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**Polygamy and Sisterhood in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of
Motherhood* (1979) and Mariama Ba's *So Long a
Letter* (1981): A Comparative Study**

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, especially my dearest husband Y.IKHLEF, friends, and to all students of English Department.

Hadjira

I dedicate this work to the sake of Allah. My special dedication to my grandmother Ben Chabane Ghenima may she rest in peace. A special feeling of gratitude to my loving parents HADJ AMAR Samia and OUDJOURI Mouloud who never failed to give me financial and moral support. To my brother Hillel and my sister Farah who encouraged me. All respects are for the teachers of English department.

Nadjma

Abstract

This dissertation is a comparative study between Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1981) in terms of 'Polygamy' and 'Sisterhood'. To achieve our objective, we have borrowed some concepts from Alice Walker's theory of 'Womanism', *In Search of our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983). Our discussion is made up of two chapters. In the first chapter, we have discussed 'Polygamy'. Then, we have shown men's authority over women in patriarchal communities. In the second chapter, we have explored sisterhood as a means of freedom for African women to fight for liberation and justice against this system of oppression. They give voice to their female characters in order to demonstrate the injustice that women face in Nigerian and Senegalese societies. Throughout the analyses of Buchi Emecheta's and Mariama Ba's works, we have concluded that there are many similarities between *The Joys of Motherhood* and *So Long a Letter*. In both novels, the institutions of polygamy empower men to rule their women who take sisterhood for liberation.

Key Words: Polygamy, Sisterhood, Womanism, Discrimination, Oppression, African women, African societies.

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I-Introduction

The present dissertation aims to study Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1981). This study explores the issues of 'Polygamy' and 'Sisterhood'. In order to better develop our themes, we have decided to rely on Alice Walker's theory of 'Womanism' which describes women's liberation as neglected and marginalized because black women are oppressed by the African men. Polygamy is a marriage in which a spouse of any gender can have multiple partners. The offense of having more than one partner, especially more than two spouses at the same time. 'Polyandry' is a type of polygamy. It is the practice of having more than husband or male partner a time, that is to say, a woman is married to several men. Polygamy is common practice, especially in African communities where a man can marry another woman at any time. According to Alice Walker, polygamous marriage in African society takes place in the rural regions and with low educated people. Polygamous men are masters and they have power in their families. They can have a new wife at any time.¹

'Sisterhood' is a unique bond between women who share the same conditions, experiences and concerns. Alice Walker emphasizes the importance of the presence of a strong women community for the empowerment and the emancipation of black women through creating a community of sisters.² The two novels are a mirror picture of reality that African women suffer from masculine oppression and domination. Thus, women want to overcome the hardships of polygamous life and become independent by escaping the forces that subjugate them.

Senegal and Nigeria are African countries where the two novels under discussion are set. In *Joys of Motherhood*, Buchi Emecheta shares the expectations of women living in a society where polygamy is the traditional way of life for Ibo people. In a patriarchal society, the importance of women is determined by their relationship to men. In *So Long a Letter*,

Mariama Ba tells the story of a woman married to a polygamous man. Furthermore, she highlights the authority of men over their wives and how women are marginalized in African societies. Both novels illustrate how women, especially the protagonists, suffer from many injustices at the hands of male members of their communities. Both authors, Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Ba belong to different societies (Nigeria and Senegal) and have the same purpose which is the liberation of women from gender oppression. However, they want to prove their identity within their societies by giving them voice.

1-Review of the Literature

The Joys of Motherhood (1979) and *So Long a Letter* (1981) have attracted critics' attention and received interesting criticism on various topics. To begin with, Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* is the centre for many critics among them Barbara Christian. In her book *Black Feminist Criticism* (1985), she argues that the protagonist, Nnu Ego, lives in a society where women's identity is tied to their relationships with men³. Indeed, Barbara Christian points that the voice of the heroine, Nnu Ego, is completely suppressed because she is forced to obey both her father and husband. In other terms, Nnu Ego tries to satisfy her father (Agbadi) and even her father (Nnaife) because in the Ibo patriarchal society women's respect is gained according to their relation with man⁴.

Another critic, Nfah-Abbenyi, in her book *Gender in African Women's Writing* (1997) states that female's sexual pleasure are neglected within polygamous system⁵. For instance, Agbadi ignores his wives for years. They can only get one yam per day. When Agbadi's wives wish to hear him, he is with his mistress, Ona⁶. The statement underscores the extent to which women are sexually oppressed in African societies.

Another critic who has reviewed Emecheta's work is Nyanhongo Mazvita Mollin. Nyanhongo in his *Gender Oppression and Possibilities of Empowerment* (2011) claims that

there are many forms of male domination in *The Joys of Motherhood*, some of which stem from the fact that women in African societies have no choices. Not only do they have to obey men in everything, but they also do not have the freedom to choose a husband. So women do not make their decisions⁷. For instance, Nnu Ego's father (Agbadi) chooses Amatoukwu as her first husband and then Nnaife as the second. Here Nyanhongo wants to clarify the true image of men's authority.

Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* also has received many criticisms. To start with, Davies Carole in the article *Marriage, Tradition and Woman's Pursuit of Happiness in the Novels of Mariama Ba* (1986) supports Mariama Ba who is convinced that happiness and not just women's happiness, but men's as well, a whole happiness must be based on a monogamous marriages⁸. Davies Carole proves that unhappiness in Muslim polygamous family is due to ignorance of the basic tenets of Islamic and as a result she suggests education as means of by which to clear mind of both men and women from distortion.⁹ Davies reveals that Mariama Ba is against this idea of multiple marriage since women are unhappy and she proposes education as a means of freedom.

Another critic who has reviewed *So Long a Letter* is Ayayi Simon Ademola in his book *African culture and Civilization* (2005). The latter states, in society of Mariama Ba, women are not given due consideration either due to ignorance or abuse of principles. In other words, Ramatoulaye who has been married to Modou for twenty five years and blessed with twelve maternities is quite hypocritical and it is an attempt to force Ramatoulaye to accept Modou's action. Tamsir even reinforces by reporting what Modou has said:¹⁰ "it is fate that decides men and things: God intended him to have a second wife, there is nothing he can do about it".¹¹ Ayayi notes that what Mariama Ba seems to highlight, through *So Long a Letter*, is that institutions of prejudice, suppression, discrimination, division and instability.¹²

Reuben Kehinde Akano's article which entitled *So Long a Letter: Understanding the Missionary Narrative of a Polygamous Victim* (2014) presents polygamy as a social challenge to the African women. In the article, it is presented as an evil. He says: "another effort at educating and soliciting the collaboration of the global community in the fight against polygamy".¹³ In *So Long a Letter*, polygamy is not presented as evil as Reuben does, but reveals the contrast between the teaching of the Quran and the application of its principles which portrays the gross distortion of the teaching of Islam on polygamy.¹⁴ Reuben proposes education as a solution to liberate African women from the oppression caused by polygamy.

2-Issue and Working Hypothesis

The above review of the literature contains various studies about Buchi Emecheta's and Mariama Ba's works. As we can see, most of the studies focus on polygamy as an evil and they suggest education as a solution. This dissertation, however, is about the negative aspects of polygamy over African women who take sisterhood as a means of freedom that helps them to liberate themselves from all the potential threats of polygamy. Therefore, our aim is to compare the two works. The similarities between them concerning polygamy and sisterhood make us assume that more affinities relate the two novels.

In order to prove the relevance of our issue in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *So Long a Letter*, we suggest that our analysis shall rely on 'Womanism' developed in *In Search of our Mothers Gardens: Womanist Prose* by Alice Walker (1983). It is an appropriate theory for this study which presents the unique experiences of black women as doubly marginalized. From our perspective, the selection of this theory as relevant method to study the two novels is due to the fact that its components fit the aim of our comparison.

3-Methodological Outline

Following the IMRAD method, we have divided our dissertation into four sections: Introduction, Method and Materials, Results and Discussion. In the introduction, we have introduced ‘Polygamy’ and ‘Sisterhood’. This has been followed by some works written on Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* and Mariama Ba’s *So Long a Letter*. In the method and materials section, we will explain Alice Walker theory of ‘Womanism’ (1983). Then, we will provide short biographies of the two authors, along with the summaries of the two novels. In the result section, we will set the findings of our research. The discussion section will be divided into two chapters. In the first part, we will deal with ‘Polygamy’ in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *So Long a Letter*. The second part will explore the theme of ‘Sisterhood’ and how women are united among themselves.

Endnotes

¹Dodoo, F. Ni-Amoo. "Marriage Type and Reproductive Decisions: A Comparative study in Sub-Saharan African". *Journal of Marriage and Family* vol. 60, no.1 (Feb,1998), 232-242.

²Christian, Barbara. *Black Feminist Criticism*. New York: Pergamon Press, 1985. 181.

³Christian, Barbara. *Black Feminist Criticism: An Angle of Seeing Motherhood in Buchi Emecheta's and Alice Walker's Meridian*,1984. New York: Colombia University Press, 1997. 230-237.

⁴Ibid. P. 230-237.

⁵Juliana, Makuchi. *Gender in African Women's Writing: Identity, Sexuality and Difference*. Indiana University Press, 1997. 24.

⁶Emecheta, Buchi. *The Joys of Motherhood: First Shocks of Motherhood*. London, UK: Allison and Busby, 1979. 36.

⁷Nyanhongo, Mazvita Mollin. *Gender Oppression and Possibilities of Empowerment: Images of Women in African Literature with Specific Reference to Mariama Ba's So Long a Letter, Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood and Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions*. University of Fort Hare, 2011. 70.

⁸Davies, Carole Boyce and Grave, Anne Adams. *Ngmabika: studies of Women in African Literature*. New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1986. 273.

⁹Ouarodima, Maina. *Polygamy in So Long a Letter: A Misunderstood*. Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria, 2018.

¹⁰Ayayi, S. Ademola. *African Culture and Civilization*. Nigeria: Atlantis Books. 2005. 272.

¹¹Ba, Mariama. *So Long a Letter*. London; Portsmouth, N. H: Heinman, 1981. 37.

¹²Ayayi, S. Ademola. *African Culture and Civilization*. Nigeria: Atlantis Books. 2005. 261.

¹³Reuben, Kehinde Akano. *So Long a Letter: Understanding the Missionary Narrative of a Polygamous Victim*. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 19, no. 8(2014): 22-27.

¹⁴Ouarodima, Maina. *Polygamy in So Long a Letter: A Misunderstood*. Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria, 2018.

II-Method and Materials

1-Method

Alice Walker theory of 'Womanism' *In Search of our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*

This part of our comparative study between Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1981) explores the theory of 'Womanism' developed by Alice Malsenior Walker in her collection of essays *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983) as the relevant theory to the issues treated in our work. Alice Malsenior Walker was born on February 9, 1944, in Eatonton, Georgia, United States. She is an African American novelist, short story writer, poet and social activist. Walker recognizes the need for new movement, distinct from Feminism in order to give women of colour a space to express their concerns. In fact, Walker uses the term 'Womanism' to describe the struggle of black women against white feminism which fights for gender equality and liberation while 'Womanism' is based on gender, race and class oppression. Walker's aim in revolutionizing the concept of 'Womanism' is in follows:

The Black Folk expression of mothers to female children, "you actin womanish," i.e. like a woman...usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous, or willful behaviour. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one...[A womanist is also] a woman who loves other women sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture...and women's strength...committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist...Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.¹

In fact, Walker introduces the concept of 'Womanism' to refer to capable, courageous, and independent black feminists. The conception is used to illustrate that the feminist ideals focus on oppressive sexism. However, feminism which is primarily a white middle-class movement ignores oppression based on racism and classism. At this point, womanists show a stronger way of oppression than white women.

Indeed, Walker highlights the suffering of women under the subjectivity of male oppression and exploitation. Black women are doubly marginalised. They are sexually oppressed because they are the opposite of men. So, 'Womanism' protects women from being victims of male subjugation and also from all forms of violence. Therefore, 'Womanism' empowers black women to achieve equality through education and employment to get better perspective. Alice Walker states: "I am preoccupied with the spiritual survival, the whole survival of my people. But beyond that, I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the Royalties and the triumphs of black women."²

Furthermore, For Walker, a 'Womanist' refers to: "A woman who loves other women sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, and women's emotional flexibility (value tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength"³ This quotation focuses on the different relationships that take place between women. It is clear that womanist loves other women and appreciates all the characteristics that make the female, including culture, emotion, and strength. This share deals with the unite motherhood, friendship, and sisterhood.

In addition, Alice Walker's 'Womanism' incorporates the concept of rebuilding negative images of women of colour. Ama Ata Aidoo states: "African women are struggling both on behalf of themselves and on behalf of the wider community is a part of our heritage. It is not new and i really refuse to be told I am learning Feminism from abroad, from Lapland. Africa has produced a much more concrete tradition of strong women fighters than most other societies."⁴ According to Aidoo, 'Womanism' is different from Western 'Feminism'.

Furthermore, Walker hypothesizes that the black Feminist movement would be differentiated from the Western movement. Despite their claims about women's place in their society, white women in the West face less oppression than women of colour and their struggles are different. Walker reveals that black woman is oppressed beyond recognition and

oppressed by everyone.⁵ Walker as a black womanist prefers 'Womanism' to 'Feminism' because 'Womanism' is rooted in black women. She wants to use 'Womanism' to evoke the power, passion and grace of black women, as well as their power to fight against the patriarchy, racism and sexism they face in society.

Alice Walker becomes aware of the need for a movement which can be different from feminism and which can offer coloured women a space to formulate their policy. She named it 'Womanism'. At the center of 'Womanism' is the concern for women and their role in their immediate surroundings (be it family, local community or work place) and more global environment. 'Womanism' is still dedicated to the struggle against oppression and fragmentation and against any kind of behaviour whose goal is to denigrate a community or an individual based on the difference in race, culture or class.⁶

2-Materials:

a-Biography of Buchi Emecheta:

Buchi Emecheta was born on July 21st, 1944, Lagos, Nigeria. She won a scholarship to Methodist Girls' High School at age 10. At 16, she married to Sylvester Onwordi and gave birth to four children. In 1962, she and her four children moved to London to join her husband where they had their fifth child. While in London, she worked as Librarian at the British Museum. With books everywhere, she started to write in her free time. However, her husband was suspicious of her writing. When she ultimately finished her first manuscript, her husband burned it which led to their separation.⁷

After the divorce, Emecheta had produced other works and studied for a Bachelor of Sociology at the University of London in 1962. She published sixteen adult novels, four child's books, numerous articles, and she televised plays. Each of her novels bases on her life experiences.⁸ She started working on her first novel, *In the Ditch* which is published in (1972). She follows this work with *Second Class Citizens* (1974), *The Bride Price* (1976), *The*

Slave Girl (1977), and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). *The Joys of Motherhood* describes the experience of women raising children in the face of changing values and tradition Ibo society. Emecheta also, authored the play *a King of Marriage* produces on BBC television in (1976). Buchi Emecheta translates her real life experiences into narrative novels in which she exposes the hardships African women face in their everyday lives. She also, advocates for the rights of African women especially Ibo women. Buchi Emecheta dies on January 25th, 2017, London, England.⁹

b-Biography of Mariama Bâ:

Mariama Bâ was born on April 17th, 1929, Dakar, Senegal. She acquired a Western French education. In 1943, she won admission to the ‘Ecole Normal’ (Teacher Training School) at Rufisque town where she received her diploma and graduated as schoolteacher in 1947. She worked as teacher from 1947 to 1959.⁹ She married an old man with three children who wanted an old style relationship. After four years and three more children, He divorced her. She quickly remarried and then divorced again. In 1950s, she met Obèye Diop her longest marriage. They had five children but the couple eventually separated and she was forced to raise her children as a single parent.¹⁰

Mariama Bâ started working on her first novel *Une Si Longue Lettre* (1979) translated as *So Long a Letter* (1981). *So Long a Letter* is written by a widow to her childhood friend who lives in the United States. In (1981), she wrote *The Political Function of African Written Literature* and *Scarlet Song*. She stated that every African woman must be proud of her strength and accomplishment. She died on August 17th, 1981, Dakar, Senegal, after a long battle with cancer, and famous school nearby Goree Island took her name.¹¹

c-Summary of Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*

Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) tells the story of Ibo Nigerian women. The protagonist Nnu Ego is the daughter of Agbadi and Ona. Agbadi is a local chief in a village of Ibuza. Ona is young and beautiful woman. She is Agbadi's mistress. Although, Agbadi has many wives, he falls in love with Ona. They have a girl names Nnu Ego (meaning a precious jewel). A few weeks after Nnu Ego birth, her mother (Ona) dies. Nnu Ego looks as beautiful as her mother and now is at the age of marriage. Her first marriage is to Amatokwu, another wealthy family. Since she is not able to become pregnant, her husband takes a second wife who will give him children. But, Nnu Ego returns to her father's house.

Agbadi arranges another marriage for his daughter (Nnu Ego) with Nnaife who works as the washer for an English family 'Meers'. Nnaife lives far away in Lagos. After marriage, Nnu Ego becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son, Ngozi. Unfortunately, Ngozi dies and she tries to put an end to her life by throwing herself from a Bridge. An Ibo man, Nwakusor prevents and stops her with help of the assembled crowd. Eventually, Nnu Ego becomes pregnant and gives birth to a boy, Oshia.

The Meers couple returns to England and Nnaife remains unemployed. So Nnu Ego returns to her cigarette trade. Nnaife finds a job away from the house and works for a group of British people. When he is away Nnu Ego gives birth to her third son, Adim. When Nnaife's brother dies, he inherits all his brother's wives, but only one of these wives has lived with Nnaife. Nnu Ego's co-wife (Adaku) arrives with her daughter.

Nnu Ego and Adaku become pregnant at the same time. Nnu Ego gives birth to twin girls and Adako's son dies after his birth. When the Second World War begins, Nnaife is forced to join the army and goes to India to participate the war. Nnu Ego's father is ill, so she takes her family to Ibuza to take care of her father Agbadi. Unfortunately, Agbadi dies and

Nnu Ego refuses to return to Lagos. Oshia and Adim want to continue their studies abroad (United States) as Oshia wins a scholarship to study in the United States. The twin girls have married and have a good bride price. Taiwo's marriage is arranged to an Ibo clerk (Magnus), but Kehinde escapes to marry Yoruba. Nnaife is put to five years in prison for attempting to murder Kehinde's father-in-law. Nnu Ego returns to Ibuza where she dies alone by the roadside. Oshia returns with an expensive funeral suitable for Nnu Ego sacrifices as a mother.

d-Summary of Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter*

Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1979) recounts the story of Senegalese women and their struggles in society. The book is a letter written by the protagonist, a Senegalese schoolteacher Ramatoulaye who lives in Dakar (Senegal), to her girl childhood friend Aissatou who lives far away (United States).

The autobiographical novel starts with Modou's death (Ramatoulaye's husband) by a heart attack. Ramatoulaye is in mourning and isolation for four months and ten days as it is required in Islamic mourning customs. During these mourning days, Ramatoulaye writes a diary to Goldsmith's daughter (best friend, Aissatou) describing funeral proceedings and the Muslim customs during this period.

Ramatoulaye evokes her memories of childhood, together with Aissatou to Koranic and colonial school where she learns how to be opened to modernity without losing value and culture. Then, she recounts her marriage with Modou and her family rejection. Ramatoulaye's mother wants her daughter to marry someone who looks like Daouda Deing, an old man who is financially stable, but Ramatoulaye refuses that. She chooses her lover, Modou. Unfortunately, Modou abandons her with twelve children after thirty years of marriage, to marry his daughter Dada's friend (Binetou) who is very young (seventeen years old).

Nevertheless, Ramatoulaye prefers to stay married to Modou who abandons her to start his new life with Binetou.

After Modou's death both Modou's brother (Tamsir) and Daouda Deing propose to marry Ramatoulaye, but she rejects them. Thus, she decides to focus on raising her children. Aissatou's marriage like Ramatoulaye's has broken up. When Ramatoulaye marries Modou, Aissatou marries Mawdo (Modou's friend) who is of noble birth and a medical student. The two are greatly in love, but Mawdo's mother (Aunty Nabou) is against his marriage. Aunty Nabou wants her son to marry her cousin (Nabou). Mawdo is afraid of his mother to become distressed, so he accepts Nabou to become his second wife whom Mawdo does not love; but he has children with. Aissatou can't accept this idea of co-wife, thus she divorces him and takes her children; also she travels to United States. At the end of the long letter, Ramatoulaye expects the return of Aissatou to Senegal as soon as possible.

Endnotes:

¹Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*. New York: Harcourt
Brace Jovanovich, 1983. xi- xii.

²Ibid. xii.

³Ibid. xi.

⁴Makuchi, Julia. *Gender in African Women's Writing: Identity, Sexuality and Difference*.
Indiana University Press, 1997. 11.

⁵ Torfs, Elizabeth. *Alice Walker's Womanism: Theory and Practice*. Katholieke University
Leuven, 2007. 11.

⁶Izgarjan, Aleksandra and Markov, Slobodanka. *Alice Walker's Womanism: Perspectives
Past and Present*. University of Novi Sad.

⁷[https://www.sahistory.org.za /archive/ biography-buchi-emecheta-alphone-baraza](https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/biography-buchi-emecheta-alphone-baraza).

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Celarent, Barbara. "Une Si Long Lettre By Mariama Bâ ; So Long a Letter by Mariama Bâ."
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November 29, 2021. [url:http://www.jstor.org /stable/ 10.1086/ 659876](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/659876).

¹¹<https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/ba-mariama-1929-1981>.

III-Results

Our comparative study of Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1981) demonstrates that both works involve within the same study of polygamy and sisterhood. In order to achieve our purpose, we have relied on the theory of 'Womanism', developed in Alice Walker's collection of *essays In Search of our Mother's Gardens* (1983). Our comparison provides the similarities that relate the two novels.

The first chapter of our discussion devoted to the polygamous system of oppression in two different African societies (Nigeria and Senegal). It reveals the ways through which polygamy humiliates women, especially African women. We have shown the female characters suffering from patriarchal rules. Through our analysis, we have deduced that the two authors aim to release African women from men subordination. The both authors wrote their novels to give voice to all African women who suffer in silence to achieve liberation.

The second chapter attempts to demonstrate the issue of 'Sisterhood' which is an important bond that unites African women together to escape the forces that subjugate them. Our focus is mainly on showing the social and cultural oppression that women bear from the system of patriarchy. In addition, the two authors aim to facilitate the fight of the way African women are affected by male oppression. They try to free themselves by sisterhood which is a means of resistance to seek for liberation and justice.

All in all, this dissertation examines the status of African women in the contemporary Nigerian and Senegalese patriarchal societies. Our work explores the suffering of black African women from 'Polygamy' and all forms of oppression. As a result, these women choose to liberate themselves by their bond of sisterhood.

IV-Discussion

Chapter One: Polygamy in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*

In this part of our work, we will shed light on “Polygamy” in both Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*. Both authors point out that the oppression of women within polygamy is the result of gender inequality. We will also present the true portrayal of polygamy which victimizes especially African women. In fact, this part of our work aims to reflect that Emecheta and Ba make clear in the two novels that African women suffer a lot while living in polygamy.

1-The Issue of ‘Polygamy’ in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979)

Polygamy is the state of marriage to many spouses. It is also the practice of marrying multiple spouses. In other words, it is the practice of having more than one wife or husband. *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta shares the expectations of women in a society where polygamy is a traditional way of life for Ibo people. In a patriarchal society, women face many obstacles because they suffer while living in polygamy which is not always necessary or acceptable.

a-Agbadi and Ona

Emecheta demonstrates polygamy and its oppression at the hands of Nwokocha Agbadi, a rich, handsome and intelligent local chief who can have any wife he wants. Agbadi has many wives: two from Ibuza, two from his own village, Ogbadi, three slaves captured during his wandering, in addition to his mistress Ona. Whenever Agbadi is not satisfied, he takes another woman, especially if his wives are busy by raising children or doing homework. Emecheta says: “He married a few women in the traditional sense, but as he watched each of

them sink into domesticity and motherhood he was soon bored and would go further afield for some other exciting, tall and proud female”.¹

In this novel, Emecheta reveals the women suffering through Agbadi’s wives. In Nigerian society, women are humiliated and Agbadi’s treatment with his wives clearly shows this. In fact, Agbadi brings his mistress home, leaving his wives suffer in silent, not even able to complain. Emecheta declares: “Agbadi was no different from many men. He himself might take wives and then neglect them for years, apart from seeing that they each received their one yam a day; he could bring his mistress to sleep with him right in his courtyard while his wives pined and bit their nails for a word from.”²

Ona is Agbadi’s mistress, she is beautiful and arrogant; Agbadi prefers her rather than his wives. However, if Ona becomes Agbadi’s wife, she will be treated as his wife. Ona will be ignored especially if she keeps being occupied, Agbadi will search for a new woman. So Ona prefers to be his mistress rather than being oppressed or marginalized because she knows how his women suffer. This perfectly shown in Alice Walker’s collection of essays *In Search of our Mother’s Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983) the term ‘Womanist’ reflects Ona’s “outrageous, audacious, intrepid or wilful behaviour”³.

Alice Walker’s theory of ‘Womanism’ is a revolutionary movement for the marginalized black women in term of race and gender. Emechet’s novel depicts the injustice and unfair treatment of women. Women in African societies, especially in Nigerian, are considered as the ‘other’ while men are always ‘superior’. Walker says: “I am preoccupied with the spiritual survival, the whole survival of my people. But, beyond that, I am committed to exploring the oppressions [...] of black women”⁴. Women are also measure by their beauty, just as Agbadi is fascinated by his beautiful mistress, Ona. During Agbadi’s time a woman’s worth is determined by her beauty and possession. Then, Agbadi sends all his wives away just to live

with his beloved mistress Ona. Emecheta says: “People said that Nwokocha Agbadi spent all his life on his earth courting his Ona”.⁵

Throughout the novel, Emecheta proves that Ona is a bad woman in the eyes of her society because she disobeys Ibusa’s patriarchy since she refuses to marry Agbadi. Furthermore, the latter sexually oppresses his beloved mistress Ona like an excited animal to satisfy his desires whereas Ona dissatisfies and cries; because she feels humiliated by the beast of Agbadi. Emecheta claims: “Grunting like an excited animal with a helpless prey, (...) and rolled painfully to other side of goatskin. Having hurt her on purpose for the benefit of his people sleeping in the courtyard, he had his satisfaction”⁶. In the same context Walker states: “[...] their bodies became to men who used them, they become more than ‘sexual objects’, more even than mere women: they become ‘Saints’. Instead of being perceived as whole persons, their bodies became shires.”⁷

Emecheta problematizes gender oppression such as polygamy which is a traditional way of life in Ibusa. It causes a lot of pain for women including jealousy, disrespect, and abuse. She shows women’s suffering through Agbadi’s senior wife, Agunwa. The latter is very ill because Agbadi shows disrespect to her by pleasing his mistress so publicly in the same yard where they sleep together. Agbadi’s disrespect leads to Agunwa’s death. Emecheta writes: “Agbadi’s senior wife, Agunwa, became ill that very night. Some said later that she sacrificed herself for her husband; but a few noticed that it was bad for her morale to hear her husband giving pleasure to another woman in the same courtyard where she slept.”⁸

The author uses Nwokocha Agbadi to show the authority of men over women and gender discrimination between them in a patriarchal society. Moreover, women are the only ones to be blamed. In this case, Ona takes the blame of Agbadi’s senior wife’s death, Agunwa, instead of Agbadi. As a matter of the fact, ‘Womanism’ aims to highlight the way society treats women and to combat any form of stereotypes that devalue them. Emecheta

writes : “Ona moved about like a quiet wife. She knew that people blamed her for Agunwa’s death though no one had the courage to say so openly.”⁹ In addition, Agbadi’s oppression is also shown during his last days before he dies. Agbadi prefers his mistress, Ona, who died a long time before rather his wives who sacrifice their lives to please him. Emecheta writes: “[...] your father was a good man. He saw your mother, and he was going to the woman he loved, the woman he had missed all those years in death.”¹⁰

b-Nnu Ego and Amatokuwu

The heroine Nnu Ego grows up in a traditional Ibo trib. Her father Agbadi chooses a husband for her, and he receives a high bride price. Amatokuwu, the new husband of Nnu Ego makes her very happy, but everything changes when she does not become pregnant. Ibo people expect wives to give birth to a boy as their successor, if this does not happen, the family will soon start looking for a new wife. Emecheta claims: “She was not surprised when Amatokuwu told her casually one evening that she would have to move to a nearby hut, kept for older wives, because his people had found him a new wife. [...] I am very sorry, Nnu Ego, but I can’t fail my people.”¹¹ This extract explains that women must accept their fate without complaining since men have always the right to have a second wife, especially when a woman can’t be a mother. Nnu Ego says: “Father, my position as a senior woman of the house has been taken by a younger woman”.¹² In Ibo community, women are blessed only if they achieve this expected role (being a mother). Otherwise, they will be ignored and a new wife will take their place. Gupta asserts: “A woman’s place in her new [husband] family is often secured until she produces a male heir.”¹³ In fact, every woman’s dream is not only to get married, but also to become a mother because it is crucial to her personality and social status. So, it is through motherhood that African wives feel their womanhood.

In polygamous societies, women are used to serve men. In the case of Nnu Ego, after being unable to become pregnant, her relationship with Amatokwu weakens as her stature decreases since it is taken by a new wife. In addition, Amatokwu changes towards Nnu Ego, she is demoted to take care of the new wife's baby son. She is also nothing more than a farm helper. The author argues: "During the yam harvest Amatokwu who only spoke to her when it was necessary, said crisply: "you will go and work with me on the farm today. Your young mate may be having my child any time now. She will stay at home with my mother."¹⁴ Women in Nigerian society are humiliated and oppressed. Nnu Ego becomes hopeless and frustrated since her husband has a new wife. Nnu Ego suffers not only from jealousy in polygamous marriage, but also from oppression because Amatokwu even beats her.¹⁵ Nnu Ego knows that marriage is ultimately oppressing her. Emecheta argues that polygamous marriage robs women's happiness. Nnu Ego understands that marriage will never give her independence, but only suffering as submitting to more male domination. Nnu Ego's first husband becomes cruel when Nnu Ego fails to get a child.

c-Nnu Ego and Nnaife

Nnu Ego returns to her father home after she fails to give birth to Amatokwu's child. Soon, Agbadi chooses a new husband to her daughter, Nnu Ego, named Nnaife Owulum who lives in Lagos. Agbadi says: "Nnu Ego, my pet child, you know I have been making preliminary arrangements for you to go to another man?"¹⁶ When Nnu Ego meets Nnaife for the first time, she does not like him because she does not meet her expectations. Nnaife is the opposite of her ideal man, he is not like the men of Ibuza. Unfortunately, Nnu Ego has no choice only to accept her new husband to prove that she is a good woman. Emecheta spells: "She would rather die in this down called Lagos than go back home and say, "Father, I just do not like the man you have chosen to me."¹⁷

Alice Walker and Buchi Emecheta take into consideration the survival of black women. Their movement revolves not only around gender inequality, but also around race based oppression. This movement is a response to the women who are racially oppressed ‘womanism’ seemingly supplies a way for black women to add gender oppression without attacking black men”.¹⁸ This quotation explains Alice Walker’s definition of ‘Womanism’ and her search for justice and racial oppression.

Nnu Ego is a slave to her husband, Nnaife who has always claimed that he ‘own’ her because he pays her a bride price. Emecheta says: “Your father is well known for traditional principles. I’d like to see his face when you tell him you do not like the second husband he has chosen for you [...] as I said earlier, you have to do what I say. Your father can not help you know.”¹⁹ This passage reveals the man’s authority and oppression towards his women that Nnu Ego has experienced in Lagos. Emecheta highlights the effect of patriarchy in Nigerian society through the character of Nnu Ego who is dominated by her husband: Nnu Ego is not free. As a matter of fact, Alice Walker’s ‘Womanism’, seeks for women’s identity and independence.

Ibo women must not suffer so much to live a fulfilling life however women experience various difficulties in their daily life such as pain, anger, hunger, and even beating. The relation between Nnu Ego and her husband Nnaife gets worse, especially during her second pregnancy, when Nnaife is unemployed and his family is suffering from hunger. Instead of searching for work, Nnaife beats his wife, Nnu Ego the daughter of Agbadi who is working in trading cigarettes. Emecheta claims: “If you do not stop that screaming, I will hit you. Madam would not... [...] Nnaife lost his temper and banged the guitar he has holding against her head [...] if I stay here with mad woman, I will kill her.”²⁰

While Nnaife comes from Fernando Po, he strengthens his power at home and acts like a master, Nnu Ego is always subjugated, oppressed and marginalized because of her gender in Ibo patriarchal community. Women do not have rights as men in Ibo patriarchal society. For instance, Nnu Ego accepts the superiority and also the power of her husband Nnaife.

One thing was sure: he gained the respect and even the fear of his wife Nnu Ego. He could even now afford to beat her up, if she went beyond the limits he could stand.²¹ [...] Mellowed by the constant beatings of her husband, she had become apathetic and she was always cautious, and double sensitive.²²

Through these extracts, Emecheta seeks to speak about Ibuza women who are subjugated and oppressed by their husbands. As she notices gender inequality in patriarchal society which determines the value of women as the 'Other'. Emecheta also shows this inequality via Nnaife and Nnu Ego, Nnaife becomes arrogant and thinks that he is better than her. As a result, she has to respect and fear him. Moreover, Nnu Ego has limit that must not exceed and if she does so, she will be punished.

To add to Nnu Ego's pain, the death of Nnaife's brother who causes change in the life of Nnu Ego: from monogamy to polygamy. According to Ibo traditions, when the husband dies, his brother inherits all his wives and his children. In the case of Naife, he is living in monogamous marriage with Nnu Ego, he has to take care of his brother's wives who become his new wives.

Oh Nnaife, how are you going to cope? All those children, and all those wives. Here she stopped, as the truth hit her like a heavy blow. She almost staggered as it sank in. Nnaife's brother, the very man who had negotiated for her, had three wives even when she was still at home in Ibuza. Surely, surely people would not expect Nnaife to inherit them? She looked round her widely, and was able to read from the masked faces of the men sitting around that they had thought of that and were here to help their friend and relative solve this knotty problem.²³

Emecheta reveals about Nnu Ego's shock after the death of Nnaife's brother and wonders how he will take care of his brother's wives and children too. When Nnu Ego sees that her

friends are in suspense, she goes on to explain: “his brother has died and left behind several wives and God knows how many children”.²⁴ Because of her shock, Nnu Ego runs into Mama Abby to inform her about the first thing that comes into her head: “Nnaife may soon be having five more wives”.²⁵

When Nnaife’s new wife, Adaku, arrives with her daughter to live with them, fear and anger are the first emotions Nnu Ego feels toward her co-wife. Indeed, the jealous tensions start between Nnaife’s wives, Nnu Ego and Adaku. For Nnu Ego, it is difficult to live in polygamous marriage because polygamy causes sadness and jealousy in which Nnu Ego is not ready to deal with.

Nnu Ego could not believe her eyes when she came home from market one afternoon to see this young woman sitting by their doorstep, with a four year old girl sleeping on her knees. [...] she was dark, this woman, shiny black, and not too tall. Her hair was painted in the latest fashion, and when she smiled and introduced herself as “your new wife” [...] jealousy, fear and anger seized Nnu Ego in turns. She hated this type of woman, who would flatter a man, depend on him, need him. Yes, Nnaife like that. He had instinctively disliked her own independence, though he had gradually been forced to accept her. But now there was this new threat.²⁶

Multiple marriages make women suffer not only from jealousy but also from competition and pain between the wives, especially if the husband is not equal with his wives. Emecheta makes this idea of inequality clear with the character of Adaku. With the coming of the latter, Nnaife’s new wife who is not liked by Nnu Ego, Nnaife is excited and presents his new wife to everybody. In addition, he introduces Adaku’s daughter, Dumbi, to Nnu Ego’s son, Oshia, as his new sister. Nnu Ego is forgotten that makes frustrated, but she has nothing to do, only to accept and support her husband traditions. Otherwise, she will be strange because she is living in a society where women’s identity is defined in their relationship with men. In fact, Walker is concerned with male-female relationships with black community. The former displays how gender discrimination can affect black women subjectivity and leads them into misery. *In In Search of Our Mother’s Garden*, Alice Walker claims: “I wanted to explore the

relationship between men and women and why women are always condemned for what men do as an expression of their masculinity. Why women are so easy ‘tramps’ and ‘traitors’ when men are heroes for engaging in the same activity?”²⁷ Alice Walker tends to explore the traditions that oppress black women. So, when man starts to show preference to one wife, then he is asking for trouble.

Nnaife was delighted as his good fortune. Beaming like a child, round the yard. He pointed out this and that to her, and he bought some palm wine to toast her safe arrival. He looked her daughter as his, and own. He called Oshia and introduced the little girl Dumbi to him as his sister. Oshia, who suspected that his mother did not like this new sister and her mother.²⁸

In Ibo community, people give more importance to male rather than female children. As a wife hopefully becomes a mother, she has no importance more than giving birth to boys, especially when she is living in polygamy. Barbara asserts: “women in their respective societies are valued only in relation to the men in their lives and finally because of the children they bear and how this value demands a giving up of their independence and personal life.”²⁸ A man with more than one wife can not be in peace since this idea of multiple marriage oppresses wives who are jealous of everything even from rearing children, especially male child. Indeed, Nnaife’s new wife, Adaku, is in deep depression after the death of her son, and this leads her to be jealous of Nnu Ego who has two boys, Oshia and Adim. The younger wife also knows that it is difficult to live with Nnu Ego who is blessed in the society because she gives birth to two boys. The senior wife, Nnu Ego, is afraid that Adaku can do something bad or harm her children. So, Nnu Ego must protect her sons against the jealousy of the younger wife who is always crying afresh for her dead baby, and she is thinking that people are mocking her because she has no son.²⁹

I saw her in my dream last night. She was trying to push me into a ditch. I do not like her! ‘What dream are you talking about?’ Nnu Ego asked, fear creeping into her voice. She had long sensed that Adaku’s grievances were not just that she had lost her own son but that Nnu Ego had two sons already; stories of younger wives harming the sons of senior wives were common.³⁰

Marriage is a new situation in which the couple enjoy their life. In Adaku's case, marriage never allows her to live in happiness or independence. Marriage causes Adaku suffering, pain, depression, and then living under the male domination. In the novel *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta reveals the domination and the oppression made against women in Nigerian society. Although Adaku stills in bad situation after her son's lost, the selfish man, Nnaife, beats her instead of consoling her.

Suddenly Adaku screamed from inside the room. "Help! Help! He is going to kill me...you mad man!" She could hear the blows Nnaife was administering to her co-wife. What was he going to do? Nnaife had slammed the door shut but Nnu Ego kept on banging at it for him to open. "Open the door woman alone. Do you want to kill the new child that she is expecting? Open the door"³¹

This novel explores the life of the Nigerian woman, Nnu Ego. The protagonist is mistreated by her husband. She sacrifices herself for the happiness of her family and she is even enslaved in the patriarchal society. To be good and respectful woman in the Ibo community, a woman has to satisfy not only her father but also her husband and family. It is the case of Nnu Ego who has no voice in Nigerian society except pleasing her own family by being a good daughter for her father, a good wife for her husband, and a good mother for her children.

Oh, Senior wife, I think you are sometimes more traditional than people at home in Ibuza. You worry too much to please our husband. [...] As she Nnu Ego had to please her titled father Agbadi all the time?³² [...] You have already proved you are a good daughter, but a good daughter must also be a good wife.³³

After Nnaife's return from the army, everything goes well. Even Nnu Ego becomes happy with her family especially after Adaku's abandonment of Nnaife's house. Suddenly, everything changed since Nnaife decides to visit his brother's wife Adankwo. Nnu Ego warns him from going to Ibuza, she knows that her husband wants to go home to make Adankwo his wife in the normal traditional way. Indeed, Adankwo is his wife who inherits after his brother death. She is happy as a senior wife of the family though her children won't welcome the idea of their mother having another husband.³⁴ Emecheta asserts: "I am not another man, I am her

husband's brother. You have not changed Nnu Ego the daughter of Agbadi. All the male visitors laughed while this was going on.”³⁵

With addition, Nnu Ego tries a lot to prevent the relation between Nnaife and Adankwo; it is ended by Adankwo getting pregnant. Nnu Ego suffers as an African woman because in polygamous marriage is difficult to have peace and Nnu Ego has experienced multiple marriage with Nnaife's second wife, Adaku. That is why she refuses Nnaife's relation with another new woman.

Then to add to Nnu Ego's misery, Nnaife is with a new wife named, Okpo, for whom he pays thirty pounds as bride price, ten pounds more than usual. Nnu Ego is so angry and disappointed with Nnaife's new marriage, therefore she refuses this girl to be her co-wife or to share the same room with her because Nnaife is poor and is unable to be responsible for all these wives.

Where are going to put them all? She screamed at her husband and the girl, whom she suspected would soon start breeding as well. Have you gone mad or something? She went on bitterly: 'we only have one room to share with my five children, and I am expecting another two; yet you have brought another person [...] Even Adankwo whom we regard as our mother is pregnant for you; just you [...] I do not want that girl sleeping in my bed. I am not giving it up this time, and I do not care what your friends say.'³⁶

The heroine Nnu Ego as a Nigerian daughter and wife suffers from poverty, humiliation, oppression, marginalization, and jealousy in polygamous marriage. In Lagos, Nnu Ego tries to do better to please her family, especially her husband. Unfortunately, Nnu Ego fails to satisfy her husband. This leads to her fall and she lets her husband to her co- wife, Okpo. Nnu Ego allows Nnaife to have his way with his new wife Okpo. After twenty years of polygamous marriage in Lagos, Nnu Ego dies alone far from her husband who chooses to continue his life with Okpo. Emecheta writes: "I have a mind to tell you [...] leave this house immediately. I was not created to suffer for you till I die."³⁷ Alice Walker's theory of 'Womanism' sheds light on Buchi Emecheta's novel *The Joys of Motherhood* and her understanding of gender

oppression in polygamous life. Emecheta's objective is to illustrate women suffering while living in polygamy and 'Womanism' explains how black women suffer and continue to suffer under polygamy.

2-The Issue of 'Polygamy' in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*

a-Ramatoulaye and Modou

Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1981) is presented in a form of a letter. The protagonist of the story, Ramatoulaye writes to her friend Aissatou, a long letter in which she recounts all the pains and hardships she goes through after her husband's second marriage. Ba opposes polygamous marriage mainly because of the difficulties it brings to women. Ba uses Ramatoulaye to illustrate the various forms of oppression that women go through due to polygamy. The author also condemns polygamy by highlighting and exposing the negative aspects of the practice. Indeed, emotional torment is one of the downsides of polygamy that the female spouses experience throughout their lives. Ba asserts: "You think the problem of polygamy is a simple one. Those who are involved in it know the constraints, the lies, the injustices that weigh down their consciences in return for ephemeral joys of change."³⁸

In her epistolary novel *So Long a Letter*, Ba discusses the problem of polygamy faced by African black women. Indeed, Ba uses Ramatoulaye to expose the life obstacles that African black women are unable to cope with due to polygamy. Ramatoulaye has experienced polygamy which becomes a turning point in her life:

I thought of the absent one. I asked with cry of a hunted beast: 'Modou?' And the Imam, who had finally got hold of a leading thread, held tightly on to it. He went on quickly, as if the words were glowing embers in his mouth: yes, Modou Fall, but, happily he is alive for you, for all of us, thanks be to God. All he has done is to marry a second wife today. We have just come from the mosque in Grand Dakar where the marriage took place.³⁹

Polygamy is a social challenge for black women and is practiced primarily on the African continent where most traditional beliefs marginalize and oppress women. This idea is well illustrated by Alice Walker's theory of 'Womanism' which aims to fight all systems of oppression, including polygamy. In this context, Yanti Danjaitan Melda points out: "Alice Walker [...] uses dimensions of black women's oppression, racism, and sexism to show a young black woman's fight against domination in order to find her own independence."⁴⁰ In *So Long a Letter*, Ba criticizes the native men's experiences of various abuses and subjugation of women. In the case of Ramatoulaye, she is shocked and disturbed by Modou's marriage to Binetou. Modou is Ramatoulaye's husband, and everything is fine between them until he decides to marry his second wife, Binetou. Ramatoulaye's words express her disappointment at Modou's betrayal with seventeen years old Binetou. In addition, Modou's marriage to another woman makes Ramatoulaye sad. Though they have twelve children together, Modou leaves her for Binetou.

Madness or weakness? Heartlessness or irresistible love? What inner torment led Modou Fall to marry Binetou? And to think that I loved this man passionately, to think that I gave him thirty years of my life, to think that twelve times over I carried his child. The addition of a rival to my life was not enough for him. In loving someone else, he burned his past both morally and materially. He dared to commit such an act of disavowal. And yet, what did not he do to make me his wife.⁴¹

Ramatoulaye loves Modou for a whole thirty years of marriage. Also, she is loved by Modou before he decides to marry a younger woman. Modou and Ramatoulaye have twelve children who suffer too when their father is absent in favour of his new wife. So, Ramatoulaye is furious and unhappy when Modou has chosen another path.⁴² Modou's disrespect for Ramatoulaye is shown by choosing Binetou, the same age as her daughter Daba, who is promoted to the rank of her co-wife whom she must face up too.⁴³ In addition, Modou chooses Binetou over his first family so he abandons them completely.

In different parts of Africa, women experience polygamy. This is the case for the protagonist of *So Long a Letter* who suffers most when Modou leaves his house. Furthermore, Modou betrays Ramatoulaye's trust and marries the girlfriend of his oldest daughter, Daba. Therefore, Ramatoulaye can not bear the pain or struggles of polygamy because in patriarchal society like Senegal, men are given unlimited freedom to choose and abandon their wives as they wish while women are expected to remain silent and accept their bad destiny:

I acquiesced under the drops of poison that were burning me: 'A quarter of a century of marriage', 'a wife unparalleled'. I wanted backwards to determine where the break in the thread in the had had occurred from which everything had unwound.⁴⁴ [...] My own crisis came three years after you. But unlike your case, the source was not my family in law. The problem is rooted in Modou himself, my husband.⁴⁵

These extracts show Ramatoulaye's pain at Modou's departure. Although they spend thirty years together, he leaves her alone. Moreover, Ramatoulaye seeks the reasons why Modou abandons her. She is blaming herself for everything since the African women are the only one to be blamed in their societies.

Ramatoulaye, as an example, presents the fate of women in Senegal. She still fears the persistence of social constraints that men still have monopoly on power. Ramatoulaye shows how she is bound by social constraints such as customs and traditions, including the notion that women in polygamy have no true happiness or contentment:

Our lives developed in parallel. We experienced the tiffs and reconciliation of married life. In our different ways, we suffered the social constraints and heavy burden of custom. I have Modou. I compromised with this people. I tolerated his sisters, who too often desert their own homes to encumber my own.⁴⁶

Ba sets the events of her novel in the Senegalese society where huge restrictions are imposed on women. She reveals her protagonist's obligation to her family in law. Ramatoulaye does nothing to make Modou leave her. Despite her sacrifices and valuable contributions to them, she is still seen by Modou as fully disposal. Ba argues: "I made peace

with his family. Despite his desertion of own home, his father and mother and Tamsir, his brother, still continued to visit me often, as his sisters.”⁴⁷

Mariama Ba thinks that the problem lies in the character of Modou. After getting married, he tries to defend himself with law. He does not even have the courage to face Ramatoulaye when he decides to marry a second wife. So he is basically weak and only uses religion as a weapon: “It is fate that decides men and things: God intended him to have a second wife, there is nothing he can do about it.”⁴⁸

The author tends to prove that Modou not only violates Islam laws, but also uses them to defend his actions. The Quran allows polygamy under two conditions: first, the number of wives must not exceed four; second, the husband must treat all wives equally and should not favour any one wife over the other women. However, in the case of Modou, he moves in with his second wife and abandons his first wife and their children. Quran says:[...] marry other women of your choice-two, three, or four. But if you are afraid you will fail to maintain justice, then content yourselves with one.⁴⁹ Although Islam allows men to marry four women, Ramatoulaye sees Modou’s second marriage as a betrayal of trust for her family and Islam too.

Ramatoulaye is a traditional woman who is unable to let go her moral values she grows up with. Ramatoulaye’s children, especially her daughter Daba are deeply frustrated by her mother’s decision to remain in the marriage which turns out to be more painful than she thinks.

From then on, my life changed. I had prepared myself for equal sharing, according to the precepts of Islam concerning polygamic life. I was left with empty hands. My children, who disagreed with my decision, sulked. In opposition to me, they represented a majority I had to respect. “You have not finished suffering,” predicted Daba. I lived in a vacuum. And Modou avoiding me. Attempts by friends and family to bring him back to the fold proved futile. [...] he never came back again; his new found happiness gradually swallowed up his memory of us. He forgot about us.⁵⁰

This passage illustrates the unequal treatment between wives. In African society, people still believe that men are superior and that women are obliged to serve them and accepting their decisions. Therefore, women have no right to demand equal treatment with the opposite sex. Ramatoulaye, for instance, decides to remain in her marriage despite her children's request to break with their father, Modou. Ba writes: "Despite everything- disappointment and humiliation- hope still lives on with Ramatoulaye".⁵¹

Women who live in polygamous marriage feel by humiliation, pain, injustice and neglected because their husbands are busy by other women. The protagonist of *So Long a Letter* is the representative of all the subjugated African black women. When Modou marries a new woman, Ramatoulaye finds herself alone and in a miserable situation. She does all the chores around the house like paying electricity, water bills, and changing locks alone. Ba argues: "After living twenty five years with one man, after borne twelve children? Did I have enough energy to bear alone all this responsibility, which was both moral and material?"⁵²

Furthermore, Ba wants to highlight the fact that every woman must to be treated equally even if a man is allowed to have a second wife. For example, Modou forgets that he still has a lot of responsibilities towards his first family. But even so, Ramatoulaye and her children do all on their own. Despite the hardship, pain, despair, and unease, Ramatoulaye still wants her children to think well about their father.

Did Modou appreciate, in its full measure, the void created by his absence in his house? Did Modou attribute to me more energy than I had to shoulder the responsibility of my children?⁵³ [...] I experienced the inadequacy of public transport. [...] I told you then, without any ulterior motive, of this painful aspect of our life, while Modou's car drove lady Mother- in- law to the four corners of our and while Binetou streaked along the roads in an Alfa Romeo, sometimes white, sometimes red.⁵⁴

Ba tends to demonstrate in the above quotes that rearing twelve children alone are not easy, especially when money is tight and Ramatoulaye has to make a certain compromises, such as takes her children on public transportation while Binetou and her mother, Lady Mother- in-

law, drive a luxurious new car. Through Modou's decision to put Ramatoulaye in debt to support his second wife and her mother, Ba shows how women have little control over their own lives and how polygamy contributes to this lack of control. So Ramatoulaye witnesses how difficult polygamy can be, especially when there is absence of equality. Ba writes: "I no longer interested Modou, and I knew it. I was abandoned: a fluttering leaf that no hand dares to pick up, as my grandmother would have said."⁵⁵

In African societies like Senegal, women have to prove themselves good enough to earn respect. For instance, Ramatoulaye wants to prove to society that she is a complete woman who accepts everything and even takes on the responsibilities of Modou and raises her children alone. In spite of her new autonomy, Ramatoulaye misses her husband and her marriage: "The truth is that, despite everything, I remain faithful to the love of my youth. [...] I cry for Modou and I can do nothing about it."⁵⁶

Ba shows Ramatoulaye being bullied for gender oppression. Throughout the novel, the author illustrates how oppression is mediated by her husband's abandonment of his senior wife, Ramatoulaye. As a matter of fact, she emphasizes how gender determines who is "Superior" and who is considered to be the "Other". In Dakar, women are subordinated to men. They can marry as many women as they want while women are ignored. Therefore, Modou neglects Ramatoulaye for years because he is always with Binetou.

Indeed, Ba criticizes native men for all kinds of abuse and subjugation of women as Modou does, a polygamist and unfaithful man who is like many African men that subjugate and make women suffer a lot. Ramatoulaye says: "I have already totalled up my own; my seclusion has withered me. Worries have given me wrinkles; my fat has melted away. I often tap against bone where before there was rounded flesh."⁵⁷

Ba emphasizes that the female characters in the novel are victims of polygamous marriage: they are doubly marginalized and subjugated by men in the Senegalese patriarchal society. The male authority exacerbates the forms of discrimination that exist in Dakar, Senegal. Furthermore, the narrative sheds light on the ways in which African societies restrict women through customs and traditions because it does not give freedom to women to express their opinion and this devaluates women's stature in their society. For instance, in the novel *Ramatoulaye* is imprisoned by the traditions from seeing the changes happening around her. So the heroine of *So Long a Letter*, *Ramatoulaye* remains aware of the contradictions in her life, especially when dealing with traditions.

This is the moment dreaded by Senegalese women, the moment when she sacrifices her possessions as gifts to her family- in- law; and worse still, beyond her possessions she gives up her personality, her dignity, becoming a thing in the service of the man who has married her, his grandfather, his grandmother, his father, his mother, his brother, his sister, his uncle, his aunt, his male and female cousins, his friends. Her behaviour is conditioned: no sister- in- law will touch the head of any wife who has been stingy, unfaithful or inhospitable.⁵⁸

This passage shows how *Ramatoulaye* is governed by her patriarchal society's customs that demands submission even after *Modou's* death. Indeed, in order to satisfy the demands of customs, *Ramatoulaye* has to devote herself entirely to the goal of serving men: *Ramatoulaye* gives up her personality and dignity to serve her relatives, especially her husband even if he has a second wife.

Moreover, the novelist refers some traditions which construct women. For example, African culture places great emphasis on male who is considered a fundamental aspect in African social norms while women's rights are denied. So according to the Senegalese tradition, *Binetou* is installed in *Ramatoulaye's* house to receive guests after *Modou's* death. Even *Ramatoulaye* is troubled by the existence of *Binetou* but has nothing to do with just accepting her. In this case, *Ramatoulaye* has to forget the pain caused by *Modou's* second marriage, especially at the funeral of *Modou* with *Binetou* by her side. *Ramatoulaye* claims:

“The presence of my co-wife beside me irritates me. She has installed in my house for the funeral, in accordance with tradition”.⁵⁹

Women experience varying levels of emotional hardship including anger, distress, competition, and loneliness. As demonstrated by the protagonist, women in polygamous marriage also suffer from jealousy. At the funeral, Modou’s sisters offer their admiration and comfort to both Ramatoulaye and Binetou. What troubles Ramatoulaye is the fact that they consider both equally, with Binetou married to Modou for only five years while Ramatoulaye has been married for thirty years. Ramatoulaye is disturbed and jealous by how her co-wife is treated to be on the same place as her, demonstrating her traditional belief about the position of a senior wife in the family who relies on the number of children she has [twelve] to justify her superiority over Binetou. Ramatoulaye declares: “Our sisters- in- law give equal consideration to thirty years and five years of married life. With the same ease and the same words, they celebrate twelve maternities and three. She noted with outrage this desire to level out, in which Modou’s new mother- in- law rejoices.”⁶⁰

A woman’s inheritance after her husband’s death is a common belief in Senegal to keep children within the family. On the fortieth days of Modou’s death, Tamsir says that he wants to marry Ramatoulaye according to the African tradition. When a husband dies, his brother has to inherit his brother’s wives. Kenneth Wettroth Harrow states:

These conflicting pressures are accentuated as Ramatoulaye loses her husband, first to a younger woman and then to death, and finds herself alone and widowed, obliged to deal with her family on her own. At first, she is forced to confront a series of suitors, beginning with her husband’s elder brother Tamsir, who expects to make her another one of his wives.⁶¹

Tamsir’s focus is on finding new economic resources to cover the needs of life and his family, rather than controlling his brother’s property. Lasbikane observes: “In Africa, the widow is oppressed, suppressed, afflicted, suspected and insulted”.⁶² In some ways, widows are not considered as members of the family who need support, but as strange since they are

inherited. So Ramatoulaye is a teacher and she is seen by Tamsir as a material gain, and not as a widow of twelve children. Ramatoulaye is outraged by Tamsir's proposal because she has experienced the bad effects of a polygamous marriage and the emotional drain of being unwilling to deal with it. Also, Ramatoulaye speaks out against disrespect caused by Tamsir who is disrespecting even his wives. Despite Modou's infidelity, as she sheds tears of blood for Modou's second marriage, but she remains faithful to the man she loves from a young age.

Furthermore, Daouda Deing is another former suitor of Ramatoulaye. He is the one her mother wants her to marry. Daouda also expresses his desire to marry her. But as a woman who has learned a lot from her own experience, Ramatoulaye rejects his offer because Daouda has a wife and even though their religion allows another wife. She chooses not to step in between Daouda and his family because she does not want to do what Binetou does to her; adding to that she remembers how lonely the years without Modou are. Thus she no longer feels the need to move into another marriage. In her mind, Ramatoulaye knows that Daouda will be a good husband but her heart refuses. Therefore, she finally decides not to be a part of another polygamous relationship and cause pain to another woman like the one she experienced. Ramatoulaye writes: "Esteem is not enough for marriage, whose snares I know from experience. And then the existence of your wife and children further complicates the situation. Abandoned yesterday because of a woman, I can not lightly bring myself between you and your family."⁶³ Ramatoulaye's ability to love and be loved saves her. Her love for her children has allowed her to endure the situation of polygamy and accept all the pain it brings. She even refuses to remarry and continues her life as a single, brave and honest mother.

b-Aissatou and Mawdo

Aissatou and Ramatoulaye suffer the same fate at the hands of their husbands. Aissatou is Ramatoulaye's best childhood friend and is close to her. Aissatou comes from a

poor family and her father is a goldsmith. Ramatoulaye's husband, Modou, introduces Aissatou to his friend Mawdo. Mawdo is a doctor and comes from the noble birth. Despite class differences between the two families, both Aissatou and Mawdo fall in love. Ba claims: "Mawdo raised you up to his own level, he the son of a princess and you a child from the forges. His mother's rejection did not frighten him."⁶⁴

Mawdo decides to marry Aissatou but his mother, Aunty Nabou, disapproves of him marrying her although Mawdo loves her very much. In African societies, traditions have a permanent place in their lives. Despite their comparable education levels, Aissatou's marriage to Mawdo defies community expectations as Aissatou does not come from a noble family. Mawdo succeeds in going against his mother's wishes when he decides to marry Aissatou. Ba spells: "Then came your marriage with Mawdo Ba, recently graduated from the African School of Medicine and Pharmacy, a controversial marriage. I can still hear the angry rumours in town."⁶⁵

In this passage, Ba illustrates how tradition limits women in a patriarchal society. In Ba's *So Long a Letter*, there is a complete mismatch between Aissatou and Mawdo because they do not belong to the same social class. At the time of engagement, everyone is gossiping about this marriage. This general shock shows the importance of the Senegalese custom in social relations and even in marriage which is personal. Walker's theory of "Womanism" is against submission and subjugation to man, and fights also against traditional rules and patriarchal cultures to bring back woman's identity. Alice Walker says: "Black women are oppressed beyond recognition- oppressed by everyone".⁶⁶

Mawdo's mother, Aunty Nabou, is very opposed to the marriage; she can not accept the idea that her only son, Mawdo, marries an ordinary woman without wealth, title, and social status. Although Aissatou is educated, Aunty Nabou sees her as the daughter of a

goldsmith. In Senegalese society, wives are expected to be from the same social class as their husband and when they fail, their families quickly start looking for a new wife. Ramatoulaye in her letter to Aissatou says: “you can not change the habits of a grown man”.⁶⁷ Ba presents African societies which value people according to gender and class. Like other female characters in the novel, Aissatou suffers from the dual oppression of gender and class. In a polygamous society the only thing women expected to do is to serve men.

The novel shows the patriarchal system that subdues women through polygamy. Aissatou faces similar problems in her married life when her husband, Mawdo, accepts a young noble woman, Young Nabou, to be his second wife to please his mother. All is well between Aissatou and Mawdo until Aunty Nabou decides to bring him a second wife, Young Nabou is Farba Diouf’s daughter and Mawdo’s cousin because she considers Aissatou as an insult to her family. Aunty Nabou says: “I need a child beside me, to fill my heart. I want this child another me”.⁶⁸ Indeed, ‘Young Nabou’ is named after ‘Aunty Nabou’ who portrays Young Nabou as a younger version of herself while a goldsmith’s daughter is never recognized by Aunty Nabou. Ba argues: “Aunty Nabou is thinking of you, Aissatou. Working out her vengeance, but was very careful not to speak of you, of her hatred for you.”⁶⁹

In polygamous marriage, women feel humiliated, ignored and even oppressed. *So Long a Letter* is a powerful example of all kinds of oppression caused by polygamy. In this case, the moment Mawdo accepts to marry his cousin and takes her as his second wife, this fact suggests that men are inherently polygamous. Ba asserts: “Aunty Nabou called Mawdo and said to him: “My brother Farba has given you Young Nabou to be your wife”.⁷⁰

Aissatou marries a polygamous man, Mawdo, who takes Young Nabou as a second wife, not only because they are of the same social class, but also to fulfill his mother’s wish. Therefore, Aissatou is in a miserable situation and feels pain for Modou’s second marriage. He can not

inform Aissatou about his marriage until the wedding. In fact, Aissatou is humiliated for being in dark when everyone else knows what is going on. Ba claims: “And because his mother had fixed a date for the wedding night, Mawdo finally had the courage to tell you what every woman was whispering: you had a co-wife.”⁷¹

Ba highlights the marginalisation of Aissatou in Dakar, Senegal, which applies to all women in African patriarchal societies. Mawdo restores his relationship with his royal family, especially those from Diakhao who invade his house and even sustain young Nabou. Aissatou declares: “My house is a suburb of Diakhao, I find it impossible to get any rest there”.⁷² The author illustrates Aissatou’s emotional distress. Aissatou, a senior wife, whose children never been given the same consideration as the children of the young wife who are believed to be from royal blood. As a matter of fact, Aissatou is very angry at this injustice even though she accepts the situation of polygamy. Ba says: “The griots spoke of Young Nabou’s son, exalting them: ‘blood has returned to its source.’ Your sons did not count. Mawdo’s mother, a Princess, could not recognize herself in the sons of a goldsmith’s daughter.”⁷³

The notion of ‘Womanism’ is depicted also in the course of *So Long a Letter* which protects women from being victims of male oppression and violence, then empowers them to achieve equality through education and employment. Within the novel, Ba depicts women who suffer from living in polygamy. As Mawdo goes on to have children with Young Nabou, Aissatou becomes jealous, and this jealousy causes her to break with her husband and to abolish traditions and customs. She decides to leave Africa, and then moves to the US with her four children. In regards to African societies, Aissatou is a bad woman who reclaims her independence instead of living in polygamous marriage.

Mariama Ba’s novel is used as a basis of highlighting the negative effects of polygamy on women in Africa in general and in Senegal in particular. Mariama Ba’s *So Long a Letter*

reveals Walker's theory of 'Womanism'. It seeks to resist patriarchal domination of black women by struggling for equality and emancipation in term of gender and race.

Our examination of the issue, in both novels *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *So Long a Letter* (1981) indicate that the marginalisation of women is an outcome of polygamy. When a woman's husband takes a second wife, she has two choices: either she stands by his side and does what he expects her to do, or to leave him and to reclaim her independence.

Endnotes

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Chapter Two: Sisterhood in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*

In this part of our work, we have shed light on the theoretical concept of sisterhood in both Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*. We deal with this issue to present the true bond that share women for the same purpose, especially African women. In fact, the two authors shared by sisterhood on the lives of black women and how they struggle against the patriarchal society.

1- The Issue of Sisterhood in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*

The Joys of Motherhood is a novel concerned with women's experience of motherhood in patriarchal culture and suppose common goal of Ibo women. Emecheta demonstrates sisterhood as the main theme that bond Ibo women together to face their same obstacles and suffering condition of life.

1-a Nnu Ego and Cordelia

Buchi Emecheta uses Cordelia, the wife of Ubani as a character who interacts with Nnu Ego and ultimately forges sisterhood. Nnu Ego is disappointed that her husband earns his living as a washer which is considered as an disrespectable job "I want live with a man not a women made man"¹. So, Cordelia advices Nnu Ego and gives her support that she need. She explains the differences between men in Ibo and men in Lagos.

Nnu Ego quickly adapts to Cordelia and she feels comfortable talking to her, when she wants to know why men treat them like slaves "will it never end"² and what she can do if her husband loses his job. Cordelia answers her honestly "I don't know my friend, I don't know if it will. It has been going on for ages. I don't think it will ever end"³. Nnu Ego considered Cordelia like her sister because she shares with her positive thoughts and feeling. Buchi Emecheta says: " When Nnu Ego later confided in Cordelia, the wife of Ubani, she had

laughed at her moaning about her husband and had said to her, you want a husband who has time to ask you if you wish to eat rice, or drink corn pap with honey”⁴

Nnu Ego and Cordelia reveals Alice Walker’s theory which defends “womanism” as embracing the courage, audacity, and self-assured of black women who love and help other women and get along well with each other ⁵To add, it was very sad to Nnu Ego to loss her child, so she ran away and Cordelia was afraid about her friend when she doesn’t find her at home and left her child alone “Nnu Ego, where the goodness are you”⁵ She stresses and worries about her place “Nnu Ego, where are you”⁶ In order to find her friend well, she let go of her fears and she know how to act.

Cordelia was as she made her many trips and from the kitchen that her friend’s door was ajar. Nnu Ego could not have gone to buy cigarettes so early, and any way she never went without saying anything. Cordelia did not recall having heard Ngozi this morning cries were unmistakable but Nnu Ego could not be far away since she had left her door open. Cordelia made a mental note to look in later, when her own demanding babies needs had been met. In haste thoughts about her friend were temporally pushed to the back of her mind⁷

Emecheta demonstrates the strong bond of sisterhood between Cordelia and Nnu Ego, how they share together happy and sad moments, and how Cordelia cares for her sister all the time hoping that her friend regains her health. As Walker’s personal struggle with self worth, she reveals her inner conflicts and the imperative events in her life that have made her for person she is. In addition, she refers to herself as ‘solitary person’, she claims: “that years I made myself acquired with every philosopher’s person on suicide”⁸

“Oh poor women”, she said. Hugging herself. Her mind went back to the picture of Nnu Ego having this baby only a month ago: how she had agonised in the kitchen, how painful it had been, being a first child, and how pride has not let her call Nnaife... “please, Mary the mother of god, why did you let this happen to my friend?”⁹

This study emphasizes the solidarity between African women community and how they share their responsibilities, their relation give them comforts and power especially among white people. Walker’s theory of “womanism” prove that black people are not as white people especially black women who suffer from this inequality between poor and rich. Walker

explain how the Civil Rights Movement intended to bring both blacks and whites together “If the civil rights movement is dead, and if it gave us nothing else, it gave us each other forever”¹⁰

Thanks to sisterhood, Nnu Ego and Cordelia became stronger, they stand in constant solidarity to look for each other interest and leave with the feeling of wholeness. In this novel, Cordelia is unspoken appeal for companionship with an appropriately charitable response and sisterhood with Nnu Ego.

1-b Nnu Ego and Mama Abby

Emecheta’s shows to what degree Nnu Ego’s family is very poor, it is apparent through her son Oshia who feels neglected after the birth of his brother. Despite his illness, he doesn’t receive any attention until his neighbour Mama Abby enters and makes Nnu Ego understand that her son is ill and she must take care of him. Emecheta claims: “But his beautiful dream was act short by a neighbour called Mama Abby who was fond of wearing red clothes. Wake up, Oshia, you have fever. Where is your mother? Mama Oshia comes!”¹¹ So, Mama Abby shows her fidelity to Nnu Ego from helping her child to get better and promise to take him on a day trip to Island, Mama Abby said to Oshia: “when you get better, I’ll take you on a day trip to Island. So hurry up and get better”¹² Emecheta writes: “I see that our son is quite ready. She beamed, what a nice suit! She stood and looked at him with an exaggerated air of reflection.”¹³ Thanks to the link of motherhood and the environment of care, love and happiness the relationship between two characters is so strong.

Mama Abby is the only refuge who never disappoints Nnu Ego when she needs to talk especially when Naife decides to marry his brother’s widow. In addition to that, Mama Abby explains to her friend that the majority of men do that to take care of the orphans and respect for traditions and customs. To add, Alice Walker urges black people to pave the way for future generation to eliminate the distress in this life, she claims: “I believe in listening to a

person, whose rocky road I am still travelling”¹⁴. Also, Emecheta writes: “Oh, dear, are you bound to accept them all? Asked Mama Abby, who know little of Igbo custom “you have your own children to think of surely people know that Nnaife is not in steady job?”¹⁵

The relationships between the characters don’t stop only on advice and guidance, but Mama Abby helps Nnu Ego in the matter of the letters sent by her husband. Mama Abby goes with Nnu Ego to visit the post office or the army barracks, she sacrifices everything for the continuity of their sisterhood and gives her a strong supportive circle and emotional connection. Emecheta asserts: “When she arrived at Mama Abby’s house, she almost wailed to her, I’ve got a letter! Oh, Mama Abby, I think it’s from the children’s father. I Think so”¹⁶

1-c Nnu Ego and Iyawo

Emecheta shows that Iyawo takes care of her friend’s child who finds safety with her because she is safe and genuinely care of him until sleeping. “Iyawo told him that it would be a while before he could play with his brother, and that he should go to sleep, because his mother would be resting for a while yet. Iyawo would not even allow him to see her”¹⁷

Sisterhood is a strong bond that relates African women together and Iyawo is sociable with Nnu Ego especially in time of poverty. Nnu Ego suffers a lot with her son, she lives a miserable condition and she doesn’t find anything to eat, for this reason Iyawo cooks to her a soup with all humanity and spirit of sisterhood and offers her all comfort that she needs. For African women, unity is essential to survive not only to share their feeling or opinion but also helps them to look after children needs and to overcome difficulties in Igbo society. “Iyawo made a lot of the stew, hoping that she would be able to tempt both Nnu Ego and Oshia”¹⁸

1-d Nnu Ego and Adaku

Emecheta focuses on relationship between Nnu Ego and Adaku who is Nnaif's brother's wife who Nnaife inherits when his brother dies. As a result, they come together and treat each other like sisters not like co-wives. This relation led them to be stronger, they help each other with emotionally and psychologically in order to bring positive change to their family like the economic interest to overcome poverty.

Also, Adaku influences on Nnu Ego and helps her to live as an independent woman and shows her the right way in order to leave her poverty because she considers women's work is as interest as the work of men, as Alice Walker theory of "Womanism" empowers black women to achieves equality through education and empowerment and encourages them to become financially independent¹⁹. This emotional pact between the two women base on helping one another in difficulties and employment, feeling they are not being given enough money to support their household, they go on strike in order to increase the financial crises.

“Adaku laughed, the first real laughter she had let herself indulge in since arriving that morning. It was a very eloquent sound, telling Nnu Ego that they were going to be sisters in this business of sharing a husband”²⁰

Nnu Ego and Adaku support themselves like sisters, they share the same situation and condition of life. They challenge together for best life because both are in need of care and affection, and together they can create an enriching bond.

1-e Nnu Ego and Nwokocho's wives (father's wives)

The first example that initiates sisterhood in *The Joys of Motherhood* is between Nnu Ego and father's wives. Emecheta declares in the third chapter *The Mother's Early Life* that Nnu Ego married a man she loves but she returns to her father's compound, because she can't have a child and her stepmothers receive her with open hand, love and sisterhood. Father's wives give the true emotional support to Nnu Ego with words and actions, they offer her a

listening ear and give helping hand. At the beginning, Nnu Ego hesitates to come back to her house, especially as she knows the longing of father's wives to see a son for her "his wives always rush out to greet me hopping that I am already caring child. You can see the disappointment on their faces"²¹

Nnu Ego has a spirit of sisterhood with them and shares a feeling of respect and love "Most of his wives, now elderly, were sympathetic and nursed her mentally back to normal, they made her feel that even though she had no borne a child, her father's house was bursting with babies she could regard as her own"²² They are sympathetic and even though she can't give her husband any child, her father's wives say that our sons are as yours. They encourage her mentally until she became happy and physically well again. This bond of sisterhood that relates Nnu Ego and father's wives decreases her stress levels which improves her mental health and forms another strong and positive emotion to begin with. As Alice Walker give power to female bonding, which enable them to discover their selves and they achieve psychological wholeness and health after overcoming oppression.²³

1-f Nnu Ego and Amatokwu's wives

Emecheta narrates the suffering life of Nnu Ego in Amatokwu's house, as soon as she hasn't a son, so she has no right, no opportunity. Emecheta adopts Alice Walker's theory of 'womanism' which protects women from being victim of male subjugation and violence.²⁴ As a senior wife, she must accept with patience like any Igbo woman who accepts polygamy. Moreover, she feels a sense of responsibility and accepts the second wife as a sister and understands her with an open mind, she helps her to raise her child. Nnu Ego gives a real image of Igbo women in hard time as a unit of solidarity and relationship after the child and stay with him all the time with full of courage. As a result, the younger wife is full of apology to Nnu Ego.

Nnu Ego relationship with other women in Amatoukwu compound was amicable. The younger wife did not keep her new son to herself but allowed Nnu Ego as the senior wife to share in looking after him. An evening neighbour would hear Nnu Ego calling the younger women to come for her crying baby.²⁵

Amatoukwu's second wife is characterised by good manners as she feels the fatigue of Nnu Ego in helping her to raise her baby "Sorry senior wife, I knocked at your door but you must have been sleeping. So, I know that our son must be all right. It's our husband, he just won't let me go."²⁶ So, she understands that this is a true example of sisterhood and that only a true sister can do the same. Nnu Ego leaves her husband and his younger wife comfortably and alone for long time while she takes care of their baby until he sleeps like an angel in her arms. Buchi Emecheta's novel explores Nnu Ego's life which centres on her children and family. *The Joys of Motherhood* reveals the pleasures of bond of sisterhood among Nigerian women to share experiences and responsibilities in order to gain the respect of their community.

2- The issue of sisterhood in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*

Mariama Ba narrates the story of two Senegalese women Ramatoulaye and Aissatou and how they relate to each other's experiences. She demonstrates sisterhood and how it is important to black women because it makes a big sense of their own changing identities in post-colonial society, for her it is important to achieve national liberation and modernity to Senegalese women.

a- Ramatoulaye and Aissatou

The protagonist and narrator of the novel Ramatoulaye a widowed Senegalese woman promises to keep a diary that will also serve as a letter to her friend Aissatou and says that the distance can never be a barrier of their strong bond of relationship. In this extract, Ramatoulaye recalls the origins of their childhood which is traced from their grandmothers and mother's intimacies. They spend their childhood and memories together, these make

clear that the two friends share the same childhood memories which highlight the foundation of their sisterhood. In addition to that, they walk along the same road to Koranic school, and the two of them burying their baby teeth in the same hole. Simply as it is mentioned they walked the same paths, for this reason Ramatoulaye recall their earlier, more hopeful years in the past Mariama Ba adopts Alice Walker's theory of 'Womanism' which emphasizes the importance of the presence of a strong women's community for the empowerment and the emancipation of the black women through creating a community of sisters.²⁷

Your presence in my life is by no means fortuitous our grandmothers in their compounds were separated by fence and would exchange messages daily. Our mothers used to argue over who would look after our uncles and units. As for us, we wore out wrappers and sand and sandals on the same story road to the Koranic school, we buried our milk teeth in the same story road to Koranic school, we buried our milk teeth in the same holes and bagged our fairy grandmothers to restore them to us, more splendid than before.²⁸

When Aissatou finds her-self alone and widow, obliged to deal with her family under the Senegales Muslim Tradition, she feels that Ramatoulaye can console her like her sister. Ba shows that woman became more appealing, Strong and free as long as she stands in constant solidarity to look for each other best interest, and live with the feeling of wholeness. She states: "My friend, my friend. I call on you three times. Yesterday you were divorced. Today I am a widow"²⁹

Through *So Long a Letter*, Ba recounts the relationship that unites Ramatoulaye and Aissatou with their study journey together, they lived every moment together, they remember everything like any two sisters with full of hope. Furthermore, Ramatoulaye asks Aissatou to recall the school they both attended. She says: "Let us hear the walls of our school come to life with the intensity of our study. Let us relive its intoxicating atmosphere at night, while the evening song, our joint prayer, rang out, full of hop"³⁰

Ba demonstrates at what point the two protagonists are like two sisters, as we find their life develop in equal like a mirror. They marry their fiances during the same period and

together they endure the happiness and sadness of their new marital life. They suffer together, they express their deception and failure openly and together they escape from these social and marital problems to be free from all the constraints of costumes. In this analyses, we rely to Alice Walker's theory of 'Womanism' who draws the issue of sisterhood to declare that traditional do not suit them, and they have to search for a better life as Ba mentions that Aissatou divorces to move later to the US and successfully makes a new life for herself and financial success which qualify her as the exemplar for the position of New African Woman. Ba argues: "Our lives developed in parallel. We experienced the tiffs and reconciliations of married life. In our different way, we suffered the social constraints and heavy border of custom"³¹

Ba express the fidelity of Ramatoulaye and Aissatou as they stand together in difficult times, they prefer to spend their free time together, walk together and realise in Aissatou's beautiful home profit open air. The two friends spend more time together and find more fulfilment in this relation than home's duties. For this, Ba focuses on sisterhood to show that female relationships are stronger and more liberate than marital one. She writes: "Depression and sadness would disappear, suddenly to be replaced by feeling of plenitude and expansiveness"³². Also they lives the same disappointment when their husbands betray them and their decision to marry another women, they are maltreated victims of male indifference. Ba claims: "You and I were so alike"³³

The author tend to prove that the tenderness of sisterhood is big in Aissatou heart, she pays for her friend a car and encourages her to learn driving because this will help her to move freely and to accomplish her mother's duties. Ba claims: "I shall never forget your response, you, my sister, nor my joy and my surprise when I was called to the Fiat agency and was told to choses a car which you had paid for, in full"³⁴

The two friends discover that being married is far from what they expected it to be, but they continue to be as two sisters, support each other in the turning point in their life like two hols becoming one. Their sisterhood is so intense that they are connected to the point they become a part of each other. Sisterhood is a common theme underlying Mariama Ba *So Long a Letter*, she tries to show the two black women's particular experiences and their relationship as two sisters, they relay to each other to overcome their hardships. Their bonding is intense, powerful and they are so close since their childhood.

Alice walker defines 'womanism' by referring to the different types of relationships and individual identity that occur between black women. Sisterhood is a bond that allows the two characters create an alliance of complementary to assist each other, in which each gives and receives equally. Demonstrating a sense of responsibility for each other, they are joined emotionally, something that unites them to share their feeling, affections, opinions, and connections. In addition to that, sisterhood allows them to see that they are not alone but two in one. This bond is so strong that it significantly affects each other's life and helps them to struggle the marital and Senegalese society.

I've related at one go your story as well as mine. I've said the essential, for pain, even when it's past, eaves the same marks on the individual when recalled. Your disappointment was mine, as my rejection was yours. Forgive me once again if I have re-opened your word. Mine continues to beled."³⁵

Ba presents another form of sisterhood, where we find that it's more important and meaningful than love and marital life. It helps them to escape from life's difficulties, and allows them to forget about their marital life. They are coming together all the life, as Walker argue in her quote: "[...] anywhere comforting than in the arms of a sister..."³⁶She notice that she has known every love possible, but sister's love creates the illusion for the moment that the women is not alone. " Appreciate and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility value tears us natural counter balance of laughter and women's strength"³⁷. From

this quotation Alice shows different relationships that occur between women. It is obvious that womanist's loves other women spontaneously because it makes them feel more comfortable. Ba states: "When we meet, the signs on our bodies will not be important, the essential thing is the content of our heart which animates us. The essential thing is the quality of the sap that flows through us. You have often proved to me the superiority of friendship over love."³⁸Sisterhood is shown from Ramatoulay's dairy in response to Aissatou's letter which empowers each other and led them to be more strength and support each other to overcome the difficulties of life.

b- Ramatoulaye and other women

Ba focuses on women relationship as sisters and how religion ritual bonds them to be solider with other. Ba writes: "women close relatives are busy. They must take incense eau-de-cologne, cotton-wool to hospital for washing of the dead one"³⁹ They stand together to make funeral preparations and helps each other in such difficult moments.

Also this bond shares multiple girls from different nations who come to the same school from the whole of French West Africa, they formed a kind of true sisters at that school. They encourage girls to think globally, to make them strong and solider with each other to create a good moral character. They choose this bond of sisterhood because it helps them to provide them with education and het their freedom, prestige and economic independence. Ba says: "Nothing differentiated us; apart from specific racial features, the fon girl from Dahomey and the Malink one from Guinea. Friendships were made that have endured the test of time and distance. We were true sisters. Destined for the same mission of emcipation."⁴⁰

Ba shows the impact of sisterhood in women's lives. It brings positive change in their approach and view point. Each shares the other's decision as they build a strong sisterhood which is important to Senegalese women. The same faith that they live led them to this bond

of solidarity and sisterhood is a tool to bring them together. Ba argues: “I counted the abandoned or divorced women of my generation whom I knew”⁴¹

c- Ramatoulaye and Jackline

Ba writes about the bond that relates Ramatoulaye and Jackline who finds herself in a new world with different reactions, temperament and mentally, she has trouble adapting to the Senegalese culture. For this reason, Ramatoulaye cares for her friend who needs all help and support to integrate in this society. This is another form of female solidarity like sisters cares. So Ba invites all women to follow this example to cultivate the challenging path of sisterhood. She claims: “And I think of Jackline, who suffered from one”⁴²

d- Ramatoulaye and her daughters

Ba shows another bond of sisterhood that can relate mothers and daughters. Ramatoulaye says that there is nothing important that spending time with your daughter and enjoy each other’s company, this is what she does with her daughters. It is through these precious moments that she gives them advices. Moreover, she drives into deep, intimate conversations about feeling, thoughts and daughters behaviours. Sisterhood is the best bond in order to create a positive atmosphere between mothers and daughters. Ramatoulaye creates a peaceful place and sharing love before talking any subject with her daughters in order to teach them values, she makes sure they grew up to be good daughters with good behaviour. Ba illustrates the best quality of mothers to be a sister to her daughters. Ba declares: “Unquestionably, at a certain age, a boy or a girl opens up to love. I wanted my daughters to discover it in a healthy way, without feeling of guilt, secretiveness or degradation. I tried to penetrate their relationships, I create a favourable atmosphere for sensible behaviour and for confidence.”⁴³

Ramatoulaye creates a bond of sisterhood with her daughters to establish a sound of communication and to teach them values. She sums up her sisterly with them, she gives them space to evolve and encourages them to challenge patriarchal laws. She lets them to make their decisions, to learn more the meaning of life from their own mistakes. As it is mentioned in the novel that one of her daughters gets pregnant out of wedlock, but instead of getting nervous, she embraces her daughter and shows her love, support, comfort and guidance. Ba says: "I took my daughter in my arms, painfully, I held her tightly, with a force multiplied tenfold by pagan revolt and primitive tenderness. She cried choked on sobs"⁴⁴

e- Ramatoulaye and Binetou

Binetou is Moudou's young second wife who installs in Ramatoulaye's house. Ramatoulaye associates with her, after all she is young enough to be like her daughter. She creates a bond of sisterhood because she prefers to see her as a sister in law. Ramatoulaye's descriptions of her co-wife as an apparatus of women's victimization exiled in the world of adults. In her eyes, Binetou is just the same age as her daughter Dada. Moreover, she respects her religion and as a devoted Muslim she accepts the precepts of Islam.

My co-wife and my self are put inside a rough and ready tent made of wrapper pulled tent above our heads and set up for the occasion, while our sisters in law are constructing it to the women present informed of the work in hand, get up and throw some coins out the fluttering canopy so as to ward off evil spirits.⁴⁵

To add, Ramatoulaye is someone who cares about education, particularly for young women. For this, she has horror at Binetou's removal from school establishes. That's why she helps her to continue school. Ba asserts: "And then, having with drawn Binetou from school, he paid her a monthly allowance of fifty thousand francs just like a salary due to her"⁴⁶

Ba reminds us of the importance of sisterhood between women especially black one, as it begin with conflict and difficulties in Nigerian society that the two characters shared together it finishes by creating a bond of sisterhood and friend to give a new image of new

African women who makes choices based on revolt. Ba illustrates that sisterhood plays a big role in African women which led them to be stronger and voiced to face any situation together. For her, the country should make of women's condition a priority before any appeal to other forms of development.

To conclude, both Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Ba highlight the same issue of women's sisterhood as a means that helps black women to get free from all the potential threats that subjugates them. They reveal through the experiences of main characters and their relationship with others women to overcome patriarchal society in all forms in both cultures. Buchi Emecheta called for sisterhood because it offers black women freedom, liberty and resistance against oppression. Mariama Ba, on the other hand, demonstrates the power of sisterhood which helps her to open her mind up for new approaches in life.

Endnotes

¹Emecheta, Buchi. The Joys of Motherhood. First Shocks of Motherhood, London, UK: Allison and Busby, 1979. 52

²Ibid. P.52

³Ibid. P.52

⁴Ibid. P.51

⁵Ibid

⁶Ibid

⁷Emecheta, Buchi. The Joys of Motherhood. A Man is Never Ugly, London, UK: Allison and Busby, 1976. 63

⁸<http://en. M. Wikipedia.org>. In Search of Our Mother's Gardens

⁹Emecheta, Buchi. The Joys of Motherhood: A man is Never Ugly, London, UK: Allison and Busby, 1979. 106

¹⁰<http://en. M. Wikipedia.org>. In Search of Our Mother's Gardens

¹¹Emecheta, Buchi. The Joys of Motherhood: A man is Never Ugly, London, UK: Allison and Busby, 1979. 106

¹²Ibid. P.107

¹³Ibid. P.107

¹⁴<http://en. M. Wikipedia.org>. In Search of Our Mother's Gardens

¹⁵Emecheta, Buchi. The Joys of Motherhood: A Man needs Many Wives, London, UK: Allison and Busby, 1979. 116.

¹⁶Emecheta, Buchi. The Joys of Motherhood: The Soldier Father. London, UK: Allison and Busby, 1979. 176.

¹⁷Emecheta, Buchi. The Joys of Motherhood: A Mother's Investment, London, UK: Allison and Busby, 1979. 102

¹⁸Ibid. P. 104

¹⁹<https://www.brainyquote.com>. Alice Walker quotes.

²⁰Emecheta, Buchi. The Joys of Motherhood. The Mother's Early Life, London, UK: Allison and Busby, 1979. 123

²¹Ibid. P. 31

²²Ibid. P. 34

²³<http://www.IPl.org> essay sisterhood in Alice walker

²⁴Ibid

²⁵Emecheta, Buchi. The Joys of Motherhood. The Mother's Early Life, London, UK: Allison and Busby, 1979. 123.

²⁶Ibid

²⁷<https://www.brainyquote.com>. Alice Walker quotes

²⁸Ba, Mariama. So Long a Letter. London, Portsmouth, N.H: Heineman, 1981. 1.

²⁹Ibid. P. 1

³⁰Ibid.P.15

³¹Ibid.P.19

³²Ibid.P.21

³³Ibid.P.38

³⁴Ibid.P.56

³³Ibid

³⁴Ibid

³⁵Ba,Mariama.So Long a Letter. London;Portsmouth,N.S: Heineman, 1981.75.

³⁶<https://www.brainyquote.com.AliceWalkerquotes>.

³⁷ Ba,Mariama.So Long a Letter. London;Portsmouth,N.S: Heineman, 1981.75.

³⁸Ibid.P.3

³⁹Ibid.P.16

⁴⁰Ibid.P.41

⁴¹Ibid.P.43

⁴²Ibid.P.43

⁴³Ibid.P.81

⁴⁴Ibid.P.88

⁴⁵Ibid.P.4

⁴⁶Ibid.P.11

Conclusion:

Buchi Emecheta's and Mariama Ba's works tend to depict the suffering of women in two different African patriarchal societies (Nigeria and Senegal). Both the novelists have devoted themselves to literary writing to gain freedom to express their thought and ideas against male oppression and authority. Both authors fight against gender inequality to bring back the dignity and emancipation of women, especially African black women who are marginalized in their communities.

By the end of our study, we have achieved the main aim behind writing *The Joys of Motherhood* and *So Long a Letter*. Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Ba use their autobiographical lives to illustrate the oppression of black women in patriarchal communities. Since African women suffer in silent, both authors seek to restore the dignity of women by giving them a voice for their liberation. They protest against the established gender stereotypes constructed against women and try to end gender inequality for social change.

In chapter one, we have discussed the polygamous system of oppression. Both writers criticize the institutions of polygamy which empowers men to rule over women. The female characters in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *So Long a Letter* are enslaved by males. The fact that makes them the only victims of male exploitation, oppression and discrimination. So in patriarchal societies, women are portrayed as the 'Other'.

In chapter two, we have shown that Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Ba highlight the same issue of women's sisterhood as a means of freedom that helps African black women to get free from all the potential threats that subjugate them. Both the novelist reveals through the experiences of the main characters and the relationship with other women the importance of sisterhood to overcome women's oppression in all its forms in both cultures. Finally, Buchi

Emecheta and Mariama Ba reflect most aspects of Alice Walker's theory of 'Womanism' which denotes women's emancipation for social change.

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