male and female test readers. It is told through the perspectives of one female character and two male protagonists, making it a gender-neutral read.

### *Synopsis*

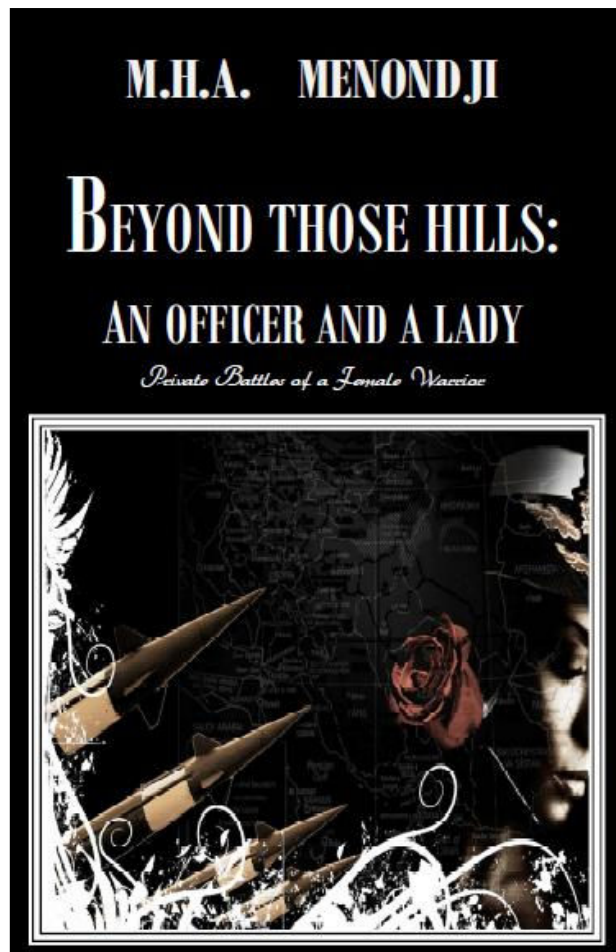
Entrusted with the well being of his late best friend’s daughter, Laura, former C.I.A. operative Jim Marshall had kept his promise well beyond what was expected of him. Now an accomplished young woman, Laura Armitage uses Marshall’s connections to become an unlikely candidate to an elite US Navy unit. A tragedy still shadowing her days, Lieutenant Armitage fights her way through discrimination, humiliation, and the cover-ups of the Iran-contras scandal. Forced into a status of secrecy, she stands her ground through every mission from the Middle East to the Arctic Circle, wondering if her tenacity and integrity will be enough to win over her teammates and her contemptuous commanding officer, Lieutenant T.J. Wilkins. Amidst gunfights, the power struggle against then USSR and the rise of terrorism on the world scene are:

- the confusion of a woman in uniform (Laura) who eyes compromise as she tries to assess the value of her allegiance to the flag, the feelings she nurtures for the two men in her life and her relationship with the woman Jim has loved: her own mother;
- the dilemma of a man (Jim) torn between loyalty to a dead friend, whose widow he had once loved, and acknowledging a new set of feelings for Laura, a woman he has raised as a daughter;
- the awakening of a disillusioned veteran officer (Wilkins), who lets his subsequent affair with a subordinate (Laura) compromise his judgment on the field and question his own values.

*Beyond Those Hills: an Officer and a Lady* is a multifaceted self-discovery journey. It is a compelling tale of redemption woven into the private battles of a female warrior.

### III- BOOK INFORMATION

- TITLE: *Beyond Those Hills: an Officer and a Lady* (Private Battles of a Female Warrior)
- AUTHOR: M.H.A. Menondji
- PUBLISHER: Daring to Dream Publishing
- DISTRIBUTOR: Amazon/CreateSpace
- ISBN: 1-4414-8530-9
- NUMBER OF PAGES: 400
- SIZE: 8.5 x 5.5 – 1” spine - US Trade paperback
- BAR CODED: Yes
- PRICE: \$14.95



#### IV- PRESS RELEASE

**Press Release (April 15, 2009)**

**“Three Continents, Four Countries, Many Cultures and the Sum of it All: A Novel”  
Writer wants to Break the Mold and Explore Multiculturalism**

With an economy on the brink of collapse, a housing and credit crisis virtually forcing entire families to cross the thin border to poverty, America no longer is your father's country, the land of opportunities that had fed the imagination of many for two hundred years. Yet some reach our shores full of dreams and aspirations, a yearning to succeed guiding them through an immigrant's life hurdles.

M.H.A. Menondji was one of the determined few.

An African native with degrees from French and American schools, Ms. Menondji was born in Cotonou, Benin in 1976. Daughter of former political prisoners and refugees, she spent her first years between Cote d'Ivoire, Benin and France. A passionate of Human Rights advocacy and humanitarian issues, she migrated to the United States a decade ago from the City of Lights to further her academic training, alone and with a mere \$50 in her wallet to survive two weeks in New York.

If her lone move to America is any indication, Ms. Menondji was never interested in waiting for life to happen. Her academic career began when she enrolled in the University of Orléans School of Law, France at age seventeen. She then attended the University of La Sorbonne in Paris, from where she graduated with a Licentiate in International Law. Having dedicated a year to learning the intricacies of the English language in an ESL school in Los Angeles, she lobbied for her transfer in Whittier College, CA and obtained a B.A. in Political Science with an emphasis on Human Rights.

Acculturation in a country of adoption is arduous; cultural shock, language barriers, social isolation and depression often threaten to crush one's determination and drive. Ms. Menondji admits to have used writing and the research associated with the creative process as means to remain focused, hopeful in difficult times.

A self-described failed French sailor and a proud product of multiculturalism, she took on the challenge of writing in a language she learned as a third while a full-time, self-supporting student. Her fascination with the US military translated into the drafting of what would become her first of two novels, *Beyond Those Hills: an Officer and a Lady*. This four-hundred-page piece is a meticulously documented military drama set in the mid-1980s. It features three characters - a young, half-caucasian, half-hispanic, blue-blooded female US Navy officer, her wealthy but troubled mentor/Pygmalion and her contemptuous, booze-loving, Vietnam veteran commanding officer- entangled in an emotional triangle in the wake of the Iran-*contras* scandal. The novel is deemed a showcase of accelerated linguistic and cultural assimilation. Its young author simply describes it as the anti-thesis of what the publishing world expects from a writer of African descent: a decidedly “out-of-Africa” story. It is her opportunity to break the mold.

*Beyond Those Hills: an Officer and a Lady* is scheduled for release on May 8, and will be available on Amazon.com as well as in select bookstores. Visit [www.mhamenondji.com](http://www.mhamenondji.com) or [www.whoislauraarmtage.com](http://www.whoislauraarmtage.com) for more information.

## V- FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**1. *What drives you as a writer?***

Having a story worth telling, whether fictional or real.

**2. *Where does your interest in the military come from?***

Not sure. Blame it on my past as a tom-boy.

**3. *Why did you leave France to live in the US?***

For the opportunity to be more than I thought I could, had I stay in France or even in Benin. It's the classic story of a go-getter with an agenda full of dreams to achieve.

**4. *Why write a military drama?***

For the same reason I wear red one day, and green the next: it just happened to be what took my fancy at the time. I don't mean to make it a specialty and want to diversify my work as much as research allows.

**5. *Isn't the concept of your story the same as that 1997 movie with Demi Moore "G.I. Jane"? What do you say to detractors?***

Isn't the concept of the first *Rocky* movie the same as *Raging Bull*, an American boxer of Italian ancestry taking on challenges in and out of the ring? One concept, two completely different stories and if I recall, both Oscar-winning feature films.

**6. *Why do you see African writers as typecast by the publishing industry?***

I realized having *Beyond Those Hills* distributed by a major publisher would be next to impossible after a third agent told me they liked it but would take on anything European or better yet, African I would write. African writers, and women more specifically are expected to write about war, being victims of male-dominated societies, genocide and any other topic that vindicates how Africa is portrayed by the US media. Anything validating the image of a war-torn, poverty-stricken continent is worth looking at, no matter how poorly written. If I do believe many of those stories need to be told, an entire industry cannot disregard the potential others bring. It would be like expecting Jewish writers to limit their work to stories about the Holocaust. Try to think outside the box and someone will kindly remind you where it is...

**7. *How do you think multiculturalism impacts or shapes a writer's work?***

Multiculturalism and its by-product, globalization truly are modern-day muses. They not only enable but entitle today's writers to wander outside the boundaries and the comfort of their own culture. With information traveling at the speed of a click, a Mongolian monk could write a very credible story about a Kenyan schoolgirl and convince an Australian book buyer to read it. Multiculturalism deepens a writer's creativity in ways nothing else can.

**8. *What will your next project be?***

I am currently working on a non-fiction challenging the concept of the American Dream and how impossible to achieve it has become for immigrants. The conclusion to *Beyond Those Hills* will be next... I'm not done with that Armitage girl.