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**A Comparative Study**

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**Dedication:**

First and foremost, I would like to dedicate this work to my beloved parents. My thank and appreciations to my sister, Fariza, my brothers, sisters-in-law, nephews and friends.

Yasmina.

To my dear parents and my sweethearts brothers and sisters and all my family.

Hanane.

## **Abstract:**

*This dissertation is a comparative study between the Afro-American and the African literary works, Alice Walker's The Color Purple (1982) and Mariama Bâ's So Long a Letter (1981). It examines Women's Solidarity in both works. This comparative analysis is based on Alice Walker's Womanism, developed in her collection of essays In Search of Our Mothers Garden: Womanist Prose (1983), and Clenora Hudson-Weems's Africana Womanism set in her Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves (1993). Our dissertation first shed light on the issues of the black women in the African-American and the African communities. The discussion section, initiates with an analysis of how they contribute in the black women's liberation in forms of solidarity. Then, it studies the relevant factors of how men can exert their superiority over the southern US and Senegalese black women who, in return, resort to letter writing as a means for self-affirmation, which is, in fact, the emphasis of the last chapter of the discussion section. Through the analyses of Alice Walker's and Mariama Bâ's works, our work concludes with the similarities and the differences between The Color Purple and So Long a Letter.*

## **I. Introduction:**

The African-American literature has increasingly become part of the American literature. It has changed from Phillis Wheatley, the first African-American female poet, to Toni Morrison, Maya Angelo and Alice Walker in style and themes. The strong presence of works such as: Up From Slavery (1901) by Washington, gave a significant shift from the mid-eighteenth century slave narrative to the twentieth century African-American women literature.

The African-American female writers made a significant appeal in literature in the twentieth century. Since the days of slavery, the contemporary African-American women were disempowered by gender, class and race. Hence, it is worth noting that the dilemma shared among the black female community required them to turn towards each other and redefine the black women's representation.

Many works including I Know Why the Caged Birds Sings (1970) by Maya Angelo and The Bluest Eye (1970) by Toni Morrison, followed by the publication of The Color Purple (1982) by Alice Malsenior Walker leveled against sexual and racial issues and explored the black women's predicaments. The works of these writers embarked within literature and presented their own history. They, indeed, expressed themselves and created a deep impact on literary criticism within which they achieved canonical status. Hence, shared contempt developed among the black women writers across the ocean.

The cotemporary African literature resulted from years of assessment. The African literature was dominated by male writers; and this is due to two important facts, as discussed in Women in African Literature Today by Aldred Durosimi Joneet.all.:

First, that African women writers, as a number of articles in the collection point out, have been neglected in the largely male-authored journals, critical studies and critical anthologies and, secondly, that the last ten years or so have been a tremendous blossoming of highly accomplished works by African women writers and it would have been inexcusable to continue to ignore them [...] there is the suggestion that African male writers are either unable or

unwilling to present woman in her totality, and have therefore resorted to the use of stereotypes; and that their treatment of issues that most deeply concern women-issues such as polygamy, childbearing, motherhood, the subordination of the female to the male<sup>1</sup>

Most male writers in their earlier phases of the African literature wanted the marginalization of the African women. In this context, and in many instances the African women were marginalized by their male counterparts. Together with the African traditions, customs and the effects of religion, the African women literature established itself and dealt with the transformations that occupied the African literature in the twentieth century. Specifically broken the barriers imposed by the tradition among the two sexes. The commitments of the African women writers were, therefore, to correct the misconceptions that inflicted upon them<sup>2</sup>.

In recent years, several factors have been the focus of women writings. Buchi Emecheta's The Bride Price (1976), Ama Ata Aidoo's Our Sisters Killjoy (1977), and Mariama Bâ's So Long a Letter (1981) forecasted issues like: love, family, marriage, polygamy. These authors gained a mastery of recognition of self-expression in contemporary Africa<sup>3</sup>.

As a matter of fact, literature breaks the artificial boundaries that exist between different contexts. The cotemporary African-American and African literatures brought forward the experiences of their contexts in a series of works and explored the contribution of the black women in literature as a means of sustenance and resistance.

Alice Walker's masterpiece The Color Purple (1982) outlines the Afro-American women's confrontation with the oppressive forces of the southern society during the 30s. She exposes many important issues and portrays the impact of patriarchal system and its domination over the black women. Such representations, in fact, are converted into a frequent misogyny among the sexes. In this concern, the former articulates a clear vision on the limited image of black femaleness<sup>4</sup>.



Alice Walker consistently attempts to approach these questions through the poor, rural black woman, Celie. Barbara Christian, a pioneering African-American scholar in Black Feminist Literary Criticism, states:

Walker does not choose southern black women to be her major protagonists only because she is one, but also, I believe, because she has discovered in the tradition and history they collectively experience an understanding of oppression that has elicited from them a willingness to reject convention and to hold to what is difficult<sup>5</sup>

Just as the black women of the Southern US during the 30s, Alice Walker follows the journey of Celie, the Black uneducated, as she struggles to bear such experiences since the age of fourteen. Before she could establish herself as an independent woman, she has, actually, gone through a series of difficulties. She faces a domestic violence and endures both psychological and physical abuse of men in her life.

Apart from this, Alice Walker manifests to explore the power of female bonding as central factor behind Celie's emancipation until she gets liberated. This female ties, actually, lead to an intimate attachment of either: sisterly, motherly, friendship and mentor/pupil forms of solidarity, or sexual relationship. In this concern, Dinita Smith, a critic, argues that:

the unifying bond between black women is through their friendships, their love, and their shared oppression that they collectively gain the strength to separate themselves from the bondage of their past and piece together a free and equal existence for themselves and for those they love<sup>6</sup>

Just like Alice Walker, Mariama Bâ makes a clear contribution to the socio-cultural issues that prevail in contemporary African society and discusses certain thematic concerns that analyze the influence of race, class and gender on women's relationships. Her presentations focus on the African black Women's lives and their struggle to overcome multiple forms of oppression within the patriarchal society. In this regard, Farah Udegumam in a review on Mariama Bâ, observes:

In many Islamic cultures women are considered a curse to their families from adolescence to adulthood. She does not receive the same type of respect that her male counterparts receive. Her only purpose, if any, is to reproduce and if for some reason she can't she is rendered useless [...] Most women in these types of societies are

looked upon as second rate citizens in the eyes of their male counterparts. Their existence is mainly for the gratification of the male<sup>7</sup>

So Long a Letter (1981), an epistolary narrative that reflects the conditions of the African women. It interprets and evaluates the impact of African culture over the black women's relationships within a long history of African customs, traditions and religious practices. It is, therefore, foregrounds the commitment of the Senegalese women in the struggle against the injustices inflicted by its institutions in forms of bonding.

In this concern, The Color Purple (1982) by Alice Walker and So Long a Letter (1981) by Mariama Bâ are among the works that transcend the literary barriers and deal with the issues of their communities. Alice Walker's novel emerges as a sample that represents the African-American black women who struggle to overcome their domestic traumas, during the thirties of Georgia. Similarly to Alice Walker, Mariama Bâ centers her novel on the black women's lives. It incorporates the effects of African traditions, customs in colonial and post-colonial Senegal.

### **1-1: Review of the Literature:**

Alice Walker's and Mariama Bâ's novels have received a great deal of criticism. First, The Color Purple (1982) is one of the most widely read and studied novels that attracted a considerable attention in the world literature.

The African-American literary critic Harold Bloom states in: Bloom's Modern Critical views: Alice Walker-New Edition (2007) that Alice Walker's use, as a contemporary writer, to call herself 'author and medium' is, for him, 'idiosyncratic'. He argues that she is a wholly representative writer that reflects her era and the success of the The Color Purple is deserved. Her sensibility, he adds, is very close to the spirit of the age<sup>8</sup>.

In his article Alice Walker's Men: Profiles in Quest for Love and Personal Values (1989), Louis H. Pratt analyzes the positive and the negative images of black men in The

Color Purple. He states that many literary critics have perceived Alice Walker's works with *skepticism*. These interpretations, in his view, suddenly became muted in 1983 by the publication of The Color Purple. He explores her attempt to expose the relationship between men and women and argues that Alice Walker's negative representation for men continue to emerge. Her anger, he interprets, of the injustices of men led her to create in her novel an artistic stance which is basically critical to men. According to his words, men in the novel are miserable because of lack of love in their lives what lead them to treat women purely sexual. Pratt, on the other hand, treats the positive images of men in the novel and depicts Samuel as the *peripheral* male character in the novel for his *compassion and kindness* while adopting Celie's children. He goes on and argues that, this tranquil man has traditional values that transformed him into a sensitive and compassionate individual who owns a deep interest for family and faith and pride in blackness<sup>9</sup>. In this sense he reflects:

One of the major short-comings in Walker's fiction is that her black male characters emerge either as tranquil men whose existence must be validated and filtered through the consciousness of her women, or they are presented as weak, self-centered, turbulent men whose humanity is placed in jeopardy by their inability to develop loving relationships with their wives and children<sup>10</sup>

Pratt concludes that men in Walker's world are, also, in need for redemption from the oppressions of racism as well as the stereotyped images of literature and culture.

The professor of English at the university of north California, Trudier Harris indicates in, On The Color Purple, Stereotypes and Silence that Alice Walker is almost universally recognized as the *spokeswomen* for the black women and The Color Purple as a work, is the representative of the black communities. The process of reading and re-reading the novel, actually, permitted her to point out that Alice walker has reflected the dilemmas and certain life style of the black women in the United States. She goes on and criticizes Celie's reactions to her situations, she states that even the slave women who found themselves abused frequently found ways of responding and fighting back. Celie, by contrast, shows kinship. In

this concern, she sees that Alice Walker's portrayal for the struggles of the black women is to pay homage to the feminists and lesbians<sup>11</sup>.

Similarly to Alice Walker's The Color Purple (1981), Mariama Bâ's So Long a Letter has received a wide criticism since its publication in 1981. Peter Barry, for instance, states in Reclaiming the Voice in So Long a Letter: Essay that despite the stand of Mariama Bâ is not primarily anti-colonial; however, her work is valuable and significant. He argues that the author's objective is, in addition, not in against Africa. He, rather, sees that her work is more concerned with gender and class than race. He considers her work as *writing back* to African male writers which allows her, in his view, to reclaim the voice that has been previously denied from<sup>12</sup>.

In addition, Shirin Edwin examines religion in Expressing Islam Feminism in Mariama Bâ's So Long a Letter. She reflects how her reading for the novel's Islamic concepts such as *mirath*, *polygamy*, *prayer* and *sunna* required her to situate Ramatoulaye's expression for Islam within an African Islamic feminist to, further, position the novel's protagonist within a cultural context of practicing Islam in Senegal. She, finally, perceives her as a successful adherent to Islam because of her spiritual persistence and resistance to the Islamic precepts<sup>13</sup>.

Within the same context, Rizwana Habib Latha examines in her Feminism in African Context: Mariama Ba's So Long a Letter the issues of feminists within an African Muslim post-colonial context. Mariama Ba's novel provides readers with a specific insight on Ramatoulaye's, as well as other women character experience for polygamy. She, in addition, observes that Ramatoulaye's subjugation to the French colonial domination as well as the promise of liberation in post-colonial period has created a complex impact on her identity. Although the novel stresses on the protagonist's construction and reconstruction of

Ramatoulaye's identity as an individual, her experience also encompasses other collective identities both inside and outside the socio-cultural milieu<sup>14</sup>.

## **1-2: Issue and working hypothesis:**

Although Alice Walker's The Color Purple and Mariama Bâ's So Long a Letter have received a great deal of criticism, to our knowledge, they did not deal with Women's Solidarity as an important aspect in the novels. Our dissertation is, therefore, to compare the Afro-American and African works. The similarities shared between the two works concerning women's solidarity make us assume that more affinities relate the two novels.

Through our analysis, we operate within the two theoretical assumptions: *Womanism* developed in *In Search of Our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose* (1983) and *Africana Womanism* developed in *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (1992). The first by Alice Walker, which puts forward the unique experiences of the black women especially those of the rural south (America) as a doubly marginalized minority in the world. As regards Alice Walker, Clenora Hudson-Weems mobilizes the experiences of all women of color of African descent.

In the light of Alice Walker's *Womanism* and Clenora Hudson-Weem's *Africana Womanism* as theories for the black women's liberation, this study explores Women's Solidarity for the black women's emancipation. Thus, a general overview about the literatures under which the two novels emerged will highlight how the two authors treat same issues. This dissertation, therefore, justifies our attempt to explore women's solidarity.

In order to prove the relevance of our issue in *The Color Purple* and *So Long a Letter*, we suggest that analysis shall rely on *Womanism* and *Africana Womanism* as appropriate theories to this study. From our perspective, the selection of these theories as relevant methods to the study of the two novels is due to the fact that their components fit the aim of

our comparison. The two theories, actually, call for the emancipation of women of color. The two writers, therefore, portray the relationships among the black women in the African-American and African patriarchal societies. Hence, there is no doubt that Alice Walker's and Mariama Ba's works share affinities.

### **1-3: Methodological outline:**

At the methodological level, the dissertation will follow the IMRAD method. We have started with introduction in which we gave a general overview about the topic, site the purpose of the study, then followed with the review of some works written on Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*.

In the Methods section, we will try to introduce and explain the theories of *Womanism* (1983) by Alice Walker and *Africana Womanism* (1993) by Cleonora Hudson-Weems, according to their writer's views. Then, we will come to provide brief summaries of the novels cited above in the Material section. Ultimately and in the result section we will stress on our findings.

The discussion section will constitute of three chapters. The first chapter will deal with Women's Solidarity in *The Color Purple* and *So Long a Letter*. The second chapter will demonstrate multiple forms of Male Oppression and how they participated in the humiliating position that they suffer from. In the last one, we will refer to Epistolary Narrative as an act of revolt and liberation. Finally, we will conclude with a summary of the important points that related and differentiated the two works.

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#### **Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup>Eldred Durosimi Jones, Eustace Palmer et. Al. (1992) *Women in African Literature Today*. Africa World Press.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>4</sup> Christian, Barbara (1985) *Black Feminist Criticism*. New York: Pergamon Press, PP. 36-88.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., P. 89.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, Dinitia (1982) "Celie, You a Tree". *Nation* 4 September, P. 182.

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<sup>7</sup>Udegbumam, Farah *Book Review: MariamaBâ's So Long a Letter*. [online] Available from: <http://drmissani.net/mmissani/solongbk.htm> [Accessed in: 09-21-2017].

<sup>8</sup> Bloom, Harold (2007) Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Alice Walker-New Edition. Bloom's Literary Criticism. New York: Chelsea books.

<sup>9</sup> Louis, H. Pratt (1989) *Alice Walker's Men: Profiles in the Quest For Love and Personal Values*. Popular Culture Association in the South. Available from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23414452> [Accessed in: 11-10-2017].

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>11</sup> Trudier, Harris (1984) *On The Color Purple, Stereotypes, and Silence*. African American Review (St. Louis University). Available from: [https://www.jstor.org/stable/2904291?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2904291?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents) [Accessed in: 11-10-2017].

<sup>12</sup> Barry, Peter *Reclaiming The Voice In So Long A Letter*.

Available from: <http://www.123helpme.com/preview.asp?id=6760> [Accessed in: 11-11-2017]

<sup>13</sup> Edwin, Shirin (2009) *Expressing Islamic feminism in MariamaBâ's So Long a Letter*. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09663690903279161> [Accessed in: 11-11-2017].

<sup>14</sup> Habib Latha, Rizwana (2001) *Feminisms in an African Context: MariamaBâ's So Long a Letter*. Taylor & Francis, Ltd. Available from: [http://www.jstor.org/stable/4066403?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4066403?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents) [Accessed in: 11-11-2017].

## II- Methods and Materials:

### 1. Methods:

Our comparative study of Alice Walker's The Color Purple (1982) and Mariama Bâ's So Long a Letter (1981) relies on the theories of *Womanism* developed by the African-American novelist, short story writer, poet and activist, Alice Walker in her In Search of Our Mothers Garden: Womanist Prose (1983). And *Africana Womanism* by the professor Clenora Hudson-Weems developed her Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves (1993) as the relevant theories to deal with the issues of the black women that prevail in the African-American and the African communities.

#### **Alice Walker's *Womanism* (1983):**

In her collection of essays, In Search of Our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose (1983), The African-American writer Alice Walker puts forward the experiences of the women of color particularly those of the rural south (America) as totally victimized in the country; and conceptualizes a new feminist theory she calls *Womanism*. It is appropriated with the black women affirmation as colored. Yet, this newly coined concept doesn't deny its connection with some aspects of feminism. In this view point, *womanism* existed just because sexism and racism prevailed.

*Womanism*, denotes women's emancipation as a neglected and a doubly marginalized minority in the western world. Bell Hooks, a black feminist scholar, asserts in her "Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism", that the African-American women are doubly disadvantaged because they face discrimination of both gender and race. In her words:

When the black women's movement raised the issue of sexist oppression, we argued that sexism was insignificant in light of the harsher more brutal reality of racism. We were afraid to acknowledge that sexism could be just as oppressive as racism. We clung to the hope that liberation from racial oppression would be all that was necessary for us to be free. We were a new generation of black women who had been taught to submit, to accept sexual inferiority, and to be silent<sup>13</sup>



Alice Walker exhibits a variety of interpretations for the concept “Womanism”. First, she makes reference to the origins and the original use as well as the meaning of “Womanism”. She claims that it is derived from “*womanish*”<sup>14</sup> which is associated with being responsible and serious opposite of “*girlish*”<sup>15</sup> the meaning of “*frivolous, irresponsible, not serious*”<sup>16</sup>. It is mainly used in the black folk expression “*you acting womanish*” in other words “*you trying to be grown*” (Ibid: xi)<sup>17</sup>. These two folk expressions imply an interrelated meaning of “*outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior*”<sup>18</sup> to indicate a mature and grown attitude.

According to Alice Walker, a “Womanist”, also, refers to:

Woman who loves other woman, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciate and prefers woman’s culture, woman’s emotional flexibility (value tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and woman’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female<sup>19</sup>

This quotation converges around the various relationships that occur between women. It is obvious that womanists love other women spontaneously by appreciating those features that make them female including culture, emotion and strength. These shared ideals gather motherhood, sisterhood and friendship. Besides, Alice Walker employs Lesbianism, the relationship of women adoring other women sexually, actually, the relationship that comes from the exaggerated love between women. However, her interpretation for “womanist” does not denied the heterosexual relationships.

In fact, these statements denote the metaphor that occurs behind the title In Search of Our Mother’s Garden: Womanist Prose. It mainly symbolizes the coexistence of both women and men of different races just as the flowers in a garden where they can bloom equally despite their cultural distinctiveness, regardless of color.

Then she comes to enumerate the womanists' loves. *"Loves music, Loves dance, loves the moon. Loves the spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves folk. Loves herself. Regardless"*<sup>20</sup>. Alice Walker, here, depicts women's affection towards music and dance as bodily pleasures; she loves the moon as a symbol for femininity. In addition, it is interesting to note that womanists are always involved in moral and physical struggles which probably promoted a sense of pride and defense towards their identity. In this sense, Alice Walker states: *"I have fought harder for my life and for a chance to be myself to be something more than a shadow, than I have never done in my life"*<sup>21</sup>.

Although the "Western Feminist" movement is based on gender oppression and addresses the needs for white-middle class women and ignored race oppression experienced by the black women. Alice Walker indicates that both White Feminism and Black Feminism have common features; and considers *"feminism as a component of the wider ideological umbrella of Womanism"*<sup>22</sup>. Therefore, it is appropriate to conclude as Alice Walker does, *"Black feminism stands to feminism as purple to lavender"*<sup>23</sup>.

In the end, both "Western Feminism" and "Womanism" violate the norms when transferred to the African context. Women in Africa reject both the feminist movements cited above. They, actually, associate them to white and African-American women's causes that operate within the white and the African-American communities. The black women's experiences in Africa are more complex and different. They, indeed, do not perceive their men as an enemy since their shared experience for western colonialism requires them to stand unique. They, in addition, refute Alice Walker's stand for "Lesbianism", the intimate relation shared between women. In the end, both "Western Feminism" and "Womanism" did not speak for the black women in Africa.

Many prominent African women writers and scholars such as Molaria Ogundipe Leslie, a Nigerian poet, critic and one of the foremost writers on the African gender studies and literary theory, have identified themselves as womanists rather than feminists. In "The Female Writer and her Commitment", she writes: "*many of the African female writers like to declare that they are not feminists, as if it were a crime to be a feminist. These denials come from unlikely writers such as Bessie Head, Buchi Emecheta even Mariama Bâ*"<sup>24</sup>. Although among these theories, in their views, are propounded by people of an African descent, yet there still a great need to examine their applicability in an African soul. The African women now, stand different and appear with new found voices along a new series of concerns.

### **Clenora Hudson-Weems's *Africana Womanism* (1993):**

Clenora Hudson-Weems sets forth the African rootedness and makes at center the need and the importance of self-naming and self-defining for Africana women's experiences and called for *Africana Womanism* in her *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (1993). A theory whose agenda is at the same time separatist and unique.

Africana Womanism she argues, a term I coined and defined in 1987 after nearly two years of publicly debating the importance of self-naming for Africana women, under the terminology "Black Womanism", a natural evolution, is a theoretical concept designed for all women of African descent. Its primary goal...is to create their [Africana woman's] own criteria for assessing their realities, both in thought and in action<sup>25</sup>

*Africana Womanism*, therefore, emerged as a new ideology that was intended specifically for all women of African descent, by extension for all men and women in the African diaspora. It is meant to debate and correct the historical, sociological and traditional African misrepresentations; "*just as the African writer in 1950 had a duty to correct the misconceptions and rewrite the stereotypes propagated by the European writers about Africa*"<sup>26</sup>. She has, therefore, contributed to the Afrocentrism that focuses not only on the unique experiences, struggles and needs of Africana women, but also their ethnicity as women

by establishing their cultural identity, autonomy and independence that relate them directly to their ancestry and land.

Clenora Hudson-Weems asserts the importance of prioritizing racism and class-based oppression faced by Africana men and women. The primary concerns of Africana women and activists like the Senegalese Aminata Sow Fall and other African pioneers of freedom fighter like the Nigerian Buchi Emecheta and the Ghanaian Ama Ata Aidoo, are not gender based oppression, yet racism and class oppression experienced by all Africana people, men and women. Oppression, in their views, is due to their race, not because of their gender within the community of women.

*Africana Womanism*, thereby, hailed as a theory presented by Clenora Hudson-Weems to explain men and women's relationships. While Africana women have in fact, concerns regarding their male counterpart. However, these concerns must undergo an African cultural tradition. As described in chapter four of *Africana Womanism*:

[...] are self-namer and self-definer, genuine sisterhood, strong, in concert with male in struggle, whole, authentic, flexible role player, respected, recognized, spiritual, male compatible, respectful of elders, adaptable, ambitious, mothering, and nurturing [...] And Africana woman does not perceive black man as her primary enemy as does the white feminist, who is carrying out an age-old battle with her white male counterpart for subjugating her as his property<sup>27</sup>

Africana women, have never been their male's property. They in contrast, demonstrate their need to man as an important part of their lives. Because they were always equal, despite some attempts to oppress them. Black man, indeed, has never had the same institutionalized power to oppress Africana women as the white men do with their women. Here, Clenora Hudson-Weems demonstrates Africana women's affinity to man who, in her view, "*makes a whole, authentic and complete sense of Africana woman*"<sup>28</sup>.

Clenora Hudson-Weems via *Africana Womanism*, operates within the same system of oppression and domination that subordinate both black men and women. According to

Africana sociologist Clyde Franklin II, "*Black men are relatively powerless in this country, and their attempts at domination, aggression, and the like, while sacrificing humanity, are ludicrous*"<sup>29</sup>. Then, to dismiss Feminism as a relevant movement for their concerns and clearly set itself in a sharp contrast with Alice Walker's second and closing statements set in In Search of Our Mothers Garden: Womanist prose<sup>30</sup>. Apparently, neither White Feminism nor Black Womanism is relevant in labeling the Africana womanist's experiences.

## **2. Materials:**

### **Summaries of the novels:**

#### **a. The Color Purple (1982):**

The Afro-American novel The Color Purple (1982) is an epistolary work written by Alice Walker. It is narrated by two female characters: the protagonist Celie and her sister Nettie.

In her first letters, Celie, a fourteen years old black girl, writes to God telling about her living hardships which conduct her life. At an early age, she is being raped by her stepfather Alphonso (Pa) than he deprived her from her two children. She offers him her body so as not to approach her young sister Nettie. Later on, he forced her to marry Mr\_\_\_\_(Albert), so she enters a loveless marriage with a slow death by experiencing a wide range of exploitation and persecution. Her husband considers her as a sexual object and her role is restricted to households and raising Albert's children. Nettie runs away from Alphonso and takes refuge at Celie's house. The advantage that she has over her sister is her intellectual background. So, she takes profit to offer Celie knowledge. Mr\_\_\_\_ in his turn approaches her, so she flees for her own safety. From here, Celie had never heard about her sister again and thought she is dead; As she is separated from the only person she has in the world, her life gets worse and worse.

Many years later, Albert's eldest son Harpo married Sofia an outspoken and independent woman. She is strong and fights back all attempts of domination and subjugation. According to her, her husband has to take part of the households and bearing children since it is not the responsibility of woman only. She gives new perspectives on women for Celie. Ultimately, she leaves harpo when he tried to follow Celie's advice on biting her and consider it as a betrayal from Celie. The latter continues her life alone under her ruthless husband's control until she met Shug Avery the blues singer woman who is already in love with Albert. She falls ill and he takes her to his house. Celie nurses and nurtures her back to health . In return, she brings the outside world into Celie's closed-off environment, the two women become friends. She teaches Celie about love, self-esteem and how to stand up for herself and promised to protect her from Albert's abuse. Their friendship, hence, transformed into a sexual one.

That silenced woman becomes radiant towards Albert when she discovered with shug that her sister is still alive and that he has been hiding all of Nettie's letters in his locked trunk. By reading the letters, she realizes that her sister became a missionary in Africa surrounded by her two nephews (Celie's children). During all the past years, she did not stop writing and sending letters. She wrote about her everyday life, about Africa and everything. Celie feels betrayed and decides to leave Mr\_\_\_ and move to Memphis with Shug where she becomes a good designer of pants and succeeds to turn the work into business by the help of Shug. Many other events took place and celie more and more becomes empowered and emancipated. The novel ends with the return of Nettie, her husband Samuel and the two children who grew far from their mother to America.

### **b. So Long a Letter (1981):**

So Long a Letter, is a semi-autobiographical novella by the Francophone Senegalese Mariama Bâ. It is first published in French Une Si Longue Lettre in 1970.

At the beginning of the letter, we learn that Ramatoulaye a Senegalese school teacher has just lost her husband Modou by a heart attack and she is sequestered in mourning for four months and ten days as it is mandated by Islam for the new widow. During this period, she writes a diary in a form of a long letter to her best friend Aissatou a goldsmith's daughter to overcome her solitude and take a great weight off her mind. She describes Modou's death, his burial and the traditional mourning process. Later, she reminisces about hers and Aissatou's early age and how they attended the coranic and colonial schools and how they involved as wives and mothers with responsibilities. Ramatoulaye confesses the importance of their encounter with the headmistress of the colonial school who contributed in the formation of their strong personality. She taught them how to stand against challenges of patriarchal institutions, constraints of traditions and how to be opened to modernity and civilization without losing their own culture and values. Throughout the epistle, this new widow evokes the traumatism caused by the arrival of the co-wife experienced by both of them. Aissatou leaves her beloved husband Mawdo who is commanded by his mother to take his cousin as a second wife; She took her children and travelled to the USA searching for self-empowerment. Contrary to Ramatoulaye, she remains in her marriage. But her husband had already traced his new life, he abandons her with twelve children and a wide range of responsibilities. Aissatou succeeded to overcome her predicaments and become economically and spiritually independent so, she shows tremendous supports to make her friend self-confident and autonomous too, she helps her to improve her life's conditions and defiantly to create a life apart man. In the meantime, Ramatoulaye consoles and relieves her during the predicaments.

Consequently, both of them achieve heroic statues by sustaining the survival of their newly created self and they constantly fill their husbands' vacuum. At the end of the letter, we learn that Ramatoulaye is waiting for her best friend Aissatou who will across the ocean to present her sincere condolences and provide her support.

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**Endnotes:**

- <sup>13</sup> Hooks, Bell (1981) *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. United States: Pluto Press, PP. 1-2.
- <sup>14</sup> Walker, Alice (1983) *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, P. xi.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.,
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.,
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.,
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., P. xi.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., P. xi.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., P. xii.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., P. 125.
- <sup>22</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Womanism>. [Accessed: 06-02-2017]
- <sup>23</sup> Walker, Alice (1983) *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, P. xii.
- <sup>24</sup> Ogundipe-L., Molar (1992) *The Female Writer and Her Commitment*. In: Eldred Durosini Jones, Eustace Palmer et. Al. (1992) *Orature in African Literature Today*. Africa World Press, P. 11.
- <sup>25</sup> Hudson-Weems, Clenora (1993) *Africana Wamanism: Reclaiming ourselves*. Triny, Mich.: Bedford Publisher, P. 50. In: Aldridge, Declores and Young, Callene (2000) *Out of Revolution: The Develepement of Africana Studfies*. Lexington Books. Available from: <http://faculty.missouri.edu/~hudsonweemsc/africanachapter.doc> [Accessed in: 06-23-2017]
- <sup>26</sup> EldredDurosini Jones, Eustace Palmer et. Al. (1992) *Women in African Literature Today*. Africa World Press, P. 2.
- <sup>27</sup> Dlores, P. Aldridge and Carlene, Young (2000) *Out of the Revolution of Africana Studies*. Lexington Books.
- <sup>28</sup> Hudson-Weems, Clenora (1993) *Africana Wamanism: Reclaiming ourselves*. Triny, Mich.: Bedford Publisher, P. 69. In: Aldridge, Declores and Young, Callene (2000) *Out of Revolution: The Develepement of Africana Studfies*. Lexington Books. Available from: <http://faculty.missouri.edu/~hudsonweemsc/africanachapter.doc> [Accessed in: 06-23-2017]
- <sup>29</sup> Clyde, W. Franklinjr. (1986) *"Black Male-Black Female Conflict; Individually Caused and Culturally Nurtured"*. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, P. 112
- <sup>30</sup> Walker, Alice (1983) *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. San Diego: Harcourt BraceJovanovich, PP. xi-xii.



### III- Results and Discussion:

#### Results:

Our comparative study of The Color Purple (1982) by the African-American Alice Walker and So Long a Letter (1981) by Mariama Bâ, has demonstrated that both works are involved within the same study of Women's Solidarity. In order to obtain our purpose, we have relied on the theory of *Womanism*, developed in Alice Walker's collection of essays *In Search of Our Mothers Garden: Womanist Prose* (1983) and *Africana Womanism*, a theory which is set in Clenora Hudson-Weems's *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (1993). Our comparison has provided an enquiry of the possible similarities that can relate both African American and African novels

The first chapter, is devoted for "Women's Solidarity", the main theme of our dissertation. It has revealed the ways through which consolidation has investigated itself, at any rate, for the emancipation of women of color from distinct socio-cultural contexts and how, in some cases, can devastate their power and maintain their subjugation. It has, then, conducted to the available sources of their sufferings and how the two women writers lament the domination of men that is mainly caused by the patriarchal institutions. It has in addition, pointed out the ways through which the African traditions and its customs can become among the primary origins that encourage male supremacy and affect women's empowerment.

The ultimate chapter has treated the authors' use of "The Epistolary narrative" as a means to approach the sensibilities that prevailing in their communities. The two writers, in fact, resort to letter writing as an act of revolt and liberation that sustains their protagonist's distress against patriarchal domination within the domestic sphere which becomes a site of resistance for women in both African-American and African societies.

## **IV- Discussion:**

### **Chapter one: Women's Solidarity:**

In this part of our work, we will shed light on Women's Solidarity in both The Color Purple and So Long a Letter. Alice Walker and Mariama Bâ resort to solidarity among the black women in both African-American and African communities as a means of emancipation. The two authors make a clear contribution to the socio-cultural issues of their communities and discuss gender, race and class. They focus on the lives of the black women and their struggle to overcome multiple forms of oppressions in form of women's bonding.

#### **1-1: Women's Solidarity in The Color Purple:**

Alice Walker 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<sup>31</sup>. Celie's interaction with other women in the story including her sister Nettie, her daughters in law Sofia and her husband's mistress, the blues singer, Shug Avery, has contributed to overcome her hardships and become a strong independent woman. Each of these black women, initially, provides her a sense of security, morale, physical and material support. Indeed, these black women, have to do more importantly with the mechanisms by which they clear away the obstacles that impede Celie from emancipation.

Celie, consequently, develops the ability to stand up for herself against the oppressive forces that subjugated her. She, finally, brings her gradual redemption to self empowerment to affect the men in her life. As expressed in Barbara Christian's *Black Feminist Criticism : Perspectives on Black Women Writers* : "Walker's Celie comes close to liberating herself through the community of black sisters, Nettie, Sophie, and Shug, and is able to positively affect the men of her world"<sup>32</sup>. It is therefore, the way by which Alice Walker sets forth her female hero to escape the forces that subjugates her. She is rendered to foster her own

creativity, to develop her own voice and gain her freedom physically, psychologically and economically /materially.

### **1-1-1 : Celie and Nettie :**

The first example that initiates among women's bonding in The Color Purple as a proof of loyalty and courage is between the two sisters Celie and Nettie. Walker's narration involves around Celie's private life in the world surrounding her. Celie's story begins with despair and frustration from those she should receive guidance and protection. She experiences her mother's illness then sexual exploitation from her father, Alphonso, at an early age. These disconnections within her natal home, consequently, restricts her into silence and prevents her from the sense of selfhood.

Basically the family reflects love and care. In the novel however, the two sisters reared within a family where affection is totally absent. For them, its meaning is more like a burden than a place of protection. Due to the absence of parental affection, the two sisters have depended on each other for survival in the harshest living situation. Celie provides Nettie with love and support. She is, therefore, not only a sister, but a substitute mother as she comes first to fill the emptiness of her lost children, she states: *"I Say I'll take care of you. With God help"*<sup>33</sup>. In such precarious situation, Celie sacrifices herself to protect her sister from same experiences<sup>34</sup>. In return, Nettie provides her a degree of stability, security and moral comfort even though she spends years away from her.

In her unfortunate marriage, Nettie witnesses her sister's submissiveness for Mr.\_\_\_\_'s brutality who frequently beats her. She is the laborer, the source of care for his children and unexpectedly his source of sexual pleasure. Nettie argues her to stand up for herself and fight her husband and his rotten children. Celie by contrast, submits to her conditions and reflects: *"I don't fight, I stay where I'm told, but I'm alive"*<sup>35</sup>.

Alice Walker presents Nettie as the first model for guidance that influences Celie. Although the latter is removed from school due to her pregnancies, Nettie in eye is the perfect model of passion for education. She is a smart, a pretty and self-sufficient girl who owns the descent chance to become a teacher.

Nettie is, in fact, influenced by the independent thoughts that her teacher Miss Beasley possesses which inculcate a strong sense of independence for greater opportunities in life then secretly teaches Celie. She provides her with reading and spelling as the basic tools and the necessary implements for self-expression within the world surrounding her. By reading and writing, Alice Walker sets her heroine the initial means to break her silence. These techniques, enable her to sustain the bitterness and ease the suffering of her miserable private life in letters to God, then to her sister. Nettie, eventually conveys her experiences from Africa; she reflects: "*when I don't write to you I feel as bad as I do when I don't pray, locked up in myself and choking on my own heart*"<sup>36</sup>. Barbara Christian, in this regard, argues :

It is written entirely in letters, a form that (along with diaries) was the only one allowed women to record their everyday lives and feelings, their "herstory". And of equal importance, Walker explores the richness and clarity of black folk English in such a way that the reader understands that the inner core of a person cannot be truly known except through her own language<sup>37</sup>

But what is more important in Alice Walker's use of letters is ranging from separation to solidarity. Cheung, an American literary critic, states that: "*Nettie's account of another world with a different set of rules, along with her singular example, makes Celie all the more convinced that, like Sofia and Shug, she must hold her own*"<sup>38</sup>. Through the The Color Purple, Alice Walker recounts the strong relationship between Nettie and Celie through letter writing.

While Celie is situated within her private realm, Nettie's experiences in Europe and other places such as Africa enables her to 'enter into creation' and serves as a primary source of acquisition for her. As an eager learner, Nettie does not hesitate to report her newfound knowledge for her sister. Her interaction with other people makes her realize how ignorant she

was; this fact forces her to ask for new information from the American missionaries, Samuel and Corrine, and look forward her previous ideas and interpretations. Her descriptions, actually, make reference to each place and each poeple she meets. Meanwhile, she realizes that the first human in the world is not white, but black, and the Africans had at one time a more advanced civilization than the Europeans. Thus, to establish new ideas in Celie's mind in relation to her God. Since her understanding was associated with man, her stepfather, who initially destroyed her relationship with at the beginning of the novel: "*you better not never tell nobody but God. I'd like kill your mammy*"<sup>39</sup>. This awakens in Celie a sense of ethical pride and self awareness and helps both Celie and Nettie to grow mature.

As a matter of fact, Nettie puts her sister within an other context since her experiences reveal same even bigger contemps than those of their community. She brings her to know the different dialects that are used by both black and white poeple. She, in addition, makes her aware of the African heritage and how they were sold along millions of Africans like slaves.

In doing so, Alice Walker renders her protagonist to see the oppressions and the resistance of her motherland, Africa. This in fact, brings Celie along to know her original traditions, customs and the effects of colonialism on the Olinka village as well. Nettie becomes an educated and an independent woman thanks to Celie's sacrifices. Nettie in her own opens her sister's horizon for new possibilities in life.

### **1-1-2: Celie and Sofia:**

Sofia Butler, Celie's step-son's wife, emerges as a living example of sisterhood in the novel. She represents a meaningful image of an independent woman who becomes second model for Celie, after her sister Nettie. As Amy Sickels, a critic, writes:

Sofia is the first woman Celie encounters who successfully resists male abuse, she is one of the women in the novel who will challenge celie's passivity and influence her developement into an independent woman<sup>40</sup>

The relationship shared between Celie and Sofia is symbolically appropriate with relationship of empowerment. Sofia is the primary example of strong character in the novel whose active resistance provides Celie a contradictory image of woman that she is familiar with. As a black African-American woman who reared in southern US during the 30s, she totally rejects the humiliating conditions that oppress and engulf the position of woman. Actually, the blacks in general are predestined to remain subservient to the whites. Therefore, the black woman is an absolute prisoner of such system. Consequently, such facts do not suit Sofia's nature, because she is meant to command not to take orders. Sofia, therefore, captures Celie's attention of woman's existence beyond that of the slave. However, at this stage Walker's heroine has not yet recognized the concept of the self by implication, the Other.

They be just marching hand in hand like going to war. She in front a little [...] she not quite as tall as Harpo but much bigger, and strong and ruddy looking, like her mama brought her up on pork [...] she stand up, big, strong, healthy, girl, she say, Naw, Harpo, you stay here. When you free, me and the baby be waiting<sup>41</sup>

The above cited quotation, significantly depicts Sofia's physical presence which captures Celie's attention at first sight. She is described as a strong-willed woman mainly when she asks Mr\_\_\_\_'s permission for marriage to Harpo. As a matter of fact, she possesses a strong inner resolve which reflects her own determination. Tracy L. Bealer goes on in her interpretation to Walker's words and says that Sofia's powerful body is a physical example of the family support system that makes her resistance possible. She therefore, does not accept to submit. She by contrast, gets married to Harpo regardless the rejection of Mr\_\_\_\_. She instead, keeps her independent behaviour and characteristics :

I tell her one thing, she do an other. Never what I say. Always back talk [...] Sofia think too much of herself anyway [...] if she talking when Harpo and Mr\_\_\_\_ come in the room, she keep right on, if they ast her something she say she don't know. Keep talking<sup>42</sup>

Bealer adds in a description about Sofia as a physically powerful and emotionally head strong woman who fights back with her strong body. She over whelms Harpo's attempts to physically dominate her.

However, this kind of relationship between a wife and her husband is not permitted in a male dominated society. For this, Albert does not tolerate Sofia's independent behaviours. He suggests Harpo to beat her, as he does Celie.

Alice Walker goes on analyzing the theme of solidarity and sets forth the first signs of Celie's awakening. While Sofia confronts Celie about her recommendation to Harpo to beat her into submission, the protagonist at this level takes the first step towards her awakening. Cheung argues that *"the reason behind Celie's act is because she has thoroughly internalized the basics of female subordination as well as being jealous of Sofia's strength against Harpo"*<sup>43</sup>. And this is evident while Celie confesses her jealousy towards Sofia and reflects: *"I say it cause I'm a fool, I say. I say it cause I'm jealous of you. I say it cause you do what I can't"*<sup>44</sup>

However, their relationship at this point is of a crucial importance because Sofia has challenged Celie to be a strong woman. Since Sofia has experienced same treatments of abuse from men in her life along with the family support, her resistance is made possible. Walker sets sisterhood among the black women as a pivotal means for female resistance. So she suggests Celie to fight because a girl is not in safe in a family of men:

All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl ain't safe in a family of men. But I never thought I'd have to fight in my own house. She let out her breath. I loves Harpo, she say. God knows I do. But I'll kill him dead before I let him beat me. Now if you want a dead son-in-law you just keep on advising him like you doing<sup>45</sup>

Ross goes further explaining that *"Sofia is a black woman warrior, her aggression is her means to prevent others from subjugating her. Her defiance in the face of brutal treatment provides Celie a model of resistance against sexual and racial oppression"*<sup>46</sup>.

Celie by contrast, does not accept to fight. Unlike Sofia, she keeps silent and obedient which bring her down into humiliation. She even affirms that men are superior to women. For this reason Celie trusts God to whom she confesses her daily sufferings. Sofia brings her to understand new possibilities in life. She with her determination does not accept to be humiliated by anyone in her life. Whether black or white, man or woman, she does not accept to be lessened or diminished. She suggests to Celie to bash Mr.\_\_\_\_ in her words: *"you ought to bash Mr\_\_\_\_ head open, she say think bout heaven later"*<sup>47</sup>.

From this, Celie realizes that a woman can be strong and independent. The two become closer to each other. Guo indicates that *"this sisterly communication brings to arouse Celie from her inactivity and that it seems that she has managed to cast off her old self and is in fact ready for regeneration"*<sup>48</sup>. Sofia's influence continues as her imprisonment degrades her as a person. She is not a strong woman any more. She in fact, at the same level as Celie.

By this ultimate fact, Brenda B.Smith, a famous literary critic, indicates that Sofia's voice is the first one to penetrate the shell of Celie's repressed emotions<sup>49</sup>. She develops in her the strength to survive that Celie was incapable to realize in the beginning of the story. By Sofia's *"courageous and willful behaviour"*<sup>50</sup>, Celie realizes how weak she is. Then, comes Shug Avery to fill the gap that remains for her final liberation.

### ***1-1-3: Celie and Shug Avery:***

Shug Avery, also known as the tramp, the famous blues singer and Mr.\_\_\_\_'s mistress, plays a significant role in liberating many black female characters. Her relation with Celie is set as an other form of female solidarity in The Color purple. Her influence on Celie is completely different from that of her sister Nettie and her daughter in law, Sofia. If Nettie has provided her the sense of hope and moral support that sustains her bitterness and Sofia, the rebellious spirit that makes her realize how powerless and weak she is, Shug is her affectionate mother and the sexual mentor that helps her to grow mature.



Shug's relationship with Celie has actually gone through three important phases: as a mother and her daughter, friends and lovers. Long before Celie encounters Shug, Celie has first hear of her existence in Alphonso's home, the place where she has endured her first tastes of brutality. Taken by a photograph, she is attracted by Shug's beauty. She sees her as the most beautiful woman she ever saw, even more prittier than her mama. This in fact, provides her the image of womanhood that she has never seen and comes to realize how much Shug's world is different from hers<sup>51</sup>. This in fact, draws a direct link with her and makes her understand the common suffering they both share.

After years of Celie's admiration of Shug, their relationship has intertwined while Celie gets married to Mr. \_\_\_\_\_. From the novel we come to know that Shug is ill to death and nobody accepts to take care of her: *"Dear God, Shug Avery sick and nobody in this town want to take the Queen Honeybee in. Her mammy say she told her so. Her pappy say, Tramp"*<sup>52</sup>. Celie, however, is always fascinated by Shug. For this she devotes a total attention to nurse her with lot of warm and affection until she regenerates.

In The Color Purple, we are told that Celie's transformation has begun with Sofia's attemptes to draw celie out of her silence. She, however, failed at a certain level because Celie has not yet realized the concepts of the Self and the Other. She in fact, in need of someone with whom she can share words and to whom she can show her own acts.

While Sofia drove her to self-realization, Shug is the woman who leads to encounter her long repressed selfhood. Shug's illness is the primary sign of dependency between the two women. Celie nurses her back to health, as she does it to her dead mother or her lost daughter, Olivia; *"I work on her like a doll or like she Olivia. Or like she mamma"*<sup>53</sup>. At first glance, mirror fact, Celie's intention is to treat Shug as a doll. However, the image of *the doll* here, is of substantial importance to the novel as a whole and in Celie's psychological developement

in particular. In this context, Daniel W. Ross (1996), an American critic and psychologist states that :

The psychoanalytic school of object relations recognizes dolls as a transitional devices, helping girls break out of the pattern of childhood dependence as they begin preparing for nurturing role they will experience as mothers. With this symbol, we see that Celie has begun to employ some typical mechanisms of female psychic growth and development<sup>54</sup>

The traditional game for girls in The Color Purple, puts forward the initial mechanisms that Walker employs for/ in Celie's development from childhood to maturity. By nurturing Shug, Walker straightens away Celie's feelings. She experiences the role of the mother that she had never got to experience before. While her step-father prevented her from bearing her children, Adam and Olivia. And befriending Shug permits her to continue her development to maturity which was interrupted successively. The latter, feels as her mamma or may be her grandma used to do<sup>55</sup>. Yet, they create a connection that becomes later unexpectedly sexual.

Alice Walker continues with Shug's and Celie's connections and outlines how, even secretly, she later defends Shug by spitting in the glass of water of Mr. \_\_\_\_'s father. When he refers to her as *a Whore*. With this act, The Color Purple denotes Celie's primary attempts to create an opinion of her own.

The illness of Celie, Ross indicates is not physical, but a psychological one. He goes on and explains how the act of Shug's naming for Celie's song for the first time<sup>56</sup>, assumes the Celie's intertextuality. Shug's song '*Sister*' offers her a public recognition and gives her the strength to stand up for herself to fight against male's domination.

The representation of women's solidarity develops gradually between Celie and Shug as the latter decides to leave for Memphis. She, therefore, provides her the opportunity to develop the voice that she has never possessed since the beginning of the novel. Besides her protection from Mr. \_\_\_\_, Celie's confidence grows deeper while she starts to ease her sufferings for the first time to other listeners than God :

Oh miss Celie, she [Shug] say. [...] Don't cry, Celie, Shug say. Don't cry. She starts kissing the water as it come down side my face [...] My mama die, ItellShug. My sister Nettie run away. Mr\_\_\_come git me to take care his rotten children. He neverast me nothing bout myself. He clam on top of me and fuck and fuck, even when my head bandaged. Nobody ever love me, I say<sup>57</sup>

Contrary to Celie's God, Shug has allocated a comprehensive attention and psychological guidance which give her an active refusal of Alphonso's commands to "shut up" and causes her loss of confidence in God. She further regenerates her thoughts and decides to write to her sister Nettie<sup>58</sup>.

Linda Abbandonato argues:

It is her love for Shug that enables Celie to bury her sad double narrative of paternal origins and construct a new identity within a feminine domain [...] In loving Shug, Celie becomes a desiring subject, and in loving Shug, she is made visible to herself as an object of desire [...] is accompanied by a whole range of other discoveries that relegate man to the margins of a world he has always dominated. The most significant of these is a reconceptualization of God the patriarch. Describing her feminist redefinition of God, Shug makes an explicit connection between spiritual and sexual jouissance<sup>59</sup>

The conversation about God challenges Celie's spirituality. This stage in her development, gives her the opportunity to grow aware of the world surrounding her and gives her the possibility to see it within herself ; Hence, to not perceive her husband as Mr.\_\_\_, yet as Albert. This indeed, reveals her shift in her perception into equality with Albert.

As a matter of fact, Alice Walker gives a considerable attention to love and sex relationships and examines 'Lesbianism', the intimate relationship between Celie and Shug that consistently developed naturally from sisterhood to lovers. Since Celie has no cognition of the sexual sensation caused by the manifestation of masculine domination that internalizes having sex with Mr.\_\_\_and Alphonso's repeated rapes. Barbara Chritian goes on and interprets: "*the love /sex relationship between Celie and Shug [...] is presented as a natural, strengthening process through which both women, as well as the peopel around them, grow*"<sup>60</sup>.

To accomplish her goal, Walker sets the few remaining alternatives of female solidarity that facilitates her heroine's successful development. In fact, she uses to situate the two female characters within the context *Womanist (Womanism)* set in her collection of essays *In Search of Mother's Garden : Womanist Prose* (1983)<sup>61</sup>.

For Shug, virginity means pleasure. Since her female partner has never had an orgasm or enjoyed sex, she argues that Celie still virgin. Ross notices that before the arrival of Shug, Celie had no desire to know her body. Yet, by nurturing her, he argues, she finds her first erotic stirrings that she associates with the most pure thing in her life which is her faith. He points out that:

[...] to make a desire for selfhood possible, Celie must take a new perspective on her own body. Rather than defining herself in terms of fragmentation or of lack, she must learn to define herself synecdochally her genitalia, as a sufficient symbol of herself as a whole<sup>62</sup>

Shug guides Celie into a new perception of sexuality and introduces the mysteries in the female body. Walker here, connects *the black(er)* skin as a powerful and relevant force for change:

Celie experiences her sexual awakening because her lesbian desire leads her to Shug, a woman uniquely suited to help her combat and defeat the masculinist oppression preventing her liberation<sup>63</sup>

Celie now awakens not only her sexuality, but also acquires the performance to construct her personality. Alice Walker's The Color Purple demonstrates how the Lesbian relationship shared with Shug, leads to Celie's transition from a sexual object to a sexual subject. Here, therefore, the meaning is that:

fulfills African American women's need for "a female hero", an African American "every woman" whose condition speaks to that of many other African American and who ultimately masters her world and claims her place within it as an autonomous, courageous and creative self<sup>64</sup>

Through The Color Purple, Alice Walker conveys how crucial is the collective understanding and the friendship in all its forms for Celie's emancipation. Ranging from

Nettie's education to Sofia's spiritual and physical determination, then to the sexual mentor, Shug, Celie is able to transcend her traumatic experiences for the psychological, the physical/sexual and the economic freedom. Autonomy, hence, is only possible through the relationships with others.

## **1-2: Women's Solidarity in So Long a Letter:**

Mariama Bâ highlights an active participation of the black women in the novel that converts into a mutual solidarity as a means that helps them to get free from the burdens of the potential threats that subjugate them. A reality that she reveals through the experiences of Ramatoulaye and her mutual relationship with the French Headmistress and the Senegalese, Aïssatou. In her introduction for the novel W.Harrow states:

Ramatoulaye sets out the story of her present tribulations, the past events that led up to them, and the anxieties she faces as a mother, in a series of letters to her 'sister' Aïssatou, who herself faced the trauma of a long-term marriage coming to an end as her husband chose to take a young woman as his second wife. Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou evoke the situation of the mature, troubled woman, of those who have only each other to turn to for sustenance<sup>65</sup>

The bond shared between the three black African women has paved the way to transcend the hardships within the African society.

### **1-2-1: Ramatoulaye and the Headmistress:**

Ramatoulaye and the French white Headmistress are the primary indications for women's Solidarity in the So Long a Letter. In several situations, the Headmistress offers to Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou self-awareness. Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou's experience for colonialism, independence and neo-colonialism is of a crucial importance to keep their bond in the midst of the transformations that occur in Senegal.

Neo-colonialism calls for new challenges for the Senegalese women who, in fact, are set in a balance between the traditional African values and the modern western beliefs. It

invites the black African women to question some aspects that may subjugate them. In order to investigate the solidarity shared between Ramatoulaye and the Headmistress, it is necessary to consider the effects of colonialism on women in Senegal. Mariama Bâ makes her appeal for education which she firmly believes available to inculcate in them the hidden possibility for women's strength. Thus, an approach to colonial education makes the potentiality of this attempt. The Headmistress offers Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou access for education, an opportunity to challenge their Senegalese patriarchal institutions, most importantly the force which fortifies their friendship.

Both protagonists take an advantage from Colonial Education and granted themselves higher status in society. It is presented as a means that offers them the status of professional women. Therefore, acts as a key which granted them and other women to stand together: *"colonial education has revolutionized the lives and minds of the two friends, turning them into upper-class narrators-professional"*<sup>66</sup>. In fact, both women are the pioneers of educated African women who provide a vivid example of a liberated woman to their generation and those to follow. Thus, an example of self-empowerment.

As Senegalese, both Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou do not hesitate to abandon the Koranic School to attend the colonial one. Mariama Bâ, at this level portrays the first seeds of the impact of Colonial Education on women's consolidation. Both characters become teachers who own a financial independence in a context where women are only required to get husbands and raise a family. She, therefore, presents education not only as a means for professionalism, yet a pivotal step towards liberation despite the patriarchal attempts to oppress them.

Ramatoulaye gives a considerable attention in befriending Aïssatou. Thus, she portrays the nurturing attention of their Headmistress, who actually introduces them to school.

The latter, in fact, stresses carefully on sisterhood as the basis that she adopts, besides education, to get out from the burdens of patriarchy, Ramatoulaye reflects in her letter:

Aïssatou, I will never forget the white woman who was the first to desire for us an ‘uncommon’ destiny [...] To lift us out the bog of tradition, superstition and custom, to make us appreciate a multitude of civilization without renouncing our own, to raise our vision of the world, cultivate our personalities, strengthen our qualities, to make up for our inadequacies, to develop universal moral values in us: these were the aims of our admirable headmistress. The word ‘love’ had a particular resonance in her. She lived us without patronizing us, with our plaits either standing on end or bent down, with our loose blouses, our wrappers. She knew how to discover and appreciate our qualities<sup>67</sup>

Ramatoulaye’s experience for colonialism raises her awareness for better options in her life. Her relationship with the white Headmistress paves the way to become a schoolteacher. Their relation, hence, leads to a strong link between Ramatoulaye and her childhood friend Aïssatou.

Both Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou benefit from the impact of western colonialism. Yet their interpretations of its influence are different.

### **1-2-2: Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou:**

Mariama Bâ sets the events of her novel in the Senegalese Muslim society which places enormous restrictions upon women. She makes a potential contribution for “*women’s bonding, of Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou’s enduring friendship, of their shared world without men*”<sup>68</sup>. She exposes her protagonists’ commitments to consolidate each other, an advantage that urges them to develop the capacity to overcome their sorrows. She, therefore, evokes this form of solidarity through the “*The most intimate and personal form of correspondence to her close friend, Ramatoulaye dares her soul and diuerges her innermost concerns, worries and beliefs*”<sup>69</sup>.

The intimacy recounted in Ramatoulaye's long letter substantiates that distances and differences can never be a barrier, yet a proof for closeness and women's empowerment that launches the social injustices as well as the ability to resist the unfair treatments of polygamy, a religious practice that offers men the right to have four wives. Indeed, a patriarchal institution that causes women's subjugation in the Islamic world. Hence, to challenge and denounce the imposed practices in form of solidarity.

The collection of the memories in So Long a Letter that Mariama Bâ develops in parallel between Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou allows her to extend their friendship into solidarity and reach a new stage in their lives; she says: "*Yesterday you were divorced. Today I am a widow*"<sup>70</sup>. The former emphasizes on women's friendship through her characters' commitments to fight any oppression that causes their pain and despair. She therefore, protests her characters empowerment to heal the betrayals of their husbands and assume their own lives as single mothers.

Obviously, western education paves the way to Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou for self-empowerment, most importantly the force that strengthens their friendship for years despite their ideological differences. Their exposure to western colonialism causes Aïssatou's willingness to embrace the culture of the colonizer thus her difficulty to cope with the traditional African values that dictates her daily lives. The Francophone women writer and literary critic, Keith L. Walker, in this concern indicates how the move to independence also involves a shift in the identity of the colonized subject<sup>71</sup>. Contrary to Aïssatou, Ramatoulaye is not affected by this division and remain traditional.

Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou exhibits different views concerning the issue of marriage, yet these differences do not marred their closeness. Mariama Bâ presents the two friends as a perfect example of what women bond should be. As Coulis (2003) indicates:



Even though Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou choose different responses to the attempt to subjugate them, they retain a friendship and respect that endures. Their bond transcends distances and all differences and is the core of the narrative<sup>72</sup>

Their tie grows stronger through time together and apart to their middle age lives.

The narrator states:

Your presence in my life is by no means fortuitous. Our grandmothers in their compounds were separated by a fence and would exchange messages daily. Our mothers used to argue over who would look after our uncles and aunts. As for us, we wore out wrappers and sandals on the same stony road to the koranic ; we buried our milk teeth in the same holes and begged our fairy godmothers to restore them to us, more splendid than before<sup>73</sup>

Mariama Bâ tends to demonstrate in the quotation cited above, the reliance and sustenance that her women characters develop towards each other. Hence, the trust that glorifies a multi-generational dependability in the stance of their difficulties. In this process, “So Long a Letter” clearly reveals the sufferings of the Senegalese women.

Mariama Bâ sets out polygamy as a participant agent in women’s subjugation. It is the platform which practically puts women as others and reduces them into sexual objects, the reality that both friends undergo its consequences. After many years of happy marriage and birth of three children, Aunt Nabou, Mawdo’s mother as a princess of noble birth, urges her son to take another wife of his class. To satisfy his mother’s wish, Mawdo Bâ honored her and takes young Nabou as a second wife without Aïssatou’s knowledge. Although Islam allows a man to have up to four wives, his action seems a betrayal of trust.

Feeling betrayed, Aïssatou takes his commitment seriously and dares to challenge the institution of marriage and takes a full responsibility of her and her children and leaves to US, instead of being involved in polygamy and says: “*I am stripping myself of your love, your name. Clothed in my dignity, the only worthy garment, I go my way*”<sup>74</sup>.

Mariama Bâ presents Aïssatou's choice as a very courageous, indeed rare in a society where women are expected to welcome a co-wife openly not to take mere decisions. She, actually, has to stand unique against the Senegalese traditions, its customs and its judgments as well. Yet her rejection of polygamy by extension the Senegalese norms, does not affect her relation with Ramatoulaye who by contrast respects her marriage.

Class division makes a significant contribution to Aïssatou's decision who, actually, revolts against polygamy, the same rejection of the system that does not advocate marriage between men and women from different social classes. In Ramatoulaye's claim:

Then came your marriage with MawdoBà, recently graduated from the African School of Medicine and Pharmacy. A controversial marriage. I can still hear the angry rumors in town: 'What, a Toucouleur marrying a goldsmith's daughter? He will never "make money"'”<sup>75</sup>

Ramatoulaye's refutation for class division that categorizes people regardless their achievements in society reinforces Aïssatou's determination;

The different responses of the friends to marital betrayal are largely determined by contrasts in their social position. It is significant that Aïssatou, of working class origins, is not constrained as Ramatoulaye is when she strips herself of a betrayed commitment, her choice of naked vulnerability is in striking contrast to Ramatoulaye's enclosed view<sup>76</sup>

Besides, her departure with only three children makes her choice easier and her independence possible since her determination and the African demands are distantly positioned. Contrary to Aïssatou, Ramatoulaye's stand, by contrast, proves a challenge for the Senegalese institutions yet, neither distance nor differences can endanger their friendship. The level at which MariamaBâ makes the character's bonding possible.

Obviously, common interests are the tied that unifies women. However, Mariama Bâ's So Long a Letter suggests that differences can reach the same aim. Ramatoulaye's respect for her childhood friendship urges her to sympathise her ambivalent friend, even at the

extent of encouraging the later in her new responsibility. Ramatoulaye, indeed, is more concerned with friendship *that kills obstacles and resists time*<sup>77</sup>. As a matter of fact, the former exposes the solidarity that sustains Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou as a perfect paradigm that transcends the limitations of friendship and other obstacles in their lives. Ramatoulaye's assistance, therefore, is of a crucial importance for her friend, who actually requires any support to face her predicament. Finally, to find herself requires same encouragements as she goes through an experience that is similar or even worse than hers.

After years of marriage and twelve children, Ramatoulaye's husband Modou Fall, makes his irresponsible decision and take Benitou, a child in the same age as her daughter Dada, promoted to the rank of her co-wife, towards whom she must face up to. Just as Ramatoulaye, MariamaBâ follows Aïssatou's tremendous support for her friend to surmount her experiences despite their different perceptions.

Caught in her deep respect for the African traditions and customs, Ramatoulaye is driven into the traps of patriarchy and chooses to suffer rather than to reject the Senegalese values. As a devoted Muslim she accepts the precepts of Islam and tolerates polygamy. She reflects:

I lived in a vacuum. And Modou avoided me. Attempts by friends and family to bring him back to the fold proved futile [...] He never came again; his new found happiness gradually swallowed up his memory of US. He forgot about us<sup>78</sup>

Her decision to become a co-wife, therefore, comes from her faithfulness for the institution of marriage. In fact, she firmly believes that man and woman are complementary and that a woman is in need of her man to maintain a balance in society as she reflects:

I am one of those who can realize themselves fully and bloom only when they form part of a couple. Even though I understand your stand, even though I respect the choice of liberated women. I have never conceived of happiness outside marriage<sup>79</sup>

Mariama Bâ, Here, demonstrates Ramatoulaye's affinity for men, family, thus marriage, to reflect Clenora Hudson-Weems's definition for *Africana Womanism* who is in her view makes a whole, authentic and complete sense of Africana woman<sup>80</sup>.

Though Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou have different approaches concerning polygamy, Mariama Bâ's attempt is to demonstrate that women's differences are not an obstacle, yet a form of solidarity. She therefore, invites the reader to interpret their differences as a positive quality that calls more for unity than division. Just like Ramatoulaye's help for Aïssatou through her experience, the latter also influences her friend with her opinions and argues how Aïssaou's disappointments were hers, as her own rejection was Aïssatou's. The narrator indicates:

The essential thing is the content of our hearts, which animates us; the essentiel thing is the quality of the sap that flows through us. You have often provide to me the superiority of friendship over love. Time, distance, as well as mutual memories have consolidated our tied and made our children, brothers and sisters. Reunited, will we draw up a detailed account of our faded bloom, or will we saw new seed for new harvest? [...] Till tomorrow, my friend. We will then have time to ourselves<sup>81</sup>

Thereby, to overcome her own challenge. Their differences, indeed, have never been a burden since their open mindedness that they share as well as the mutual respect that unite them are much stronger than a divergence in their views. Then, their capacity to handle it, demonstrates their ability for sustenance. Their reliance is also accomplished by material support.

Mariama Bâ makes her protagonist's bond stronger as the car Aïssatou buys for her friend provides her not only with material supply, but the means for self-confidence. Her attentiveness, in addition, urges her to travel across the Atlantic to provide her friend support to stand against her subjugations. The latter reflects:

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 choose a car which you

had paid for, in full. My children gave cries of joy when they learned of the approaching end of their tribulations, which remain the daily lot of a good many other students. Friendship has splendors that love knows not. It grows stronger when crossed whereas obstacles kill love. Friendship resists time, which wearies and severs couple. You, the goldsmith daughter, gave me your help while depriving yourself<sup>82</sup>

Although Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou have adopted different attitudes in their deception. However, the novel reveals that their shared friendship is not only an empowerment, but the bond that ultimately extended into solidarity. The sisterhood that unifies them, has secured their survival against the constraints of patriarchal institutions as well as any other form of prejudices across time and space. Meanwhile, has allowed Ramatoulaye to move closer to the role model of her dearest friend. Their meeting, Katherine Frank points out, symbolise the crucial union of the Westernized and the African cultures<sup>83</sup>.

So Long a Letter undeniably makes clear that friendship allows women to challenge a diversity of oppressions. In the end, it demonstrates how bonding asserts their solidarity in spite the cultural and social differences and distances.

To conclude, both Alice Walker and MariamaBâ have made a strong appeal for women bonding as the key vehicle to overcome women's oppression in all its forms in both Afro-American and African cultures. Alice Walker has called for the triple union of Nettie, Sofia Butler and Shug Avery to help Celie to transit from oppression to liberation. MariamaBâ, on the other hand, has made her own attempt through the Headmistress and Aïssatou for Ramatoulaye's redemption.

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**Endnotes:**

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<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, P. 181.

<sup>33</sup>Walker, Alice (1982) *The Color Purple*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., P. 5

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, P. 15.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, P. 18.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, P. 122.

<sup>37</sup>Christian, Barbara (1985) *Black Feminist Chriticism*. New York: Pergamon Press, P. 185.

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- <sup>51</sup> Walker, Alice (1982) *The Color Purple*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., P. 8
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid., P. 42
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid., P. 51.
- <sup>54</sup> Ross, Daniel W. (1996) "A Fairy-Tale Life: The Making of Celie in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*". Teaching American Ethnic Literature: Nineteen Essays, eds. John R. Maitino and David R. Peck. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- <sup>55</sup> Walker, Alice (1982) *The Color Purple*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., P. 51.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid., P. 70.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid., PP. 102-103.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid., PP. 173-177.
- <sup>59</sup> Abbandonato, Linda (1991) "A View from 'Elsewhere'": *Subversive Sexuality and the Rewriting of the Heroine's Story in The Color Purple*. Modern Language Association, Vol. 106 (5), P. 1112. [Online] Available from: <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0030-8129%2819910%29106%3A5%3C1106%3A%22VF%27%22S%3E2.0.CO%3B2-B2-4>
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- <sup>77</sup> Bâ, Mariama (1981) *So Long a Letter*. Heinemann, P. 54.
- <sup>78</sup> Bâ, Mariama (1981) *So Long a Letter*. Heinemann, P. 48.
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- <sup>82</sup> Ibid., P. 56.
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## ***Chapter two: Male Oppression:***

The issue of male oppression and women's subjugation has been among the major thematic concerns of the African-American and African literatures in the last few decades. Alice Walker and Mariama Bâ and many contemporary black female writers have brought forward the truth of the black women's lives and create a sense of responsibility to become the voice for those who have been silenced by life and literature. In this concern, They discuss the issue of male oppression in The Color Purple and So Long a Letter. The two authors highlight the domination of men as an important issue in both novels. They treat the predicaments of the black women in relation to the men in their lives. They, actually, tend to examine the status of the two sexes both in the African-American and the African communities.

### **2-1: Male Oppression in The Color Purple:**

Alice Walker's The Color Purple is concerned with male-female relationships within the Black community. The former displays how gender discrimination can affect black women's subjectivity and leads them into misery. In *In Search of Our Mother's Garden* she claims:

I wanted to explore the relationship between men and women and why women are always condemned for doing what men do as an expression of their masculinity. Why are women so easy "tramps" and "traitors" when men are heroes for engaging in the same activity?<sup>84</sup>

Indeed, Alice Walker tends to explore the traditional African-American family that oppresses the black women with an optimistic vision towards the power of division between the sexes. In order to reach her aim, she questions the sexist societies and patriarchal system alike. As Bernard Bell pointed out :

the color purple is more concerned with the politics of sex and self than with the politics of class and race...its unrelenting, severe attacks on



male hegemony, especially the violent abuse of revolutionary leap forward into a new social order based on sexual egalitarianism<sup>85</sup>

The question over male domination and female resistance is thus one of the major issues that Alice Walker exposes in The Color Purple. She openly presents a number of ways of abusing women. Consequently, she concentrates on black-on-black interrelationships, a way by which she can present the disproportion between the sexes. She in fact, aims to overcome greater issues in her environment namely the black community. She tends most importantly, to create awareness of the fact that discrimination exist within her own community.

Alice Walker manages to attract the reader's attention to confront with an extreme humiliating position of the black women in southern community during the 30s. She, therefore, examines the psychological harm that results from both the physical and the emotional violence, as well as the sexual oppressions that characterizes the relationship between male and female. Some of these facts, are actually described in the relevant case of Celie and the man she considers her biological father and her husband alike.

### ***2-1-1: Pa (Alphonso):***

Alice Walker presents through The Color Purple the extreme form of male violence through the father/daughter rape. She enables the reader to enter the private thoughts and the emotions of her fourteen years old protagonist. The fact that Alphonso, the man she perceives as her biological father, silences her for years. He orders her to submit to his will prohibits her from articulating her experiences to the outside world: "*You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy*"<sup>86</sup>. As Linda Abbandonato, a feminist literary critic, claims:

Celie's story is told within the context of this threat : the narrative is about breaking silences, and, appropriately, its formal structure creates the illusion that it is filled with unmediated "voices". Trapped in a gridlock of racist, sexist, and heterosexist oppressions, Celie struggles toward linguistic self-definition. She is an "invisible woman," a character traditionally silenced and effaced in fiction ; and by centering on her, Walker replots the heroine's text. I want to show how Celie's story\_the story of that most marginalized of heroines the black lesbian\_challenges patriarchal constructions of female subjectivity and sexuality and thus makes representation itself a compelling issue for all women, regardless of their ethnicity or sexual orientation<sup>87</sup>

Besides, one can perceive that Celie's experiences robbed her from her innocence and childhood. Due to her mother's illness, whose situation is not less than that of her daughter, Celie endures her first sexual abuse on the part of "Pa". She therefore, has to fulfil duties that are not hers. Additionally, to submit to the man who is supposed to be the source of care, protection and guidance. He instead, impregnates her twice. Consequently, to create a sequence of instabilities in Celie's psychological transformation. In Celie's description:

I have always been a good girl [...] He never had a kind word to say to me Just say You gonna do what your mammy wouldn't. First he put his thing up against my hip and sort of wiggle it around. Then he grab hold my titties. Then he push his thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying You better shut up and git used to it. But I don't never git used to it. And now I feels sick every time I be the one to cook<sup>88</sup>

The description noted above, allows the reader to confront with Celie's experience of rape that creates a gap between her physical and psychological perception of such act. Despite her incomprehension of the act of abuse which reflects the psychological trauma she is living because of her literal obedience for "Pa's" orders. Yet her letters show her awareness of the conditions imposed upon her and this is evident through the first statement, which reflects her inner struggles between, her own perception and the negative judgements of her community.

The external realities cited above, in fact, are set in opposition to Celie's moral dynamics. These oppositions, consequently, cause her loss for the sense of the being. In essence, she is not inferior since her surrounding consider women as subordinated. The cruel relationship that the father-daughter share, the first contact that Walker's protagonist has with a man, influences her negatively in the future.

Alice Walker's The Color Purple follows the forms of male oppression and presents Celie's psychological subjugation. Her graphic forces the reader to confront not only with ugliness of child abuses, but also to illustrate her heroine's attempts to face these brutalities and the possibility of its perpetuation. Celie's "Pa" stopped her commitment for development as he deprives her from the most crucial element she loves and allows her independence which is the access for formal education. She declares : "*The first time I got big Pa took me out of school. He never care that I love it*"<sup>89</sup>. Alphonso by contrast, takes his decision and arranges her marriage to a neighbor of his age. He clears up :

Well, He say, real slow, I can't let you have Nettie. She too young. Don't know nothing but what you tell her. Sides, I want her to git some more schooling. Make a schoolteacher out of her. But I can let you have Celie. She the oldest anyway. She ought to marry first. She ain't fresh tho, but I specs you know that. She spoiled. Twice. But dont need a fresh woman no how. I got a fresh one in there myself and she sick all the time [...] He say, Let me see her again. Pa call me. Celie, he say. Like it wasn't nothing. Mr\_\_\_want another look at you. I go stand in the door. The sun shinr in my eyes. He's still up on his horse. He look up and down. Pa rattle his nespaper. Move up, he won't bite,he say. Igo closer to the steps, but not too close cause I'm little scared of his horse. Turn around, Pa say.I turn round [...] She good with children. Pa say, rattling his paper open more. Never heard her say a hard word to nary one of them. Just give' em everything they ast for, is the only problem. Mr\_\_\_say, That cow still coming ? He say, Her cow<sup>90</sup>

In this passage, Alice Walker rightly shows the very moment of Celie's dehumanization. As Linda Abbandonato notices: "*the marriage negotiations take place entirly between the stepfather and the husband: Celie is handed over like a beast of*

*burden, identified with the cow that accompanies her*”<sup>91</sup>. Since their meeting soundingly a scene in a slave market. Celie is married to a man who is more concerned with the cow which serves as her dowry.

“Pa” who should normally be the source of confidence for both Celie and Nettie, naturally exploits his authoritarian position as a father. His mal-treatments are not better than that of a slave since what counts for him is how to satisfy his sexual desires no matter how. When he gets ride of his oldest daughter, he starts eying Nettie, the youngest one. Under these precarious conditions, Celie comes to understand that she does not even look at men and wishes the justice applied even at other’s hands, she says: *“I don’t even look at mens. That’s the truth. I look at women, tho, cause I’m not scared of them [...] Whenthey [herbrothers] they gon fighthim. Maybe kill”*<sup>92</sup>.

Through Alphonso’s final death, which marks the end of the novel, with the new house build to replace Celie’s childhood house, Alice walker symbolically sets her heroine in site of creativity within her community which is also similar to her freedom.

Finally one can say, despite the repeated abuses that Celie has experienced within a place expected to be full of respect and love, yet, she learns at an early age that she has nothing to expect from men than violence and believes that all men are equal.

### **2-1-2: Mr.\_\_\_\_ (Albert):**

Although Celie’s marriage makes an end to one violence on her step-father’s part. However, The Color purple conducts us to a new beginning of another violence at the hands of her husband she dennotes as Mr.\_\_\_\_. A widower with four children who misuses her: verbally, using diminishing comments. Secondly, by destroying her link with the outside world as a means of dependency. This relationship, indeed, is most appropriate with black-on-black violence in The Color Purple. A husband in the

patriarchal community has the right to treat his wife in any way he wishes. In this sense, Celie narrates her first abuses from her husband.

Similarly to her step-father, Alphonso, Celie is forced to live her moments of marital sexual involvement with Mr.\_\_\_\_ in the most dehumanizing ways that assumes a form of rape:

I pretend I ain't there. He never knows the diffrence. Never ast me how I feel, nothing. Just do his business, get off, go to sleep [...] Mr.\_\_\_\_ come git me to care hid rotten children. He never ast me nothing bout myself. He clam on top of me and fuck and fuck, even my head bandaged<sup>93</sup>

For her, having sex with her husband is consistently a masculine domination that she figures it out as rape.

Caught in this loveless marriage, Celie confronts with new realities that are not more than a continuation of what she has already faced through her childhood. She embodies the most vicious aspects of male oppression. Under the authority of a dominant husband, she has to fulfil the role of a slave. She is expected to look after his uncooperative children, work both in the house and the field. Even more, she is expected to submit to the frequent joyless sexual encounters in order to satisfy his desires. Consequently, this causes her loss of physical control. At this point, Alice Walker presents her protagonist as a worthless sexual object who pocesses no value as a woman should has since *"He look at me [Celie]. It like it looking at the earth"*<sup>94</sup>. The former reflects:

They stumbled in body, so dimmed and confused by pain, that they considered themselves unworthy even in hope. In the selfless abstractions their bodies became to men who used them, they became more than "sexual objects", more even than mere women : they became "Saints." Instead of being perceived as whole persons, their bodies became shrines : what was thought to their minds became temples suitable for worship. These crazy Saints stared out at the world, wildly, like unatics\_\_or quitly, like suicides ; and the God that was in their gaze

was mute as a great stone [...] that acknowledge them, except as "the mule of the world"<sup>95</sup>

The Color Purple features an other side of physical violence. Alice Walker powerfully examines Celie as a subject of a repeated beatings as a device by which men can control women. "*He beat me as he beat his children*"<sup>96</sup>. Through this quotation, one can notice that Celie's only way to survive under such circumstances is to remain silent, obey Mr.\_\_\_\_ commands and tolerate his beatings.

What is significant in Mr.\_\_\_\_'s and Celie's relationship is Mr.\_\_\_\_'s performance to dominate the domestic sphere. Except his love for his mistress, Shug Avery, he manages to organize his contacts under his will. Undoubtedly, this is evident while ordering his son, Harpo, to dominate his wife suggesting that "*wives is like children. You have let 'em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating*"<sup>97</sup>.

Meanwhile, Celie does not consider Mr.\_\_\_\_ as a partner, yet a source of an absolute domination just as he determines it. While analysing The Color Purple, we come to notice Celie's inability to name her husband. The process of naming in fact, is linked to the period of slavery, when the African American community was the white master's property. As the Feminist critic Mori Aoi pointed out in "Tony Morrison and Womanist Discourse": "*under slavery, the power of naming absolutely remained with the white master*"<sup>98</sup>. Hence, the connotation of slavery is noticeable through Alice Walker's use of the word "*Plantation*" referring to Mr.\_\_\_\_ property and most importantly in which Celie is living and working not less than a slave without recognizing it. The Color Purple exposes the process of unaming as an appropriate form by which Celie addresses her husband's authority with similar representation for her "Pa". Guo Dayan observes "*In a male-dominated society, women's voice is silenced.*

*Before her awareness of identity is awakened, Celie does not dare to speak out the names of those men who stongly command authority over her”<sup>99</sup>.*

Alice Walker follows Mr.\_\_\_\_’s oppression by the most hurting abuses that Celie has to cope with for years through her sister’s letter’s being hidden. By doing so, he deprives her from education. The Color Purple, thus, conducts to one conclusion, is that Celie has been unexepectedly what Albert wants her to be, his slave.

Mr.\_\_\_\_’s cruelty is stopped by Celie’s decision to break from her marriage and leave him with his prostitute, Shug Avery, to Memphis. Celie revolts against Mr.\_\_\_\_’s patriarchal ideology and silences him as he did to her. Her challenge for Albert’s patriarchy begins. Now she is able to voice out the pathetic experiences to which she was previously submitted to verbalize her first words by self-affirmation : *”The jail you plan to me is the one in which you will [...] I’m pore, I’m black, I may be ugly and can’t cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I’m here”<sup>100</sup>*. Her proclamation allows her possession of the authentic self which also gives her the possibility to fight and to break from Mr.\_\_\_\_’s ideology.

Here, Alice Walker starts accumulating the turning point of both Celie’s and Albert’s characters and their lives alike to redefine themselves :

I [Celie] in his eyes and see he feeling scared of me. Well, good, I think let him feel what I felt [...] you know, he say, you use to remained me of a bird way back when you first come to live with me. You was so skinny, Lord, he say. And at the least little thing happen, you looked about to fly away<sup>101</sup>

Looking back at the oppression of patriarchy, Mr.\_\_\_\_ has ruled as he maintained authority, yet disrupted while he loses his domination.

Physically and psychologically abused by stepfather and husband alike, Celie is denied as atatus as subject. Her submission is enforced through violence. In her terrified acquiescence to such blatant male brutality, Celie symbolically mirrors Everywoman. Fear of rape, for example, is

so habitual that it has become naturalized and conditions women automatically ; when it circumscribe their movement, we call it Common Sense, and judicial system holds women who lack accountability for male violence. Celie bleakly represents the plight of her more privileged sisters, who are victimized by social tyrannies like antiabortion legislation, the kidnapping of children, and state intervention in the family and individuals' sexual orientation<sup>102</sup>.

Although The Color Purple is narrated through Celie's letters, the former tends to explore Celie's passivity since her subjectivity reveals an absolute dependency for her step-father and later her husband.

By the representations that operate within The Color Purple (Alphonso's and Mr. \_\_\_\_'s relations with Celie), Alice Walker portrays the internal structure of the African-American family as a site of oppressions. One can conclude by Simone De Beauvoir's famous statement that suits the character of Celie: "*one is not born, but rather one become, a woman*"<sup>103</sup>. The woman who symbolically reflects every African-American black woman, is now able to overcome her traumatic experiences and break from the patriarchal domination of her step-father, husband and the hierarchical God who is reminiscent to man.

## **2-2: Male Oppression in So Long a Letter:**

This study, actually, investigates an analysis for the structure that governs men and women's relationships. Particularly, a study of the relevant sources of male oppression which reduce the African women's status from developing the sense of womanhood. It also includes an enquiry of how the traditional African norms, values and religious practices can be relevant factors for male oppression and women's subjugation. In the light of these concerns, Mariama Bâ invests a deep emphasis to reconstruct the black African Muslim womanhood. She, therefore, positions herself among the African pioneers of freedom fighters for African women's liberation who



offers a sensitive portrayal of the complex realities of the Senegalese women. In his introduction to the novel, the professor of English, Kenneth W. Harrow, states:

Bà promoted the crucial role of the writer in Africa. She believed that the 'sacred mission' of the writer was to strike out 'at archaic practices, traditions and customs that are not a real of our precious cultural heritage'. *So Long a Letter* succeeds admirably in its mission<sup>104</sup>

In this regard, Mariama Bâ makes her stance clear and validates neo-colonialist issues and delineates the impact of Islam upon the Senegalese women and their community in general. She foregrounds the living conditions which keep them subjects to men's authority and denounces the socio-cultural norms that affect and shape the individual's marriage and release male oppression. She, therefore, displays her central character's, Ramatoulaye, relationship with her husband, Modou Fall, and her brother-in-law, Tamsir.

### **2-2-1: Modou Fall:**

Mariama Bâ interrogates the various Islamic, traditional beliefs and discusses the effects of polygamy, the point through which men can exert his superiority over women. She, therefore, initiates male oppression through Ramatoulaye, a Senegalese and a mother of twelve children, and her husband, Modou Fall. The feminist critic, Katherine Frank in *Women Without Men: The Feminist novel in Africa*, notices:

After thirty years of marriage and twelve children, Ramatoulaye, the heroine of *So Long a Letter*, is devastated when her husband takes as a second wife the schoolmate of one of their daughters. The novel consists of a long lament and meditation on the pain, anger and despair of Ramatoulaye suffers as a result of her husband's desertion and it is addressed to her closest friend, Aïssatou, who not long before had divorced her husband when he also took a second wife [...] assumes the posture of the traditional, obedient African wife and submits to her husband's second marriage<sup>105</sup>

Although Islam allows men to have up to four wives, Ramatoulaye perceives Modou's second marriage a betrayal of trust for her family and Islam as well. After

years of marriage and twelve children, Ramatoulaye falls into the traps the African traditions and faces her fate as her husband takes Benitou, the classmate of their eldest daughter, Daba, as a second wife<sup>106</sup> without her knowledge. In this concern, Mariama Bâ outlines Ramatoulaye's courageous attempts to restore and maintain her dignity and remain Modou's wife. In doing so, Mariama Bâ, actually, highlights the value of belonging, family, as structured in Clenora Hudson Weems: *Africana Womanism: reclaiming ourselves*.

Mariama Bâ, additionally, brings the reader's attention to the damaging results of Modou's betrayal as she receives a sudden visit by Tamsir, Ramatoulaye's brother in law, Mawdo, her friend and Aïssatou's husband, and the local *Imam* who come to inform her about her husband's marriage which, in fact, took place in a mosque in the capital of Senegal, Dakar.

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, 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.' The thorns thus removed from the way, Tamsir ventured: 'Modou sends his thanks'<sup>107</sup>

Modou does not only break the laws of Islam, but uses them to defend his act. The messengers, hence, come to consolidate her with the important position she acquires as a senior wife in the African tradition. They also teach her forgiveness, supported by words from the holy Koran to accept, according to their viewpoints, God's will.

He says it is fate that decides men and things: God intended him to have a second wife, there is nothing he can do about it. He praises you for the quarter of a century of marriage in which you gave him all the happiness a wife owes her husband. His family, especially myself, his elder brother, thank you. You have always held us in respect. [...] 'You are the first wife, a mother for Modou, a friend for Modou'<sup>108</sup>

Nevertheless Modou's abrupt decision, Ramatoulaye surrenders her destiny and accepts polygamy. Obviously, the latter reinforces male supremacy. As a matter of fact, Ramatoulaye's respect for the religious precepts acquires her to restore her husband's indignity, she indicates:

I forced myself to check my inner agitation. Above all, I must not give my visitors the pleasure of relating my distress. Smile, take the matter lightly, just as they announced it. Thank them for the humane way in which they have accomplished their mission. Send thanks to Modou, 'a good father and a good husband', 'a husband become a friend'. Thank my family-in-law, the *Imam*, Mawdo. Smile. Give them something to drink. See them out, under the swirls of incense that they were sniffing once again. Shake their hands<sup>109</sup>

So Long a Letter, therefore, portrays the negative effects of polygamy in pursuit of selfish desires. In this concern, MariamaBâ addresses male domination that oppresses women further into subjugation. Ramatoulaye, hence, rises above her circumstances and strives the humiliating conditions that disdained her as well as her children. Farah Udegbuma, in addition, discusses how the men of the story interpret their own meaning of the Islamic laws and use them to satisfy their selfish desires and points out:

Although the Holy Quran states that men are allowed up to four wives, it also says in the very same verse that one wife is best! Modou took this statement to mean what was convenient to him, the way this would affect the women involve [...] The Holy Quran admonishes the man that he must be a maintainer and protector of the woman and children. The husband is expected to provide for the wife and children, whereas the wife is to assume the role of a housewife and mother to their children<sup>110</sup>

As Farah Udegbuma points out, Islam gives man an opportunity for more than one wife. Yet Modou forgets about his commitment as a Muslim with his first family and adopts a part of the Islamic principles which exists in the African traditions and neglects another part which, in fact, necessitates equality and protection within the polygamic life.

Modou's decision to take a young innocent girl as a second wife causes Rmaloulaye's despair. Modou neglects his responsibilities as a husband and runs before his immature behavior. He instead, turns his intention to Benitou and tries to satisfy her as well as her family at any rate. Indeed, his selfish behavior decreases him to the extent of using his material resources to satisfy his will.

Following the indications of Islam and the sanctions of the African traditions, Ramatoulaye is expected to accept her husband's irresponsibility and waits for compassion. His oppression, in addition, surmounts her determination into submission as his rejection for their twelve children causes her despair. Indeed, her agony from a physical and psychological abandonment even more when she struggles with their children who are also expected to remain respectful for their father, regardless their circumstances. In this sense, So Long a Letter highlights the distress which is caused by her polygamous husband mainly the carelessness that inflicts an emotional and psychological harm inside her.

The novel, thus, displays how certain precepts of Islam can cause women's oppression and how traditionally provoke their inheritance. The next form of oppression is therefore, related to the way in which polygamy can either disempower or empower Ramatoulaye.

### **2-2-2: Tamsir:**

As this chapter has already indicated, men such as Modou Fall embarked in religion to serve his interests, rather to accomplish its precepts. The actual study follows Ramatoulaye's inheritance, an event that is anticipated by their relatives. Tamsir, her elder brother in law, is another example of the way in which man in the Senegalese culture can exert oppression over women. Kenneth W. 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<sup>111</sup>

The inheritance of woman after her husband's death is a common belief/ custom in order to keep the children within the family. In this concern, Tamsir takes his own slice from polygamy and wield the African customs and its traditions to his favor. The mourning day, after forty days of Modou's death, Tamsir approaches Rmatoulaye to offer her the supposition and be one of his wives before another suitor would do it.

Yesterday I celebrated, as is the custom, the fortieth day of Modou's death [...] After going through the motion of piety, Tamsir came and sat in my bedroom in the blue armchair that used to be your favourite. Sticking his head outside, he signaled to Mawdo; he also signaled to the *Imam* from the mosque in his area. This time, Tamsir speaks [...] Tamsir speaks with great assurance, he touches, once again, on my years of marriage, then he concludes: 'When you have "come out" (that is to say, of mourning), I shall marry you. You suit me as a wife, and further, you will continue to live here, just as if Modou were not dead [...] You are my good luck. I shall marry you. I prefer you to the other one, too frivolous, too young. I advised Modou against that marriage'<sup>112</sup>

Tamsir's motivation, actually, hides his selfish attention to take control over his brother's property and find out new financial resources to cover the demands of life and his family alike. Particularly, for being a woman who earns her own salary. Ramatoulaye is, therefore, viewed as a material gain for him than her brother's widow or a mother for twelve orphaned children. MariamaBâ's position here is not totally an anti-tradition yet to criticize those who adopt these practices for personal goals or achievements. Hence, the lack of consideration that Ramatoulaye feels causes her not only harm, but the potentiality to break her silence: W.Harrow adds:

She rejects both his [Tamsir] and his arrogant assumption of male superiority, and she puts in their place the brother, the suitor and the imam, along with all the former prerogatives of the patriarchal order that attempted to assert its control over her again<sup>113</sup>

As the narrator strongly responds:

My voice has known thirty years of silence, thirty years of harassment. It burst out, violent, sometimes sarcastic, sometimes contemptuous. 'Did you ever have any affection for your brother? Already you want to build a new home for yourself, over a body that is still warm. While we are praying for Modou, you are thinking of future wedding festivities. Ah your strategy is to get in before any other suitor, [...] 'What of your wives, Tamsir? Your income can meet neither their needs nor those of your numerous children. To help you out with your financial obligations [...] I shall never be the one to complete your collection. My house shall never be for you the coveted oasis: no extra burden; my "turn" every day; cleanliness and luxury, abundance and calm! No, Tamsir [...] I concluded, more violent than ever: 'Tamsir, purge yourself of your dreams of conquest. They have lasted forty days. I shall never be your wife'<sup>114</sup>

Nevertheless Ramatoulaye's respect for Islam, the African tradition, customs and its beliefs that compelled her to bear the burdens of the Senegalese living conditions, she finally acquires courage and voices out the thirty years of harassment and silence that subjugated her. Ramatoulaye, now, balances herself between modernity and tradition as she rejects the system of that predestined women's marriage out of tradition and adopts some modern ways of living:

It is at this point that Ramatoulaye passes from being the maltreated victim of male indifference to being the autonomous parent whose reactions and values are to shape the life of her child profoundly. As she struggles as a mother over how to treat her daughter in need, the dictates of religion and traditional custom, and issues of becoming the New African Woman, fade into the background [...] she embraces her fate as the women of her times, forcefully forging the image of the 'New African Woman' whose trajectory is delineated by the choice she makes based on both tenderness and revolt<sup>115</sup>

Her voice which reveals a quarter of a century of subjugation is ultimately broken.

As traditional men, both Modou Fall and Tamsir caught in their beliefs on Islam and precede their selfish desires over their duties and responsibilities. MariamaBâ, hence, concentrates on men's practices that unveil their oppressions. She mainly

portrays the institution of marriage that favors polygamy to men's advantage. However, her representations hide a testimony of male importance in the African society.

From the analysis above, one can notice how The Color Purple (1982) and So Long a Letter (1981) have much in common concerning male oppression and how both African-American and African writers adopted patriarchy as central factor for women's subjugation.

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**Endnotes:**

<sup>84</sup> Walker, Alice (1983) *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, P. 256.

<sup>85</sup> Bernard, Bell (1987) *The Afro American Novel and Its Traditions*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, P. 263.

<sup>86</sup> Walker, Alice (1982) *The Color Purple*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., P.3.

<sup>87</sup> Abbandonato, Linda (1991) "A View from 'Elsewhere'": *Subversive Sexuality and the Rewriting of the Heroine's Story in The Color Purple*. Modern Language Association, Vol. 106 (5), P. 1106. [Online] Available from: <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0030-8129%2819910%29106%3A5%3C1106%3A%22VF%27%22S%3E2.0.CO%3B2-B2-4>

<sup>88</sup> Walker, Alice (1982) *The Color Purple*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., P. 3.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., P. 11.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., PP. 9-13.

<sup>91</sup> Abbandonato, Linda (1991) "A View from 'Elsewhere'": *Subversive Sexuality and the Rewriting of the Heroine's Story in The Color Purple*. Vol. 106 (5), P. 1111. [Online] Available from: <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0030-8129%2819910%29106%3A5%3C1106%3A%22VF%27%22S%3E2.0.CO%3B2-B2-4>

<sup>92</sup> Walker, Alice (1982) *The Color Purple*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., PP. 7-18.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., PP. 74-103.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., P. 21.

<sup>95</sup> Walker, Alice (1983) *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, P. 232.

<sup>96</sup> Walker, Alice (1982) *The Color Purple*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., P. 23.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., P.

<sup>98</sup> Mori, Aoi (1999) *Toni Morrison and Womanist Discourse*. New York: P. Lang, P. 45.

<sup>99</sup> Guo, Deyan (2005) *A Modern Allegory of The Color Purple*. *Canadian Social Science* [Online], Vol. 1 (1), P. 86. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/viewFile/j.css.1923669720050101.013/93> [Accessed in: 08-25-2017].

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., P. 187.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., PP. 201-256.

<sup>102</sup> Abbandonato, Linda (1991) "A View from 'Elsewhere'": *Subversive Sexuality and the Rewriting of the Heroine's Story in The Color Purple*. Vol. 106 (5), P. 1111. [Online] Available from: <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0030-8129%2819910%29106%3A5%3C1106%3A%22VF%27%22S%3E2.0.CO%3B2-B2-4>

<sup>103</sup> De Beauvoir, Simone (1994) *The Second Sex*. Paris: Gallimand.

<sup>104</sup> W.Harrow, Kenneth (1982) *Introduction*. Bâ, Mariama (1982) *So Long a Letter*. Heinemann.

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- <sup>105</sup> Frank, Katherine (1992) *Women Without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa*. In: Eldred Durosimi Jones, Eustace Palmer et. Al. (1992) *Women in African Literature Today*. Africa World Press, PP. 18-19.
- <sup>106</sup> Bâ, Mariama (1981) *So Long a Letter*. Heinemann, P. 40.
- <sup>107</sup> Ibid., PP. 38-39
- <sup>108</sup> Ibid.,
- <sup>109</sup> Ibid.,
- <sup>110</sup> Udegbumam, Farah *Book Review: Mariama Bâ's So Long a Letter*. [online] Available from: <http://drnissani.net/mnissani/solongbk.htm> [Accessed in: 09-21-2017].
- <sup>111</sup> W.Harrow, Kenneth (1982) *Introduction*. Bâ, Mariama (1982) *So Long a Letter*. Heinemann, P. v.
- <sup>112</sup> Bâ, Mariama (1981) *So Long a Letter*. Heinemann, PP. 59-60.
- <sup>113</sup> W.Harrow, Kenneth (1982) *Introduction*. Bâ, Mariama (1982) *So Long a Letter*. Heinemann, p. v.
- <sup>114</sup> Bâ, Mariama (1981) *So Long a Letter*. Heinemann, PP. 60-61.
- <sup>115</sup> W.Harrow, Kenneth (1982) *Introduction*. Bâ, Mariama (1982) *So Long a Letter*. Heinemann, P. vi.



### Chapter Three: Epistolary Narrative:

The Epistolary Narrative comes from *Epistle*, a Greek word, meaning of *letter*. It is the form of a novel which is made up of letters written by one or more characters. The Epistolary Narrative allows the author to convey the entire events of his novel immediately, without his interference. Meanwhile, gives the reader the opportunity to experience the character's voice and to articulate an objective conclusion of his psychological aspects which offers a deep perception to the entire novel, thoughts and feelings<sup>115</sup>.

The Epistolary Novels that are recognized as a form of communication, are sentimental in nature. They are commonly written as a vehicle to approach the issues of morality. This new form of writing, has long been associated with the restrictions of women to the domestic and inferior status. It is, thus, highly used by women writers as a way to express the sensibilities prevailing feminine concerns through the use of women as main characters of these novels. Some of the voices that can be found as a successful example in the genre cited above are: the Irish novelist, playwright Mary Davys in her The Reform'd Coquet or Memoirs of Amoranda (1724) and Familiar letters Betwixt a Gentleman and a Lady (1725). The Epistolary narratives appeared to be the most adequate genre that help them to transcend social barriers and reach autonomy<sup>116</sup>.

The popularity of the Epistolary Narrative is renewed by the best known African-American and the African women writers in the twentieth century. There are many female writers in English and Francophone literature who use the technique of writing in their works as a means of communication between the characters. In opposition to these, the African-American writer Alice Walker and the Senegalese Mariama Bâ, employ this technique in accordance with the changes in woman's literature to discuss the sensitive issues that suit their needs in modern times. Actually, both writers follow the transformations that manifest in

women's lives until their liberation. The Epistolary Narrative is therefore more adequate form for the two authors. This study, indeed, examines letter writing used in both The Color Purple (1982) and So Long a Letter (1981) from feminist perspectives<sup>117</sup>.

### **3-2: Writing: an Act of Revolt and Liberation:**

#### **3-2-1:The Color Purple (1982):**

Many scholars including Linda Abbandonato, have pointed out that Epistolary narratives is originated in the 18th century and first popularized with the British epistolary writer of the period, Samuel Richardson's Clarissa Harlowe (1747-1748). Indeed, the first novelist who wrote in English which was marked a remarkable break in plot, characterization and themes. Abbandonato goes on and shows the connection between both Richardson's work and Alice Walker's The Color Purple and interprets:

To substantiate my claim that *The Color Purple* is a conscious rewriting of canonical male texts, I propose a literary connection that is at once obvious and unlikely : the novel's epistolary form invites us to trace its ancestry all the way to *Clarissa*. Both novels represent a woman's struggle toward linguistic self-definition in a world of disrupted signs: Celie like Clarissa, is imprisoned, alienated, sexually abused, and driven into semiotic collapse<sup>118</sup>

Alice Walker's intention in using letter writing is to depict the limitations of her African-American southern black girl, Celie, who suffers a double oppression to self-discovery. As an Epistolary novel, The Color Purple comprises of Celie's letters to *God*. They unfold her awful experiences, first as the subject of repeated rapes of her step-father then to sell out as a sexual object for Mr.\_\_\_\_. The chain of events conducts us to her final liberation through letters by/to her sister Nettie from Africa, the rebellious spirit her sister in law sofia. Finally, through the sensuous bond with her husband's mistress the blues singer, Shug Avery. Barbara Christian, in this concern, argues:

The entire novel is written in a series of letters. Along with diaries, letters were the dominant mode of expression allowed women in the west. Feminist historians find letters to be a principal source of information and facts about the everyday lives of women and their own perception about their lives, a source of both "objective" and "subjective" information<sup>119</sup>

Expressing oneself is the important act that Alice Walker employs against the domination of patriarchy. The Color Purple is written in the first narrative style. It exposes Celie essentially as a passive object followed by a series of a repeated verbal, physical and psychological exploitations assumed by the men she denotes as "Pa" and "Mr. \_\_\_\_". Despite these facts, Celie interestingly is not set in an entire disillusionement since her decision to pour her sufferings down into paper in defiance to her abusers. In Barbara Christian's words: *"In using the epistolary style, Walker is able to have her major character, Celie, express the impact of oppression on her spirit as well as her growing internal strength and final victory"*<sup>120</sup>. The only way to assert herself in the midst of these difficulties, introduced in vernacular words addressed to an imposed God<sup>121</sup>.

The Epistolary technique, *"manifests itself as a liberal representation of a protagonist creating herself by finding this voice in act of writing"*<sup>122</sup>. The "letter" thus becomes a means to communicate thoughts and experiences, an act against the men who tend to rob autonomy from her at any rate. Indeed, an act of resistance against those who prevent her from voicing her sufferings<sup>123</sup>.

Almost all the first half of The Color Purple consists of an unsigned letters that Celie addresses to God. Alice Walker's use of God, the abstract addressee and the one she can confide, gives the reader access to Celie's intimate side with no detail hidden. However Lauret, a critic, declares: *"Celie's writing is not itself an act of liberation even self-expression, but rather an escape valve when all else fails...writing to God does not count as an act of self-empowerment"*<sup>124</sup>. For her, the one who is considered the recipient of Celie's

violence, is not an act of self-empowerment, yet an escape since she does not dare to mention her name even in her sub-consciousness. Thereby, her inability to reveal her identity.

The first half of The Color Purple reflects the first half of its protagonist's, attempts to voice her lives in letters to God in simple thoughts and feelings. This simplicity is translated through Alice Walker's use of vernacular language. Apparently, Alice Walker demonstrates Celie's lack of someone she can confide. By extension, her inability to interpret certain facts in her life or make judgements over her own situation; that she resorts to writing as a means for liberation. Yet letters addressed to God, reveals her submission for Alphonso's patriarchy.

Although Celie's letters addressed to God are "a diary like" entry, the letters addressed by/to her sister Nettie from Africa, the bond joining them, mark the protagonist's shift to a new life. Writing is, indeed, transformed from a means to communicate experiences to an act of liberation<sup>125</sup>.

Celie still attempts to give meaning for her sufferings through letters by/to her sister Nettie from Africa as a missionary. Nettie's section exhibits her experiences from Africa to which she parallels Celie's ones. Both sisters are able to communicate with each other despite the years of separation. Nettie's letters provide her sister with valuable information and lessons about her ancestors. The significant force that helps her to break from the men who judged her, indeed God. Most importantly, the hope she loses for years. *"I don't write any more to God"*<sup>126</sup>.

Through the use of letters, Alice Walker is able to expose the cultural differences that exist between Celie and Nettie's educational background and circumstances. Among a number of commentators on The Color Purple, Linda Abbandonato addresses her critical view on the formality of Celie and Nettie's narration and declares:

By incorporating Nettie's letters into Celie's text, Walker illuminates the contrast between Celie's space suggestiveness and Nettie's stilted verbosity. Thus the expressive flexibility of the black vernacular, a supposedly inferior speech, is measured against the repressed and rigid linguistic codes to which Nettie has conformed ; the position of standard (white) English is challenged, and Celie's vitality is privileged over Nettie's dreary correctness. Nettie has been imaginatively stunted, her language bleached white and her ethnicity virtually erased [...] The novel moves freely through time and space, juxtaposing the African motifs with the African American, thus supplying a dialectical commentary on the two cultures<sup>127</sup>

Walker incorporates effectively the black folk English in Celie's letters to present a clear vision to the reader and bring him closer to the poor African-American black girl's rhythm of life. To consider first all the contradictions in writing technique. Despite Celie's letters exhibit her lack for formal education, yet show her progressive awareness. Thereby, an assertion of her ethnicity<sup>128</sup>.

Her language is indeed so compelling that we actually begin to think as Miss Celie\_\_like Shug, we have her song scratched out of our heads\_\_because by participating in her linguistic processes, we collaborate in her struggle to construct a self<sup>129</sup>

In contrast to Celie, Nettie's letters from Africa, Barbara Christian observes:

[...] are written in standard English. These letters not only provide a contrast in style, they expand the novel's scope. The comparison-contrast between male-female relationships in Africa and the black south suggest that sexism for black women in America does not derive from racism, though it is qualitatively affected by it<sup>130</sup>

Nettie's letters challenge the status of standard English and deal with important issues in the black society. The contents of her letters indeed, do not give her own contemplations, she rather imitates the Olinka's lives which add a different perspective to the novel. She actually, reports her achievements in a larger framework as compared to those of the African-American women's lives. She, in addition, displays the politics of racism and the religion that resides in the village. Most importantly, deal with women's rights including : the right for formal education, sexism that prevail in the same context.

Nettie's letter's, hence, are a source of information that allow Alice Walker to present Celie's progress instead of her reflection on one incident in one space. Alice Walker, now parallels not only the transformations in letter's style, but the change that occurs in their writers lives. Meanwhile, Celie's ability to articulate more formale sentences that are among the primary indications that marks her psychological developement.

Alice Walker's The Color Purple follows the gradual formation of her protagonist, The poor, uneducated African-American black girl, Celie, who evolves from patriarchy to an independent woman. She is committed to depict Celie as a symbole of faith, hope, courage, and strength through the use of Epistolary narrative.

For Alice Walker, writing is the only refuge for Celie in moments of disillusionement. The means through which she can communicate her traumatic experiences. Hence, her ability to fight and construct her identity and break free : physically, spiritually and economically from the domination of patriarchy<sup>131</sup>.

The importance of writing is completed by Women's Solidarity against Male Oppression, that were previously discussed, for Celie and other female characters in the novel including her sister Nettie, her daughter in law Sofia. More over, her ability to voice taboo events through the intimate relationship between the protagonist and the Blues singer, Shug Avery. Thus, to accomplish her deffinition for *Womanism* set in *in Search of Our Mother's Garden : Womanist Prose* (1983)<sup>132</sup>.

### **3-2-2: So Long a Letter (1981):**

Mariama Bâ's use of letters as an uncommon mode of writing in the African literature is to expose and criticise its culture. Most importantly, the mode that allows her to revolt against the multiple oppressions that subjugate the Muslim women in contemporary Senegal. The letter writing, therefore, enables her to investigate the ways in which the African

traditions and its customs continue to marginalize women and conduct to their subjugation, an intersection of oppressions that *So Long a Letter's* protagonists suffer from; nevertheless their positions. Hence, to explore the intimacy shared between the two characters, a way of coming in terms the distress discarded by their polygamous husbands, Modou Fall and Mawdo Bâ and their families alike.

The actual study, provides an examination of Mariama Bâ's use of Epistolary narrative, an ideal means for women writers to expose the domestic issues in contemporary Senegal. A collective history of the private experiences that Ramatoulaye follows as an abandoned wife, single mother and finally as a widow in a long letter that she writes to her childhood friend Aïssatou during the 'Iddah', the forth-month day mourning process that Muslim widows have to follow, filled with memories from their past. Keneth W.Harrow reflects:

Both the intimacy of its address and its turn to the epistolary mode marked *So Long a Letter* as a unique form of fiction writing in contemporary African women's literature. Moreover, it broke new ground as a deeply personal account of the trials that are peculiar to the Muslim Senegalese woman of today. Ramatoulaye sets out the story of her present tribulations, the past events that led up to them, and the anxieties she faces as a mother, in a series of letters to her 'sister' Aïssatou, who herself faced the trauma of a long-term marriage coming to an end as her husband chose to take a young woman as his second wife. Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou evoke the situation of the mature, troubled woman, of who have only each other to turn to for sustenance [...] Senegalese woman to Senegalese woman, and thus is brought into an intimate, private space created by Bâ<sup>133</sup>

*So Long a Letter's* opening consists of letters that Ramatoulaye produces to report the circumstances preceding her husband's death. *The Mirasse*, a religious precept that requires "the disclose of the deceased material possessions"<sup>134</sup> among his family after forty days mourning period, the event that creates nothing than a psychological injuring for Ramatoulaye. She is, actually, exposed to a disgusted scene of hypocritical behavior in the manner in which her family in law take advantage from Modou's death. She is on the other

hand exposed to a series of her husband's crimes that he committed against his first family to acquire, consequently, her own split from 'the mirasse' in form of a psychological disillusionement, that she laments to her confidant, Aïssatou.

Ramatoulaye's long letter, in addition, invites the reader to come across an other form of *mirasse*, actually an African custom, when she has to face her own inheritance at the hands of elder brother in law, Tamsir<sup>135</sup>. Her letter, thus, is marked with a shift in time to describe the past glory that she experienced along her husband, her friends, Aïssatou and Mawdo, during school and college periods. Blinded with a painful memories as middle-aged woman.

In the light of the title, Mariama Bâ resorts to letter writing to best provide her protagonist the opportunity to reflect the Senegalese domestic life. Her narrative records a journey to the past events. She, actually, invites the reader to interfere between colonialism and post-colonialism. She is, therefore, "*situated at a point of convergence, a point of ambivalence when old and new ideas, old and new values collide*"<sup>136</sup>. In essence, she discusses the ways in which western modern values affect in some cases totally discarded the traditional Islamic values to produce a hybrid text through which herself is set in ambivalence.

Rmatoulaye's long Epistle reflects her stance against the African traditions that restricts her since her childhood to an involuntary solitude within the domestic context that becomes to her as a site of resistance, she writes :

I hope to carry out duties fully. My heart concurs with the demands of religion. Reared since childhood on their strict precepts, I expected not to fail. The walls that limit my horizon for four months and tend ays do not bother me. I have enough memories in me to ruminate upon. And these I am afraid of, for they snack of bitterness<sup>137</sup>

Despite her respect for Islam, her descriptions unveil an unjust traditional practices as her interpretations for polygamy evoke a break from its sanctions that are instead used to defend male supremacy. Her paradoxical position, in fact, is clearly demonstrated in the way



she receives her marital betrayal. In spite of the deep harm that is assigned by her husband's abandonment, her letter shows her ability to restore her dignity and her family in the midst of the Senegalese norms, traditions and customs.

Mariama Bâ is very concerned with women's contradictory views that imply a strong connection for the traditional Ramatoulaye to her selected confidant, the westernized Aïssatou. The former follows her protagonist's '*Diary*'<sup>138</sup>, a record to self-understanding, to report the paradoxes evoked in women's views towards their sufferings. Ramatoulaye's present 'Diary' in response to Aïssatou's letter, transcends the need for women's solidarity. Her writing shows the psychological impact of similar past experiences that she sees "*her letter, as a comfort in itself*"<sup>139</sup>. In this sense, Mariama Bâ demonstrates the power of letter writing in sustaining distress. She, in addition, shows the strong bond that unites them which is, actually, evoked not only in the novel's context, yet in its form as well. After all, Ramatoulaye benefits from western education which opens her mind up for new approaches in life and higher awareness within her world. Yet a remarkable impact is left in Senegalese post-independence.

The last third of the novel focuses on Ramatoulaye's confrontation with the modern life. She recounts her struggles to acquire her position as a single parent for her children in the newly changed world. She, actually, has to face her teenagers's tendency to adopt the modern life or keep her disillusionment aside and prepares herself to embrace the modern life, she argues:

My grown children are causing me a great deal of concern. My worries pale when I recall my grandmother, who found in popular wisdom an appropriate dictum for each event [...] Arame, Yacine and Dieynaba, smoking in their bedroom. Everything about their manner showed that they were used to it [...] I considered the wearing of trousers dreadful [...] Since my daughters wanted to be 'with it', I accepted the addition of trousers to their wardrobes [...] Was I to blame for having given my daughters a bit of liberty? [...] As for myself, I let my daughters go out from time to time. They went to the cinema without

me. They received male and female friends [...] My grandmother would perhaps have suggested, 'For a new generation, a new method'<sup>140</sup>

In doing so, Ramatoulaye has to position herself within a role of an ideal mother.

Mariama Bâ's protagonist, hence, resorts to letter writing to voice out her sufferings without any outside interaction in order to show the sharp contrast that exist within herself and the outside world. Her diary, thus, serves as the window through which the reader can observe the Senegalese society from feminist perspective.

The Epistolary Narrative, fits women's needs for self expression. As twentieth century womanist writers, Alice Walker and Mariama Bâ have adopted the letter writing to express women experiences and concerns. It is the way through which both Celie and Rmatoulaye expose their private life as a site of resistances. It is, therefore, used as a means of revolt against patriarchy that has long silenced both of them. In the end, to criticize both African-American and African (Senegalese) societies.

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<sup>115</sup> Muhammad El-Hindi, Dina (2016) *An Epistolary Novel Revisited: Alice Walker's Womanist Parody of Richardson's Clarissa*. German Jordanian University Amman, Jordan

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>118</sup> Abbondonato, Linda (1991) "A View from 'Elsewhere'": *Subversive Sexuality and the Rewriting of the Heroine's Story in The Color Purple*. Modern Language Association, Vol. 106 (5), P. 1106. [Online] Available from: <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0030-8129%2819910%29106%3A5%3C1106%3A%22VF%27%22S%3E2.0.CO%3B2-B2-4>

<sup>119</sup> Christian, Barbara (1985) *Black Feminist Chriticism*. New York: Pergamon Press, P. 93.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., P. 93.

<sup>121</sup> Walker, Alice (1982) *The Color Purple*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., P. 3.

<sup>122</sup> Gates, Henry L. (1988) *The signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford UP, P. 131.

<sup>123</sup> Muhammad El-Hindi, Dina (2016) *An Epistolary Novel Revisited: Alice Walker's Womanist Parody of Richardson's Clarissa*. German Jordanian University Amman, Jordan.

<sup>124</sup> Lauret, M. (2000) *Modern Novelists: Alice Walker*. New York: St. Martin's Press, P.101.

<sup>125</sup> Abbondonato, Linda (1991) "A View from 'Elsewhere'": *Subversive Sexuality and the Rewriting of the Heroine's Story in The Color Purple*. Modern Language Association, Vol. 106 (5), PP. 1108-1109. [Online] Available from: <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0030-8129%2819910%29106%3A5%3C1106%3A%22VF%27%22S%3E2.0.CO%3B2-B2-4>

<sup>126</sup> Walker, Alice (1982) *The Color Purple*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., P. 92.

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- <sup>127</sup> Abbandonato, Linda (1991) "A View from 'Elsewhere'": *Subversive Sexuality and the Rewriting of the Heroine's Story in The Color Purple*. Modern Language Association, Vol. 106 (5), PP. 1108-1109. [Online] Available from: <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0030-8129%2819910%29106%3A5%3C1106%3A%22VF%27%22S%3E2.0.CO%3B2-B2-4>
- <sup>128</sup> Ibid.,
- <sup>129</sup> Ibid., P.1108.
- <sup>130</sup> Christian, Barbara (1985) *Black Feminist Criticism*. New York: Pergamon Press, P. 94.
- <sup>131</sup> Abbandonato, Linda (1991) "A View from 'Elsewhere'": *Subversive Sexuality and the Rewriting of the Heroine's Story in The Color Purple*. Modern Language Association, Vol. 106 (5), PP. 1108-1109. [Online] Available from: <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0030-8129%2819910%29106%3A5%3C1106%3A%22VF%27%22S%3E2.0.CO%3B2-B2-4>
- <sup>132</sup> Walker, Alice (1983) *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, PP. x-xi.
- <sup>133</sup> Bâ, Mariama (1982) *So Long a Letter*. Heinemann, PP. i-ii.
- <sup>134</sup> Edwin, Shirin (2009) *Expressing Islamic Feminism in Mariama Bâ's So Long a Letter.* In: *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, Vol. 16 (6), P. 736.
- <sup>135</sup> Bâ, Mariama (1982) *So Long a Letter*. Heinemann, PP. 59-60.
- <sup>136</sup> Nnaemeka, Obioma (1990) "Mariama Ba: Parallels, Convergence and Interior Space." *Feminist Issues*. Vol. 10 (1), P. 16. Available from: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/BF02686516> [Accessed in: 10-10-2017]
- <sup>137</sup> Bâ, Mariama (1982) *So Long a Letter*. Harlow: Heineman, P. 9.
- <sup>138</sup> Ibid., P. 1.
- <sup>139</sup> McElaney-Johnson, A. (1999) Epistolary Friendship: La prise de parole in Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*. *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 30 (2), P. 118.
- <sup>140</sup> Bâ, Mariama (1982) *So Long a Letter*. Harlow: Heineman, PP. 79-81.

## V- Conclusion:

Our comparative study of the African-American novel The Color Purple (1982) by Alice Walker and So Long a Letter (1981), an African one, by Mariama Bâ has relied on the theory of *Womanism* by Alice Walker in her collection of essays: *In Search of Our Mothers Garden: Womanist Prose*(1983). And *Africana Womanism* (1993) by Clenora Hudson-Weems in her *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*. It has treated Women's Solidarity, Male Oppression and the Epistolary Narrative as an Act of Revolt in the black women's lives.

Although Alice Walker and Mariama Bâ came from two different backgrounds; our analysis has pointed out a series of compatibilities that both works have in common. The two writers explore women's private experiences within the domestic realm. They present a collective history of oppressions that both their female characters suffer from. They, indeed, provide the reader with an insight of the black women's traumas from Afro-American and African perspectives. They, in addition, inscribe the letter writing to foreground the healing power of black women's solidarity.

In this concern, it is worth to begin with Women's Solidarity. We have noticed through our analysis that women's solidarity is given more importance in both works. Just like The Color Purple, So Long a Letter shows a significant participation of women's bonding for liberation. The two authors adopt their works to explore the private lives to which their protagonists are restricted. All of Nettie, Sofia Butler, Shug Avery; the Headmistress and Aïssatou make a strong commitments for Celie's and Ramatouleye's capacities to fight back the forces that silenced them for years.

Our study of the two novels has revealed different forms of women's solidarity which are either: sisterly, motherly, friendship or sexual relationships. Both Nettie and the Headmistress are presented as a source of education. Sofia and Aïssatou, on the other hand,

are emerged as a living example for women's bonding whose self-determination and opposing views concerning their issues in life provide a meaningful image of the qualities that an independent woman has to acquire in contexts that expect them to remain obedient. Consequently, to become the role model for Celie and Ramatoulaye. In the end, each work reflects the structure of its society.

Our analysis, however, has shown how the two authors exhibit different approaches in their interpretations for Women's Solidarity. Alice Walker's work, actually, dismantles the usual relationship of men and women. The former incorporates Lesbianism shared between Celie and the Blues singer, Shug Avery, as a means for her heroine's liberation from men, actually, set in her collection of essays, *In Search of our Mothers Garden: Womanist Prose* (1982) to introduce her theory *Womanism*<sup>134</sup>

The phenomena towards which Africana women reveal an attest of separation. While women in The Color Purple resort to Lesbianism as a form of liberating other women (sexual liberation); women Africa call for the harmony of the two sexes. Men, then, are of crucial importance in their lives.

Africana women, do not appreciate separation from men. They by contrast, prove their importance within their lives despite their superiority. In Clenora Hudson-Weems view: "*makes a whole, authentic and complete sense of Africana woman*" (Hudson-Weems, 1993: 69)<sup>135</sup>. Ramatoulaye in this concern, demonstrates her affinity to her husband and family and writes:

I am one of those who can realize themselves fully and bloom only when they form part of a couple. Even though I understand your stand, even though I respect the choice of liberated women. I have never conceived of happiness outside marriage<sup>136</sup>

While women struggle against patriarchal domination in The Color Purple; the ones in So Long a Letter endanger, in some cases, the situation and facilitates it. Closer reading of Mariama Bâ's novel, has required us to provide an examination of how directly or indirectly maintain sustenance to perpetuate women's subjugation. A new form of solidarity that breaks the conventional 'female-female' relationships within male-dominated society.

From feminist perspective, man is the only oppressor for woman. Our study of So Long a Letter by contrast, has substantiated women as an other evident source for black women's subjugation. The issue of women oppressing other women is subtle in Mariama Bâ's work. Lindorfer in this concern explains how this tendency is widespread in Africa in which women, as we have already mentioned, practice and maintain oppressive customs and that women themselves are behind some of the dehumanizing practices that women suffer from<sup>137</sup>. While Aunt Nabou causes Aïssatou's divorce, Lady Mother in Law, Binetou's mother, ruins Ramatoulaye's life. The narrator reports:

She [Aunt Nabou] was thinking of you [Aïssatou], working out her vengeance, but was very careful not to speak of you, of her hatred for you [...]. One fine day, aunt Nabou called Modou and said to him: My brother Ferda has given you young Nabou to be your wife, to thank me for the worthy way in which I have brought her up [...]. Every other night he would go to his mother's place to see his other wife, so that his mother 'would not die' to 'fulfill a duty'<sup>138</sup>

Our dissertation has in addition shown the available sources of male domination. It has the silence and submission of Celie in The Color Purple. However, So Long a Letter is very concerned with dissimilar sources of patriarchal domination. This text, has made us aware of how the African traditions and its customs take advantage from Islam either to limit women's liberation or perpetuate their submission.

Ultimately, we came to treat Epistolary Genre which make the works of Alice Walker and Mariama Bâ comparable. The two writers adopt epistolary mode as an act of rebellion to convey the sensibilities that can exist in the domestic sphere. Our interpretations have

demonstrated how letters recover feminist issues and how extend they restore the self. Yet, we came to a set of paradoxes that co-exist between the two works. The Color Purple traces Celie's gradual formation from a limited young girl finally to a mature and modern independent woman in a series of letters written even by Celie or from the latter to/from her sister. Ramatoulaye's diary, by opposition, follows a series of subordination. Despite here educational background and her found voice; she remains constrained by some Senegalese norms what balance her from being traditional and modern at the same time.

No matter how Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Mariama Bâ's So Long a Letter are distinguishable in some features, their works examine same issues.

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<sup>135</sup>Hudson-Weems, Clenora (1993) *AfricanaWomanism: Reclaimingourselves*. Triny, Mich.: Bedford Publisher, P. 69.

<sup>136</sup>Mariama (1982) *So Long aLetter*. Heinemann, P. 65.

<sup>137</sup>Lindorfer, Simone (2007) *Sharing the Pain of Bitter Hearts: Liberation and Psychology and Gender-related Violence in EasternAfrica*.P. 127.

<sup>138</sup>Mariama (1982) *So Long aLetter*. Heinemann, PP. 29-31.

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