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The Portrayal of Women in Modern Feminist African Literature

*A Study of Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* and Sefi Atta's
*Everything Good Will Come**

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Dedication

I express gratitude toward Allah for the help he has offered me to compose this research

I would like to dedicate this work proudly to my beloved mother, Fatima Mahammed, who showers me with her endless love and who always pushes me forward.

To the only man in my life, my father Lansari Mahammed, who taught me how to defy the challenges of life.

A special feeling of gratitude goes to my lovely auntie Nezha Bentassa, who is always with me.

To my precious sister Hayat who is always there for me and who never forsook me.

To my dearest brothers Ali and Hichem who are always protecting me.

To the last hope of our family Amina, to whom I wish the best of luck in academic life.

Finally, to the spirit of five years of friendship.

Lansari Hadjer

Dedication

In memory of my grandfather Hocine Yanina who had been always the joy of our family with his wisdom, kindness, generosity, you will always be in our hearts, minds and prayers, may Allah grant you mercy, forgiveness, love and the highest place in
Jannah

I dedicate this work to the source of my inspiration, my mother who has always been an endless source of an unconditional love, support and encouragement.

To the source of knowledge, my father who has guided me through all the challenges I faced in my life.

To my aunt Safia I know you are far away, but I carry you inside my heart all the time

To my guardian angel and my protector, my brother Brahim.

To my precious sisters, the sweets of my life, Hadjer and Chahrazed who mean so much to me.

To my soulmate, Hadjer, Hadjer, Hadjer. I call on you three times. What words could tell my joy right now. After all these years, you never fail to make me happy. You will always be my best friend, forever and ever.

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Abstract

Over decades, authority, power, superiority were the prerogatives of men. Women swallowed all forms of oppression and subjugation imposed on them by traditions, cultures, and customs. They lived under the shadow of men with no rights or respected position. Women were viewed as a subordinated being to men. Society considered women as a tool of sexual pleasure and as a demonic creature. Therefore, this despotic treatment provoked women, mainly in Europe and America, to fight for their rights and to change the negative image of women in society. Likewise, African women were influenced by the feminist movement. They also struggled to vanquish the patriarchal system which relegated their roles to the dark corner. The situation of African women was dreadful because they faced repression and discrimination in the real and literary world. At first, African writers depicted women as passive and naïve characters believing that women did not have a story to be praised. Thereby, African feminist writers refused to bear this ill-treatment, and they agitated to change women destiny and horrible situation. Writers like Mariama Ba and Sefi Atta used their pens to improve women's conditions and give them the opportunity to celebrate their stories. They encourage women to militate against any form of persecution. Concerning this issue, the work selected two African novels, Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* to analyze how these writers handle the subject of feminism and how they treat patriarchy in their works. Consequently, this research aims to examine the portrayal of women in the above mentioned novels and to investigate how the two African writers succeeded in presenting powerful and independent female characters that could defy the prejudiced practices of the African societies.

Keywords: Feminism, treatment of patriarchy, oppression, the portrayal of women.

Résumé

Au fil des décennies, l'autorité, le pouvoir, la supériorité étaient les prérogatives des hommes. Les femmes ont avalé toutes les formes d'oppression imposées par les traditions, les cultures et les coutumes. Elles vivaient à l'ombre des hommes sans droits ni position respectée. Dans la société, les femmes étaient considérées comme un être subordonné aux hommes. Elle considérait les femmes comme un outil de plaisir sexuel et une créature démoniaque. Par conséquent, ce traitement despotique a provoqué les femmes, principalement en Europe et en Amérique, à se battre pour leurs droits et positions dans la société. De même, les femmes africaines ont été influencées par le mouvement féministe; elles ont également lutté pour vaincre le système patriarcal qui a relégué leurs rôles au coin sombre. La situation des femmes africaines était épouvantable parce qu'elles faisaient face à la discrimination dans le monde réel et littéraire. Au début, les écrivains africains dépeignaient les femmes comme des personnages passifs croyant que les femmes n'avaient pas d'histoire à féliciter. Ainsi, les écrivains féministes africains ont refusé de supporter ces mauvais traitements, et ils ont agité pour changer le destin des femmes et leur situation horrible. Des écrivains comme Mariama Ba et Sefi Atta ont utilisé leurs stylos pour améliorer les conditions des femmes. Elles encouragent les femmes à militer contre toute forme de persécution. Concernant cette question, ce projet a sélectionné deux romans africains *Une si Longue Lettre* et *Everything Good Will come* pour analyser comment ces écrivains traitent le sujet du féminisme et le traitement du patriarcat. Par conséquent, cette recherche vise à examiner la représentation des femmes et à étudier comment les deux écrivaines africaines ont réussi à présenter des personnages féminins puissants qui pourraient défier les pratiques préjudiciables des sociétés africaines.

Mots clés : Féminisme, traitement du patriarcat, oppression, représentation des femmes.

ملخص

على مر العقود السابقة، كانت السلطة والتفوق من صلاحيات الرجل فقط، أما المرأة فقد ابتلعت كل أشكال الظلم والقهر التي فرضتها عليها العادات والتقاليد والثقافات لتعيش في ظل الرجل دون حقوق أو وضعية لائقة ومحترمة. اعتبرت المرأة في ذلك المجتمع مخلوقاً أدنى من الرجل وتابعا له، ووسيلة من وسائل المتعة الجنسية، بل وكيانا شيطانيا، وقد أدى هذا التعامل الاستبدادي الجائر بالمرأة الأوروبية والأمريكية إلى الرفض والثورة على هذا الوضع المخزي، والنضال من أجل حقوقهن وتغيير الصورة السلبية للمرأة في المجتمع. ومن جهتها فقد تأثرت المرأة الأفريقية لاحقا بهذه الحركة النسوية، فانتمتضت هي الأخرى للنضال ضد النظام الأبوي والذكوري الذي حسر دورها في زاوية معتمة، ولقد تعرضت إلى مضايقات مروعة جدا بسبب مواجهتها للقمع والتمييز في العالم الحقيقي وفي المجال الأدبي والإبداعي أيضا.

ففي البداية كان الكتاب الأفارقة يصورون النساء على أنهن شخصيات بسيطة وساذجة لا يعتقدن بأن النساء عكس الرجال لا يملكن حياة حافلة بالأحداث، وأن حياتهن لا قصة فيها ولا تاريخ يحتفى به، لذا رفض الكتاب الأفارقة المساندين لتحرر المرأة هذه الانتهاكات، وتحركوا لتغيير مصير النساء وإخراجهم من هذا الوضع المزري، فكاتبات من أمثال "مارياما با" و"سفي أطا" سخرن أقلامهن لتحسين ظروف المرأة الأفريقية وإعطائها الفرصة للاحتفاء بقصصها. وحرصن النساء على شن حملات ضد أي شكل من أشكال الاضطهاد.

وقد اخترنا في هذا الصدد روايتين أفريقيتين هما: *خطاب طويل جدا (So Long a Letter)* و*الأفضل آت (Everything Good Will Come)*، لتحليل ومعرفة كيف تعاملت الكاتبات مع موضوع حرية المرأة والنظام الأبوي والذكوري. وقد حددنا هدف هذا البحث في مسألة معاينة تمثيل المرأة، ودراسة كيف تمكنت هاتان الكاتبتان الأفريقيتان من تقديم شخصيات نسائية قوية ومتحررة أمكن لها أن تتحدى الممارسات التعسفية والسلبية للمجتمعات الأفريقية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحركة النسوية، النظام الأبوي، الاضطهاد، تمثيل المرأة.

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General Introduction

Literature is the mirror of societies. Writers use literature to express their feelings, thoughts, and concerns about issues. There is no denying that the influence of literature is highly significant on the readers and on the world in general. The literary works determine the cultural level and development of communities. They “do not just entertain or instruct they produce and are often cited as a source of knowledge” (Nnaemeka 84). Literature also studies the role of individuals in societies. Women’s position is immensely discussed in the contemporary literature. The function of women has a considerable impact on many levels socially, politically, and in relationships, because women are the mainstay of societies, families, and nations. They are the donors of love, the protectors, the educators and contributors to nation building.

Like other works of literature in the world, African literature devoted a part to the study of women and portrayed them in various profiles. At first, African literature was written by men who were strongly affected by the patriarchal beliefs and norms of their societies. Some feminist critics believed that male francophone writers routinely portray their female characters in the stereotype of an oppressed and subjugated woman who has no efforts to shape her destiny or change the system that deprives, oppresses, and robs her dreams and ambitions. African male writers view women as “passive” characters with neither personality nor serious problems, accepting their faith with no serious attempt to emancipate themselves. Moreover, male-authored texts presented women as characters with no identity or story to be shared or embraced.

These ideas imposed an earnest dilemma in Africa. African women found themselves in a place where they have to choose between being faithful to traditions

or striving for equal rights with men. However, by the post-colonial era, African women commenced their rebellion to attain women emancipation. Feminism, the widespread movement in Europe and America, influenced them.

Feminism is the political and social movements that seek to redefine, defend, and achieve equal rights for women politically, economically, and socially. For women, the feminist movement displays the hope to liberate themselves from the restraints of the past. It is also the willingness to reevaluate the distorted image of females through literature. Feminist literary criticism denounces gender discrimination found in African literary works.

African literature has been described as a fictitious patriarchal world because of those writers who always relegated women to the background. Male authored-texts depicted African women as weak, obedient and ignorant individuals. This negative image about women provoked African women and especially writers. Writers like Mariama Ba, Sefi Atta, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Buchi Emecheta, and others use their literary works to change this wrongful picture. They decry the oppressive treatment of patriarchal societies and male practices. They endeavor to improve women's position by portraying understanding, helpful, and divergent female characters.

For that matter, this thesis studies two well-known novels, *Everything Good Will Come* and *So Long a Letter*, written by famous African women. In their novels, Sefi Atta and Mariama Ba touch on the complexities that occur in African women's lives, and the burden of traditions that impedes their dreams, aspiration and freedom. The study aims at analyzing the condition and situation of African women through these novels and how these authors dealt with feminism in their books.

1. Statement of the Problem

For long centuries, the African society has repressed and persecuted women through the patriarchal beliefs and old norms; therefore, African women agitated to release themselves from this ill-treatment. They started to rejuvenate their hurt dignity, fight marginalization and create a place in the society. Feminism was the flame that ignited women's struggle for equal rights. A number of African writers were influenced by the mottos of this movement. They took the responsibility to emancipate women from the shackles of slavery both in literature and society. Literary works like Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* opposed all fixed ideas that limited the role of women, and this has led us to carry out this research, which aims at analyzing the treatment of feminism by these writers. Besides, this work gives a portrayal of how these female writers depict the image of women through their novels. Using these novels as a framework, this paper sheds light on significant themes that are intertwined in each story such as self-realization, religion, friendship, polygamy, prejudice and examines the impact of patriarchy on women's relationships.

2. Purpose of the Study

The objective of this study is to examine the impact of feminism on African female writers (Mariama Ba and Sefi Atta), to view the African women struggles, positions and conditions, by observing how they are portrayed in these two novels *Everything Good Will Come* and *So Long a Letter*. In addition, this study attempts to give another perception, which might remove the old negative views of women in Africa. It tries through the characters of the abovementioned novels to demonstrate how women defy patriarchy and their ordeal, and how they struggle to create an independent identity, fight to protect their rights and to overcome male hegemony.

Moreover, it emphasizes women's concerns and roles in maintaining harmony and building a nation.

3. The Significance of the Study

This work will be of vital importance at many levels. First, it might be considered as a secondary source for students or researchers who are interested in the feminist studies or the women's struggle for liberty. It will also be a model for African women who refuse to stay under the shadow of men. Moreover, this study exposes the issues and daily life problems that impede women's ambitions and freedom, particularly in Africa. Furthermore, it is a right, a duty and a commitment for women to contribute to this field and enlighten people, particularly men, of the significant role of women in societies.

4. Primary Questions

This topic opens the door to many essential questions relating to feminism. The first dominant question will be: to what extent did Mariama Ba and Sefi Atta succeed in portraying characters that have the effort to emancipate themselves from their patriarchal society? Second, how do these writers treat feminism in their novels? What are the motifs that provoked these writers to enjoy women's quest for freedom? Finally, what are the hindrances that prevent women from acquiring their rights and establishing a place in the African society?

5. Scope and Limitation of the Study

From the period 1950s and 1980s, Africa has witnessed a dramatic change in different fields such as politics, economics, and social life. People became more aware of their rights, and African women started to use women as protagonists of their novels to shed light on women's stories and reveal the reality of African societies. Thus, this study focuses on the postcolonial feminist literature. There are many

literary works that deal with feminism, but the present study is restricted to Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*.

6. Methodology

6.1. Materials

This work examines the portrayal of women in *Everything Good Will Come* and *So Long a Letter*; therefore, the primary sources of data used in this study are the two novels. Besides, it uses secondary sources like books, articles, journals, videos, and internet materials that are related to African feminism and the portrayal of women in African literary works.

6.2. Method

This work is exerted within a literary frame, thus, the research methodologies applied include the analytical and the descriptive paradigms in order to analyze the issue of women liberation, and to establish a better understanding of the topic.

7. The Structure of the Work

The study is an examination of two African novels. Thereby, the work is divided into three chapters. The first chapter gives a general idea of the background of the study, literature review of both novels, history of feminism, and African feminism. Furthermore, in this study a special concern is given to patriarchy and its origins. The end of the chapter sheds light on one of the most important topics, which is the existence of patriarchy in some African novel and its role in provoking female African writers to write-back.

The second chapter is devoted to the study of Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*. It deals with the treatment of patriarchy and feminism dimension in the novel. Moreover, it discusses the techniques and style used by Sefi Atta in her novel.

Finally, the last chapter studies another African novel; *So Long a Letter*. It illuminates the treatment of feminism, the role and responsibilities of women. Furthermore, it emphasizes the impact of education and colonialism on women. Finally, it gives consideration to the interpretation of Islam in Mariama Ba's story.

Introduction

African female writers have succeeded in gaining a prestigious importance in the contemporary African literary world. Their major objective has been the emancipation of African women from any kind of enslavement and prejudice imposed on them by traditions, norms, stereotypes, or any form of demonic beliefs that dominated the African societies. Thus, they use their pens to study the African societies and to liberate women from all practices that would rob their freedom and set their roles at naught. Moreover, they endeavour through their literary works to enhance the power of their words in order to bring the welfare of both genders in the African countries. In this chapter, an attempt is made to give an idea about the history of feminism internationally and regionally, the unfair treatment of patriarchal societies, and an assessment of some previous works that had provided the key answer to this problem.

1.1. Background of the Study

The world of literature has witnessed a crucial movement called *Feminism* that was established by both male and female writers who sought to fight the patriarchal institution that subjugated and persecuted women. For centuries, women have endured oppression, repression, and servitude because of the unfair traditions and male practices. They were unable to have a position with men or to express their ideas, ambitions, fears and dreams. Their roles were limited to cleaning houses, raising children and fulfilling men's sexual desires.

This unjust treatment imposed a significant problem for women, particularly African women; they felt that it is their duty to liberate and make African women's voices audible in their societies, by eliminating these constraints and hindrances that impede women's freedom.

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African women's endeavours for a better life and equal rights with their male counterparts have contributed to give them the name "Feminists", as the early group whose works and struggles concentrated on the emancipation of women from their misery. They struggled to offer them an honourable place in society to enjoy what life has to offer.

1.2. Literature Review

1.2.1. Review of Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*

The Nigerian writer Sefi Atta in her novel *Everything Good Will Come* gives the reader a unique demonstration of how women defy the challenges of the patriarchal institution and the diversity in the city. She also highlights the differences between generation, faith, tradition, the realisation of a female from childhood to adulthood, and the impact of wars and colonialism. These elements make Sefi's work as one of the prominent novels in the African literature.

Times Literary Supplement, U.K, states that, *Everything Good Will Come*, is "A beautifully paced stroll in the shoes of a woman growing up in a country struggling to find its post-independence identity. *Everything Good Will Come* depicts the struggles women face in a conservative society. This is convincing; more remarkable is what the novel has to say about the need to speak out when all around is falling apart" (Copnall).

Sefi Atta adopts a unique style in writing *Everything Good Will Come*. This unique style attracts both the readers and the writers' attention. It demonstrates the author's ingenuity and ability to compete with the greatest writers in Africa. Similarly, "Again and again Atta's writing tugs at the heart; at the conscience. At the same time, reflecting the resilience of the Lagosians whose lives she explores, humour is almost constant, effervescent, most often with a satirical twist." (*Sunday Independent, South African*)

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Through her literary work, Sefi Atta takes the attempt to redefine the Nigerian literature by highlighting new issues and themes. It is a story that takes the African literature to the fullest extent. In emphasizing this idea, the well-known Nigerian poet Ochia Ofeimuna says, “Sefi Atta’s first novel has the nerve to redefine existing traditions of African storytelling. It comforts the familiar passions of a city and a country with unusual insights and a lyrical power pointing our literature to truly greater heights.”

The famous Nigerian-born British Buchi Emecheta shares the same opinion with Ofeimuna. She says that, “*Everything Good Will Come* is like listening to an old friend and bringing up to date and to life happenings in our beloved city of Lagos. I was sorry when I came to the end.”

The novel deals with various dimensions of feminism. It gives a unique story about friendship that ended with female solidarity. It relates to the journey of a woman toward self-realization. *Everything Good Will Come* is a contemporary story reflecting family issues and women’s aspiration. Moreover, it is as Kehinde and Mbipom in their article “Discovery, Assertion and Self-Realisation” declare it to be “a courageous story about friendship, family, ambition and self-discovery” (67).

The Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie says that, “There is wit, intelligence and a delicious irreverence in this book. But it is Sefi Atta’s courage in choosing to look at her fictional world through fiercely feminist lenses that I most admired.” Similarly, Tenure Ojaide in evaluating the work says that, “Sefi Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come*, is an affirmation of faith in one’s capacity especially female and national, for self-realization.”

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1.2.2. Review of Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*

Mariama Ba's novel *So Long a Letter* is considered as one of the classic feminist works that describe the transformation of a woman. Through the book, Ba gives her comments on several problems. The novel won the prestigious Noma Prize, after being translated into English in 1989, eight years after its first publication. The novel was one of the most read books in Senegal, for being precisely within the school system. *So Long a Letter* has also an echo in many other countries as Gueye Maramé, an Associate Professor of African and African Diaspora Literatures, states in her paper that, “[*So Long a Letter*] became a constant in American classroom [...] The novel continuously features in college syllabus, as a text through which to examine the condition of women in contemporary Senegal. It is taught in a varied range of courses in disciplines such as literature, gender studies, religion, and anthropology” (Gueye 1).

In his review, Philip Rushworth says that Mariama Ba through her novel proposes to the reader a delicate representation of Senegalese women's struggle on the dawn of independence. In addition, the thing that made it a classic and unique is that,

Not only its brave and honest account of the challenge of polygamy for women but its subtly elucidated message calling for women's self-reliance. Bâ reveals through Ramatoulaye the inner strength demanded of a woman but also, poignantly, the challenges and fears that she faces. The much broader message that any reader will take away is the sense of hope and disappointment, clarity and confusion, of those caught in the bewildering social change of twentieth-century Africa (*Africa Book Club*).

Nicki Hitchcott, a lecturer in the French University of Nottingham and the author of *Women Writers in Francophone Africa*, wrote an article entitled “Confidently

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Feminine? Sexual Role-Play in the Novels of Mariama” in 1996. The author studied the two heroines of the novel. According to Hitchcott, Ramatoulaye is a woman who shows “passive femininity” and Aïssatou is a woman who shows “active masculinity”.

Hitchcott writes:

Bâ’s text suggests that a woman alone cannot resist the historically sanctioned practices of patriarchy, for such strength comes from the collective memory of the shared experiences of women. The friendship between Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou stands as a model of such solidarity (Hitchcott 152).

Through these characters, Mariama Ba presented two typical types of African women who fought to overcome their ordeals.

1.3. History of Feminism

Feminism has been given various definitions by feminist writers and critics who support equal rights for women with their male counterparts and intend to free women from the bonds of subservience and patriarchy. Toril Moi propounds that “feminism is a bourgeoisie, egalitarian demand for women to obtain power in the present patriarchal system” (103). Simon de Beauvoir expounds that feminists are women or even men, who are struggling to improve women’s condition (6).

For Lisa Tuttle, the feminist theory is “the advocacy of women’s rights based on a belief in the equality of the sexes” (107). Charles Nnolim concurs with Tuttle’s stand. He asserted that both feminist critics and writers have “fought successfully for the right of women” (47). The above definitions demonstrate that the liberation of women and the urge for equality between sexes is the predominant concern in the feminist writings.

The dawn of feminism dates back to the Age of Enlightenment, the period that witnessed outstanding intellectual works. At that period, some political philosophers in

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Europe started a massive struggle to defend the idea that human beings are equal, and their rights should not be determined by their wealth, race, or social position. Their thoughts received a favourable welcome from people.

These thoughts paved the way for the 1775 American Revolution, and the French revolution of 1789 when people became fully aware of their rights and started to protect their rights; that were taken by the bourgeoisie. However, women's rights did not take considerations by the political philosophers. Instead, women were left in a place where they had to agitate for their rights by themselves.

Consequently, men's revolution and struggle for better living and equity are regarded as the spark that ignites feminists' struggle for the emancipation of women. As a result, the quest for the rights of women gained favourable supports from many writers and philosophers. John Stuart Mill is a prominent voice in the strife of women. For him, "no slave is a slave to the same lengths, and in so full a sense of the word as a wife is" (Qtd. in Moers 16). After that, the call for women emancipation burgeoned with the publications of many literary works.

It is assumed that feminism started with Mary Wollstonecraft with the publication of a book entitled *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) in which she recognized the exigency of equality of women. She notices through her literary work that, "from the tyranny of man, the greater number of female follies proceed" (De Leeuw 35). As a result, the movement finds its basis "in the great feminist decade of the 1970s, when Mary Wollstonecraft blazed and died" (Mores XII).

Then, the feminist literary writer Virginia Woolf came with the publication of *A Room of One's Own* in 1929, which necessarily required that the economic and social freedom of women should be inevitably realized. Similarly, the French philosopher

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Simon De Beauvoir wrote *The Second Sex* in 1949. She asserted through her book the crucial notion of “the female is born the women is created.” (De Beauvoir 267)

The translation of the book *The Second Sex* into English and the publication of Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* (1963) paved the way to new intensive protests, which led to a radical change in America and other nations. Subsequently, the activities of feminist writers and philosophers rose up increasingly, and the movement “which one might have supposed as dead as the Polish question was again an issue” (Harrison x).

These new feminist writers, as Nan Albinus states, urged for a drastic change in women’s social role, to grant women a breathing space to gain political power the same as men and become “economically independent and in control of their own sexual lives and productive systems” (830). Moreover, this new radical perspective contributes to regarding human reproduction and marriage as wicked sources that cause the anguish and oppression in women’s lives (Asiegbu 60). Thereby, the movement encountered strong criticism because even those who supported the feminist quest objected to what is called radical feminism.

Though radical feminism caused a reversal on the path of the movement, the call for the emancipation of women boomed. This is due to the fact that women, all over the world, suffer in their patriarchal societies which denied their rights politically, educationally, socially and economically because they are considered as inferior human beings.

Despite this prosperity, women’s literary works were not stimulated or encouraged due to the fact that some female writers were coerced to deny their real names and write by pseudo male names. The American Alice Bradley Sheldon (James Tiptree, Jr.) had her real sex identified in 1976. The Brontë Sisters (Ellis, Acton, and Currer Bell) later started writing by their real names and gained recognition. Mary Ann

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Evans, known as George Eliot, only revealed herself after her first writing *Adam Bede* (1856) gave her huge credit.

In here, we notice the psychological failure of the abovementioned writers because they were incapable of celebrating their real female names and publishing their works using their names; although, they were extraordinarily skilful, and their literary works contained great thoughts. This demonstrates how much the patriarchal literary world affected the attention of the readers and underestimated women's literary creativity.

1.4. African Feminism

The notion that has prevailed over the world is that feminism means the movement which calls for equality between the two sexes as the French philosopher Charles Fourier suggested. However, it is worthy of note to state that the approach of female writers regarding the movement takes diverse dimensions due to the cultural, racial, and sociological variations. While western feminist writers struggle to have equal rights with males in different fields such as marriage, politics, economy; African feminist writers strive to be heard, recognised and to share or celebrate a story, a women's story.

For centuries, African women were abused, victimised, and oppressed under the hand of tradition, norms and culture. To a great extent, they had no place to express their feelings and to complain about the unfair treatment imposed on them. Their voices and thoughts were prohibited to be heard or expressed publicly in society. Despite this ill-treatment and persecution, many prominent feminists emerged and militated to put an end to women suffering and felt proud to be praised among women folks.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, who illustrates the mistakes that contribute in subjecting African women in his novels *Weep Not Child* (1964), *The River Between* (1965), *A*

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Grain of Wheat (1967), *Wizard of Crow* (2006). Throughout his writings, we notice that he devotes a significant part to the theme of feminism. He shares with the well-known writer of Botswana Bessie Head the burden of responsibility to declare the rights and freedom of women. Bessie in one of her novels, *Maru* (1971), portrays two kinds of women, strong and weak female characters. Her books centre upon colour prejudice and apartheid.

The South African writer Olive Schreiner also struggled for the amelioration of women's condition; she has been considered as an “*Advocate for Feminism*”. Her novel *The Story of an African Farm*, written between 1874 and 1875, is regarded as one of the most outstanding feminist works. Olive emphasises the importance of women's equality without neglecting the necessity to consider both men and women when it comes to gender relationships. The Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka in her novel *The Lion and the Jewel* (1959) criticises the African culture by creating a protagonist ‘Sidi’, a beautiful young girl, who exemplifies the epitome of the powerful woman who is aware of her value. Similarly, Noureddine Farah in his first novel, *From a Crooked Rib* (1970) relates the story of a nomad girl who refuses her conservative African society and flees away looking for other opportunities that might fulfil her perspectives. The Somali novelist depicts the severe conditions and circumstances that make women downcast. He encourages women to create a chance, to look for new choice, and to make a drastic change in their lives. His novels like many writers seek to set confidence in women's soul and enlighten them that change starts from them so that they can achieve whatever they want.

The Algerian writer Assia Djebar is also considered as a famous feminist figure. Her novel *Vaste Est La Prison (Wide Is the Prison)* (1995) indicates the writer's preoccupation with women's experience, the idea of a shared feminine identity which

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remains a controversial subject, and females are portrayed as obscure characters. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie also has her standpoint concerning this topic. Through her famous novel *Americanah* (2013), Adichie shows how women suffer and struggle to find their identities. Moreover, her outstanding speech “*We Should All Be Feminists*” (2013) continues in inspiring millions of women, not just in Africa but all over the globe. However, the list is very long with the vast number of writers who were interested in women’s issues and led the first activities to fight against the patriarchal system that neglected the role of women for centuries.

Furthermore, female writers’ objectives in modern African literature are not just about living better or having equal rights with men, but it is “the re-entrenchment of women and/or female-related aspects of the selected statement into contemporary discourse” (Uzuegbu 9). Again, their concerns take another curve; they felt the necessity to work hand in hand with men in order to maintain harmony in society. This position concurs with Elizabeth Ogini’s (1996) position that the new attitude of Womanism “desires that the men and the women should be in harmony in the home and society at large” (15). The need for harmony between men and women does not indicate that women failed in defending their rights or they gave up. These thoughts were a result of the consciousness of female writers of the problems that are shredding and threatening their countries. For that reason, they start using their literary works to concentrate on new domains such as politics, religion, leadership and economy to shed light on the problems that led to political, social and economic instability.

As the western female writers mentioned earlier, African female writers also endured discrimination in the literary field. Their works were never appreciated, though their works were brilliant. The outcome of this situation is the birth of authors like Sefi

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Atta, Mariama Ba, Buchi Emecheta, Kaine Agray, Akachi Adimora and others who wanted to change this inequitable treatment through their works.

The African culture failed to consider the creativity of women or their roles outside homes because women's role was restricted to merely be a mother and an obedient wife. This ideology not only was inherited in the mindset of the African people for years, but it also controlled the African literary world. Therefore, women were always left in the dark corner when male writers celebrated the success of their works. In this regard, Dr. Ngozi Chuma Udeh clarifies in her book *Trend and Issues in Nigerian Literature* that:

The female voices in Nigerian literature, therefore, came up as a total and implicit rejection of this derogatory lifestyle created by the norms of the society to restrict and subjugate women both in real life and in the fictive sphere since literature is a weapon of authority, women writers have together used it as a medium to promote and give value to the lives of women therefore filling successfully the guilt between the male and female characters in Nigerian novels. They based their argument on the premise that progress in the society can be fostered by steering clear of sexual segregation. (210)

Thus, African female writers denounced this discrimination by gender. They yearned for a better position declaring that the writer should be evaluated by the masterfulness of his work and not by his gender; so that, harmony and justice could be established through the world of literature for the welfare of both genders.

Having viewed women's position and struggles against the patriarchal system that tyrannized women, it is worthy of note to state the origins of patriarchy and how this

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later provoked women all across the world particularly in Africa to agitate for a better life.

1.5. Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a concept that has been highly discussed in the contemporary literature particularly African literature. Many social scientists and writers wrote about it and gave it variable definitions. Engels in his book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) mentioned that the earliest system of domination creating that patriarchy is the “world historical defeat of female sex” (30). The purport of this definition is that patriarchy is viewed as one form of political organization that dispensed power in an unjust and iniquitous way between men and women to the detriment of women. The Royal Academy of the Spanish Language Dictionary defines the concept as “A primitive social organization in which authority is exercised by a male head of the family, extending this power even to distant relatives of the same lineage” (Facio).

The word “patriarchy” emerged before the arrival of the feminists’ activities or women’s movement. It was in the past two decades when the concept has been discussed to lighten the origins of men’s hegemony and persecution of women (Kamarae). Very often, the word was used as a description of father’s supreme authority as he is considered as the ruler of the family. Abidemi R. Asiyanbola states that “A patriarchy is considered the head of the household and within the family; he controls productive resources, labour force, and reproductive capacities based on the notions of superiority and inferiority and legitimized by differences in gender and generation” (3-4).

Sylvia Walby in *Theorizing Patriarchy* defines it as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women” (Walby 20).

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Feminist theories started to examine the meanings and origins of patriarchy in the second half of the twentieth century when social sciences closed their discussion about the concept because they considered that the concept of patriarchy is related to ancient societies (Facio). However, for feminists patriarchy is not a practice or a civilization that characterized or existed only in the ancient times. Its scope goes further away from the common definition still given by many dictionaries which is, as the Oxford Dictionary defines it “A system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it.” According to them, it is a present-day iniquitous system that subjugates women. Accordingly, Carole Pateman writes that, “the patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection” (207).

Therefore, feminism is a movement and a struggle that seeks to defend the patriarchal system, to attain equity, respect, dignity, freedom, and to give women the ability to take control of their lives in different aspects of life. In other words, feminism is “an awareness of patriarchal control, exploitation and oppression at the material and ideological levels of women’s labour, fertility and sexuality, in the family, at the place of work and in society in general, and conscious action by women and men to transform the present situation” (Bhasin and Khan 3).

1.6. Origins of Patriarchy

The origin of patriarchy and male dominance can be traced to ancient epochs, or as Stephen Sanderson traced its ancestry to the 3rd century BCE, when the eminent Greek philosopher Aristotle recognised that the patriarchal family contributed in developing the city-state, though he believed that they were entirely different (Oso 1). Aristotle believed in Socrates’ idea who considered “being born a woman is a divine punishment since women are half way between a man and animal” (Qtd. in Oso 1). He

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also announces in chapter thirteen of his notable book *The Politics* (1885) that “Men and women have different kinds of virtue” (17).

Maltin in one of his studies has observed that discrimination against women is noticed on Biblical time (Asiegbu 61). At that time, women were not considered human to be counted. It was also in the Bible when Mary Magdalene committed adultery, she was presented to the hand of Jesus to be stoned without any blame or mention of the man “with whom she committed the adultery who, most probably, initiated the act” (Onyeoziri V).

The Jewish tradition also ill-treated and humiliated women where their roles were degraded to nothing, “the women should keep quiet in the meetings. They are not allowed to speak; as the Jewish Law says, they must not be in charge” (Qtd. in Asiegbu 62).

Similarly, the ancient Arab societies before Islam have neglected and subjugated women. They viewed woman as a sexual tool created just for their lust. They burnt, stoned, and buried women alive just because it was a shame to have a female born. It was the arrival of Islam, which played a vital role in changing these views and gave women the value and consideration that they deserve. Islam has declared the rights and duties of woman. It proclaims her right in inheritance, allows her to express her opinion without any fear, and to decide about her personal life, such as, in marriage where she can choose and agree upon the person with whom she would continue her life. However, the misinterpretation of Islam and the Koran contributes to the misery of women until now.

Hence, we can infer that the males’ view of women as powerless and inferior individuals is widespread in many societies and age long. Yet, there are some societies which appreciated and esteemed women, like the Egyptian women who were highly

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entitled to do some valuable practices in the community unlike women in other cultures. John Temple Bristow in his book *What Paul Really Said about Women* states that, “Egyptian women attended market and were employed in trade. In ancient Egypt, a middle-class woman might sit on a local tribunal, engage in real estate transactions, and inherit or bequeath property. Women also secured loans and witnessed legal documents”. (41)

Moreover, there are also some outstanding heroines who are considered as the ideal person for bravery, valour, and power in spite of the patriarchal system they were living in. They succeeded in putting their imprint not only in their societies but also in the world history. They are now celebrated among the greatest leaders the world has ever known, including the *Queen Belkis of Sheba*, the Egyptian pharaoh *Queen Hatshepsut*, the Algerians queens *Tin Hinan* of Hoggar and *Kahina* of the Berbers.

Furthermore, patriarchy’s roots were also found in the world of fiction where men dominated the literary world and women’s works did not gain any appreciation; instead, they were relegated to the dark side. This is highly observed in the African literature where male-authored texts had neglected women and portrayed them as submissive characters.

1.7. Patriarchy in African Novels

African novels are defined as a source that depicts the concerns of people and deals with the problems occurring in the society. In other words, they are considered as “that body of fiction that relates to the history of and experiences of African people and society” (Abiola 12). The African literature has been considered as a fictitious patriarchal world because male writers presented their female characters as oppressed and subjugated women who have no effort to change their destiny. They are also portrayed as “sex objects, prostitute, indolent, pleasure seekers” (Oso 2).

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The only image that was given to the African women by African writers, according to Julie Agbasiere, “is that of the subordinate, subservient and decorative, second-rate character dominated by society’s patriarchy. Feminist writers are now giving women a voice and a locus stand to challenge the societal norms and values obnoxious to them” (72). In other words, the African literature “had worn a masculine mask, operating to the disadvantage of women by rendering them invisible, or homogeneous, or voiceless” (Newell 138).

As a result, some writers and critics like Acholonu (1989), Mojola (1989), Saadawi (1991), Akachi Ezeigbo (1997) and Grace Okereke (1998), denounced this situation and struggled to give women an honourable place whether in the society or male-authored novels. Grace Okereke decries the “Patriarchal literary world’s phallogocentric considerations of male concerns as valid subjects for literature while regarding female concerns over gender relations as trivial” (114).

Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* demonstrated this ill-treatment of women. Achebe presented the African women as obedient and servile servants, who blindly obey men without any questions. The society in the novel is under the total domination of men with women playing limited roles. The protagonists, Okonkwo’s wives, endure his lousy mood and severity. This marginalisation appears almost in his early novels, *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *The Man of the People* (1966), and *Arrow of God* (1964), in which the principal character Ezeulu gave a significant statement about females stating that, “in our custom, a man is not expected to go down on his knees and knock his forehead on the ground to his wife to ask her forgiveness or beg a favour. But a wise man knows that between him and his wife” (Achebe 172).

Therefore, Achebe encounters harsh and strident criticism from feminist critics, until his next novel *Anthills of the Savannah*, which is regarded as an empowerment of a

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female character. In this novel, Achebe changes the old image of the female character by giving her more considerations and values.

Like Achebe, other male African novelists also portrayed women in a negative image. In Ayikwei's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the principle characters are only men, "The Man", Teacher, and Koomson. The Female characters in the novel, like the Man's wife, Oyo, and Oyo' mother, "are blind to the virtues which the Man and Teacher possess" (Oso 3). Cyprian Ekwensi in the novel *Jagua Nana* depicts his female characters with no morals or integrity. They used their bodies as an object to fulfil their materialistic needs.

Therefore, the emergence of African female novelists is not surprising. Their novels were viewed as writing back to male's works and an illustration of the burden of traditions, and norms faced by women in the patriarchal African societies. Works like Nawal El Saadawi's *Women at Point Zero* and *She Has No Place in Paradise*, and Chimamanda's *Purple Hibiscus* attempt to improve women's position and to give them the power to challenge old norms.

Conclusion

For female writers Feminism is the hope to live better and an eagerness to have rights in the different aspects of life. Feminism was a result of the unfair treatment, oppression, and the patriarchal system. It has become a struggle to be heard, recognized, and respected.

Until now, many societies still rob women's freedom and degrade their roles to nothing. Hence, many writers were provoked by this unjust treatment like the paper's target Sefi Atta and Mariama Ba who used their pens to condemn and fight against any forms of women subjugation. Their primary purpose was the improvement of women's position, both in the real world and the world of fiction.

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For that, the following chapters are included in order to have a clear view about how these writers present their female characters, and to what extent they succeeded in changing the old pictures and portraying powerful and independent women who refuse to dream through men's perspective.

Introduction

The Nigerian writer Sefi Atta, born in 1964, Lagos, has placed herself prominently in the African literature by the publication of valuable works which have been translated into several languages. Her novels include *A Bit of Difference* (2009), *Swallow* (2010), and *Everything Good Will Come* (2005). Her short stories collections include *News from Home* (2010), *An Ordinary Legacy*, *The Muson Festival*, *Muson Centre*, *The Naming Ceremony*, and *New World Nigeria*.

For her unique style, Atta gained several awards and recognitions, such as, Wole Soyinka prize for literature in Africa (2006), Noma award for publishing in Africa (2009), Caine prize for African literature and others awards that indicate the author's brilliance and talent.

Sefi Atta is considered as an active, vibrant voice in the Feminist movement in modern African literature. Among other literary works, her works aimed to improve the living standards of women. Her works contributed significantly to give women the place they deserve whether in society, home, or the literary world. Thus, this chapter aims to examine how Sefi Atta deals with Feminism in her novel. How women are portrayed in contemporary female-authored text, notably Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*, and what themes and techniques characterized Sefi's novel.

1.1. Patriarchy in *Everything Good Will Come*

The Nigerian writer Sefi Atta in her first novel *Everything Good Will Come* depicts the realities and events that marked the Nigerian history. The story denounces the persecution and repression of women in the patriarchal Nigerian society. Sefi Atta discloses the unfair treatment, old beliefs, and traditions that reduce the role of women to nothing than just a house wife and prevent them from putting their imprint in the society.

The first thing that captures attention is that all the major female characters in the novel were downcast in their marriage and relationships with men. This divine institution (marriage) has oppressed and segregated women from the real world. It contributes to make women as a tool in the hands of men who are portrayed as egocentric, heartbreakers, and barbaric creatures, who view women as an object created just to fulfil their sexual desires. Men believed that women's role is in the kitchen and they cannot do anything else outside of it. In this position, Susan Gardner says that, "A girl is not a failure. A woman needs not be to be defined by marriage and above all motherhood; the woman who supports herself depend(s) on men less" (161).

The novel centres on the character Enitan, the only daughter of Bandele Sunday Taiwo, and Arin "Mama Enitan". The novel is written in the first person narrative technique. It is a narration of the realization of a growing child who recognized the marginalization of women. It records the protagonist's life from childhood to the time when she becomes fully aware of the problems that occur in her society and impede her freedom. Her attempt to release herself from persecution ends by abandoning her marriage with Niyi Franco.

Sefi Atta emphasizes that many women endure bad marriages just to comply with the old norms and traditions of the patriarchal society. They save their marriage to whatever extent it costs them in order to avoid the stereotype made about divorced women. Several characters in the novel suffer from their marriage such as Toro Franco, Enitan's mother in law, Sheri Bakare, Enitan's childhood and close friend, and Mother of Prison who makes a prominent statement about marriage that:

We marry anybody for marrying sake, love anyone for love sake, and once we love them, we forsake ourselves; make the best of it, till they die or till we do. Look at me. Everything in that house I bought, and I

was sending money to my parents in the village, sending money to his parents.... Then like a fool, I was telling everybody that it was my husband who was providing, you know, to boost him up. (Atta 271)

The protagonist also found herself in a frustrating marriage with Niyi Franco. He represents the typical example of an African man who believes that women are servants of men, and a man marries a woman just to take care of him and to satisfy his sexual desires without any arguments or complaints. Husbands in Africa expect women “to conform to the most limiting definitions of wifhood” (Newell 137).

Unlike men in the past, men in the contemporary African societies accept women's work outside the home, but the old belief that house chores are limited only for women is remaining in the minds of people. In fact, many women start working to support men in financing the family because they are aware of the increasing financial requirements in modern societies. On the other hand, men fail to aid women in the simplest tasks of home. They enjoy the virtual kingdom they had created in their imagination, while women are still suffering in dwellings, works, and from the old norms that prevent women from saying “No” to the selfish demands of men.

This is similar to what Sefi Atta highlights in her novel, Enitan's husband Niyi Franco does not care about house chores because he thinks that there is someone who looks after him and cleans up his mess. He makes “things in the house haphazardly, much to Enitan's chagrin” (Oso 6). Therefore, Enitan abandons her marriage and liberates herself, not caring about the sharp criticisms of her society. Her old neighbour Busola tells her that, “Everyone is talking about you. They say you left for no reason. He never beat you, never chased. I know he's moody, but he went to work for God's sake. What would you do married to a lazy bugger like mine?” (Atta 320).

Her friend Sheri also says to her, “You wait. You just wait. Your father will ask when he is out, “Why did you leave your husband?” (Atta 320). Sheri and Busola’s comments on Enitan’s decision exemplify the thinking of a category of women, which seems stuck in the patriarchal mindset. This mindset induced women to do everything they could to save their marriage from collapse.

In *Everything Good Will Come*, Sefi exposes how stereotype and male practices aggrieved women. Sheri is one of the rape victims; this ordeal brings her melancholy at a very young age. The male character Damola Ajayi in the novel did not just abuse her sexually, but he also humiliated her. The outcome of this atrocity was unwanted pregnancy, which leads Sheri to drop out of school. After that, Sheri committed a failed suicide. Her reaction was an attempt to release herself from the ignominious views of her society. The Nigerian society blames women if they were raped; they believe that women are the one who provoked men to abuse them. This is similar to what Enitan believed “bad girls got raped. We all knew” (Atta 62).

The Nigerian law also is not equitable for women in the cases of rape. In Sheri’s case, no one from her family had taken her case to court. The divine justice came when Damola entered a mental institution for drug addicts. Therefore, Sheri and many other women like her choose silence because they were afraid to speak out. They know that everything around them accuses them wrongfully. This silence later becomes a burden that suffocates these women. Consequently, they try to cut off the line that links them with life to end their torment.

In *Everything Good Will Come*, both Sheri and Enitan are victims of the tenets of their patriarchal society. Enitan condemned her friend for being raped. She considered her as “a hibiscus that attracted insects” (Akung 120). This view is a result of the wicked unfair beliefs transformed from generation to generation and handed from

mothers to daughters. Sheri's society considers her actions as the primary cause for the ravishment she faced, but she was too young to be blamed. She, like many other girls of her age, wanted to be noticed mainly from the other sex.

In this regard, Atta opens the doors to another crucial dilemma. She highlights one of the motives that lead to sexual harassments. The absence of parents affected Sheri's life and actions. She lacks parental instructions because her mother is dead, later she discovers that it was just a lie by her father, and that her father was busy with his wives. She was in need of family attention, thus, she searched for it outside her family. Sefi Atta in her novel attributes Sheri's tragic accident to the parents' mistakes because they shirk duties.

The impact of stereotypes is highly significant in oppressing women. Sefi shows how Nigerian people believe firmly in stereotypes especially those made about women. The scene when Enitan and Sheri were discussing their future jobs is very indicative. Sheri said that she wants to be an actress, while Enitan declared that she wants to be like a president. Sheri interrupted her by saying that, "women aren't presidents [...] and our men won't stand for it" (Atta 29). Sheri's repetition of this idea emphasizes how deep she believes in this mistaken notion.

Sefi reveals how the Nigerian patriarchal society has limited the aspiration of women. It makes them believe that the only mission created for them is to be a wife who cooks for her husband. She also noticed how her patriarchal society robs women of their rights; it discourages them from protesting. "In my country, women are praised the more they surrender their right to protest" (Atta 177).

The treatment of law towards women is also exposed in the novel. Sefi Atta gives examples of how the Nigerian law is oppressive to women. Sheri's ruthless uncle took all her father's heritage after his death. Sheri describes the awful experience she faces

with her family after her father's demise stating that, "when my father died, who remembered me? Chief Bakare done die, God bless his family. We didn't even know where our next meal was coming from, and no one cared. Not even my uncle, who took all his money" (Atta 104). The uncle's action is justified by the law. Sefi through the novel condemns the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian law, which contributes in repressing women.

The male characters' actions in the novel are not questioned or stigmatized in the society. They have the right to betray their wives and marry as they want. However, they wait for an ultimate fidelity and commitment from women. They believe that women should be tolerant and accommodate their mistakes.

Moreover, the male characters portrayed in this literary work have as Ayo Kehinde and Joy Ebong Mbipon state:

One moral flaw or the other and an imbalanced gender perspective which accounts for their insensitive treatment and denigration of the "other" sex. Even though a man like Barrister Sunny claims that he is for the liberation of women, his treatment of Arinola (his wife) speaks volumes of his genuine position as the story unfolds. (72)

Sefi gives a description of men by the protagonist Enitan who sees them as "Beaters, cheaters, lazy buggers." (Atta 224). According to Sefi Atta, men seek to subordinate women and make them unable to live without them; therefore, she portrays a woman who challenges males' beliefs and proves herself without the need of a man.

The above illustrations and examples manifestly show how Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* offers an absorbing treatment of patriarchy.

1.2. Feminism in *Everything Good Will Come*

Throughout the novel, Sefi Atta succeeded in presenting the dimensions of feminism by including some sensitive themes related to African women. These dimensions include: growth and self-discovery, education and social awareness, and women's social activity.

1.2.1. Growth and Self-Discovery

What is unique about *Everything Good Will Come* is that Sefi Atta gives the readers a story that records all the stages of a woman's life, from childhood until she becomes a young woman. The story starts from 1971 Nigeria, with a seven-year-old Enitan. Like other children at that age, Enitan is an innocent, naive, unaware child. During her journey to self-discovery and realization, she encounters many incidents and experiences.

From the very beginning, Enitan accepts whatever she was told, yet as she said: "I had my own inclinations" (Atta 8). She lives with a father who shows her his endless love and a restrict mother. The relationship between Enitan and her mother is distant as Enitan says, "My mother never had a conversation with me; she talked and knew that I was listening. I always was. The mere sound of her footsteps made me breathe faster" (Atta 19).

Although Enitan was a young child, she was aware of the issues occurring in adults' world. She knew that there was a serious problem in her parents' relationship. Sefi Atta opens the door here to another critical issue that occurs among families. She shows how a child can be affected by the problems of his/her family. Enitan in describing how she handles the fighting of her parents says that, "Walls could not save me from the shouting. A pillow, if I stuffed my head under it, could not save me. My

hands could not, if I clamped them over my ears and stuffed my head under a pillow” (Atta 8).

Therefore, children search for another place to hide and protect themselves from adults' world. For Enitan, she fled to the jetty to be protected where she could build her world without her parents' yelling and problems. “So, there it was, the jetty, my protectorate, until the day my mother decided it was to be demolished” (Atta 8). It was also on the jetty where she met Sheri who has influenced her life.

The novel is divided into four phases ranging between the years 1971,1975,1985,1995. Each period chronicles the protagonist's experiences. In the first stage, Enitan was introduced to the sexual life. Firstly, she gained sex education from her mother. She reports, “Sex was a filthy act, she said, and I must always wash myself afterwards” (Atta 22). She was frightened by this idea. She saw marriage as something bad and “The prospect of dying young seemed better now” (Atta 23).

Later, she also gained some knowledge about her sexuality from her friend Sheri who seems to know more than her, as when she states, “I wondered if she knew more than me” (31). Enitan also raised disapproval towards her mother's attitude. She kept saying “in my mother's church.” This is interpreted as she does not feel that she belongs there. She scorned the superstitious beliefs of her mother's church. Sefi re-questions, the religious activities practised by the Nigerians through Enitan's character. Enitan describes her mother saying, “In her church gowns I always thought my mother resembled a column” (18). It seems that the writer through her heroine “lays bare her ideology concerning religious matters” (Kehinde and Mbipom 70). This stage ends by Enitan entering the secondary school, a new life and new experience.

The secondary school “Royal College” marks a turning point in Enitan's life. It shapes her identity and changes her perspectives. Enitan meets girls of different cultural

backgrounds. When she came across this diversity among the Nigerian girls, the flashback of what her uncle Alex said about this reality came to her minds, “Uncle Alex had always said our country was not meant to be one. The British had drawn a circle on the map of West Africa and called it a country. Now I understood what he meant. The girls I met at Royal College were so different” (43).

Sefi Atta sheds light on one of the leading causes that hinder Nigeria from building one nation. She condemns the British colonialism in neglecting the differences and ethnicities among the Nigerian people.

The first conformation Enitan faces, is to grow up in a country plagued by political chaos and insecurity. Although Nigeria got its independence from Britain in 1960, which meant the official end of colonialism, it does not enjoy the true meaning of freedom. Nigerians face another form of military imperialism, which caused political instability by their interference in political issues. Nigeria has witnessed many military coups; the first one occurred in 1966, a six-year after independence, a time when the nation had to be built. These coups had dramatic consequences and marked a dark period in the history of Nigeria. They threatened the lives of individuals and led to anarchy and corruption. However, these political issues were not the primary concern of Enitan as she said, “There was bribery and corruption, but none of it concerned me” (Atta 44).

It is also in this phase when she tries to engage in a relationship with the other sex, Damola was the one who stirred her feminine feelings toward love. She explains, “I thought of Damola. Once or twice, I crossed out the common letters in my name and his to find out what we would be: friends, lovers, enemies, married. We were lovers” (Atta 51). She was the first who wanted to engage in this relation. Sefi objects the traditional Nigerian belief that is only the men that could express their feelings toward women. She

believes that, “the woman could go for the man of her choice and make the relationship work” (Akung 116).

This stage ends with a tragic event that affected both of Enitan and Sheri's life. Sheri got raped and committed abortion. Enitan, on the other hand, learns about the truculence of the other sex. Her dreams about Damola have vanished away the same as Sheri's happiness. By these incidents, the heroine gets “some assurance that our world was uniformly terrible” (66).

The third phase begins by 1985. After the ordeal of Sheri, Enitan chooses to travel to London to continue her study. Conformity was the first challenge that Enitan faced. She had to conform to this new society. Enitan's settler in London offers Sefi the opportunity to show how Nigerian emigrants endure racism due to colour discrimination. Furthermore, she reports that, “Black denigration which stems from lingering colonial perspective of white-black relations” (Kehinde and Mbipom 71). However, the separation of her parents with the unimproved news from home makes her return to home impossible, as she declares, “I never wanted to go back” (73).

Through this literary work, Atta refers to the unbearable situation in Nigeria including, the lack of opportunities, corrupted system, and inequality between sexes, and how these factors compel Nigerians to the Diaspora.

Moreover, we observe the self-alienation of a person when s/he feels that home is no longer home. Enitan was forced to stay in England. Her dislocation from her home was the result of being unable to adapt to the new situation of her home. In recounting her distress, she says that:

A squabble began between them, over ownership of property and me. My mother vowed to have my father debarred. Instead, she developed hypertension...soon I began to spend vacation in London, working as

a shop assistant in departmental stores to supplement my allowance to avoid staying with either of them. (75)

Later on, she changes her opinion and returns home by the summer of 1984, when she realizes that home is the place where a person really belongs, it is in home where the person could really feel the warmth. As she says, "At least, at least I would be warm" (77). Enitan's decision to return home exhibits a conscious awakening, even in the Diaspora, to her conscience and duties towards her nation. Sefi's novel, thus, expresses the female commitment and responsibilities.

The terminal station in the novel is in 1995 when Enitan discovers herself and becomes an assertive, independent, and a courageous woman. She also gives more consideration to women's quest for freedom. She liberates herself from the shackles of a disappointed marriage. Enitan says that:

I couldn't remain as I was before. Otherwise, my memory of her [my mother] would have been in vain, and my survival would certainly be pointless. Anyone who experienced such trauma would understand... One life had gone, and I could either mourn it or begin the next... This was the option I chose. (308)

Sefi Atta through the novel opens the doors to another essential reality, not only in Nigeria but also in the entire African continent. She condemns the national elite that competes for power and authority. She also elucidates its weaknesses and inability to guide its people to prosperity. Instead, they "hasten to make their own fortunes and to set up a national system of exploitation, do their utmost to put obstacles in the path of this "Utopia." (Fanon 163). Sefi blames those who destroy the dream of building a nation because of their interests and greed. Moreover, she exhibits the failure of the

decolonised African societies in building a nation and portraying another type of colonialism.

Enitan, the protagonist of the story, exemplifies the awareness of women about political affairs in the society. Unlike women in the past, women start having an analytical view of what is happening around them, from a young age until they become assertive. Enitan observes, "I knew that our first Prime Minister was killed by a Major General that the Major General was soon killed, and that we had another Major General heading our country. For a while, the palaver had stopped, and now it seemed the Biafrans were trying to split our country in two" (Atta 9)

However, her views changed when she became more mindful as she says that:

How did we live comfortably under dictatorship? The truth was that, we [...] if we never spoke out, were free as we could possibly be, complaining about our rubbish rotten country, and crazily armed robbers, and inflation. The authorities said hush and we hushed; they came with their sirens, and we cleared off the streets; they beat someone, and we looked the other way; they detained a relation, and we hoped for the best. (216)

Enitan's views toward what is going on in life have changed. This change was the outcome of the harsh reality and experiences that helped in shaping her personality. Atta confirms the notion that the identity we carry is refined by life experiences.

Nevertheless, through this piece, Sefi Atta demonstrates how women infer that "freedom was never intended to be sweet. It was responsibility from the onset, for a people, a person, to fight for, and hold unto" (207). This attitude and alteration come as a result of specific factors such as colonialism, Biafran war, and political instability that contribute to the shaping of African women and their identities.

1.2.2. Education and Social Awareness

All great civilizations across the world have revolved around knowledge and education because they are the key to success with which people liberate themselves from ignorance and underdevelopment. Similarly, Atta emphasizes the impacts of education in forming one's identity, be it formal or informal.

Enitan armed herself by the knowledge she acquired from the different stages of her life. She learnt about her sexuality from her mother and Sheri. The education at Royal College changed her perspectives and made her enlightened and experienced. She learnt about the varied ethnicities in her country. This stage also equipped her with an analytical view to annotate on the things and events going on in her nation. She explains that, "Outside our school walls, oil leaked from the drilling fields of the Niger Delta into people's Swiss bank accounts. There were bribery and corruption, but none of it concerned me" (50). In this stance, Kehinde and Mbipom emphasize that, "Secondary education in the boarding house at the Royal College marks another step in Enitan's social, moral and intellectual education. She is exposed to the reality of the multicultural nature of her nation, the myths and cultural practices that characterize these different ethnic groups" (70).

In London, Entain learnt about her sexuality. She says that, "The first person to tell me my virginity belonged to me was the boy who took it. Before this, I'd thought my virginity belonged to Jesus Christ, my mother, society at large. Anyone but me" (69).

Atta scorns men's belief that women's virginity or body should be given to them. Sefi's message here is that a woman's body belongs to her. She is the one who could decide to whom she would give her love and affection. If women are aware of this, they will transcend themselves from any limitations.

Enitan at London also discovers that she was mistaken by judging her friend. She learnt from Robin that, “nothing a woman does justifies rape” (70). Her decision to study law involves her in world politics. She was a member of the Nigerian Student Community. This opens the door for her to comment on the political and economic chaos in her country as she says, “Politics in our country was a scuffle between the military and politicians” (81).

When she returned home, she was equipped to risk life, make choices, and accept the consequences. She engages in some failed relationships until she marries Niyi, which proved later to be a big mistake. The experience of prison also influences her thoughts where she met other women with different stories. Enitan gained an informal education also from the journalist and human right activist Grace Ameh. She inspires her with the limitations imposed on women by her society. He encourages her to use her voice, defend her rights and to forget about what the society says. She says to her, “Yes, yes, but you have a voice, which is what I always try to tell people. Use your voice to bring about change” (248).

All the harsh experiences and the bitter realities that Enitan encounters through her journey to self-realization affected her in a way or another. She realized later that she should sympathize with her mother not her father. She remembered her mother's words when she advised her, “never make sacrifices for a man” (173). She understands her mother's escape to church. It was because of her failed marriage, because of the time she gave from her life to a man who failed to appreciate her sacrifices.

1.2.3. Women' s Social Activity

Through Enitan and Sheri's characters, Sefi encourages the friendship or “female solidarity” between women. For her, if women combine their efforts, they could achieve the shared dream of women, “A group of army wives had founded a program for

women in a village. They promised to train the village women to eradicate infant dehydration” (211). Jonas Akung asserts this idea as he says:

Here Atta calls on women to adopt female friendship, bonding or sisterhood as these would be one of the ways they can win the war against inequality, tradition and all other patriarchal dictates. Once this is achieved the advancement of women in the society would be achievable. (119)

This call for female bonding is manifested through Enitan and Sheri's strong friendship. Sefi Atta offers a unique story of friendship that offers the two friends the power to go through their ordeal and failures. Though their friendship was prohibited by Enitan's mother due to religious segregation, they reunite after some tears of separation. Each one of them provides the other with worthy precious pieces of advice to overcome the frustration of life.

Though Atta calls for female bonding and offers a story of friendship that ends by female solidarity and emancipation, there are other African writers who highlight the failure of women who are involved in the campaign and organization of women liberation. As an example, Belkacem Mezghouchen in his novel *The overcoat of Virginia*, through some female characters, attributes the failure of women in liberating themselves to their misunderstanding of feminism.

Belkacem's characters are well educated, and participate in women's quest for rights, however, at the personal level; they still hold the patriarchal beliefs. They still obey and treat their men as "God". Ironically, they consider that their happiness is related to men's joy. This is demonstrated through Imene's character that considers that it is her responsibility in failing to offer her husband a child. She believed in the society's belief that considers women as a source of reproduction with no other

important roles. For that, she treats her husband with all forms of caring and endless love just to save her marriage, "Don't worry, dear. I'll breathe air into your lungs!" (Meghzouchene 29).

Furthermore, Sefi breaks the rule by presenting a female character that is a social activist. She takes the responsibility to save her father's business. She also participates in the release of her father and other prisoners. As a result of her activities, she was arrested. Her fight to release her father symbolizes her battle and eagerness to be recognized in her society. It is a battle to prove herself as an independent woman.

Enitan's advice for women is that the kitchen is no longer the place where women frequently are found. She confirms to women that to fight for your right or any person's right you need to find a place out of the kitchen. She enquires, "How can I decide what to do about my father from the kitchen" (245). Akung in his article argues that, "The kitchen has become a destructive metaphor limiting the woman from actualizing her dreams" (119). However, it is not only the kitchen that restricts women; the men also participate in limiting a women's role as a servant for them. In addition, society has an influence in restricting women's role. It always condemns, silences, and relegates them to the background.

Enitan also fought for her mother to make her father transform the estate to her mother. Sefi Atta depicts a woman who fights for herself, her family and her nation. She is the ideal protagonist who shows that women's concerns go beyond love affairs and romantic fantasy.

1.3. Style and Techniques

Techniques are literary devices a writer uses in his narration to deliver his message. *Everything Good Will Come* is a reflection of a women's story from the

different stages of life. Sefi's unique style makes her novel a masterpiece. Some of the techniques which Atta adopts include:

1.3.1. The First-Person Narrative Technique

The novel is written in the first person narrative technique, which is also called autobiographical technique, recognized by the use of "I". It is a narration of a growing child and the realization of a woman from childhood to adulthood, when she becomes an educated independent woman. Sefi's use of this technique is to see, evaluate, and criticize what is going on in the Nigerian society through a woman's eye. Unlike the past, the protagonist in this novel is a female character. Sefi gives her heroine a space to examine what she observes around her. While this technique is viewed as a subjective one, Sefi Atta shows that it is high time to let women speak out and give them a chance to express themselves.

1.3.2. Irony

The irony of *Everything Good Will Come* is that Enitan learnt about women emancipation from her father. Enitan's father tells her about her mother that, "If she asks where you learned such nonsense, tell her from your father, and he's for the liberation of women" (24). Enitan's father claims that he is for the liberation of women, but his wife responds to his word by saying that, "All women except your wife" (24). Enitan's father oppressed his wife and listed her to the back seat. This is a common attitude adopted by many African men because of their greed and desire to dominate; they understand feminism in a negative way. Sefi shows that the educated men who proclaim women's right are unable to omit the patriarchal thoughts entrenched in their minds.

1.3.3. Dialogue

The story consists of a series of dialogues between the characters and the protagonist Enitan. The use of outer dialogue is notable in the novel. The function of the dialogue is important because first, it allows the readers to learn about the character. In Enitan's case, we assess her knowledge and discover her dreams as when she said that she wants to be a president. Second, the interaction between the characters gives the readers insight to understand both the story and characters. Finally, by this technique, Atta depicts a reliable story related to reality and daily life and gives the readers a chance to imagine the scenes.

1.3.4. The Bildungsroman Narrative Technique

The word Bildungsroman consists of two German words, the word "*Bildung*" which means formation and the word "*Roman*" which means novel. The Bildungsroman is a narrative technique and a genre of the novel in which the major character gets on a journey of self-discovery. The protagonist improves himself from the different stages he engages in. In *Everything Good Will Come*, the story begins with an ignorant, naive girl Enitan, and ends with a powerful, independent, and audacious woman. According to Kehinde and Mbipom:

Enitan's perspective- is a bildungsroman, which reveals an unbroken growth pattern till Enitan comes of age as a self-conscious and assertive woman. Enitan's process of growth comes with self-realisation which prompts greater response and reaction to the activities which go on around her. These processes motivate her sexuality and individuality" (67).

Through this technique, Atta gives the heroine the opportunity to react to the events and experiences in her life. It also allows the readers to live with the protagonist, and to discover her fears, dreams, and awareness.

1.2.4. Structure of Bildungsroman in *Everything Good Will Come*

The chronological order used in the novel to display the protagonist's change through experiences and the passage of time, makes the work a typical Bildungsroman novel. Sefi Atta's novel has three parts structures:

1.2.4.1. The Set-Up

Enitan is introduced as an innocent, unknowledgeable child as she declares, "from the beginning I believed whatever I was told, downright lies even, about how best to behave" (8). She has no experience, and she is alienated from the real world. She still obeys the rules of her mother, father, and society.

1.2.4.2. Experience and Change

Enitan witnesses the culmination of self- discovery by the education she has received and by the complicated experiences she faced. One indicative example of her change is through Sheri's accident when she starts questioning life. She says that, "Sheri had gotten pregnant from the rape. Didn't a womb know which baby to reject? And now that the baby had been forced out, how did it look? The color of the hibiscus?" (67). These questions are no more coming of a careless girl, but they are coming from a girl who desires to grow up.

1.2.4.3. Maturity

At the end of the novel, Enitan finds a sense of inner peace. She is no longer the naive girl. Now, she becomes fully mature and could decide by herself, engage in new relationships, face the bitter reality of life, and always find a way to survive. When a

person understands the meaning of risking life, he arrives to his self discovery, and this what Sefi depicts through Enitan's character.

1.2.5. Symbolism

The last dance of Enitan at the end of the novel symbolizes her victory. It is a dance for every woman. It is a dance of freedom and liberation. By the end, Enitan becomes resolute and powerful to save her happiness and joy, as she concludes her story stating, "Nothing could take my joy away from me. The sun sent her blessings" (323-324). Through this dance, sefi laughs about life and its attempt to imprison women. By this dance, Enitan liberates herself from all those who want to steel her identity. This last dance is a celebration of a new chapter in life, a life with no restrictions, lies, or disappointment. It is a dance to celebrate one's identity. The theme of identity here is intertwined with feministic orientations. Identity begins when we start to be independent and not related to others, and when we can say "No" to everything that hinders our freedom. Moreover, Enitan in the novel symbolizes a modern educated woman who succeeded in emancipating herself from life's limitation and in establishing her identity.

Conclusion

Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* depicts the story of a growing woman from childhood to adulthood. By this novel, Sefi Atta portrays female characters who are activists and assertive women. She succeeded in presenting the character of Enitan who could unleash herself and use all means to emancipate herself from the patriarchal system and male dominance. Moreover, Sefi emphasizes the impact of education and experiences in shaping one's personality. Her message is that women could survive despite all the harsh realities. *Everything Good Will Come* is a novel with an optimistic tone that the future will be better for women and society.

Introduction

In a context where masculine writings prevailed, Mariama Bâ took charge of the feminine case to encourage female writings. She reacted towards the conditions of her sisters, victims of traditions and domination of men. However, she was criticized for denying her feminist inclination like many other female writers whose “weltanschauung corresponds to basic ideas of feminism more or less [but they tend to] distance themselves from it” (Qtd. in Asiegbu 60).

So Long a Letter was her first novel written in French and translated into 19 languages. It was published in 1979 and in 1981. The novel won the first ever Noma Award for Publishing at the Frankfurt Book Fair. Bâ's health had been declining for years. She died later that year August 17, 1981, shortly before publishing her second novel *Scarlet Song* in November.

So Long a Letter has been one of the most remarkable African successful works. It is an epistolary novel (written in the form of a series of letters) from Ramatoulaye to her best friend, Aïssatou. The letter narrates the adventures and disappointments, ups and downs of the two girls, who lived the same painful experiences. It is, therefore, a kind of pretext to show Ramatoulaye's vision of the society.

Mariama Ba in this novel exposes female subjugation. She highlights how women face patriarchal society and how they struggled to overcome male unfair practices. Similarly, to the previous chapter, this chapter aims at exploring how Mariama Ba portrays the female characters in her novel. Does she succeed in presenting a woman who liberated herself from the constraints of the past? How do the literary techniques used by Mariama Ba help in constructing a thematic analysis of this novel?

3.1. Feminism in *So Long a Letter*

Feminism is seen by men as a rebellion against all barriers that imposed on women and suppress their freedoms. In other words, feminism is seen as a destructive element that destroys the institution of marriage and the friendly relationship between man and woman. Mariama Bâ, through her novel, tried to inform the African society about the condition of African women, so that it gives women their freedom. The author also tried to encourage African women to have confidence in themselves. Bâ does not advocate excessive feminism, which expresses the total rejection of men; on the contrary, her wish remains a shared love in order to be able to live.

As an icon of African women literature, Mariama Bâ enthusiastically contributed to women's organizations during her lifetime. Ndiaye emphasizes the fact that Mariama was a very active writer in the field of feminism, as she states that:

Her involvement in militant activities came in 1968 before earning her a reputation as a female writer [...] the prominent role she played within the movement as a member of FAFS (Federation of Senegalese Women's Associations), president of the Feminine group which she herself created...she was often regarded as the main authority on women's issues. (117-121)

As seen above, her participation in women organizations rose from the wish to place forward women's points of views and their desire to change their lives. She used literature as a means of expression. This attracted not only the attention of African society but also the Western world at large. This idea of Feminism is characterized in Bâ's novels as she sheds light on the way of treating women in Africa and proves that women can assure their womanhood as a unit that does not subjugate both sexes.

Bâ's extraordinary book *So Long a Letter* was recognized and accepted as an unusual piece of writing. Mariama Bâ became a well-known supporter of African women issues. Through her feminist novel *So Long a Letter*, Bâ became one of the first African women to denounce the injustice done to the woman in the African society. The work contains political ideas, derived from her personal experiences, which are mainly related to the views of feminism.

Education was the catalyst element of the feminist revolt illustrated in the psychology of the three characters of Mariama Bâ's *so long a letter*, Ramatoulaye, Aïssatou and Modou Fall. Indeed, the first two were influenced by the headmistress of their school; a white woman; a model of Western feminism, she believed in humanist ideas based on the equality of human beings. Her mission according to the narrator Ramatoulaye, was to develop the fundamental universal moral values which allow them to overcome life's obstacles, and to lift them out of the swamp of traditions, superstition and customs. These values also prepare them to appreciate a multitude of civilizations.

Ba also excelled in defending women's rights and challenging the traditional customs that support women's subjugation. Through analyzing the novel, the reader can deduce that some parts of the story are phases of the author's own life; Mariama Ba herself, being one of the few women in her generation sent to school. She depicts the fight between the intellectual progress of women and the hard work done by men to stifle such a movement: "Because, being the first pioneers of the promotion of African women, there were very few of us. Men would call us scatter-brained [...] But many wanted to possess us [...] those that have burst miserably like soap bubbles, leaving us empty-handed?" (15-16).

The feminist battle of Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou was born of the awareness of the universal values that guarantee the human dignity taught by their headmistress. The two

heroines reject polygamy; the first refused to marry polygamous suitors after the death of her husband, and the second by leaving her husband who accepted an arranged marriage. By sacrificing her love and her married life, Aïssatou wanted to refuse this practice and to assert her irrevocable decision, "I will not yield to it" (32). She rebels against polygamy in a separate letter addressed to her husband.

As seen, Ramatoulaye is basically feminist, still she kept holding some beliefs that other feminists might disagree with or find unfamiliar. She is a pious Muslim, following orders of her religion even if they appear against feminist beliefs. Yet Ramatoulaye is a teacher and a responsible mother. Her way to independence begins when she cites other women who suffered the same situations as hers. Ramatoulaye hopelessly says, "I counted the abandoned or divorced women of my generation whom I knew" (41). Through inducing the sad story of Jacqueline and other women who struggle to overcome their husbands' injustice, Ramatoulaye understands that she is not alone in this battle and she can fight to change her life.

The third character Modou Fall, Ramatoulaye's husband married his daughter's best friend Binetou and intentionally withdrew her from school "the critical and unsparring world of the young," as he claimed (11). This has proved that Modou was a symbol of anti-feminism; he is against the idea of woman emancipation. Thus, he wanted to stifle any inclination for a coming feminist revolt in his young wife (Edwin).

3.2. Gender and Traditional Responsibilities

In *So a Long Letter*, Mariama Bâ presents the multiple roles of the African woman. As any contemporary women in the world, she is a caring mother, a loving wife and a political and social activist, Bâ portrays African women as ambitious and determined to be heard.

3.2.1. The Woman as a Mother

It is the wish of every woman, to have a happy family, a peaceful home and well-educated children. A home full of God's mercy between all members of the family. The role of the woman in building such a home cannot be overlooked. Women take a central part in building homes. For Mariama Bâ, the woman plays a very significant role in her marriage, both within her family and her society in general. However, most often, at that time, this role was limited to` raising children, cooking and cleaning. Through *Ramatoulaye*, Bâ magnifies the invisible work of the African housewife when she states:

Those women we call 'house-wives' deserve praise. The domestic work they carry out, and which is not paid in hard cash, is essential to the home [...] pile of well ironed, sweet-smelling washing, the shining tiled floor on which the foot glides, the gay kitchen filled with the smell of stews. Their silent action is felt in the least useful detail. (64)

Ramatoulaye herself is in charge of serving her family members by doing all the work she can so that her husband and children feel relaxed. On the other hand, women, in general, have a duty to raise and educate generations. For this, they make considerable efforts to instil their children's minds with the taste of life. *Ramatoulaye*, for example, is a mother who is responsible for twelve children. When her husband Modou left her for her daughter's friend Binetou, and more after his death, *Ramatoulaye* redoubled her efforts as a devoted mother. Especially, when the growth of her children took place in the dawn of the Senegalese independence period. A new society that is less suppressed than it was before was emerging, and at the same time, it was filled with new challenges. She deludes the small brains of her children and prepares them for

maturity and life difficulties. She teaches them to respect the cultural values and inculcates in them the spirit of doing meritorious actions that they would be honored for, when she says:

I always tell my children: you are students maintained by your parents. Work hard so as to merit their sacrifices. Cultivate yourselves instead of protesting. When you are adults, if your opinions are to carry weight, they must be based on knowledge backed by diplomas. A diploma is not a myth. It is not everything, true. But it crowns knowledge, work. (73-74)

The woman in the novel has a positive image. As a keeper of traditions within her society, provider of moral and material support to her family members, she also restores order and peace and ensures that justice and harmony prevail all times; Ramatoulaye in this regard says that, “one is a mother in order to understand the inexplicable. One is a mother to lighten the darkness. One is a mother to shield when lightning streaks the night, when thunder shakes the earth, when mud bogs one down. One is a mother in order to love without beginning or end” (83-84).

3.2.2. Woman as a Wife

As presented in *So Long a Letter*, a wife in a Senegalese society has no rights but only obligatory duties that she must do. She must stay home, do work all time, be faithful to her husband, have qualifications such as gentleness, generosity, submission and politeness, and without all these specifications, man always has the right to look for a new woman. Ramatoulaye in describing men in her society says, “His egoistic eye looks over his partner’s shoulder. He compares what he had with what he no longer has, what he has with what he could have” (42).

Mariama Bâ also presents the woman in the novel as overwhelmed with the heavy old customs and traditions. As an example, Ramatoulaye, Aïssatou and Jacqueline are all victims of their husbands' betrayals. They were abandoned in exchange for young beautiful girls. Loneliness, abandonment, depression and misery have become their daily share.

In addition to that, female and male characters are treated as two different social groups. Men have higher socio-economic status and privileges than women who, despite being sometimes as educated as men, they are often reduced to their *weaker* biological status. Ramatoulaye speaking about the case of Aïssatou says that, "In any case, could a goldsmith's daughter have any dignity, any honor?" (32). However, according to Bâ even if they were both of the same class, she suffers extortion of all kinds. Jacqueline, for example, is tortured, beaten, rejected by the one who must instead surround her with all the most loving care.

3.2.3. Woman as a Political and Social Activist

Before her death, Mariama Bâ criticizes Negritude. She argued that, "African literature should start to recognize women's political and economic contributions to their societies. She also rejects the image of the woman in *Femme Noire*, a poem by Léopold Sédar Senghor, which honors the black woman, her beauty and sensuality, describing it as "a symbolic figure of the nationalist fantasy of men" (Newell 38). Mariama Bâ here calls for the literature that recognizes the ordinary black woman with her many tasks such as collecting wood, planting fields, raising children, as well as her significant role in socio-political organizations.

It is clear that, according to Mariama Bâ, the gap between the symbolic woman and the real woman in African literature is notable. The problem is that, by idealizing the African woman as writers of Negritude have done, we conceal the exclusion of

women from political and economic positions. These writers of Negritude became more interested in the mythological beliefs about women rather than the status of women in the real world of inequalities that swing between power and labor.

Thus, in *So Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye believes in the political role of women and advocates for reforms that must improve their share and take a step towards equality between men and women. This is exemplified through the dialogue between her and Daouda Dieng when they discussed women's position in African politics and their importance in improving the society. Through Daouda speech Ba, advises women to, "No longer be decorative accessories, objects to be moved about, companions to be flattered or calmed with promises" (61). She also contends that, "Women are the nation's primary, fundamental root, from which all else grows and blossoms. Women must be encouraged to take a keener interest in the destiny of the country" (62).

Women in *So Long a Letter* contribute to the evolution of society through the various activities that are out of their households. We note that Ramatoulaye, her best friend, Aïssatou, and the little Nabou are able to combine two functions. They are housewives and employees. However, Mariama Bâ, in another interview with Alioume Toure in 1979, says that women's participation in politics is very difficult. This is due first of all to the selfishness of men in political parties. According to them, the woman has a nature that is not easily controllable. Following the example of the MP Daouda Dieng who declares that, "But you women, you are like mortar shells. You demolish. You destroy. Imagine a large number of women in the Assembly. Why, everything would explode, go up in flames" (61).

The second obstacle that Bâ mentioned is the multiple tasks the woman performs at home. Indeed, she is the one who gives birth, feeds the children, and who does all home works, however it becomes difficult for her to combine these tasks with outside

activities, especially if she does not know how to manage her time. Daouda Dieng blames Ramatoulaye for this when he says, “Even you who are protesting; you preferred your husband, your class, and your children to public life. If men alone are active in the parties, why should they think of the women?” (62).

The woman, unlike the man, has dual tasks. She is eager to succeed and to prove herself in the society without neglecting her role in the house with the children by protecting, loving and caring about them. In other words, she is the donor of love.

3.3. The Impact of Education and Religion on African Women

From the second half of the twentieth century, a significant change has taken place in the field of education, which is considered as a solid basis of development in all areas of life. It is the keystone of both traditional society and the modern nation. It controls the formation of the human personality. This section will clarify the impact of education on African women and the impacts that school, family and society, as privileged places, have on women for their role in the transmission of knowledge.

Mariama Bâ brought social awareness to the lives of Senegalese women who struggled to overcome patriarchal chains during the French colonization. She was privileged to receive an education at a time when boys were encouraged to go to school while girls had to stay home and remain illiterate. Bâ and many other intellectuals supported and participated in the nation's building effort, each in her field of activity. As a teacher, she has trained young Senegalese generations and prepared them for a better future. In addition, her commitment to women's organisations such as *Les Soeurs Optimistes Internationales* has shown how much she cared about women. Through these associations, Bâ has always fought for the improvement of women's conditions and

against the daily injustices perpetrated on them. She describes in her novel the pain and suffering that she shares with the Senegalese women.

So Long a Letter is a novel written in an epistolary form. It allows the narrator Ramatoulaye, to recount her memories to her old childhood friend, Aïssatou. Many themes are mentioned: childhood, engagement, weddings, the happiness of young couple life, the collapse of marriage as an institution, disappointment and the daily struggle to survive. However, the theme of education in *So Long a Letter* occupies a prominent place. Bâ speaks of it in the seventh chapter. She depicted Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou, as women engaged in the struggle for freedom or emancipation of women especially in their social environment. The Western education that Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou had received helped them a lot in facing and overcoming the difficulties they had been asked to perform as abandoned wives. Okoye Justina illustrated the role that education plays in the struggle of these women as, “The acquisition of western education proffers solutions to problems of inequality and gender discrimination in a patriarchal society. Education changes the lives of women and their mentality too [...] Western education empowers women and affords them individuality” (85).

Education provides women with freedom, respect, and economic independence. Despite her difficult life, liberal education made Ramatoulaye capable of making her life enjoyable with reading books. It also helped her get modern amenities after the death of her husband. She enjoyed watching films, listening the radio. This idea is not baseless, her values were influenced by Western movies, when she states that they “deepened and widened [her] vision of the world, thanks to their cultural value” (52). She also found freedom in moving around with the car that Aïssatou bought her. Besides, her inner preparation to get rid of mental stress made her life more comfortable.

Education also helps women to enrich and expand their field of knowledge in life. Through flashbacks, Ramatoulaye travels back to the past to remember with nostalgia her joyful memories of childhood when both of her and Aïssatou were students in the French school. They start reminiscing about the old days when Ramatoulaye says to Aïssatou:

We were true sisters, destined for the same mission of emancipation. To lift us out of the bog of tradition, superstition and custom, to make us appreciate a multitude of civilizations without renouncing our own [...] to develop universal moral values in us: these were the aims of our admirable headmistress. (16)

Though she praised her western teacher, Ramatoulaye was not brainwashed, or blindly copying her. She is in the other hand a faithful and a firm believer. Mariama's use of some Koranic rules and words demonstrates how devout her protagonist is. For instance, Ramatoulaye states, "And yet we are told in the Koran that on the third day the dead body swells and fills its tomb; we are told that on the eighth day it bursts; and we are told that on the fortieth day it is stripped" (8). She also says that, "The mirasse commanded by the Koran requires that a dead person be stripped of his most intimate secrets; thus, is exposed to others what is carefully concealed" (9). Besides, she emphasizes saying in the name of God with firm motivation, "Bissimilai! Bissimilai!" which shows her devotion (70). All these pieces of evidence prove that Ramatoulaye did not blindly follow the Westerners civilization; instead, she used her education in a meaningful way.

It is necessary to talk about the mother/child relationship in the process of education since it is the first form of communication. All African writers praise motherhood. They glorify the role of women as mothers, "Great men are born to

mothers who have wiped the sorrows, fears, worries, and difficulties of marriage” (Amhadou Kourouma 44). They describe the mother’s attachment to her children, her patience, and her courage. In teaching children, every mother has her philosophy. Mariama Bâ, through the narrator who is the main character of her novel *So Long a Letter*, gives us her point of view on this vital subject of the education of children, especially after the challenges of modernism.

Ramatoulaye had ensured that raising children is not an easy task. At the same time, she thought that it is essential to rely on the grandmothers’ experience (traditional education) because grandmothers embody the past, and that past is as important as the present. When Ramatoulaye’s children caused her worries, especially the older ones, she asked the wisdom of her grandmother, “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. She liked to repeat, ‘The mother of a family has no time to travel. But she has time to die’” (140).

Although obtaining a religious education at an early age is an essential part of life in a predominantly Muslim society, Mariama Bâ gave only one brief reference to Ramatoulaye Koranic school attendance as the outset of her childhood memories in the first page of the novel. Ba’s remark of “mistaken and selfish interpretations of religion” in her mainly Muslim society marks her as an Islamic feminist who shows her belief that religious practice plays a crucial role in the subjugation of women. She exposed this in an interview in which she stated that the women in her society were “heavily burdened by mores and customs, in combination with mistaken and egoistic interpretations of religion” (Qtd. in Rizwana 71).

Ramatoulaye proves her knowledge on the rights of a woman whose husband had entered into a polygamous marriage, which made her aware of her rights and duties

prescribed by Islamic religion. In her announcement she says, "I had prepared myself for equal sharing, according to the precepts of Islam concerning polygamic life" (46). She is also conscious that she has the right to express her complete rejection of this marriage by divorcing her husband. This refers to the classical Islamic law of divorce, which allows a woman to end an unwanted marriage. (Qtd. in Rizwana 74)

With this idea, Bâ (2007) puts traditional, religious and modern education side by side. Riesz and Bjornson (1991) testify in their article, "Mariama Bâ's *Une Si Longue Lettre: An Erziehungsroman*", that both Europe's modern education system and the African traditional education system can produce, grown, conscious women who take their responsibilities. Education in general, whether it was modern, conventional or religious, plays a significant role in the struggle for women's emancipation nowadays. Every woman needs a formal or informal education to coexist with the socio-cultural problems that occur in her environment.

3.4. Female Solidarity, Friendship and Sisterhood in *So Long A Letter*

Bâ's novel presents the power of female bonding, which enables women to defeat the cruelty of traditions and society. That relationship is demonstrated throughout the book that works as a tool for ending the patriarchal system, which is understood as a danger to women's solidarity. *So Long a Letter* apparently considers this relationship as a way of unifying women of various social classes to endure male prejudice. This friendship is also called *sisterhood*. It does not only suggest a blood connection between females but also shows women view towards a common case. The novel embodies the perfect and even strong friendship that unites Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou. It allows them to go beyond the boundary of gender discrimination and inspires African women to

form unions which help them revolt against female subjugation, "Friendships were made that have endured the test of time and distance. We were true sisters, destined for the same mission of emancipation" (16).

The letter also reduces the distant relationship that exists between the two women. It attempts to show the closeness and strength of their friendship, from the beginning of the novel when Ramatoulaye calls on Aïssatou, "My friend, my friend, my friend" (01). Their friendship is like a bond that unites them together. Throughout the sixteen chapters of the novel, the intimacy that links the two is clear, from their childhood and even after they become married women. Despite their relation, Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou accept and respect each other's choices in responding to the attempt of subjugating them. Their friendship transcends all differences as Ramatoulaye contends, "If over the years, and passing through the realities of life, dreams die, I still keep intact my memories, the salt of remembrance [...] We walked the same paths from adolescence to maturity, where the past begets the present" (01).

So Long a Letter seems like a symbol of the sisterhood that connects Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou and continues to offer power and support for both of them. Since they went through the same painful experiences, they understood each other's wounds. Aïssatou understands Ramatoulaye's suffering because she lived the same one when her husband Mawdo took a second wife. Thus, friendship offers them a chance to reinforce their connection to coexist with their husband's' infidelities.

When we meet, the signs on our bodies will not be important. The essential thing is the content of our hearts, which animates us; the essential thing is the quality of the sap that flows through us. You have often proved to me the superiority of friendship over love. Time,

distance, as well as mutual memories, have consolidated our ties and made our children brothers and sisters (73).

Through recalling her common experiences with Aissatou, Ramatoulaye discovers the misery of the Senegalese woman; her letter was like pulling the trigger against thirty years of silence. She does not seek her friend's help, but she rather takes women persecution as a main concern. The letter thus, is a declaration of solidarity between African women. Therefore, Bâ through her novel summonses all subjugated women to stand with each other to help defeat all the misery with female friendship as the only salvation tool that women can use to survive.

So Long a Letter, therefore, shows a reliable form of friendship that eventually extends to female solidarity as Aïssatou and Ramatoulaye empower not only each other but also inspired every single woman. The sisterhood they established secures their existence against the unfaithful system of patriarchy, tradition and polygamy.

3.5. The Interpretation of Islam in the Modern Senegalese Society (Polygamy)

The religious dimension in this novel is highly significant. Islam plays a fundamental role in the social and cultural life of the characters. Ramatoulaye, the protagonist as a Muslim woman in the novel, was guided by the logic of strict Islamic principles in her decision on polygamy (Mohamed Ahmed 157). She definitely rejects its excuse, and considers it as a betrayal, "I was irritated. He was asking me to understand. However, to understand what? The supremacy of instinct? The right to betray? The justification of the desire for variety? I could not be an ally to polygamic instincts. What, then, was I to understand?" (35). Practically, Ramatoulaye is not against polygamy because of her Muslim background. She is rather against the excuse that her

husband made for a second reason, which was as he explained instinctual, but to her that would be an act of treason. This is the general view of polygamy in Muslim societies since ancient times, because men used to marry more than one wife for good reasons, not for mere excuses, as the reason of preventing a divorce, giving birth to children, preventing spinsterhood or spreading the Islamic beliefs.

This practice has existed for a very long time before the arrival of Islam in Africa. Polygamy is practiced by traditionalists and Muslims. In principle, polygamy is very important in Islam. However, men have given Islam another interpretation that suits their desires. It is true that it allows the man to take four wives, but it also obliges him to treat each one equally, respect them, love them, provide their needs and not abandon them. Allah declares (In the name of God the Most Gracious the Most Merciful) "Treat women with equal fairness" (An-Nisaa verse 129).

The Quran that allows the man to take four women is not against monogamy. Daouda Dieng, who married his cousin, respects his wife. He has an ideal family life. Abou, Daba's husband, the eldest daughter of Ramatoulaye does not treat her as a slave. The couple works together in the kitchen. While he cooks the rice, she does something else. As he says about his wife, "Daba is my wife. She is not my slave, nor my servant" (74). God the Almighty set this rule to help protect the Muslim community. The law that allowed Modou Fall, Mawdo Ba, Samba Diack and Tamsir to take second wives, also allowed Ramatoulaye, Aïssatou and Jacqueline to seek divorce.

Being a wife in Africa carries a heavy social burden on women. In this context, Mariama Bâ criticizes the abandonment and suffering of the first wives in polygamous houses. The Senegalese novelist draws our attention to the fact that, in the marital life of a couple, while the woman remains faithful to her husband, the latter seeks elsewhere to satisfy his male instincts. Men in *So long a letter* has abandoned their first wives for

other young women, “Her husband [...] spent his time chasing slender Senegalese women, as he would say with appreciation, and did not bother to hide his adventures, respecting neither his wife nor his children” (42).

Through analyzing the story, some educators focused on the negative effects that Islam and polygamy have on women. The novel validates their assumption of a subordinated African woman who is always victimized by her Islamic religion and culture:

Champagne shared how readily his class empathized with Ramatoulaye [...] A particularly bright student remarked that the Islamic religion seemed to sexualize women excessively. Another wanted to know why Ramatoulaye remained faithful to her religion, given Islam’s negative influence on her life. (Qtd. in Gueye 4)

As a traditional Muslim woman, Ramatoulaye finds that she has to accept a polygamous marriage. She prepares herself for equal sharing with her co-wife Binetou as it is mentioned in Islam. However, that does not mean that Islam forced her to accept that life. In contrast, she is well aware that she has the right to express her explicit rejection of this marriage by divorcing her husband. The burden of having twelve children, however, and the need to feed and to take care of them with a salary of a teacher seemed difficult. Therefore, she found it impossible to allow herself to react like her friend Aïssatou, who chose to leave her country and her husband, thus, she said, “leave? Start again at zero, after living twenty-five years with one man, after having borne twelve children? Did I have enough energy to bear alone the weight of this responsibility which was both moral and material?” (41)

3.6. Traditions vs. Modernity

The writer demonstrates the debate over modernity and traditions that has been criticized in the contemporary African studies. In the novel *Ramatoulaye* was conflicted whether to accept the new attitudes brought by colonialism or stay loyal to traditions and old norms. In this crucial debate she states:

Should we have been happy at the desertion of the forges, the workshops, the shoemaker's shops? Should we have rejoiced so wholeheartedly? Were we not beginning to witness the disappearance of an elite of traditional manual workers? Eternal questions of our eternal debates. We all agreed that much dismantling was needed to introduce modernity within our traditions. (18)

Ramatoulaye depicts the impacts of colonialism on her society. She shows how the decolonized people in her country adopt the new attitudes. Even by taking their independence the only thing they wish for is to be like the colonists in their way of living, and even dressing, "The assimilationist dream of the colonist drew into its crucible our mode of thought and way of life. The sun helmet worn over the natural protection of our kinky hair, smoke-filled pipe in the mouth, white shorts just above the calves, very short dresses displaying shapely legs" (24).

This desire to look like the colonists goes beyond imitating them in dressing or speaking. The decolonized people who are still mentally colonized seem to be eager to rob the colonists of everything they possess. They want to possess "all manner of possession: to sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife if possible" (Fanon 38). This dream of native people shredded the African countries. It hinders them to attain independence and reconstruct their nations.

This unconscious copying and the desire to look like the colonists, for Mariama Ba and Franz Fanon, is the obstacle that prevents African countries from achieving their psychological independence. Their failure to revive and appraise their history and traditions makes them impotent to guide their nations towards prosperity. Moreover, their look to the westerners and colonials as more advanced and superior people restricts their minds to achieve the real meaning of independence. Similarly, the Algerian philosopher and thinker Malek Bennabi emphasized that one of the leading causes of the psychological colonization is the ability to be colonized; therefore, “to liberate oneself from colonization, it is necessary to liberate oneself first from its cause ‘Colonizability’” (16).

So Long a Letter puts African women at the crossroads of two civilizations. Through Western education, they came out from the stagnation of traditions, and superstitions of certain customs. They learned how to appreciate other civilizations without denying theirs. The narrator represents the perfect example of a moderate woman. Addressing Aïssatou, Ramatoulaye says, “Used to living far away, you will want again, ... table, plate, chair, fork [...] More convenient, you will say. However, I will not let you have your way. I will spread out a mat. On it there will be the big, steaming bowl into which you will have to accept that other hands dip.” (90)

Nevertheless, with respecting the positive aspects of African traditions, Ramatoulaye condemns its negative ones that suffocate women in particular and prevent their growth. In addition, she believes in the virtues of modernity which changes their way of thinking and allows them to participate in the nation-building and hence in educating the future generations.

The novel shows that there are different ways of dealing with oppression and discrimination. Aïssatou as an example refuses the secondary role of women assigned to

her by her husband, so she left him. She decided to get divorced and to go to the United States, where she can accomplish her plans. However, in the case of Ramatoulaye, she could not agree to live the same as her friend. For her, a life outside marriage is impossible. Finally, Modou forces Ramatoulaye to live alone. Ramatoulaye is abandoned and must take care of herself and her children alone. Her field of activity remains limited to her home.

Like Aïssatou, she studied and worked as a teacher when she was young, but no part of the novel shows us that Ramatoulaye had a professional life. Probably, she stopped working as a teacher a long time ago, maybe right after she got married. Aïssatou is described as mobile, and Ramatoulaye lacks any mobility. Nevertheless, one day, Aïssatou buys a car to Ramatoulaye, which symbolizes mobility. Aïssatou wants to see Ramatoulaye become more ambitious and social.

Aïssatou returns to Cameroon, but just before her arrival, Ramatoulaye finishes her letter which she concludes saying, "I warn you already, I have not given up wanting to refashion my life. Despite everything---disappointments and humiliations ---hope still lives on within me. It is from the dirty and nauseating humus that the green plant sprouts into life, and I can feel new buds springing up in me" (90).

Here, we see very clearly that, by writing her letter and reflecting on her life, Ramatoulaye begins to rethink her life and how she works in changing it for the better. She has already become more dynamic in her thoughts and behavior.

3.7. Style and Literary Techniques Used in *So Long a Letter*

Through reading the novel, it was noted that Ba used several literary techniques in her epistolary novel. This long letter is a flashback in time. The use of **flashbacks**

makes the story unique. In doing so, the author succeeded in presenting two-time periods past and present. Flashback occurs when a character in the present has a sudden vivid memory of the past triggered by a specific occasion in the present:

You who have loved me [...] my conscience is not accommodating enough to enable me to marry you, when only esteem, justified by your many qualities, pulls me towards you. I can offer you nothing else, even though you deserve everything. Esteem is not enough for marriage, whose snares I know from experience (69).

Ba also used **Irony** in the novel when Ramatoulaye met Binetou once in her house. The latter told her that the sugar daddy of the boutique dresses wants to marry her, but she is not interested in him. Ironically, however, Ramatoulaye later discovered that this young girl, her daughter's friend who asked for her guidance, became the second wife of her husband.

The use of **invocation** in contemporary literature is also significant as an example of Ramatoulaye calling for her best friend Aissatou, and this invocation shows the importance of the subject to be discussed, "My friend, my friend, my friend. I call on you three times" (1). Her calling demonstrates the need to reveal her ordeals, disappointment, and sorrow to her friend. Only Aissatou that could understand her, sympathize with her and give her the effort to overcome the misery of life.

Through Ba's work, we can observe the use of **Symbolism** in many parts of the novel. The mention of foreign embassies appearance in Senegal soon after Ramatoulaye's marriage has different interpretations. Whilst many people received the idea of this progress with open hearts, others were more pessimistic about it and considered these embassies as a negative intruder touching their Senegalese society. For those people, these foreign embassies were a symbol of the Senegalese culture.

Ramatoulaye elucidated when talking about Modou, "But he cursed the hasty establishment of too many embassies, which he judged to be too costly for our underdeveloped country" (26).

The author also used many **Metaphors** in the story. After Aïssatou's leaving, her husband Mawdo kept having intimate relationships with Nabou, his second wife. Nevertheless, in spite of that, he claimed that he needed Aïssatou back because he was unsatisfied with her. In addition, when Ramatoulaye asked him to simply leave her, he compared himself to a *starving man* and to justify himself, he compared Nabou to a *plate of food*, "I saw a film in which the survivors of an air crash survived by eating the flesh of the corpses" (34-35). However, even if he really missed Aïssatou, to him, his sexual desires were more important than her (Grade Saver).

Conclusion

Though they criticized her for presenting a reflection of a woman who victimized herself and failed to liberate her feminine soul from a highly patriarchal society, Mariama Bâ in *So Long a Letter* aimed at expressing her desire to enhance the image of women in that society. She introduces two different characters. Aïssatou refused to share her husband with another woman, abandoned her marriage and looked for other opportunities outside her patriarchal country. Ramatoulaye remained faithful to her husband. She could not find happiness outside her role as a wife. Bâ, through Aïssatou, and Ramatoulaye shows us that within the African societies there are two kinds of women, those who are still radical despite their intellectual or educational level link their happiness with male's happiness, and those who are more liberal choose another path to tread.

Moreover, because of some similarities between the history of Ramatoulaye, the narrator, and of Mariama Bâ, the author, some critics qualify *So Long a Letter* as an

autobiographical novel. However, in the end, whatever the different criticism of this novel might say, it is noted that *So Long a Letter* remains one of the unique masterpieces of the African literature.

General Conclusion

This work displays a general background to the study, followed by a brief history of feminism and African feminism. In addition to the origins of patriarchy and its existence in African literature since it was the first reason that provoked African authors, mainly female writers, to put an end to this oppressive system. Therefore, to examine the reaction of female writers, this paper selected Mariama Ba's *So Long a Latter* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* as a case study for feminist interpretations in the African literature.

After the independence of almost all the African countries, writers and thinkers carried the onus of responsibility to rebuild their nations, by exposing the problems and harsh realities existing in their communities. They tried to elucidate the consequences of these issues for the government and people, so that they may attempt to resolve these parlous issues. Among these issues was the discrimination against women.

For a long time, African women endured all forms of subjugation, persecution, and humiliation. In the eyes of men and society, women are inferior individuals with no knowledge or moral virtues; thereby, they were prevented from participating in the community or from having equal rights with men. Moreover, this inhuman treatment surpasses the real world and overwhelms the literary world.

Females in literature were routinely portrayed as submissive people. There was no voice given to them. Even the protagonists in African males' novels were male characters. The only role and position that was given to them is a housewife, a tool used by others, a daughter, and a mother who stands behind her husband, brother, son, or father; following his shadow.

However, by the emergence of female novelists and the feminist movement, female characters started to receive more attention. Writers fought against any

behaviour and traditions that existed in the past and oppressed women. They wanted to make their marks in their societies and express their opinions openly without any fear or shame. Female novelists like Mariama Ba and Sefi Atta shed light on women's stories and condemn male iniquitous practices and patriarchal system. These writers encouraged people to offer women a prestigious stature in the society. They emphasized the importance of women education in giving them the power to vanquish and change the world.

In *Everything Good Will Come* and *So Long a Letter* we find a unique demonstration of how women defy the challenges of the patriarchal institution and the various attempts exerted to subdue them. By discussing these two novels, we infer how Sefi Atta and Mariama Ba depict African women's awful situation. They break the silence that existed for a long time. Both Mariama Ba and Sefi Atta portray their female characters as survivors, warriors and independent women who refuse to stay at the mercy of men and society.

Everything Good Will Come portrays Enitan as a woman who becomes aware of her identity. Through the course of life, she becomes an assertive woman who defends her rights and survives in all circumstances. At the end, she dances for her freedom and victory.

Mariama Ba's novel depicts two female characters that choose different ways to liberate themselves. While Aissatou breaks the rules by seeking divorce and travelling abroad, Ramatoulaye in her attempt to overcome her ordeal never lost hope and faith. Her unique friendship with Aissatou gives her the power to continue her life. However, there are others who criticized Ba's portrayal of Ramatoulaye. They view her as a passive character who keeps lamenting about her destiny, but Ramatoulaye's decision reflects the typical thinking of many African women.

It is worthy of note to say that African women are still under the control of their society, and they still bear servitude and abasement through many forms of subjection such as traditions, norms, misinterpretation of religion, stereotypes and others. As an example, in Algeria, women are still hitched and oppressed by customs and new forms of repression. One critical form comes with the rise of spinsterhood in Algeria. People blame women and address them with bitter words since they fail to have a partner and a house. However, men are not criticized if they delayed marriage. These thoughts are the outcome of the common belief of people and society, which considers that the big achievement of women is to be married and have children. This view of women as a source of reproduction continues in abusing women for a long time.

African authors by their literary works endeavour to awaken the consciousness of women to liberate themselves, but African women also oppress themselves. They mistakenly believe that their happiness is linked to male's happiness and they offer men the opportunity to suppress them. The question about the failure of women in emancipating themselves opens the doors to another psychological research.

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