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**THE STRUGGLES OF MOTHERHOOD IN THE AFRICAN NOVELLA AND  
NOVEL: MARIAMA BA'S *SO LONG A LETTER* AND BUCHI EMECHETA'S *THE  
JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD***

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Accepted, 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2022

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**ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study was to investigate the challenges women encounter in motherhood as well as the position of women in their societies, credibly displaying both the truth as well as the strengths of women in modern setups. The fundamental issues of motherhood for the key characters in Bâ's and Emecheta's work are related. Nonetheless, regardless of which level of society they fit in or what level of difficulty they suffer, these characters really experience shockingly related feelings just as offer the challenges at any rate somewhat or not molding the occasions of their family's lives. This study will analyze how the position of a woman contributes to the struggles of motherhood, identify the different stylistic strategies used to characterize the struggles of motherhood, and determine how the constraints of motherhood raise gender issues in the selected texts. This research is limited to the selected texts because the authors have come from societies where women struggle under polygamous marriage. In these patriarchal societies, women are made subjects to the men who are their superiors. The study will use West African texts by feminist authors, which clearly illustrate these challenges. In addition, the societies which the authors have come from are victims of these issues. Hence, this study aims at creating social awareness of the challenges that women are still facing in most African countries and credibly displaying both the truth as well as the strengths of women in the modern setup. The findings of the study will be of benefit to the ministry of education in the formulation of policies that relate to the challenges of motherhood. The study will be premised on formalist and feminist literary theories. The research will be carried out through textual analysis of the two selected novels; Mariama Bâ's (*So Long a Letter*) as well as Emecheta (*The Joys of Motherhood*), and relate the data to the objectives of the study. The researcher will make relevant conclusions and propose recommendations to address the challenges women encounter in motherhood and the position of women in their societies, convincingly displaying both the truth as well as the strengths of women in a modern setup.

**Keywords:** *Struggles of Motherhood, Stylistic Strategies, Constrains of Motherhood So Long A Letter, The Joys of Motherhood*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The research will analyse the experience of motherhood according to Mariama Bâ's (*So Long a Letter* (originally *Une Si Longue Lettre*)) and Buchi Emecheta's (*The Joys of Motherhood*), the two books examine the lives of their hero as ladies in their social orders. At first, these two social orders, the Senegalese just as the Nigerian (Igbo) arose essentially unique, yet a couple of fundamental human encounters are portrayed just as cross-examined in the two social orders. Choices as respects to marriage, family, just as property are completely at the removal of the guys of the two social orders. In the two books, the lady's situation as a darling spouse is sabotaged by her husband taking in another and more youthful wife, an activity affirmed by the religion and authoritatively by the general public albeit, as per the impacts that occurs in the two stories, ruins the trust of the marriage, the confidence of the accomplice, and the structure of the family's coexistence. In Buchi Emecheta story; On at the time of her demise tells Agbadi to "allow Nnu Ego to have a life of her own, a husband if she so desires. Allow her to be a woman" (Buchi, 1979, p. 28).

Miriama Bâ's novella features a character that is to a great extent, more eloquent and not tolerating the limited job related to ladies in her general public. Despite Emecheta's ladies, Miriama Bâ's female characters have been designated "bosses of progress just as equity" who "rouse other ladies and individuals to live just as continue" (Chain, 1987). Ramatoulaye endures various limitations on her developments as Nnu Ego does by temperance of being a spouse just a mother. She spends a tremendous arrangement of her life feeling that occasions are outside her ability to control: marriage (even though she just as her better half had decision for one another instead of shaping a masterminded marriage), property proprietorship, and mastery by parents in law, her significant other's relinquishment.

Globally, in most countries the men have free will for the choice of what they need, while the women remain greatly constrained to the domestic chores. In most developing countries, women still continue to be constrained in their public engagements right from the time of adolescence (Baxter, 2000). In Turkey, modern Islamic religion has been associated with the women wearing traditional attire but not the men (Peter, 2002).

In South Africa, the history of women's roles in society has slowly come to be recognized. In the past, the women's political association, their fight for liberty from domination, for society rights and, significantly, for gender equality, was greatly disregarded in literature. The females protested against their oppression from the men, by forming movements that aimed at promoting freedom of women's liberty to ensure gender equality. The women, they faced a difficult constraint, in fight for freedom. The women were tired of remaining at home, without power to create important changes from the discrimination of their gender (SAHO, 2011).

Kenyan writers have also represented the struggles that women go through especially in the western Kenyan communities. A good example is Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye in her text *Coming to Birth*, which illustrates the struggles of a naïve girl who encounters domestic violence in her marriage and society expects her to accept what she goes through (Valerie, 2011). Oludhe in her text presents the struggles that women face in Western communities, because of the ideologies which suppress women in society. The study will analyze what has been written about the struggles of motherhood in the case study of *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Bâ and *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta to critically analyze and demonstrate how polygamy contributes to the struggles of motherhood.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Throughout both novels, the investigation is focused on the woman's position in society. the characters in both stories, destroys both trust in marriage and the self-esteem of the wife, as well as the fabric of their family's life. The fundamental issues of motherhood for the key

characters in Bâ's and Emecheta's work are related. In any case, regardless of which level of society they fit in or what level of difficulty they suffer, these characters really experience shockingly related feelings. Therefore, the researcher seeks to analyze the selected texts, which display the position of women in their societies as well as the strengths of women in modern setup. The book *So Long a Letter* (1980) by Miriama Bâ and the novel *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) by Buchi Emecheta are both based on the study of motherhood—both its joys and sorrows—as well as the status of women in a particular culture, which are both important aspects characterizing the works.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The objectives of the study are to -:

- i. Analyse how the position of a woman contributes to the struggles of motherhood as presented in the selected texts, *So Long a Letter* and *The Joys of Motherhood*.
- ii. Identify the different stylistic strategies used to characterize the struggles of motherhood in *So Long a Letter* and *The Joys of Motherhood*
- iii. Analyse how the constrains of motherhood raise gender issues in *So Long a Letter* and *The Joys of Motherhood*

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 The Position of a woman**

#### **2.1.1 Patriarchal societies**

Patriarchal societies are those in which the men are superior to the women. The features of patriarchal societies can be explained by violence on women and children. The men's motive for male-dominancy on women can be based from strong cultural beliefs that are enacted by religious views which give high privileges to the male; empowerment and promoting male-dominancy (Valerie, 2011).

This is evident in Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye's work; *Coming to Birth*. Oludhe presents Paulina, who is a naive girl and she struggles to live with her husband Martin in Nairobi. Paulina becomes a victim of domestic violence, as she is beaten by her husband who is. Oludhe illustrates the set-up of African society, where women are to listen to their husbands without questioning their decisions Paulina suffers physically and goes through miscarriages, with zeal to give birth. As the wife, she stays at home while Martin goes to work.

In *The Colour Purple*, Alice Walker presents women as persons who face double tragedy, them being slaves and women. As a woman Celie is constantly raped by her stepfather (the one person who is supposed to protect her). She is not allowed to be a mother to her children since her father sells me. Celie is later forced to marry mister who needs someone to take care of his children. Celie suffers a lot in the hands of mister, and as a woman she has no power over her own life. For so many years she does not know where her children are or if they are dead or not. She suffers the pain of a mother separated from her children.

#### **2.1.2 Women Empowerment**

Globally, in most countries the men have a free will for the choice of what they need, while women still remain greatly constrained to the domestic chores. In most developing countries, women continue to be constrained in their public engagements right from the time of adolescent (Baxter, 2000). These kinds of constraints prevent many women from being educated or from gaining knowledge and hence, their level of illiteracy is not developed. This eventually, prevents the women into taking place in career opportunities or even gaining social inter-relational skills. On the other hand, they become dependent on men, for financial support because they do not have jobs. This brings along, the male-dominancy (Patel, 2012).

The position of a woman in these kinds of communities is greatly determined by her marriage. Certainly, in most countries in the world, the men mostly remain in possession of

all the useful property and these include living with the children while the women are given a share of the property, which still remain under the care of other male relatives after a divorce. Margaret Ogola in *The River and the Source*, praises the Kenyan woman as a mother but questions compulsory motherhood and the traditional preference of sons. Florence Mbaya's; *A Journey*, portrays women's contribution in the development of their selfhood and nationhood. Mbaya demonstrates the changing roles of the African woman through the protagonist, Monika who makes efforts to actualize herself and contribute to the growth of the nation. She is portrayed as performing both teaching and co-curricular activities with distinction at a time when she is expecting her first child (Magu, 2014).

## **2.2 Stylistic strategies that characterize the struggles of motherhood.**

The research study is also concerned with identifying the different stylistic strategies that are used by writers to characterize the struggles of motherhood. The authors apply stylistic devices, as a technique of presenting the challenges that women go through in societies. It is through the use of literary techniques, that authors are able to adequately communicate to the audience. In addition, the aesthetic effects are also realized as the readers; get to understand the implied message in the text.

### **2.2.1 Character Development**

Authors employ the technique of character development, in order to illustrate the potential with the women characters in the text. Margaret Ogola in her text; *The River and The Source*, uses Akoko a female character, to portray the superior character personalities with women. Ogola's intention as a female author is to correct the misconception that 'men are better than women'. In this case, she uses Akoko to present strong character personalities of an African woman. Therefore, Akoko's characters can be emulated widely in spite of the challenges that she faces as a widow. Ogola brings change through her texts and condemns the cultural beliefs and practices that tend to oppress women in African societies.

Ogola introduces Akoko, whose father is a famously great chief and who, in addition to Akoko, now has seven sons. Adoyo honors the season she was born in, Obanda pays tribute to her recently departed uncle, Akelo honors her stepgrandmother, and Akoko is thus called because of her boisterous nature. Although Akoko is first seen as being physically petite, she is able to demonstrate her intellectual prowess despite her little stature. It can be noted that, Akoko's hard work is what makes her to gain success in her entire life (Kamau, 2017).

### **2.2.2 Symbolism**

A literature review of Margaret Ogola's work; the title, "*The River and The Source*" is symbolic. Akoko signifies the source of this river, as Chief Odera comment;

"A home without daughters is like a spring without a source" (Ogola, 2004,p.11).

This comment, presents a ridicule of the cultural beliefs especially among most African communities; where men are highly regarded, unlike women. Hence, Akoko symbolizes the beginning of a new generation of women in society. She helps in bringing change in the society, while voicing out the oppression of women. She is an intelligent woman, hardworking, courageous and determined. However, she faces many challenges in her entire life and as the source of the river; she is exposed to difficulties among them deaths. Yet, the stream endures the barriers and flows with high intensity. A rivulet on the verge of drying up, the author muses,

"She it was who had been the source of this torrent" (Ogola, 2004, p.204).

Akoko's name which refers to "noisy one" means that women ought not to be quiet, when they are not given what they rightfully deserve. Akoko's first words to alter when she is a young girl; '*dwaramara*' means '*want mine*' meaning that, women should voice out their rights. On the other hand, we get to see Otieno Kembo, who represents the oppressive men.

He is a symbol of greediness, cunning and superiority of men who hold on to cultural beliefs in order to defend their self-interests.

### **2.2.3 Vivid Description**

It is through vivid description, that Ogola presents Akoko's beauty Thu:

"Her eyes were a nice size, not too little or big, and her teeth were white and even, with a charming gap in the middle of the top row. Her nicely pierced ears had tiny hoops that hung at just the right height from her skull. Not to mention, look at that neck! It merited instrumental fanfare of appreciation. To add insult to injury, did she really have two o rings on her belly button? To the extent that her legs were bent, it was most likely 'Were' himself who did the work and not one of his trainees." According to (Ogola, 2004, p.24),

Rebeka Njau has also used different literary techniques to portray the effects of male-dominancy on gender relations and displays how such dominancy in society can be controlled. She has made a careful choice of styles, to present the reality of the social and cultural issues. Some of the stylistic techniques she has used include mythology, where she portrays literary writings that fight male supremacy; where she ridicules gender personalities that prevent social equality among men and women (Wanja, 2013).

### **2.3 The Constraints of Motherhood**

According to Chain, *The Joys of Motherhood* portrays a general public wherein ladies and young lady kid are not granted extraordinary regard or worth, as long as they stay to the limited arrangements of their general public. Miriama Bâ's account includes a character who is enormously more expressive just as unaccepting of the slender job adequate to ladies in her general public. In spite of Emecheta's ladies, Bâ's female characters have been referred to as "victors of progress just as equity" who "empower other ladies and residents to live and continue"(Chain, 1987).

#### **2.3.1 Cultural Constraint**

In *Marxism and Literature* (1977) by Raymond Williams, the corporate culture has a number of regulations and implicitly established conventions that have penetrated inside every of our customs of living. Yet there are constantly dissent forces that try to overthrow, renew or else question this set of principal values, which is afterward translated in both social as well as narrative texts.

Recently, in South Africa, the history of women's roles in the society has slowly come to be recognized. In the past, the women's political association, their fight for liberty from domination, for society rights and, significantly, for gender equality, was greatly disregarded in literature. The books at this period, portrayed men having superior roles compared to the women. Additionally, women were less represented and were viewed as subordinates to men. The females were assigned roles which were mainly domestic chores that included; child rearing and taking care of the family. The women were not allowed to concern themselves with issues outside domestic activities like economics and politics. Such social activities were only acceptable to the men and was considered not 'feminine'. The females protested against their oppression from the men, by forming movements that aimed at promoting freedom of women's liberty to ensure gender equality. For the women, they faced a difficult constraint, in fight for freedom. The women were tired of remaining at home, without power to create important changes from the discrimination of their gender (SAHO, 2011).

According to Elaine Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) concurs with Williams' argument and notes that women and girl child take up a subcultural point from which they form a unity and counter with fictional as well as biographical strategies. A woman author must balance linking marginality as well as inclusion, but with a given overriding goal: Rewriting sex in dominant fiction. Consequently, it is not at all amazing that one of the key

aspects of twentieth-century women authors is critique of narrative, which is not only the story (BlauDuplessis, 1985).

Muthoni Li kimani is a Kenyan author whose works of fiction represent females character. Oscar Maina in “*The Treatment of the Theme of Identity in the Works of Muthoni Li kimani*” notes that, Li Kimani is concerned with “the male-controlled society and major experiences that shape a community” (Maina, 2006).

#### **2.4 Theoretical Framework**

This research work is informed by formalist and feminist literary theories. The formalist theory focuses on the literariness of content. It also allows the researcher to analyze, interpret as well as evaluate the language of the content. This is in line to analyze different stylistic strategies used to characterize the struggles of motherhood. The approach focuses on structural essentials of work such as language as well as structure. Formalist critics propose intense examinations of the correlation between form as well as meaning in a work of art. From a close textual examination, the prominence is on the arrangement of the work. Of attention to my research are the styles like irony, symbolism as well as figurative language.

The formalist theory gives this study the liberty to interpret the stylistic components of the two novels by interpreting these works in search of how the novelist has used them to highlight what the characters experience. Formalism will be of help to this study because it attempts to describe a literary work in terms of its form as well as structure which in other language is its ‘literariness’. Formalism has two key branches: The research focuses on literary feminist theory, which centers on ladies' capacity to keep up their fairness through their own choice. Through literary feminist theory, the research is able to look at how the protagonists in the selected texts try to make their voice heard via the decisions they make. The theory also helped analyse how the position of women in a patriarchal society raise gender issues.

#### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

The research data is based on qualitative research design, which analyzes data using textual analysis of the selected novels, Mariama Bâ's (*So Long a Letter*) as well as Buchi Emecheta's (*The Joys of Motherhood*), and relate the data to objectives of the study. The target population for this study will be selected novels from; Mariama Bâ's (*So Long a Letter*) and Buchi Emecheta (*The Joys of Motherhood*). The two selected texts, having female authors both from an African background are able to identify with the struggles of women, not only mothers in Africa.

The researcher employed a semi-structured questionnaire with both open-ended and closed-ended questions to collect primary data. Primary sources include; the two selected novels (*So Long a Letter* and *The Joys of Motherhood*), other literally books that relate to the research study and documented information from the library. The secondary data resources, comes from; journals, articles in periodicals, internet documents, among others. The researcher presents the truth and gives all the facts regarding the research sources of issues of treatment of women in modern society. The research study was carried out using a close textual analysis of the two selected novella and novel. From Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* and Buchi Emecheta *The Joys of Motherhood* the data was built.

#### **4.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS**

##### **4.1 The Position of a Woman as Presented in the Selected Texts.**

A close textual analysis of Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter*, represent the position that women have in the society. Their literary texts reveal the way in which the society views women. The position of a woman as presented in these texts is seen from the women's roles and how their voices are perceived. This generally includes, if they are decision-makers and the concerns which they get to voice out when

given a chance. It is notable from this research analysis that the position of a woman in a society also contributes to the struggles that the women face.

#### **4.1.1 Women's Roles as Voiced in the Novella and Novel**

Mariama Bâ presents Ramatoulaye a female character, who writes a long letter to her friend Aissatou; expressing her struggles in polygamous marriage desperation. From the beginning, Ramatoulaye reminds her friend Aissatou of their childhood memories. And this includes the domestic chores that both their mothers used to perform on daily basis. *So Long a Letter* is a text set in Senegal and Mariama Bâ criticizes the gender inequalities that are evident in the African traditions. Ramatoulaye, illustrates the roles that are entitled to women in such a polygamous society.

Our grandparents lived in different colonies divided by a fence but kept in constant contact with one another via daily communications. When we were little, our moms would bicker over who would take care of our aunts and uncles. Sweat beads on your mother's ochre cheeks as she leaves the kitchen; a line of giggling young women carrying damp towels returns from the springs. According to (Mariama Bâ, 1980,p.1)

This illustrates the work of a female character; as she is expected to take care of the family. The women, therefore, end up becoming dependent on their husbands, for the provision of anything that they require. As a result, they end up suffering, especially when they need money to raise their children. In cases when the husbands divorce the wives, the women are the ones left with the family responsibilities. Their lives turn into misery when they don't have a livelihood to sustain them. Binetou, a school girl is made to drop out of school to get married. The women take the domestic roles, and are made to depend on their husbands. For Binetou, she suffers when her husband dies, because she has no job. Ramatoulaye illustrates; The very bright young lady wanted to continue her education and take the baccalaureate examination. To assert his authority, Modou was "wickedly determined to remove her from the critical and unsparing world of the young" (Mariama Bâ, 1980, p.10).

An analysis of Mariama Bâ's text indicates that the women roles act as ways of oppressing them. If a wife only does the house chores, the husband makes her to depend on him. Ramatoulaye goes further to illustrate how she is perceived by her in laws, simply because she is a working mother.

"My sister-in-law thought I was exempt from the mundane tasks of housekeeping. They would exclaim, "With your two housemaids!" Do your best to convince them that a woman who works outside the house is just as accountable for her family. Explain to them that you have to take care of everything and do it all over again if you don't get involved, including the cleaning, cooking, and ironing. There are dishes to be done, laundry to be done, a spouse to be cared for, etc. Some in-laws didn't much like my lifestyle. They saw my frantic activity around the home after a long day of classes. The wives let their husbands take care of them since they valued their own ease and relaxation (Mariama Bâ, 1980, p.20).

However, Mariama Bâ illustrates female characters like Aissatou who refused to be oppressed by her husband in a polygamous marriage. Ramatoulaye congratulates Aissatou for her big job and her independent, strong personality.

"You rented a house and set up home there. And instead of looking backward, you looked resolutely to the future. You set yourself a difficult task; and more than just my presence and my encouragements, books saved you. Having become your refuge, they sustained you. The power of books, this marvelous invention of astute human intelligence... They enabled you to better yourself. What society refused you, they granted: examinations sat and passed took you also to France" (Mariama Bâ, 1980, p.32).

In Buchi Emecheta's book *The Joys of Motherhood*, represents tough women characters like Nnu Ego who struggle with motherhood, in their entire lives.

Buchi Emecheta presents to the reader the gender concerns that are prevalent in the African societies. According to the African traditions, it is the role of a female character to give birth, take care of the husband and the children.

"...Taiwo, had set aside a certain day to receive the monetary portion of her wedding price. Young and just arrived in Lagos, her future husband worked as a clerk. He was well-educated after a stint as a professor in Onitsha, but he decided he would be better with a less-intelligent spouse. For him, a wife's job was complete as long as she produced offspring, took care of his personal hygiene, and did the laundry (Buchi, 1979, p. 204).

#### **4.1.2 Women's voices**

The women are not supposed to question men, in patriarchy societies. Buchi Emecheta in *The Joys of Motherhood*, presents the female characters as passive decision-makers. The text which is based from an African social set up, describes women as docile. The father to a daughter who is at the age of marriage, is the one who decides who will marry his daughter. This is clearly presented in Buchi's text. Ona's father, who is a chief, had initially forbidden her to get married.

"See, you're not even going to let yourself be a lady. You are only able to think like a guy during your first few weeks as a mother, bringing up masculine issues for your father just because he is unable to do it for himself." (1979, Buchi, p. 24 & 25).

Later, Ona strongly speaks for her daughter Nnu Ego. She tells her father Nwokocha Agbadi, to allow her daughter to get married when her times approaches.

She cried out in a raspy voice, "Agbadi, you see that I was not meant to live with you. But you, my father, and I are all obstinate, just like you. Do not lament me for too long, and make sure that no matter how much you adore our daughter Nnu Ego, you still give her the freedom to live her own life and find a spouse if she so chooses. Let her live like a lady. Ona passed away shortly after this, and her frail newborn baby followed her a day later (Buchi, 1979, p.28).

However, in the case of Ona's daughter Nnu Ego, it's her father together with his friends who chose a marriage partner for her. Nnu Ego represents the many women who struggle with motherhood. When she realizes that she can't give birth, her father Nwokocha Agbadi finds a husband for her. Nnu Ego gets into great shock and misery when she is taken to Lagos to meet with Nnaife, her new husband. She becomes disappointed with her expectations and starts to regret.

In *So Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye illustrates how women depend on male characters for life decisions. Nabou who was later to be married as a second wife to Mawdo (who is also her niece) seeks advice from him, about furthering with her education.

"The elder Nabou encouraged her niece to take the admission exams for the State School of Midwifery after receiving her elementary school diploma and a few years in secondary school, saying, "This school is excellent. There, you get education. No crowns for the heads. By assisting in the birth of new followers of Mohammed, the prophet, you will earn your livelihood and receive grace for your admittance into heaven," (Miriam Bâ, 1980, p. 30). Young, sober ladies without earrings are encouraged to do this.

Ramatoulaye talks of Aissatou as an independent woman, who makes out her own decision, despite the external forces from society.

"How I envy your composure when you were here last! You had removed the mask of sorrow and were there. Contrary to all expectations, your boys were developing well. Mawdo didn't matter to you. Yes, you were there, the past stomped under your heel. brave pioneer of a new life, according to Miriam Bâ (1980, p. 34).



Male characters like Mawdo, take advantage of uneducated female characters like Nabou. The society in which this text is set, views men are the decision-makers and hence women entirely depend on men.

The husbands to both Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, never get to inform them, about their marriage to second wives. In this kind of society, women are not allowed to question any action taken by their husbands. However, Ramatoulaye illustrates how Aissatou had made her own decision and proved to be a strong female character in such a society. Aissatou refuses to be a passive female, and instead separates with her husband.

#### **4.2 Stylistic Strategies used to characterize the Struggles of Motherhood in the Selected Texts.**

Authors of the selected texts; *The Joys of Motherhood* and *So Long a Letter*, have used different literary techniques such as; Character Development, Symbolism, Vivid Description and Flashback. It is through the use of these techniques, that the authors have been able to clearly illustrate the suffering of women from various African societies.

##### **4.2.1 Character Development**

In Buchi Emecheta's text *The Joys of Motherhood*, uses Nnu Ego a female character, to illustrate the struggles and joys of motherhood. Buchi divides the text into different sections, and this helps the text to have a chronological flow of the work. From the beginning, the reader is introduced to the mother of Nnu Ego Ona, who is the chief's daughter. When the right times comes for Ona to get married, Ona's father chases all the suitors away. However, when Agbadi makes love to her when she is sleeping, she becomes pregnant with Nnu Ego. This is when Ona realizes the joys of motherhood, which her father had all along been denying her. On her death bed, Ona tells Agbadi not to deny their daughter Nnu Ego, the opportunity of becoming a mother. Buchi then illustrates the life of motherhood, using Nnu Ego a female protagonist. Nnu Ego greatly suffers emotionally and physically, when she realizes that she is barren. In the West African societies, a female is regarded as a complete woman, if she has children. Because Nnu Ego is not able to conceive, she gets married again and this time gives birth.

On the other hand, Mariama Bâ uses Ramatoulaye as the main character to present women oppression in a polygamous marriage. Both Ramatoulaye and Aissatou go through the same suffering, only that Aissatou had decided to move from her husband's house; while Ramatoulaye remained. Mariama Bâ, uses these characters to represent what women experience in polygamous marriages. However, the author shows how these women refuse to be silenced but become independent and succeed in their careers. Mariama Bâ also show the dependency of female characters on their male counterparts. Young girls like Binetou become sorrowful after the death of the husband, because they do not have someone to depend upon.

##### **4.2.2 Symbolism**

The authors have also used symbolism, as a stylistic feature that helps to illustrate the struggles of motherhood. The title of Mariama Bâ's text *So Long a Letter*, symbolizes Ramatoulaye's life experiences that she wants to share with Aissatou. Also, Ramatoulaye indicates the suffering that made her friend Aissatou to separate from her husband. Ramatoulaye talks of Mawdo as a male character who represent the men who approve for polygamous marriages;

"I did not answer Mawdo. For Mawdo, and through him all men, remained an enigma to me" (Mariama Bâ, 1980, p.33).

Ramatoulaye illustrates to Aissatou Modou's feeling, after Aissatou had expressed her strong attitude and had refused to remain in a polygamous marriage. Mariama Bâ symbolizes, how female characters like Aissatou finally succeed even after struggling to make ends meet after

their husbands marrying second wives. This illustrates that, for the female characters who suffer in polygamous marriages, can also disapprove such customs. "He kept his head lowered, in the attitude of those who accept defeat before the battle" (Mariama Bâ, 1980, p.37).

Buchi Emecheta's text title; *The Joys of Motherhood*, represents the life of motherhood. The joy of motherhood is giving birth to a child and loving that child even despite its sex. In addition, it is the joy of the mother to see her children getting what they need and prospering in life. Buchi shows that even despite the struggles of life, the mother works hard to provide for the children.

#### **4.2.3 Vivid Description**

The two texts have greatly used vivid description, as part of illustration of different concerns. Buchi uses both vivid descriptions and similes to describe the physical outlook of Ona, who is the only daughter's chief. And she does this, to illustrate the beauty and strong personality that can be found in an African woman.

"She was of average height and had smooth, light coffee-colored skin that resembled half-ripe palm nuts. Her head appeared to be driven out of her shoulders by a strong, long, and muscular neck, and her precisely cropped hair fit her skull like a cap on top of that. For males reared in that culture who were familiar with the sound of each bead, her attraction was increased by the murmuring of her pricey waist beads made of the finest coral when she moved. She seldom ever wore a top, and unlike the older women, she never tied her lappa over her breasts. She did, however, have several waist lappas and pricey coral bead alterations for her neck and waist. Tattoos that were greenish-black shone out vividly against her dark skin. Despite usually being in minimal clothing, she frequently gave the impression that she was a traditional, haughty presence who was as distant and icy as any woman born from a royal family. This lone daughter of Obi Umunna had style, as seen by the way she sat with her long legs tucked together in modest femininity" (Mariama Bâ, 1980, p. 13).

Mariama Bâ, has also used vivid description in her text and mostly, to describe to Ramatoulaye's grief of her late husband; who had left her together with her eleven children. The author illustrates the double suffering that Ramatoulaye goes through, during the grieving time. She recalls past memories with Mawdo and the presence of second wife, torments her emotions.

Ramatoulaye captures situational irony with rich detail; her spouse used to accompany Binetou. The reader may comprehend Ramatoulaye's problems when her spouse leaves her by reading about them in her recollections. She is compelled to confront the painful reality that her spouse has been unfaithful to her;

"...and each month, Modou would colour his hair. Binetou would never miss an opportunity to laugh cruelly at him, despite his waistline being horribly constricted by vintage pants. Modou would exhaust himself attempting to hold youth in its fall, which abandoned him on all sides: the awkward droop of a double chin, the heavy step at the first hint of a chilly breeze. He was surrounded by grace and elegance" (Mariama Bâ, 1980, p. 49).

#### **4.2.4 Flashback Usage**

It is through the use of flashback, that Ramatoulaye reminds Aissatou their childhood memories. Ramatoulaye recalls of past occurrences like gaining education, which has helped them greatly in their lives. In addition, Mariama applies flashback to demonstrate how women in African societies have progressed from past oppressive customs and have embraced change in the modern world. Hence, the author recommends for change in the crude oppressive social norms.

"As for us, we traveled the same stony route to the Koranic School in worn-out wrappers and sandals. We also buried our milk teeth in the same holes and pleaded with our fairy

godmothers to give them back to us, even more beautiful than before. Even if dreams fade as time goes on and we face life's reality, I still hold onto my memories, the salt of recollection. I summon you." The feelings of the past are brought back to life. I avert my gaze. Ebb and flow of emotions including heat and dazzling light, woodfires, and the bitter green mango that we greedily bit into one at a time. I avert my gaze. Waves and ebbs of pictures" (Mariama Bâ, 1980 p. 1 & 2.)

#### **4.3 How Constrains of Motherhood in the Selected Texts, Raise Gender Issues.**

As authors present the struggles of motherhood, there is also evidence of gender inequality in society. The social norms that are prevalent in various societies encourage gender inequality. Religious ideologies that have been enacted indicate social gender inequality. Both cultural norms and religious constraints, seem to enforce men as superior and women as inferior characters.

##### **4.3.1 Cultural Barriers**

The struggles of motherhood in society can be viewed as a result of cultural practices that oppress women. This in turn, leads to social gender issues. Mariama Bâ's text *So Long a Letter*, reveal a polygamous society that does not treat both genders equally. The men have the right to marry many wives, although there are usually unaware. Ramatoulaye talks of her present situation together with her friend Aissatou, who share the same suffering.

"My friend, my friend, my friend. I call on you three times. Yesterday you were divorced. Today I am a widow" (Mariama Bâ, 1980, p.1). Ramatoulaye laments of her psychological suffering during the funeral of her late husband. According to the customs, she has to stay together with her cowife. "I find it annoying to have my cowife standing next to me. Tradition dictates that she be installed in my home for the burial. Her huge, lovely eyes that open and close on their secrets, maybe their regrets, get more and more pierced with each passing hour, and her cheeks develop deeper hollows and more rings. This youngster, at the age of love and independence, is plagued by grief" (Mariama Bâ, 1980, p.3&4). These kinds of cultural practices raise the issue of gender inequality in the society.

Because this is in a Muslim society, it is Ramatoulaye who takes the role of providing for the mourners who have come to grief for her late husband. Her resources are used by everyone that comes to her house. At the same time, she has to bear the burden of psychological torture because of losing the husband. She does this, as people continue to come in large numbers. And after the grieving time is passed, she's left with the domestic role of cleaning her house. Ramatoulaye and Binetou are given equal share of money that is contributed during the time of mourning. Society does not consider Ramatoulaye's status, as one having many children to bring up by herself. Mariama Bâ uses Ramatoulaye, to create the gender oppression and inequality that women from these kinds of societies face. According to the customs, the family-in-law to Ramatoulaye, take the greatest share and leaves her in misery; while trying to provide for her eleven children.

Mariama Bâ presents to the reader, a society where the male individuals, have the freedom to marry many wives without consideration of the women's decisions. For Ramatoulaye, she narrates her painful discovery of her husband's unfaithfulness. Despite Modou irresponsible behavior as a father, he is referred to as a champion during his funeral. It is evident that the society advocates for women oppression, while the men continue to be seen as superiors.

Additionally, Mariama Bâ represents gender inequality in administrative duties. Ramatoulaye voices out her concern to Daouda, and talks of unequal treatment of women who demonstrate their capabilities. The men do not encourage women to get empowered, but seem to advocate for women dependency on the male characters. In such a society that regards men as superior to men, Ramatoulaye together with her friends struggle to become powerful women.

Similarly, Buchi Emecheta presents the struggles of women in a polygamous society. The women are seen as property. For the chiefs and rich men, they marry many wives as a way of representing the great wealth that they have. Therefore, the female characters are regarded as material. This raises the gender issue, that concern mistreatment of female characters.

#### **4.3.2 Religious Ideology**

Ramatoulaye notes down the dirge that is sung to her late husband Modou. Mariama Bâ uses this dirge to indicate that, religion also oppresses women and advocates for polygamous marriages. A man is greatly honored when he has more than one wife. The author condemns these kinds of constraints in the Muslim religion, that oppress the women;

Mariama Bâ expresses some of the Muslim religious practices that seem to be oppressing the women. It is the women who suffer, while trying to bring up their children. The religious practices that Ramatoulaye gets to perform, painfully remind her of the times they used to live with Modou. This causes her to suffer emotionally.

“The *miracle* commanded by the Koran requires that a dead person be stripped of his most intimate secrets; thus, is exposed to others what was carefully concealed. These exposures crudely explain a man's life. With consternation, I measure the extent of Modou's betrayal. His abandonment of his first family (I and my children) was the outcome of the choice of a new life. He rejected us. He mapped out his future without taking our existence into account. His promotion to the rank of technical adviser in the Ministry of Public Works, in exchange for which, according to the spiteful, he checked the trade union revolt, could not control the mire of expenses by which he was engulfed. Dead without a penny saved. Acknowledgment of debts? A pile of them: cloth and gold traders, home delivery grocers and butchers, car-purchase installments” (Mariama Bâ, 1980, p.9).

Ramatoulaye is threatened by her brother in law, when she refuses to marry him. He uses the religious ideologies to illustrate that, it is necessary for Ramatoulaye to be married again. At this point, Mariama Bâ uses religion as a tool for women oppression. As an effect to past Ramatoulaye's marriage, she denies been married in a polygamous marriage again.

In Buchi Emecheta's text, *The Joys of Motherhood*, Buchi presents the strong belief of ancestral spirit and the ability of women to give birth. Female characters like Nnu Ego, greatly suffer with the realization that, she has to pray for her god 'chi', to give her children because she is barren. She strongly believes in what people tell her, that she is a rebirth of a slave woman who had been forced to buried together with her died master. Sacrifices are offered as a religious belief and Nnu Ego gets to a state of depression as she continues to plead her 'chi', to bless her with babies. Such beliefs enslave women to blame themselves as the cause of infertility.

#### **5.0 CONCLUSIONS**

The struggles of motherhood can be seen to be closely relating with the challenges that women face, in polygamous marriages. It is a struggle against inadequate resources, especially in situations when the mother is the sole provider. Women characters like Ramatoulaye in *So Long a Letter* are forced to raise their children on their own after they are separated with their husbands. From the selected texts, the reader can realize the strong personality of some female characters, as presented by Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Bâ. Buchi portrays Nnu Ego as an independent woman, whose joy is fulfilled by been able to provide for her beloved children. Ramatoulaye the female protagonist in the text, informs Aissatou; of the great hope with her even in spite of marriage disappointments and humiliations. She is faced with the duty of teaching her teenage children, to be morally upright.

Additionally, the analysis of the research findings indicates there are some male characters in the society, who advocate for women empowerment. They fight for the presentation of the

female self and their decisions been paramount. Likewise, women's decision seems to be insignificant. In the polygamous societies, husbands marry a second wife without informing their wives. The women's voices or even decisions are not listened. Using the analysis of the selected texts, it can be concluded that the women's struggles is mainly because of the disregard of their own decision and judgment of social situations. Hence, they struggle with extreme tension, while the husbands continue to be the decision makers.

Moreover, Buchi Emecheta in *Joys of Motherhood* and Mariama Bâ in *So Long a Letter*, have used literary language in their texts, to bring out the aesthetic effect and the major thematic concern; of the women's struggles in society. It is through literary techniques such as; sarcasm, irony, satire among others, that the authors have illustrated female oppression in polygamous marriages and the sufferings of women dependency on the males. It is unfortunate to note that, some women in society also participate in encouraging the oppression of women. Conclusively, it is apparent that there is lack of job employment. This is still a social crisis, in most African countries.

## 6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is paramount that the position of a woman in the society should be seen as a social concern. Basing this support from this research analysis, the challenges that the women go through especially in marriages; are caused by the roles that are entilted to them. The society needs to view women not as inferior to the men, but as individuals who can also be listened. Contemporary societies need to display the credible truth and strengths of women.

The government should formulate policies, to prevent mistreatment of women and in addition, strictly deal with domestic violence as a criminal offence. In connection to this, the government needs to offer financial support, for the children who don't have finance and yet willing to study. Parents need to willingly offer good education, not only to their sons but their daughters also. Parents should advise their daughters on the need to get educated.

The non-governmental institutions should advocate dismissal of social norms, that prevent gender equality. For example, in *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba the women face challenges and struggle in the particular social setup. This is because of the cultural norms that have been enacted by society, which constrain the women to have freedom of empowerment.

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