

**A FEMINIST EXAMINATION OF THE POSITION OF AFRICAN WOMEN IN
SELECTED FEMALE AFRICAN NOVELS**

By

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my parents, Mr Kabetwa Johannes Phaahle and Mrs Malefo Elizabeth Pheladi Makgwale. Though gone to the other world beyond this, you brought me up in the person I am today. Your relentless and unbreakable belief in my ability gave me such strength to pursue my academic goals thus far.

MAY YOUR SOULS REST IN PEACE!

DECLARATION

I declare that the mini-dissertation, **A FEMINIST EXAMINATION OF THE POSITION OF AFRICAN WOMEN IN EMECHETA'S *JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD AND BA'S SO LONG A LETTER*** hereby submitted to the University of Limpopo for the degree of Master of Arts in English Studies has not previously been submitted by me for a degree or any other university. It is my work and that all material thereof contained in it has been accordingly acknowledged.

MAKGWALE MH

DATE:

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ABSTRACT

This study will examine the position of traditional African women as explored in the fictions, *The Joys of Motherhood* (Buchi Emecheta) and *So Long a Letter* (Mariama Bâ). It will probe into the depiction of a traditional African woman in the selected texts under thematic issues which will assist us in understanding how Emecheta and Bâ perceive issues that directly impact the lives of women, even today. The issues include patriarchy, marriage, motherhood and childbearing, sex and gender, objectification of women, and the role of the chief wife. Both Emecheta and Bâ use communal voices that blend cultural incidents with fiction to demonstrate the subordinate role played by women in traditional African societies that are characterised by patriarchal practices and suppression of women. Both Emecheta and Bâ demonstrate cultural and religious stereotypes towards African women. This study will apply the African womanism lens as a theoretical framework to underpin it. The study will attempt to reveal that, from the selected texts, contemporary African women writers oppose the injustice inflicted upon them through marriage or gender (sex) stereotypes. The selected fictions help the audience understand the plight of some African women.

KEYWORDS: Feminism, patriarchy, marriage, motherhood, sex and gender, objectification of women, chief wife, widowhood.

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CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

1.1. Introduction

Generalisations concerning the role and position of women in traditional African societies, like all other spheres of African life, vary because Africa has diverse cultural practices (Izugbara, 2011). This diversity gives rise to linguistic discrepancies (Sibani, 2018). Many conclusive statements about one society might not apply to the other, even in one small geographical region (Ibid, 2018). Therefore, a better understanding of the depiction and the role of women in traditional African societies as such appeals for the recognition of distinct cultural inculcations within which African women are born and raised or brought up (Emmanuel & Okpara, 2013). Furthermore, familial and tribal customs impact on the degree to which a family is taught the norms and values aligned to a gender role. Scebile (1965) argues that “it is within this context that the society sees a woman as attached to somebody from birth to death.”

The key role of women is motherhood (Akujobi, 2013). In this capacity, women bear and bring up children; they love their families (Dickson & Louis, 2018), but in many cases, they subordinate themselves to the services of their husbands, children, families and clans, (Becker, 2016). Omer (2018) argues that this tendency, however, applies to all women in the entire world. Thobejane (2017) states that there are factors which are typical of African women in traditional societies, and this forms a good base for a better understanding of their position in African societies in general. Sudarso, Keban and Masudah (2019) submit that in terms of tribal laws, women in African societies are minors; they are fed and protected by men as their guardians. This general rule however depends on the structural principles governing or operational in different social groups (Baloyi, 2013).

Africa boasts two principles of structural organisations that are crucial, namely the patrilineal and matrilineal principles with their concomitant rules of residence (Mwambene, 2017). In patrilineal societies, women occupy an inferior position and status to that of men (Becker, 2016). The society treats her as a minor before and after marriage, and she is always under the guardianship of someone; she is under the guardianship of her father before marriage, and her husband after marriage (Thobejane, 2017). Given this situation, a young man with powers and authority inherited from his father’s social and legal position can decide his mother’s remarriage,

in case of his father's death (Ibid, 2017). Therefore, the marriage contract puts her not only under the guardianship of her husband but also of her husband's whole kinship. According to the traditional rules applicable in this type of society, she can be inherited by one of the kinsmen. This submission implies that in a traditional African society there is no orphanage because a wife belongs to the clan of her dead husband. However, in patrilineal societies husbands are in total control of their wives (Nga, 2017). They may not, for example, visit any home without permission from the husband; the husband has undisputable authority to beat her up if, in his opinion, she has misbehaved or done something in counter to the expectations of the true African woman (Anyidoho, 2020).

In the traditional African society, a woman cannot occupy a hereditary position or any public office (Njogu & Ochardson-Mazrui, 2019). There are however some exceptions to this as, for example, Queen Modjadji of the Balobedu tribe in Limpopo, South Africa. The example I give, and others that might be added to the list, do not in any way change the position of social injustice and disadvantages faced by some African women.

There are discriminatory moral and legal laws or sanctions which operate in different African societies. For example, if caught in the act of adultery, a woman might be beaten up or even face death punishment (Dickson & Louis, 2018). However, these punitive measures do not apply to a man caught in the same act or offence (Ibid, 2018). Matrilineal descent groups are different from patrilineal ones (Lues, 2019). In these societies, descent is traced through the woman, and property is inherited by men through the motherly lineage (Ibid, 2019). The legal position of women does not change; the authority is vested in the woman's brother, rather than her husband. She is a minor to her brother but has stronger powers than her husband. Djuikonand Van de Walle (2018) argues that in matrilineal societies women enjoy more independence and a higher status than in the patrilineal ones. Therefore, the salient difference between the two is that whereas in the patrilineal societies it is the responsibility of men to increase the clan, in the matrilineal ones the reproductive powers of women are used to increase kingship group and the clan of the patrilineal groups (Ibid, 2018), and not for the benefit of the strangers. "The husband's function in this case is to impregnate women," (Apthrope, 1959).

The position of women in the Muslim Northern parts of Africa differs from the pagan South (Anyidoho, 2020). In the Arabic world, there is what Professor Fawzi calls “seclusion,” which is the relation between women and outsiders or strangers (Familusi, 2019). The expression of ‘seclusion’ is found with women who are fully veiled, exposing their eyes only, and the typical structures of the Arabic houses with their many yards designed to enable women to disappear into the back immediately when men approach them or appear (Anyidoho, 2020). Family friendships exist but only members of the same sex can exchange visits, and not otherwise (Akujobi, 2013). A young girl who goes out with a boy is ridiculed, and her reputation irreparably tarnished (Ibid, 2013).

In West Africa, in countries such as Nigeria, women suffer the same inferior social and legal position as elsewhere in the world (Baloyi, 2010). They are minors, with all social conventions favouring men. They must accept polygamy and everything it entails. What makes a difference with them is that West African women enjoy some modicum of economic independence that is derived from trading, and this emancipates them from the dominance of the men (Mwambene, 2017).

Another crucial point about the status of the African woman is her right to choose a partner. In traditional South African communities, some parents still choose who their daughters should marry (Anyidoho, 2020). Even in present-day Africa, there are incidents where daughters are married to strangers through the arrangements of their families, and they are forced to accept these husbands (Baloyi, 2013). This practice has forced the colonial governments to regulate the contract of marriage through the introduction of legislative clauses to ensure that the consent of women to enter into marriage is first obtained (Nortje-Meyer, 2017). It is important, on this note, to consider the status of the widows. In case of the death of the husband, his wife or wives are to be inherited by the kinsmen (Lawrence-Hart, 2019). The widows’ inheritance by their dead husbands’ kinsmen not only prevents foreigners from impregnating them, and thereby procreating illegitimate children, but also, shows that it is in fact between families, and not individual partners (Henry & Temechin, 2017). This practice, however, not only deprives the widows to choose their partners but it also relegates them to a tool status in patriarchal societies.

Polygamy and the bride price also invariably impact the status of African women in traditional societies. The debate about polygamy and bride price has resulted in camps of different thoughts (Thobejane, 2014). One camp argues that polygamy and bride price are traditional African practices that should not be tampered with or interfered with. Another camp argues that the practice enhances the status of the mother of the bride as the person who has succeeded in grooming her daughter into an accomplished bride (Igbelina-Igbokwe, 2013). There is also a camp that regards the bride price as a token of gratitude and appreciation to the bride's parents (Ibid, 2013). The irony in all these arguments is that it is usually male parents who take the bride price, with female ones only being informed of the exchange procedure. Furthermore, the practice of polygamy and bride price compromises the dignity of an African woman; she now becomes a convenient tool to work hard in the fields (Baloyi, 2010).

Polygamy alone gives men some advantage. In some African societies, it is argued that a single wife cannot satisfy a man's sexual urges in times of a woman's menstrual circles or when a new baby is born (Baloyi, 2010). A man should still have a wife or wives to turn to (Ademiluka, 2018). Tradition and culture orientate people as to how they should look at themselves, and what roles to which they should assign (Familusi, 2019). The orientation involves men's attitude and behaviour as real traditional men, and women as real traditional women (Igbokwe, 2013).

With the advent of what later became known as feminist literature, which swept across Europe in the late twentieth century, women began founding organisations and movements to advance their rights (Dickson & Louis, 2018). Since the 1960s, many western societies witnessed the growth of the awareness of women's rights and freedoms as important indexes of democracy, civilization and development (Omer, 2018). A new wave of female consciousness spread through the western world since the early rising of women's movements and organisations at the beginning of the twentieth century (Anyidoho, 2020). The phenomenon has been brought about by the rising awareness of equal rights in both the Asian and African countries at the end of the century (Ibid, 2020).

In the 1970s, women studies began to interrogate cross-cultural and cross-border issues. This tendency has shifted scholars' attention to the colonized woman (Robertson & Chaudhuri, 2003 cited in Waugh, 2006). Colonized women began to

question gender and racial equality in workplaces and social life, after both the European and Western women had shown signs of supremacy over the Third World ones (Ibid, 14). Literary works by various African women writers began to vehemently demonstrate that all women around the globe suffer similar patriarchal conditions: the domestication and slavery caused by marriage (Omer, 2018). Studies have shown that in the postcolonial period women have found themselves as both mothers and providers for their families while their husbands are away. This paper accordingly examines how marriage impacts women, including the issue of raising children single-handedly.

Following the stories of the two novels, *So Long a Letter* and *The Joys of Motherhood*, by Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Bâ respectively, the paper examines the objectification of African women, their treatment by their husbands or in polygamous marriages. In the selected books, the authors demonstrate the negative side of marriage. Despite international conferences and the declarations of universal equality, women are still subjected to prejudice and social subjugation (Casimir et al, 2014). The manner in which patriarchy is enforced depends on the society in which more classes exist (Chissale, 2018). Societies teach men to regard themselves as superior to women, and the latter are taught to accept and acknowledge their culturally enforced inferiority (Ibid, 2018), thereby adhering to the patriarchal dictates (Hadi, 2017). A marital connection to men gives a few women access to power and privileges (Ibid, 2018). In some cases, women remain burdened to both domestic and industrial slavery (Thobejane, 2017). The former refers to women's domesticity while the latter to low wage slavery. The tendency still exists despite the findings by the United Nations that women produce about forty-five percent of the world's food – yet they receive merely ten percent of the income (Sibani, 2018).

1.2. Definition of Concepts

1.2.1 Patriarchy: a social system in which the father is head of household, having authority over women and children. It originated from the Greek word '*patriakhès*', which means 'father of race or chief of race.' The concept can also be traced to the Latin combination of words *pater* (father) and *arch* (rule.)

1.2.2 Marriage: a union of two or more people who create a family tie and carries legal and or social rights and responsibilities.

1.2.3 Sex: a category into which sexually-reproducing organisms are divided based on their reproductive roles in their species.

Gender: roles accorded to an individual based on their reproductive organs.

Women as objects: a tendency to treat women as objects and or property.

Chief wife: a woman legally and culturally married to a man as the first wife.

1.3. Research Problem

From various perspectives, women in general have been, and are still, projected as minors to men. The society has thus far managed, through various mechanisms, to undermine, exploit, and sometimes abuse them (women). The tradition still prevails despite attempts by women's movements and organisations the world over to fight for their recognition as fellow human beings. Some movements and organisations have however succeeded in attaining meagre rights for them.

The concessions achieved by women include the acceptance of their literary works in which they express their views about certain forms of patriarchal practices that directly impact them. Based on this submission, the study intends to examine issues that impact African traditional women that seem not to have received adequate literary attention.

1.4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the depiction of women in both Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter*. The author intends to offer an input into the representation of women in African literature which has thus far attracted international interest in contemporary gender politics.

1.4.1. Justification of the Study

Women in some traditional societies suffer various forms of oppression. These forms of oppression include, among others, patriarchy, gender, marriage, socio-economic, and political ones. The forms of oppression and suppression usually differ from one region to the other. However, in most cases, forms of oppression assume similar patterns.

Literary works written by African female writers have thus far attracted worldwide interest. In the post-colonial era, the black people began to experience constitutional challenges that have been installed in their countries. They were met with the institution of constitutional democracies around the globe glamour for equality between women and men. The notion of inequality between men and women had been justified both biblically and culturally. Given this historical background, this study moreover aims at sensitizing the menfolk to see women as their equals in almost every sphere of their lives.

1.4.2. Aims of the Study

This study aims to investigate the oppressive aspects of African tradition, various interrelated issues of socio-economic conditions and to challenge the traditional view that position women as subjects to men. To do this, this study carries out a comparative analysis of two primary texts by two prominent African women writers: *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta (2006) and *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Bâ (1979). This study also explores the extent to which there are possibilities for solutions to the challenges faced by the main characters in the selected texts as an attempt to achieve self-realisation and personal empowerment. Furthermore, it examines how the primary texts offer us insights into oppressive aspects of tradition and the ways in which it can assist women's self-actualization. Moreover, this study includes an inquiry into how women struggle in oppressive traditional norms and practices, how these norms and practices impact African women's lives.

1.4.3. Objectives of the Study

- To explore the representation of the traditional African woman as presented by Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Bâ in their selected texts.
- To find whether both writers are sensitive to the socio-cultural position of the African woman.
- To investigate issues surrounding the depiction of the traditional African woman that these writers present in their selected texts.

1.4.4. Research Questions

- What is the impact of the postcolonial feminist writings on the African woman?

- Do postcolonial feminist writers appeal for a change of perception towards the traditional position of the African woman in African society?
- How can the African woman emancipate herself from the stereotypes heaped on them by either culture or religion?

1.5. Theoretical Framework

The word 'theory' has various definitions. In *Concise Oxford English*, Stevenson & Waite (2011) define 'theory' as a "supposition or a system of ideas intended to explain something, especially on general principles independent of the thing to be explained." Hadi (2017) defines theory as "an idea or a set of ideas that is intended to explain something about life or world, especially an idea that has not yet been proved to be true." In the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (1964) Howler and Howler define a theory as "a supposition explaining something, especially one based on principles independent of the phenomenon to be explained," and it is a "reasoned set of ideas that is intended to explain why something happens or exists," (Soanes and Hawker, 2003). A framework can be defined as a "set of chosen ideas, rules, principles or beliefs from which something is constructed, on which decisions are based." This study will focus on the depiction of African traditional women in both *The Joys of Motherhood* and Mariama Bâ's *Long a Letter*. To examine issues associated with women characters in these selected books, this study used a feminist theory.

Feminism is both a school of thought and a movement with the intention of structural and cultural transformation for equality in all spheres of life for women and men, elimination of all social forces which instigate discrimination, oppression, and exploitation in any way possible (Pasque & Wimmer, 2011).

Feminist theory and gender studies are closely related (Dickson and Louis 2018) and have since become significant enterprises that focus on the workings of the mind in the last decades (Lawrence-Hart, 2019). How the society exists, as augmented by the birth of this dimension of knowledge, appeals for a robust analysis from the vantage point of sociology of knowledge. Since they are almost all-inclusive, gender studies are characteristic of cognitive concerns which are interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary, comprising various theoretical orientations and viewpoints within its explanatory framework (Hart, 2019).

Feminism as an ideological standpoint that aims at cultural and structural reform for equal opportunity for both men and women, and obliteration or elimination of all socio-economic and political force leading to discrimination, oppression, suppression and exploitation of females visibly or invisibly, directly or indirectly (Obiyo, 2016). Feminism was born and developed through women activist transformative movements and organisations. The movements expressed women's concerns in many ways – all aimed at equality (Balen & Bos, 2009). As an ideology, feminism is characteristic of several positions or standpoints. It focuses on women empowerment, women emancipation, equality, and elimination of oppression and discrimination (Ibid, 2009).

Ethno-feminism attends to cultural and structural specifics of both regional and local levels, and its emphasis is on the need for different contextual forms of emancipation (Djuikon and van de Huffel, 2018). It also attempts to reconcile variations or differentiations rather than binary divisiveness.

As a discursive practice, feminism concerns itself with how theory and practice interact. As a project concerned with female emancipation, feminism, like traditional Marxism, covers political and intellectual goals (Djuikon and van de Huffel 2018). From this argument, women seem to have acknowledged and observed the reality of their situations through the patriarchal structure, the binding force of familial love, various cultural patterns and lifestyles, and values systems.

Men's power, dominance and hegemony were unnoticeably institutionalised in the interpersonal relationship between men and women. Through the willing and the consent of the oppressed, discriminated women, the male hegemony got its legitimacy. As such, feminism necessitates active involvement, opposition and, if necessary, revolt against all those institutions, ideas, ideologies, and idioms that suppress, suffocate, subordinate and make women suffer (Omer 2018). Feminist theories have various categories. Feminist theory is a conscious reaction to patriarchy and historically dominant knowledge. Historically, both academic and cognitive constructions were formulated in accordance with a man's world experience of reality, including the manner of thinking and the language itself (Ibid, 2018). Language as constituted by words, which are themselves signs, tends to support or favour a single mode of thinking and doing things, which is patriarchal in nature. Therefore, the male-

female relationship is determined by 'he' and 'she', both having a social implication, and, as a result, people tend to look at things according to them.

The conventional theory of hierarchy focuses on class, caste and race, excluding gender. The status of a man is synonymous with patriarchy: the mindset tends to be gender-based, male preferences influence what to be written, and how to describe and interpret it (Ebun 2014). Consequently, females adjust and are socially made to do so. A feminist literary theory focuses on the inequality of male-female relationships in society and mirrors patriarchal ideology. The unequal relationships can be seen in many ways, including the production of a literary text. Feminist theorists draw the audience's attention to patterns of thought, behaviour, values and power in those relationships (Vine, 2017). They are concerned with the ways in which cultural productions reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social and psychological oppression of women, and look at how aspects of culture are inherently patriarchal or male-dominated (Bolulu, 2019).

1.5.1 The Role of the Theory

The role of theory in the study is to direct the framework or vantage point from which the research problem could be tackled. In other words, the role of theory in the study is to buttress the grounds against which the research problem could be deconstructed and understood. This section will begin by attempting to define the concepts 'theory' and 'framework' as they are explained and defined in diverse sources. The selection reiterates the research problem, which is 'the depiction of an African woman in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Mariama Bâ's *Long a Letter*. To examine issues surrounding the position of a traditional African woman in the selected texts, I chose womanism to examine how these African women writers look at the life of an African woman in traditional African societies. The study will use African womanism as a strand of feminist theory and will attempt to clarify its transformative intent in the lives of both men and women. Womanism as a literary theory was founded by Alice Walker, an African American writer. In her works such as *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, *We are the Ones We have Been Waiting For*, and others, Walker examines the history of African Americans from the slavery period, the long struggle for civil rights, negative stereotypes and restrictions imposed by the white community. Womanism focuses squarely on women and their role in their immediate surroundings

(be it family, local community or workplace). Walker sees a womanist as a black feminist 'who loves other women or men sexually and nonsexual, appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility and women's strength and is committed to "survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female" (Walker, 1983). At the centre of womanism is to give insight into the multifaceted and interrelated nature of class, race and gender which can create awareness of other systems of oppression such as age, physical ability and sexual orientation. It rests upon notions of inclusion and support among women and encourages resistance against oppression and patriarchal dominance and transformation of traditional systems to create space for black women to express themselves. A womanist in this context refers to the experiences of a woman of colour, including the intersections of race and gender. Womanism as a strand of feminism originated from the feminist movements of the 1970s and is a direct interface with the civil rights movements. It recognises that women of African descent in the United States faced distinct issues that were not addressed by the predominantly white feminist movement

The feminist theory attempts to call for social reconstruction in the global village. Finke (1990) argues that feminists perceive 'reality and gender as social constructs which can be decimated and reconstructed in a new humanitarian way, and oppose exploitation, oppression, subordination and discrimination inflicted upon them on any grounds (Neera & Maithreyi, 1987).

1.5.2. Kinds of Feminism

Pasque and Wimmer (2011:4) identify the following strands of feminism:

1.5.1.1. Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism can be defined as a traditional perspective that was established as part of the first wave of feminism. It is the root of comparison when analysing the conceptualisations of feminism. Liberal feminism is against the belief of the society that women are by nature less intellectually and physically capable than men. It attempts to level the disparity in payments and other fields between men and women. Modern liberal feminists argue that patriarchal society fuses sex and gender, thereby prescribing certain job opportunities as available only to men.

1.5.1.2. Radical feminism

Radical feminists think that liberal feminist perspectives are not drastic enough to address the centuries of individual, institutional, and systematic oppression. Radical feminism can be divided into two categories, namely libertarian radical feminism and cultural radical feminism. Libertarian radical feminism focuses on personal freedom of expression. It regards androgyny as an option. Cultural radical feminism, on the other hand, argues against the low value that patriarchy has attached to feminine qualities.

1.5.1.3. Marxist/Social feminism

Marxist or Social feminism incorporates perspectives of social justice as well as socio-economic differences. It argues that the road to gender is the destruction of capitalist society. Their perspective includes issues of unequal payments for the same jobs, obstacles in excelling in certain fields, and the lack of family-friendly policies at institutions and national organisations of higher education. The purpose of social feminism is to conscientise women that they can only achieve true freedom when working to end both economic and cultural oppression.

1.5.1.4. Black/Woman feminism

A Black feminist is a person who believes that female descendants of American slavery share unique life experiences from those of black men and white women. It further argues that the lives of African American women are oppressed by the combination of racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism. A womanist in this context refers to the experiences of a woman of colour, including the intersections of race and gender. Womanism as a strand of feminism originated from the feminist movements of the 1970s, and is a direct interface with the civil rights movements. It recognises that women of African descent in the United States faced distinct issues that were not addressed by the predominantly white feminist movement.

1.5.2. Research methodology

This section describes the research method, research design, study approach, sampling technique, and data collection and analysis technique. The study used a qualitative approach and is library-based. Crang and Kook (2007) in Cropley (2019:14) argue that the central of qualitative research is to detail the daily lives of people under inquiry.

1.5.3. Research Design

Claire et al (1996) in Kohari (1990) define research as a sequence of conditions for collection and analysis of data in such a way that it aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure. A research design is a plan that directs the flow of the study. It is a technique the researcher chooses to show each step their study will take until the end. The researcher used autobiographical text narratives, *The Joy of Motherhood* (Buchi Emecheta) and *So Long a Letter* (Mariama Bâ), to examine issues of patriarchy, religion and custom/tradition/culture, (polygamous) marriage, pregnancy, motherhood, sex and gender, and the position of the chief wife.

1.5.4. Population and Sampling

The study used purposive sampling to select Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Mariama Bâ's *Long a Letter* from African literary texts that focus on the depiction of women in African societies such as Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi's *Americanah*, Tsitsi Dangaremba's *Nervous Conditions*, Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* and *Ghana Must Go* by Taiye Selasi. The researcher's choice emanates from the belief that these African female writers explore issues that help the audience understand the everyday life experiences of women in African traditional societies and expose the status of these women in African Literature from a feminist perspective.

1.5.5. Data Collection

The researcher selected Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* as primary sources, and journal articles and other critical works as secondary sources. The study collected its data from these selected texts. Thematic issues surrounding the depiction of women in the texts written by African women writers are analysed using the thematic textual analysis technique to examine the writers' perception of women in African traditional societies. The thematic issues include, among others, patriarchy, religion and custom/tradition, marriage, pregnancy, motherhood, and sex and gender.

1.6. Quality Criteria

This chapter will deal with how the quality of qualitative research is measured. This section attempts to explain the following quality criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. In each of the above-mentioned quality criteria, a brief description is given to adhering to the quality requirements of the qualitative

research. Quality in qualitative research is judged through various criteria such as credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. This is because qualitative research often engages with flexible realities “where the subjective views of respondents may shape the frame and the process of the inquiry” (Creswell, 2014). This section deals with quality criteria under credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

1.6.1. Credibility

Moser (2018) cited in Creswell (2014) defines credibility as a “true reflection that the findings are the researcher’s bias.” It is equivalent to internal validity in quantitative research and focuses on truth-value, that is, the confidence could be placed on the truth of the research findings through the adoption of appropriate and well-organised research methods. Credibility as the measure of the research quality establishes whether the research findings represent agreeable and acceptable information extracted from the participants’ original data is a correct interpretation of the participants’ original views. Based on the above features of credibility, I declare that the information furnished in this study is plausible, and therefore was not influenced by my personal bias.

1.6.2. Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of the qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings with other participants or the furnishing of the historical information to establish the context of the study and full description of the occurrence in question to allow comparisons to be made (Shenton, 2004). In case, the inquirer utilises a complete description to facilitate transferability. Accordingly, the study has attempted to detail the data drawn from the selected texts.

1.6.3. Dependability

Dependability refers to consistency and stability over time. Some authors define dependability as the employment of interconnected and overlapping research methods and in-depth methodological descriptions to allow the study to be repeated. It involves the participants’ evaluation of the findings, interpretation, and recommendations of the study such as that is supported by the data as received from

the participants of the study. This study is dependable. With the description of the selected method(s), the study could be repeated by other academic inquirers.

1.6.4. Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings of the research project could be confirmed by other researchers. It focuses on the establishment that the information supplied and the interpretation of the research findings are not drawn from things that exist in the researcher's imagination but are derived from data.

1.7. Significance of the study

This section focuses on the importance of the study. In this section, I indicate the significance of the study, which is an attempt to encourage more literary criticism in texts which are written by female Africans who tend to explore issues that directly impact their daily lives as wives, and to which male African writers tend to ignore. The portrayal of women in African literary works has seemingly attracted great criticism among the African literature audience. As such, the study hopes to open further researches into the issues that affect women's life experiences. These researches, if undertaken, would enhance the audience's appreciation in this regard. Furthermore, understanding how women writers express the views pertinent to the position and status either in African literary works or real-life situations would contribute to appreciating women in general not as 'the other people', but as equals to men in many respects.

1.8. Ethical considerations

By virtue of the exclusion of human participation and subjects, this study does not require ethical clearance but permission will be obtained from Turfloop's Research Ethics Committee (TREC) to proceed with the study.

1.9. Conclusion

The chapter focused on the aspects which form chapter one of the studies. The chapter focused on the aspects from chapter one of the study. The chapter that follows will focus on the literature reviewed for the topic of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter will focus on the literature reviewed for this study, which includes journal articles and books that focus on the representation of women in African literature. Djuikon and Vand de Walle (2018) have discovered that numerous factors determine the depiction of both male and female characters in prose. Some of the literature reviewed reveals that the portrayal of characters in African literature is influenced not only by how writers see society and reflect on it but also by the literary environment in which the writers find themselves. A study conducted by Dipio (2019) reveals that African woman writers tend to portray females as main characters, which some researchers regarded as a rebellion against a dominant man ideology. The researcher has consulted books written by African women writers which deal with the depiction and status of an African traditional woman from various perceptive.

2.2. Literature Review

Studies have been done on the general depiction of African women in African literature. By focusing on Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Bâ's fictional works, one tends to suggest that there is more to be done. Unlike other writers in Africa who are ready to talk about their works, both Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Bâ confess that they find it a bit difficult to comment on their works (Dickson and Louis, 2018). Singling her out, in her paper entitled, *Feminism* presented at the Second African Writers Conference in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1986, Emecheta states:

I am an ordinary writer, an ordinary writer who has written because if I don't write, I think I would be put in an asylum.

However, the Nigerian woman writer concedes that as an African woman, she sees a social reality through a woman's eyes, which, in my view, is equivalent to accepting the fact that as a female writer, she should be more sensitive to socio-economic conditions that affect women. She proceeds to encourage African women to get an education as a solution to their present problems. Based on this submission, Buchi shows that she is particularly interested in the personality of the African woman, the structural and material conditions in which she finds herself, the factors that downplay her personality, and the possible ways to protect the African woman's image.

Several research projects have been done on the representation of women in African literature. The findings of these research projects suggest that a wide range of literary

works written in Kiswahili, English, and French indicate that an African woman has always been depicted with stereotypical undertones by both male and female writers. In these texts women are assigned to roles by the society, and which place them in an unenviable position of machines that are operated by men, and subject to men's sexual satisfaction.

In the paper entitled '*African Motherhood – Myth and Reality*,' presented at the Second African Writers Conference in Stockholm, Swede, in Dipio (2019) quotes Laretta Ngcobo, a female writer from South Africa, as having asserted that "the image of motherhood is the most dominant in African Literature." The author argues that Ngcobo feels that way because the African community attaches the woman's reproductive fertility to her self-worth. Based on this assumption, the author further argues that the individuality of the African woman and humanity have been confiscated since she is always considered as someone's wife, mother or daughter. The erosion of the African woman's independence is vivid in African Literature in incidents where women undergo severe punishments such as being beaten up by their husbands. Thus, women are not forgiven in African Literature. Laretta Ngcobo as such proposes that the African female writer should herself try to salvage the image of the African woman.

The study focuses on the depiction of the African woman in both Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Bâ's fictional works. Furthermore, it will attempt to investigate the representation of African women in the selected texts, and whether both female writers are correct in pointing out that the mother stereotype denies an African woman her individuality. Some researchers argue that the denial of an African woman's individuality should be judged against a particular cultural society in which she grew up. The author again argues that the position occupied by African women in literary works is a true reflection of the attitudes of African societies towards women in general. The author submits that "the roles women occupy within the body of African Literature reflect societal attitudes towards them." The same writer ascribes inadequate representation of female-written works to the character of the African literary canon, where African women authors are marginalised by male authors. This tendency results in the literary works by African female writers being recognised within the exclusively female designation. A study conducted by Hadi (2017) reveals that in literary works written by African women writers, females are the main characters. The status of

African women in African literature has of late become an issue of great interest. Some literary analysts argue that some male writers who dominate African literature depict African women negatively (Aidoo, 1986 cited in Okeng'o Matiangi, 1992). They single out Sembene Ousman, Mongo Beti, and Ngugi Wa Thiongo as male writers who have attempted to portray African women positively. Other than that, numerous male writers have depicted women as inferior beings to men (Imbuga, 1979 cited in Okeng'o Matiangi, 1992). In her book *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Sylvia Walby (1990) mentions the family as one of the centres in which women's inferiority is exposed. Women are housewives, and provide food, wash clothes, clean, bear children and care for them.

Other African female writers demonstrate how African societies perceive women. In her book *Nervous Conditions*, Tsitsi Dangarembga (2004) gives a picture of a young intelligent Zimbabwean girl, Tambudzi, who wants to be educated just like her elder brother, Nhamo, who goes to a mission school. However, her mother tells her the harsh reality of a traditional African woman's life. She says:

This business of womanhood is a heavy burden. How it be? Aren't we the ones who bear children? When it is like that you can't decide I want to do this, tomorrow to do that, the next day I want to do that, the next day I want to do this, tomorrow I want to do that, the next day I want to be educated. When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who has to make them. And these things are not easy, you have to start learning them early from a very early age. The earlier the better so that it is easy later on. Easy! As if it is ever easy. And these days it is worse, with poverty of black person one side and the weight of womanhood on the other (p. 16).

The author indirectly comments on the predicament which is predetermined by some African societies in which women live under the authority of someone. Some African women live like prisoners; they do not have the right to decide about that they feel suits them. Instead, in some African women's fate depends on the discretion of some men. Certain African societies depict women with stereotypes. For example, some African males tend to regard women who question decisions made by men as recalcitrant. Some African societies discourage the image of an unruly woman to such an extent that she may be labelled as 'unmarriageable.'

Tsitsi Dangarembga argues that in some traditional African societies there are people who think that sending a girl for schooling is a waste of time as she will get married to

a young man and as such help that man's family. For example, Jeremiah, Tambudzia's father, regards education as suitable for males only. Tambudzai says about her father:

He did not like to see me over-absorbed in intellectual pursuits. He became very agitated after he had found me several times reading the sheet of newspaper in which the bread from magrosa had been wrapped as I waited for the sadza to thicken. He thought I was emulating my brother, that the things I read would fill my mind with impractical ideas, making me quite useless for the real tasks of feminine living (p. 34).

In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Arma (1968) depicts some African traditional women as insatiable and unaccepting. The man (a nameless character) works as an administrative clerk at the Railway Station. The man earns a meagre salary as compared to Koomson, his former classmate who is a prominent politician in Ghana. Oyo, the wife of The man, insults her husband for not doing corruption to satisfy the needs of his family. In Eddie Iroh's *Without a Silver Spoon*, Ure is the main male character. Ure Chokwe possesses good personality traits, though inherited from both the parents, which are said to stem from his father (MMokhosi & Seboni, 1998). The subjective assumption gives that Ure Chokwe's good personality is attributable more to his father's influence than to his mother's. The depiction of positive personality traits which are attributed to the father's influence only downplays the importance of the role that mothers play in bringing up the children.

In Africa, motherhood is the destiny of every woman. Proverbs on womanhood show that in patriarchy females are perceived differently in the various stages of their lives. In a patriarchal gender hierarchy, a female is ranked below a male; and in the hierarchical category of womanhood, a wife is on the lowest ladder (Dipio, 2019). Her status and circumstances improve when she is a mother of sons. (Ibid, 2019). Taiwo (2010) argues that no degree of stereotyping against women existed in traditional Africa. Both men and women played complementary roles. The assumption is that traditional Africa was not based on gender inequality, and there was a sense of co-independence and a balance existed. African motherhood is characterised by values of love, harmony, peace and cooperation (Norte-Meyer, 2017). Based on this assumption, the study examines how both Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Bâ depict some African women in the selected texts. Furthermore, the study will attempt to

answer the question of whether both African male and female writers perceive life experiences the same way.

2.2.1. Women in Traditional African Society

Traditional African societies have always respected women as the power to organize both the family and the society. Although both men and women played complimentary roles, each one knew what role to play to contribute to the fundamental goal of community survival. This implies that in traditional African societies people performed varying roles to maintain the efficient functioning of their society, prior to colonialism. This, therefore, means that gender inequality came with the advent of imperialism (St. Clair, 1994 cited in Taiwo, 2011). In various traditional African societies, women possessed the power that binds the society together, ensures the survival of the family and the future of marriage. That is why Leith (1967 cited in Taiwo, 2011) emphasizes that:

Culturally, African women were the transmitters of the language, The history and the oral culture, the music, the dance, the habits, and the artisanal knowledge. They were the teachers and responsible for instilling traditional values and knowledge in children. Men were also essential in the transmission of knowledge to the youth because they had a different type of knowledge of the earth and environment, and also of ceremonies and traditions that were performed exclusively by men.

The above quotation emphasizes the traditional role played by mothers. As social, economic, and political conditions change, Lues (2000) points out those women worldwide have always been considered secondary to men. However, feminism today advances the argument that this was probably the one important issue that culminated in the drive for the materialisation of power for women. Over the years the role of women in society has revolved around their presence in the family and home. As circumstances changed women stepped into the economic world to find means by which they could contribute to their families' subsistence (Ibid, 2000).

2.2.2. Contemporary African woman

The European colonialism has eroded the rights and obligations of African women and made them play passive roles. Bukachuwa (1996 cited in Taiwo, 2011) states that:

In many areas women are still regarded as chattels to be inherited, they are given no formal education as it was formerly more disadvantageous to educate a female child who is given out in marriage at an early age. They are forever under the control of either their husband or male relatives... They cannot inherit or own property nor can they participate fully in public life and the decision making process within their immediate community. They had no right over the children they bear and are mostly the victims of domestic violence ...

The above assertion implies that women are still treated as inferior people. However, the last three decades after the independence of all African nations from the chains of colonialism have witnessed dramatic improvements. Parents have realized the importance of educating all children irrespective of gender, early marriages have been drastically reduced, and women are now professionals such as professors, doctors, judges, engineers, lawyers, and pilots. For example, the first female African president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, is from Liberia (Taiwo, 2011). In South Africa, also prominent female political figures include, among others, Patricia De Lille. Conferences are being held regularly to advance women rights, duties and positions in the society. In Nigeria, a large number of women contest political positions (Ibid, 2011)

2.3. Conclusion

This chapter focused on the literature reviewed for the study. The chapter dealt with research articles and books exclusively by Africans. Having outlined how each writer represents their characters in this chapter, the subsequent chapter three will focus on the thematic issues as explored by Buchi Emecheta in her novel, *The Joys of Motherhood*. The thematic issues are related to challenges that are faced by some women in African traditional societies.

CHAPTER THREE: THE DEPICTION OF A TRADITIONAL WOMAN IN *THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD* (Buchi Emecheta)

3.1. Introduction

This chapter will focus on thematic issues as explored in Buchi Emecheta's fiction, *The Joys of Motherhood*. Like other African women authors, such as Bâ and Dangarembga, Emecheta attempts to portray the precarious status of women in a peculiar African society. Her literary works expose dissatisfaction with the situation of women in her Ibuza culture, and which she criticises through her work. Furthermore,

Emecheta's novel is an interesting book that centres on motherhood and ways in which issues of motherhood impact women's lives in a traditional patriarchal Igbo society in Nigeria. As such, motherhood will be the important theme to be analysed in this chapter. Other thematic issues that the chapter will analyse include patriarchy, a (polygamous) marriage, marriage and childbearing, women as objects, sex and gender, pregnancy, the position of the chief wife, and culture and tradition. Based on these impediments, the chapter will also consider the possibilities of women's self-empowerment in the select text.

Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* uncovers various incidents of Nigeria during the British rule. During this period, Nigerians found themselves in a transitional period, that is, they had to change from traditional to modern life. It was at this period that the British government, and other European imperialist countries, started to offer goods and work for the development of their religion in Africa. The argument above implies that it was the European colonialists who brought drastic changes to their colonies. Through colonialism, Africans acquired a new identity, religion, and or civilization. For example, the marriage should be done in a church; otherwise, it is regarded as an illegal marriage. When Nnu Ego is pregnant for the first time, Naife becomes worried that he may lose his job because they did not marry in the church. By this aspect of a 'marriage,' Emecheta describes how the West develops culture and rules through various institutions. Cynthia Ward (2004) states that that Emechet's novels apply feminist views because they represent the experience of the African woman struggling to assert herself against historically determined insignificance and try to speak for the disenfranchised African women who are oppressed by the colonial patriarchal society. Balavatbhai (2020) argues Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* attempts to expose African women's marginalization and suffering in patriarchal societies. The novel tells the story of Nnu Ego, a traditional woman, who is proud of her identity as a mother to three sons. In patriarchal societies, women who bear children are often scorned by their in-laws. According to an Ibuza society, the birth of successful sons offers the mother a comfortable old age. At the end of the novel, however, Nnu Ego dies a lonely death in Lagos, with 'no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to her (Emecheta p. 11). The author depicts the impact of colonial patriarch and economic politics that marginalized Ibuza women in the third world. A feminist observer, Alice Walker, states that because of "their double identity, black

women are the victims of both sexual and racial discrimination” (Kohzadi et al, 2011). Lewis and Mills(2003) maintain that novel ‘accommodates the aspect of western feminism which brings in the light gender inequality, sexual difference, and gender oppression within the Igbo society, and highlights the way women are oppressed and silenced by patriarchy (Ibid, 2003). In other words, Buchi Emecheta criticizes the way African patriarchal institutions define ‘motherhood.’ In the absence of her husband, Nnu Ego being alone does everything possible to feed her children: she does petty works, sells wood, she saves money her children’s school fees. She cries:

On my life, I have to work myself to the bone to look after them; I have to give them all. And if I’m lucky enough to die in peace, I have give them my soul (p. 186).

Emecheta demonstrates that by being completely devoted to her children, Nnu Ego grows faint, and does not make friends either- she is always lonely. The author highlights the burden of African women. In Lagos, a wife does not have time; she has to work and provide food from her husband meagre housekeeping money while at the same she should find the money for any comfort in the family. *The Joys of Motherhood* is the irony by which the novelist tries to present oppression, suffering and loneliness which African mothers experience within patriarchal societies (Balatavbhai, 2011).

Though there are similarities of thematic issues explored in both Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* and Bâ’s *So Long a Letter*, the former novel focuses among others, on perceptions of motherhood in traditional, Ibuza society. While many women in Africa suffer from and oppression, Emecheta explores similar also considered in Bâ’s novel.

3.2. Thematic Issues in *The Joys of Motherhood*

3.2.1. Patriarchy

This section examines how Emecheta explores the theme of patriarchy in her selected text. The section begins by referring to other texts that explore a similar issue. Some literature writers around the world have found that African societies tend to be patriarchal. They argue that in some African societies, role-playing is usually determined by a patriarchal ideology, which prescribes who to do what, and when. Kramarae (1992) argues that the term ‘patriarchy’ was around even before the contemporary women’s activist movements, and feminist studies. The author explains that the term was re-invented over the last two decades to trace the ‘origins and

reasons for men's oppression of women. Patriarchy was in the first instance used to refer to the power of the man as the head of the household.

The author states that the term was re-invented over the last two decades to trace the origins and reasons for men's oppression implicates a well-arranged organization of male dominance and female subjugation (Ibid, 1992:23). Thenceforth, the term was defined 'as a system of male authority which oppresses women through its social, political, and economic institutions (Ibid, 1992:24). Rawat (2014) defines patriarchy as a socially and ideologically constructed mechanism that regards men as superior to women, in which the former holds authority over the latter, children, and property (Walby, 1990); it encourages male leadership, male domination and male power. Reardon (1996) defines patriarchy as a system in which women are subject to economic dependence, violence, domestication, and women are in the peripherals of decision-making, it imposes structures that categorise some types of work as 'men's, and others as women's, and gender inequality (Smith, 1990). Furthermore, the term 'patriarchy' refers to the arrangement of 'a set of relations' based on material ability that capacitates men to 'dominate women (Stacy, 1993). This system of a social hierarchy and differentiation based on sex enables men to get some advantages, while at the same time putting some constraints on women's freedom to advance their interests and creativity. Based on this understanding, men characteristically have the strength and courage to face the outside world, and their sexuality is forced on women through rape, prostitution, pornography, and other cultural practices. "Women's labour is confiscated in marriage, their fertility is controlled and their creativity is impeded with persecution and knowledge is withheld from them," (Stanworth, 1987). The narrator in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) remarks about Okonkwo's obsession with his patriarchal rule in his household as the father:

Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children. Perhaps down in his heart Okonkwo was not a cruel man. But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. Okonkwo's fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep within himself.

The connotation in the above quote is that men, as the heads of families, parade their muscular supremacy through injecting fear in their families to salvage their manhood. This tendency often results in family members being afraid of expressing their ideas. In his autobiographical novel, *Down 2nd Avanie* (2004), Es'kia tells about his father's patriarchal behaviour. His father, Moses, is a drunkard and belligerent. Though employed at the post office, Moses does not take care of his family. Es'kia's mother, Eva, does a dressmaking job for a tailor just outside Pretoria (now City of Tshwane). To supplement her meagre income, Eva sells a *skokiaana* (a home-brewed beer). Little does she know that each time her husband comes back home, he demands more of it. When asked to at least take care of his children, Moses falls into tantrums, and always threatens to beat Eva up. Instead of acknowledging his weak points, Moses says: "Don't talk to me like that. Didn't your mother teach you never answer back to your husband and lord?" (p. 16).

In a Pedi custom of Limpopo region, South Africa, for example, a man is the initiator: He proposes love to a woman, sends his clan members to negotiate with his future wife's family, the bride price, pays the bride price, marries, builds a home, and provides for the family, on the one hand. On the other, the woman remains an inactive participant in the entire process. In African culture, some researchers have found that women are responsible for domestic chores such as cooking, the laundry, child-bearing and child-raising – regardless of their status and professions. It is against this gender-based classification of responsibilities that some men dominate women in many respects. Taboos, idioms, and proverbs also help entrench patriarchal mindset. For example, in Sepedi, the proverb 'tšā etwa ke ya tshadi pele, di wela ka leopeng,' which literally means 'led by a cow, the whole herd of cattle will fall into a donga.' The implication in this proverb is that women do not have leadership qualities; they usually mislead people. Montle (2021) avers that "this cultural proverb declares that a woman cannot lead and hence, should not be given a position as a leader." However, some women leaders have demonstrated good leadership qualities. For example, Mrs Margaret Thatcher was once the prime minister in Britain. Mrs Graca Machel has founded the world child welfare organisation and many more occupy prominent government positions in the world.

According to Stacey (1993), 'patriarchy' refers to the arrangement of 'a set of relations' based on material ability that capacitates men to 'dominate women. This system of a

social hierarchy and differentiation based on sex enables men to get some advantages, while at the same time putting some constraints on women's freedom to advance their interests and creativity. Based on this understanding, men characteristically have the strength and courage to face the outside world, and their sexuality is forced on women through rape, prostitution, pornography, and other cultural practices. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta explores a patriarchal view of women as objects. Nokwocha Agbadi's sexual advances to Ona are indicative of patriarchy. The writer tells a sad incident in which Agbadi uses his physical masculinity to force himself onto an unsuspecting Ona, a girl given by her father, Ubani Umanna, to Agbadi as one of the mistresses of the latter. Some Nigerian traditional men's view of women as sex objects is demonstrative of Agbadi's deliberate intent to show that some do not need women's consent to satisfy their sexual urge. The author states that:

He did not let her mouth free for a very long time. She struggled Fiercely like a trapped animal, but Agbadi was becoming himself again. He was still weak, but not weak enough to ignore his desire. He worked on her, breaking down all her resistance. He stroked and explored with his perfect hand, banking heavily on the fact that Ona was a woman, who had had him many a time. And he was right. Her struggling and kicking lessened. She started to moan and groan instead, like a woman in labour. He kept on, and would not let go, so masterful was he in his art. He knew he had won. He wanted her completely humiliated in her burning desire (p. 20).

Therefore, Emecheta challenges the use of the powers endowed to men by culture, which often unnecessarily turns women into victims of cultural subjugation. Instead of having sex with their partners out of mutual consent, the author shows how some Ibo traditional men employ their strong physicality to manipulate women's physical feebleness to quench their lust, be it sexual or otherwise. Moreover, the author shows that men in African traditional societies decide on the fate of their daughters. The author of the novel knows the truth about this cultural tendency. The essence underlying this submission is that what mattered most in an Ibo traditional society is family-building, and not love between partners-to-be. This practice still exists even today.

In her book, *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta mentions that NwokochaAgbadi and his friend, Obi Umunna, agree on Ona's fate. Umunna tells Agabadi that should Ona bear a boy, the child would be his (Umunna's), but if it is a girl, she would be Agbadi's.

Did Ona tell you of our compromise? She agreed that if she bore a baby girl, she would be mine, if a boy, he would be yours," Agbadi said coolly (p. 26).

Emecheta laments the fact that the fate of Ibuza traditional women, either as wives or daughters, is often decided by men. Given these circumstances, Ibuza men turn women into objects even in matters that directly impact on them. For example, in a particular African traditional society, fathers have an absolute right to determine the fate of their daughters; they can decide to marry them to their family friends or instruct them to bear them children if their parents do not have children. This is the case with Ona, who has to bear her father children.

The author challenges fathers to give a lease to their daughters to decide the type of life they cherish to lead, and not chastise or enslave them in any form they (fathers) fathom possible. Two friends, Obi Idayi and NwokochaAgbadi, go on to determine Nnu Ego's life. It is by their agreement that Nnu Ego is married first to Amatukwu. Idayi tells Agbadi:

Your daughter's mind is not here. She dreams of her man and her own home. Don't let her dream in vain. After all, her age-mates are already having their first and second babies. Stop rejecting young men, Agbadi; let one of them marry her (p. 27).

In response, Agbadi says, "I have promised Amatukwu that I will think about his son. He is one of those out there." (p. 27). Hoping to see a handsome man, Nu Ego expresses some disappointment at the man chosen for her by her father. Nnu Ego's disappointment with Naife as her new man indicates just how fathers in traditional African societies force their choices on their daughters. Nnu Ego describes Nnaife's physical appearance:

Nnu Ego was grateful for it, and was just falling asleep with a full Stomach when in walked a man with a belly like a pregnant cow, wobbling first to this side, and then to that. The belly, coupled with the fact that he was short, made him look like a barrel. His hair, unlike that of men at home in Ibuza, was not closely shaved; he left a

lot of it on his head, like that of a woman mourning for her husband. His skin was pale, the skin of someone who had for a long time worked in the shade and not in the open air. His cheeks were puffy and looked as if he had pieces of hot yam inside them, and they seemed to have pushed his mouth into a smaller size above his weak jaw. And his clothes – Nnu Ego had never seen men dressed like that: Khakhi shorts with holes and an old, loose, white singlet. If her husband-to-be was like this, she thought, she would go back to her father. Why, marrying such a jelly of a man would be like living with a middle-aged woman! (p. 42).

The cultural practice of choosing marital partners still exists in some African villages today. Certain African traditional communities believe that by right all members should have marital partners to continue men's lineage (Stanworth, 1987). It is therefore not surprising to see Nnu Ego being married to a man unknown to her. An Ibuza culture allows men to get a marital partner through the negotiation and agreement reached between the respective families. But in cases where the potential partners are educated, the agreement might flop. In this book, however, Buchi Emecheta denounces this cultural practice as something that belongs to the past; modern women have every right to choose what to do, and who to marry as the time might dictate. The author laments the fact that any man thought right by the parents is thrown unto the daughters without even bothering to inform them. As such, the author expresses the agony of seeing women treated as objects of exchange, which should be stopped.

3.2.2. A Polygamous Marriage

This section tackles the theme of marriage as explored in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. The study adopts Womanism to question 'marriage.' Some feminist scholars state that:

men had invented marriage to oppress women. Through such means as kidnapping, rape, and the use of force, men established dominance over women. This gave men control of women's sexual activity and reproduction, ensuring that they were the fathers of the children their mates bore (Steffoff, 2006 cited in Balatavbhai, 2011).

This narrative gives details of African woman's oppression in the marriage system of patriarchal society. Women are treated as properties of men, commodities that can appeal to the owner whilst still new (Nyanhongo, 2011). Furthermore, the author argues that they (women) are merely dominated by men, and their principal role is to

attend to the needs of their men and to produce children, especially male ones. This incident is buttressed by Nnu Ego's case: she seems to be infertile when she married first-time Amatokwa. She is to move to the nearby hut kept for older wives because his people (her husband's family) found him a new wife (p. 32). In most of the authors' books, marriage is a central theme along which other themes are aligned. Marriage is the institution in which both partners are equal in procreation: a woman needs a man in the reproduction of kids and vice versa. The writer's focus on marriage intends to expose hardships or challenges which some African women face. The writer's novel has an African country, Nigeria, as its setting. This African milieu gives the novel's story a sense of absolute Africanness or Africanity, and therefore her respective characters represent some black Africans and everything done and said in their countries. In other words, these characters are a reflection of African life. As for Emecheta's novel, the story takes place in Iboya, Nigeria.

The word 'marriage' has acquired various definitions. In this context, marriage can be defined as "a formal union of a man and a woman by which they become a husband and a wife" (*Compact Oxford English Dictionary of Current English*, 2003). This definition means that both a man and a woman are equal. However, in certain African cultures men marry women, that is, men are supposed to pay dowries to the women's families before they become husband and wife. From the African perspective, marriage fulfils the completeness of a woman (Baloyi, 2010). A spinster is frowned upon by the society (Ibid, 2010). In her book, *The Joys of Motherhood*, Buchi Emecheta sees marriage, especially a polygamous one, as a means by which men objectify women. Being men and egocentric, African polygamous husbands tend to ignore the needs of their wives, regardless of how faithful the latter might be to the former. The writer shows how irresponsible African men are: they enjoy the comfort of their concubines' company at the expense of their true, rightful wives. Emecheta says this about Nwockocha Agbadi's austere behaviour:

This story gained credence particularly when Agbadi's wives showed signs of neglect. He would be reminded to do his duty by them, then when they became pregnant he would not be seen in their huts until the time came for him to mate them again. But whenever he returned from his many wanderings he would go and stay with his Ona (pp.12-13).

Emecheta uses the phrase 'to mate them' to demonstrate the state in which women in polygamous marriages tend to find themselves. The writer refutes the type of marriage in which wives are neglected. The gist of the writer's contention is that the Nigerian Ibuza community sees women as baby-makers. To avoid experiencing these hardships, women should stay unmarried if they want to remain dignified human beings lest they be treated as the 'other' – people without emotions. This standpoint has symbolic violence. That is, in some African cultures an unmarried man or woman tends to be regarded as incomplete, on the one hand. On the other, some people had been married but experienced the agonies of married life and want to emancipate themselves from the shackles.

Furthermore, Emecheta challenges men who neglect their wives because of concubines. The writer further intends to imply that men are egocentric and selfish; they do not mind cheating on their wives. She, again, illustrates the atrocity of polygamous marriage: Agbadi's senior wife, Agunwa, dies on the very night in which he makes love to Ona in the same courtyard; he ignores his wives' emotions and does not mind the consequences of his action(s). Some Ibuza men tend to append their unscrupulous behaviour to both culture and tradition and treat their wives as insensible beings. It is men, as the writer shows, who are insensible to sensitive acts such as having sex with a concubine or a mistress in the same home where one's wife lives. Moreover, instead of caring for and respecting their wives as they respect them, Ibuza men tend to do more favours to those women with whom they are involved in extra-marital women. Ibuza women usually try to satisfy their husbands and their clans by remaining silent even on their husbands' misconduct, usually to their (women's) disadvantage. The writer comments:

Agbadi's senior wife, Agunwa, became ill that very night. Some said later that she sacrificed herself for her husband; but a few had noticed that it was bad for her morale to hear her husband giving pleasure to another woman in the same courtyard where she slept, and to such a woman who openly treated the man they all worshipped so badly. A woman who was troublesome and impetuous, who had the audacity to fight with her man before letting have her: a bad woman (p.21).

Through this quote, Emecheta portrays a man who is a culture outcast. Agbada, an old man respected by all and sundry in his village, fails to match the honour which his wives bestow to him. The writer implies that Ibuza men are insatiable and

untrustworthy to their wives. Emecheta depicts Agbadi, again, as an irresponsible man who does not respect his wives: he makes love to Ona in the same courtyard. In other words, he disregards the morale and the status of his wives. Consequently, Agunwa, being the first time in her life to experience this debauchery, dies of heart attack. The reason for the death of Agunwa, however, surprises Agbadi. Agbadi recognises the importance of Agunwa, and he says:

... You are wrong, Idayi, to suggest she might be sore or bitter just because last night with Onal amused myself a little. Agunwa is too mature to mind that. Why, if she behaved like that what kind of example would that be to the younger wives? (p.22).

Later, Agbadi talks to his grown sons about their mother:

Your mother is a good woman. So unobtrusive, so quite. I don't know who else will me keep an eye on those you wives of mine, and see to the smooth running of my household (p.22).

With these two quotations Emecheta shows that while they are culturally heads of their families, men fail in their responsibilities to protect their wives against senseless acts such as cheating. She further shows that Ibo men do not regard their wives as true human beings: Agbadi is surprised by his wife's death because he thinks that having sex with Ona in the same courtyard is an unlikely cause of death, on the one hand. On the other, the writer portrays Agbadi as a man who, though he unintentionally has contributed to his wife's death, is agonised. He fully acknowledges the superiority and importance of his wife, the overseer of his other wives and their households. The implication of Agbadi's reaction to his wife's death is that African men lose honest and faithful wives through their unscrupulous behaviour.

Furthermore, Emecheta defies the dynamics of a polygamous marriage. In the Ibo culture, just like most some African black cultures, a man can, upon the death of his sibling, inherit his brother's family. This usually creates an unprecedented rivalry between the chief and the second wife. The writer argues that this culture/tradition disadvantages wives to such an extent that the chief wife usually gets relegated, or if possible, even replaced.

'A husband was meant to share the bed of the wife whose turn it was to cook, unless she was indisposed, pregnant or nursing a child.' (p.138)

According to some African customs/traditions, a daughter-in-law should demonstrate her accomplished womanhood either upon her husband's homestead or at her house.

In Sepedi for example, there is a proverb that says ‘mosadi ke tšhwene, o lewa mabogo,’ which literally means ‘a true woman demonstrates her complete womanhood through hard work.’ The connotation under this idiomatic expression is that a true woman does not tire up; she is always industrious. Another example is the Mozambiquan custom. It is rumoured that in Mozambique, women married from foreign countries are given strenuous fieldwork to test their womanhood. Failure to perform the prescribed work indicates a physical weakness.

3.2.3 Marriage and childbearing

In some African customs, the fundamental role of a woman is to become a mother. In this context, motherhood comprises childbearing and bringing up the children, looking after them and their father, washing clothes and cleaning the family house, fetching firewood from the mountain or bush, and even ploughing the fields to produce food. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta criticises the traditional view of the ideal Ibuza motherhood. To her, traditional motherhood enslaves women as wives while it emancipates men as husbands from this gender-based enslavement. The dialogue between Nnu Ego and her husband, Nnaife, demarcates the gender-based line of responsibilities between wives and husbands:

“You are to give her children and food, she is to cook and bear the children and look after you and them.” (p.71)

“But now you have make Nnu Ego pregnant again very soon.” (p.70)

The author remarks: ‘Nnu Ego realised that part of the pride of motherhood was to look a little unfashionable and can drawl with joy’. Nnu Ego says, “I can’t afford another outfit, because I am nursing him, so you can’t go anywhere to sell anything,” (p.80). Moreover, the author shows that children are precious to an African traditional woman, and that parenthood is a huge challenge that should be handled by both partners. However, the author implies that the onus of childbearing and raising children rests squarely on the shoulders of the mothers. In other words, the writer shows that in most cases it is only the mothers who experience family challenges as fathers are away. Here the author shows through which mothers go as they bring up their children alone. The following consecutive quotes indicate the helplessness and hopelessness that underpin traditional Ibuza motherhood:

Oshia, do you want to die and leave me? Stop this sickness.
I have nothing else to give you. Please stay and be my joy,

be my father, and my brother, and my husband – no, I have a husband I don't know whether he is alive or dead (p.104).

Adaku tells Nnu Ego:

In Ibuza sons help their father more than they ever help their mother. A mother's joy is only in the name. She worries over them, looks after them when they are small; but in the actual help on the farm, the upholding of the family name, all belonging to the father ... (p.122)

On her way to their room, it occurred to Nnu Ego that she was a prisoner, imprisoned by her love for her children, imprisoned in her role as the senior wife. She was not even expected to demand more money for her family; that was considered below the – standard expected of a woman in her position. It was not fair, she felt, the way men cleverly used a woman's sense of responsibility to actually enslave her (p.137).

Emecheta cautions women who believe that true motherhood is accomplished by sacrificing their lives. She highlights the pain of challenging work to bring up children who might not take care of their mothers when it matters most. In other words, the author is concerned about the quality time Ibuza women spend on perfect motherhood when there is no guarantee of their children taking care of them in turn. Nnu Ego's death accentuates this view. The author remarks about Nnu Ego's last days in the following quotes:

However, what actually broke her was, month after month, expecting to hear from her son in America, and from Adim too who later went to Canada, and failing to do so.' (p. 224)
'After such wandering on one night on one night, Nnu Ego lay down by the roadside, thinking that she had arrived home. She died quietly there, with no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to her. She had never really made many friends, so busy had she been building up her joys as a mother (p. 224).

3.2.4. Women as objects

This section deals with the theme of the objectification of women. As I alluded to marriage as the theme along which other themes align, then the act of objectifying women follows as one of the accompanying themes in the author's narrative. In this context, objectification of women includes, among others, women as inheritable

property, women as commercial commodities and or women as sex objects either outside or inside marriage.

In *Xala* (a Muslim Senegal) Ousmane tells the story of El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye, formerly a teacher who had been dismissed from the profession because of sexual misconduct. El Haji has become one of the wealthiest personalities in the new Senegalese government under the black Senegalese. He has already married two wives, namely Adja Anwa (six children), and Oumi N'Doye (five children), and the third one is N'Gone (still young and have no children yet).

In this book, the writer shows that polygamy, as permitted by the Muslim religion, in fact, objectifies women. Adja Anwa's response to her daughter's persistence that she stays home instead of attending El Hadji's third wife marriage demonstrates that Senegalese traditional marriage imprisons women. Her daughter, Rama, encourages her mother to divorce instead of tolerating the humiliating marital situation caused by a polygamous marriage. She quips:

It's easy to talk about," Rama, her mother began slowly. What she about to say was the product of much careful reflection. "You think I should get a divorce. Where would I go at my age? Where would I find another husband. A man of my own age and still a bachelor? If I left your father and with luck and Yalla's help found a husband, I would be his third wife or his fourth wife. And what would become of you?" (p. 12)

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Buchi Emecheta shows daughters are given names that determine their commercial value. In her other novel, *The Bride Price*, Ezekiel Odi names his daughter 'Aku-nna', which means 'Father's wealth,' (p.3) In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Agbadi names his daughter 'Nnu Ego', which literally means 'twenty cowries'. The author shows that from their birth daughters do not occupy the same social status as boys – they are commercial items from which their parents, especially their fathers, make economic gains or profit just like any other commodity in the commercial market. This total objectification and authoritarian ownership over daughters by their paternal parents deny them their true sense of complete humanity; their fate is decided by someone else, and must comply with whatever contemplations and wishes their male parents might develop about them.

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, chief Obi Umunna has a daughter named Ona, meaning 'a priceless jewel.' The writer says that the chief would remorselessly pull the daughter

along, that is, wherever he went. When asked about that, he still showed no sign of resentment in treating his girl child as an object. The writer says: 'but her father told people that his little girl was his ornament,' (p.11). Therefore, the chief sees his girl child not as a human being, but as something with which to decorate himself.

In the same book, the writer shows that an Igbo woman is usually owned by someone. The author challenges the Nigerian Igbo custom that belittles women. The Igbo woman does not only have to satisfy her husband's wishes, but also her father's. Connotatively, typical Igbo women should devise a means to emancipate themselves from this traditional view of a woman. Ona's fate, Ubi Umunna's only mentioned daughter in the text, is tossed between her father, (Umunna,) and Agabadi.

... she had been dedicated to the gods to produce children in his name, not of any husband. Oh, how torn she was between two men: she had to be loyal to her father, as well as to her husband.' (p.18).
... my father wants a son and you have many sons. But you do not have a girl yet. Since my father will not accept any bride price from you, if I have a son he will belong to my father, but if a girl, she will be yours. That is the best I can do for you both (p. 25).

Balavatbhai (2020) argues that Emecheta demonstrates that women in Iboza are dehumanized by their husbands. For example, Agbadi confesses that Iboza men want women "who could claim to be helpless without them (men)." The only honour women in Iboza can get is when they can produce many sons, which means failure to carry out this 'males-producing' mandate will render a particular wife useless. Emecheta says "s (till), many agreed that she has given all to her children. The joy of being a mother is the joy of giving all to your children, they said, and the reward? Did she not have the greatest funeral Iboza had ever seen? It takes Oshia three years to pay off the money he had borrowed to show the world what a good son he was. That was why people failed to understand why she didn't answer their prayers, for what else could a woman want but to have sons who could give her a decent burial?"

Through this quotation, Emecheta discloses the suffering, loneliness, and oppression which an African woman experiences in the patriarchal society. Coetzee (2010) shows that some men are promiscuous, that is, they see women as sex toys. In his book, *Disgrace*, the author tells the story of a European man named David. David is a Communication lecturer at Cape Technical University, formerly Cape Town University

College. He is fifty-two years old. He has divorced thrice in his life. The author says about him:

He existed in an anxious flurry of promiscuity. He had affairs with the wives of colleagues, he picked up tourists in bars on the waterfront or at the Club Italia; he slept with whores. (p. 7). He does what he feels like. He does doesn't care if it's good or bad. He just does it. He doesn't act on principle but on impulse, and the source of his impulse is dark to him (p. 33).

His love life profile includes Soroya (Indian), Dam (employee at the same institution), and Melanie Isaacs (student at the same institution). In the character of David, Coetzee depicts a person who is remorseless in his sexual behaviour. A girl, Melanie Isaacs, David brings home is not only thirty years his junior, but also a student under his tutelage. No matter what happens between them now, they will have to meet again as teachers and pupils. (p. 89). David remorselessly tells his daughter, Lucy, about his rape case (a university professor charged him with sexual misconduct after sleeping with Melanie Isaacs):

My case rests on the right of desire," he says, "on the god who Makes even the small birds quiver." (p. 89). "No animal will accept the justice of being punished for following its instincts (p. 90).

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta explores a patriarchal view of Ibo women as sex objects. Nokwocha Agbadi's sexual advances to Ona are indicative of patriarchy. The writer tells a sad incident during which Agbadi uses his physical masculinity to force himself to an unsuspecting Ona. Ona is given to Agbadi by her father, Ubani Umunna, as one of his mistresses. Igbo traditional men's view of women as sex objects is indicative of Agbadi's deliberate intent to show that men do not need women's consent to satisfy their sexual urge.

He did not let her mouth free for a very long time. she struggled Fiercely like a trapped animal, but Agbadi was becoming himself again. He was still weak, but not weak enough to ignore his desire. He worked on her, breaking down all her resistance. He stroked and explored with his perfect hand, banking heavily on the fact that Ona was a woman, who had had him many a time. And he was right. Her struggling and kicking lessened. She started to moan and groan instead, like a woman in labour. He kept on, and would not let go, so masterful was he in his art. He knew he had won. He wanted her completely humiliated in her burning desire (p. 20).

Emecheta demonstrates how Igbo males pride themselves in their physical masculinity to force themselves onto women. As a salient feature of patriarchy, the author shows how some Igbo men use it to inflict both emotional and psychological pain onto women, in some cases, just to quench their sexual urges with unsuspecting women. The case in point is Agbadi's conduct of satisfying his sexual desires by raping the young Ona. The author narrates the incident:

... and covered her mouth with his. He did not let her mouth free for a long time. She struggled fiercely like a trapped animal, but Agbadi was becoming himself again (p. 21).

In an Igbo traditional society childbearing determines the failure or success of a marriage. If the marriage does not produce children, the society usually suspects the woman, and not the man, as infertile. The wife accused of barrenness is might be subjected to hard labour to force her to run away or be replaced by the junior one. The author reprimands this traditional tendency by projecting 'an infertile bride in Nnu Ego's character:

I will do my duty by you. I will come to your hut when my wife starts nursing her child. But now, if you can't produce sons, at least you can help harvest yams (p. 33.)
"Father, my position as senior wife of the house has been taken by a younger woman," laments Nnu Ego (p. 33).

Emecheta shows that some Igbo men with more wives tend to neglect their families. But when it comes to their daughters being ill-treated by their husbands, it hurts them. The author shows the untruthfulness of these men as fathers; they pretend as if nothing wrong happens in their families, and they think of wives as people who need material maintenance, but not their daughters. The author remarks about Agbadi:

Agbadi was no different from many men. He himself might take wives and then neglect them for years, apart from seeing that they each received the one yam a day; he could bring his mistress to sleep with him right in his courtyard while his wives pinned and bit their nails for a word from him. But when it came to his own daughter, she must have a man who would cherish her (p. 36).

Objectification of Igbo traditional women happens also in the form of marriage. Once a bride price is paid to the bride's parents, the woman now as a wife is completely owned by her husband. If this happens, the wife has no control whatsoever of anything

that directly affects her. In other words, the Igbo traditional marriage subjugates wives to patriarchal whiffs. Accordingly, the author, while not utterly objecting to the institution of marriage, is not happy with the advantages accrued to men:

What did you say? Did I not pay your bride price? Am I not your owner? You know, the airs you put on are getting boring. I know you are the daughter of Agbadi. Pity he didn't marry you himself and keep you by his side forever. If you are going to be my wife, you must accept my work, my way of life (pp.48).

Some authors argue that to understand the plight of women in general, one should first attempt to locate patriarchy. Patriarchy can be defined as a state where male decision-making authority supersedes the female one. Several books which have been written by African females deal extensively with the theme of patriarchy. In some African contexts, patriarchy manifests itself in making decisions on behalf of, for example, unmarried men. Traditionally, some typical societies tend to regard unmarried men as young boys who do not have to right to decide on their own. Alternatively, patriarchy happens when parents choose who their daughter or son has to marry. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta shows how unfairly the Igbo traditional society has turned women into all-accepting beings, that is, people without mind. The dialogue between Umunna and Agbadi bears the testimony. Ubani confirms Agabadi's decision to marry his daughter, Nnu Ego, to the Owulum family:

"Nonsense, my friend," Ubani tried to console him. "How can a woman hate a husband chosen for by her people?" (p.71).

Polygamy is another issue examined in the texts. Some African traditional societies allow men to marry more than one wife. The custom is meant to extend the patrilineal clan, especially when there are no boys children in such families. Polygamous marriages usually disadvantage the senior wives because they have to make sacrifices. Based on this understanding, Emecheta treats a polygamous marriage as an act of objectifying women. On the contrary, men are insensitive to the melancholy inflicted upon women as wives; they pride themselves in it. Caught in a polygamous marriage since the arrival of Adakwu at her house, Nnu Ego feels both helpless and hopeless at the thought of reporting her predicament. The author says about Nnu Ego's situation:

Nnu Ego fought back tears as she prepared her own bed for Nnaife and Adaku. It was a good thing she was determined to play the role of the mature senior wife; she was not going to give herself any heartache when the time came for Adaku to sleep on that bed. She must stuff her ears with cloth and make sure she also stuffed her nipple into of her young son Adim, when they all lay down to sleep (p.124).

Emecheta, furthermore, explores the theme of women as objects of exchange. This happens in the form of the bride price or dowry. Though childbearing naturally and equally involves the two parents, the author exposes the imbalance in the sharing of the dowry between the bride's parents. The author laments not only the practice of selling daughters but also the patriarchal trends aligned with it. When Taiwo, Nnu Ego and Nnaife's daughter, gets married, it is Nnaife who gets the price, with the mother remaining silent. This is what an Igbo traditional society does, that women bear children only to extend their husbands' families:

'The bride price was quickly paid; it belonged to Nnaife, Nnu Ego made sure that she let it be paid to Nnaife's representative, Adim.'
(p. 220).

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, the main character is Nnu Ego. Nnu Ego is the daughter of chief NwokochaAgbadi. Through her father's arrangements, Nnu Ego is married to the Amatokwu. Months pass by without any sign of pregnancy, as traditionally expected. Her failure to conceive not only frustrates her. As a result, Amatokwu not only calls her names; he even subjects her to hard field labour, and his family arranges a marriage to a junior wife. Because of incessant physical harassment, Agbadi allows her to come back home.

Determined to get his daughter a husband, Agabadi marries his daughter to the senior son of the Owulum family. The name of this son is Nnaife, and he does washing for the white people in Lagos. Though not happy with the type of man to whom her father has married her, Nnu Ego stays on because she thinks that this ugly man can impregnate her. As expected, the couple is blessed with eight children, mostly boys. The birth of male children makes Nnu Ego a proud mother. The death of Owulum the junior changes Nnu Ego's family life. As the Nigeria's Igbo tradition allows, Nnaife now inherits all his young brother's family units, that is, wives and children. Adankwo, one of Nnaife's brother's wives, comes to stay with Nnu Ego in the same house. The two wives stay in the same house, and this leads to both

Nnu Ego's frustration and some rivalry. The author highlights this rivalry by referring to the Igbo tradition:

A husband was meant to share the bed of the wife whose turn it was to cook, unless she was indisposed, pregnant or nursing a child (p.138).

Having devoted her whole life to motherhood, Nnu Ego dies in the street with her sons had gone to overseas countries to pursue their studies.

3.2.5. Sex and gender

In this context, both sex and gender shall be used interchangeably. The issue of sex is explored in Buchi Emecheta's novel, *The Joys of Motherhood*. Sex refers to a biological difference between a girl and a boy. In some traditional societies, boys are more important than girls. The argument is that, because girls marry other clans, the husband's (clan) dies out. Therefore, a family with girls only is doomed unfortunate. Boys, it is argued, ensure the continuity of the husband clan because the adult names of the boys survive those of the husband. Put the other way, girls are inferior to boys. Hence the birth of a boy is celebrated by the father's clan.

In this book, Emecheta laments the Igbo traditional society's discriminatory attitude towards the girl children. The author criticises the patriarchy for dismissing, oppressing the disempowered women characters in her novel *The Joys of Motherhood*. She attempts to show how the patriarchal society in Igbuzia uses gender as the basis of oppression. For example, Ona is not allowed to marry because she lives with Agbadi as his mistress. In her interview, Buchi Emecheta reveals that there is the power of patriarchy over women's lives. This indicates the situation in which women's freedom is controlled by patriarchy. Ona is not allowed to her pleasure as soon as he has his satisfaction because 'he wanted her completely humiliated in her burning desire' (p. 20). Buchi tries to depict a traditional patriarchal society in which women are treated as 'second citizens. In one of her interviews, the author said:

I am just an ordinary writer who has to write. Being a woman and African born, I see things through an African woman's eyes. I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African woman I know. I did not know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist. But I am a feminist, then I am an African feminist with a small.

Killam (2004) points out that Emecheta highlights the way in which the patriarchal society values male children more than female ones. According to Mohanty (2003) “daughters are valuable only in terms of the bride price they may eventually command.” For example, Nnu Ego sees that money fetched from her daughters’ marriages can go toward paying for her sons’ education. The writer believes that by constructing rules on family, sexuality, home, division of labour and education, the colonialist racial patriarchy has contributed to the increase in inequalities in societies (Zahra, 2015).

The conversation between different female characters in the book proves that boys are more important than girls in the Igbo traditional society. Nnu Ego is happy with the fact that she has born her husband a baby boy. The birth of male children not only proves that the mother is a good one, as expected by the husband’s family, but it also ensures her lasting stay in the man’s clan. The quotes that follow from Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* underpin discriminatory views regarding the sex of the child:

I know what you mean. Girls are love babies. But, you see, only Now with this son am I going to start loving this man. He has made me into a real woman – all I want to be, a woman and a mother. So why should I hate him?” (p. 53)

She accepted Nnaife as the father of her child, and the fact that she thinks child was a son gave her a sense of fulfilment for the first time in her life. She was now sure, as she bathed her baby son and cooked for her husband, that her old age would be happy, that when she died there would be somebody left behind to refer to as ‘mother’ (p. 54).

It’s a man’s world this. Still, senior wife, these girls when they grow up will be great helpers to you in looking after the boys. Their bride price will be used in paying their school fees as well (p.127).

After hearing that his wife has given birth to the girl twins, Nnaife retorts:

Nnu Ego, what are these? Could you not have done better? Where Will we all sleep, eh? What will they eat? (p.127).

You can say that now. Do you remember how sad you were, senior wife, when you had the two girls? You would have been happier if they turned out to be boys instead. Now I had a boy, my only son and he did not live. O God, why did you not take one of the girls and leave me with my male child? My only man child (p.128).

But you still have Dumbi,” Oshia said uninvitedly.

You are worth more than ten Dumbis,” Adaku snapped at the boy (p.128).

“If you were not the mother of my sons, I would have taught you a lesson this evening,” (pp.134-135).

You are the mother of the men-children that made him into a man. If Adaku dies today, her people, not her husband’s, will come for her body. It is not so with you(p.159).

According to an Igbo custom, a wife without a son is not recognised as a real mother; she has no right to complain about anything in her family life. The society looks at such a wife with contempt. In the conversation between Nwakusar and Adaku, the author disputes the bearing of baby boys as a qualification to be treated as a complete wife. The author shows how perturbed traditional wives tend to be if there is no single boy among their children. Adaku, a wife inherited by Nnaife after the latter’s brother’s death, has only girl children. This thought pains her because other wives with boy children ridicule her. Through this, the author highlights the wrong mindset perpetrated by a patriarchal ideology, which decides the fate of wives through childbearing.

Don’t you know that according to the custom of our people you, Adaku, the daughter of whoever you are, are committing an unforgivable sin?” Nwakusor reminded her. “Our life starts from immortality and ends in immortality. If Nnaife had been married to only you, you would have ended his life on this round of his visiting earth. I know you have children, but they are girls, who in a few years’ time will go and help build another man’s immortality (p.166).

3.2.6. Pregnancy

Pregnancy is another issue explored in Emecheta’s novel. Culturally, all people, especially women, are supposed to be fertile. Therefore, a wife’s failure to conceive a child may lead to her either being replaced or relegated. That is why Emecheta questions the basis of marriage in this book, *The Joys of Motherhood*. The writer also shows that Igbo women feel belittled by a failure to fall pregnant. This feeling of self-guilt destroys their well-being. The infertility problem often leads to divorce, especially if it is the woman who is infertile.

She cried quietly as she agonised alone through the long hours of darkness. Only when the pain became unbearable did she enlist the help of the women in her father’s compound.’ (p. 25)
‘Her baby daughter was very merciful to her. “She simply glided into the world,” the woman told her (p. 25).

Nnu Ego is Ona's only child and Agbadi's daughter. Because he knows that his daughter is a virgin, Agbadi is happy and proud to marry Nnu Ego to Amatokwu. However, as time goes on Nnu Ego fails to conceive a child as expected. She even seeks advice from her husband, Amatokwu. She begins making sacrifices to the slave woman who was killed to accompany her master, Agunwa but there is no pregnancy. Nnu Ego's failure to conceive for the Amatokwus becomes a serious worry so much that she even consults traditional herbalists, but to avail. The answer she gets for her worry is that the slave woman will not give her a child because 'she had been dedicated to a river goddess before Agbadi took her away in slavery.' After repeated pregnancy rituals, the Amatokwu clan marries their son a second wife because they are disappointed with Nnu Ego. She is even told to move to the huts kept for older wives. Nnu Ego starts to appeal to her husband for leniency, but the more she appeals for forgiveness, the harder unforgiving her husband becomes. In the case of the absence of children, it is women who are always to blame. The writer shows just how hurting this experience is to women. Nnu Ego finds herself in a predicament from which rescue is unthinkable: she disappoints both her father and the Amatokwus.

Finding themselves in this tricky situation, as Emcheta shows, some Igbo women tend to make uncertain confessions about their failure to fall pregnant. Nnu Ego disappointedly tells her husband:

I am sure the fault is on my side. You do everything right. How can I face my father and tell him that I have failed? I don't like going there these days because his wives always rush out to greet me hoping that I am already carrying a child. You can see their disappointment on their faces (p. 31).

After several attempts to fall pregnant, Nnu Ego laments:

O my chi, why do you have to bring me so low? Why must I be so punished. I am sorry for what my father did and I am sure he is sorry too. But try to forgive us (p. 32).

Nnu Ego further asks Amatokwu these questions to show that it is not her intention not to fall pregnant. Furthermore, the author shows how traumatised married African women in traditional African societies are, especially when they bear children to their husbands, by which she connotatively refutes the traditional way of looking at things that are beyond anyone's control:

Amatokwu, remember when I first came to your house? Our shelter? What happened to us, Amatokwu? Is it my fault that I did not have a child for you? Do you think I don't suffer too?
(p. 32)

Nnu Ego deserves Amatokwu's support in this predicament, but what she gets is the unexpected of a true husband. The writer shows that some Igbo men distance themselves from their family's misfortunes, on one hand, while on the other hand claiming to be the heads of these families. In Amatokwu's attitude towards Nnu Ego's failure to fall pregnant, Emecheta portrays a typical insensible African husband. Amatokwu retorts:

What do you want me to do?" Amatokwu asked. "I am a busy man. I have no time to waste my precious male seed on a woman who is infertile. I have to raise children for my line. If you really want to know, you don't appeal to me anymore. You are so dry and jumpy. When a man comes to a woman he wants to be cooled, not scratched by a nervy female who is all bones (p.32).

Nnu Ego is hurt by her childless marriage. She is a representation of some African women who, despite their fidelity to their husbands, were rejected, even worse, sent back to their homes. Through Nnu Ego's appeal and Amatokwu's response to it Emecheta presents the two opposing sides of the reality of life: on the first one, a woman tries to fulfil her natural role as a traditional one. On the other, the husband pretends to forget the history of their love. In the character of Amatokwu, Emecheta shows that African men are interested only in childbearing, and fail to acknowledge the fact that everything on earth is ordained by God. Emecheta's Amatokwu is heartless and unsympathetic. Now as a disgrace to both her husband and her father, Nnu Ego is married to Nnaife, who is from the Owulum family. Still, even in her second marriage, she is afraid that she might not conceive a child for her husband. She says a solemn prayer:

O my *chi*," she prayed as she rolled to her other side on the raffia, "O my dead mother, please make this dream come true, then I will respect this man, I will be his faithful wife and put up with his crude ways and ugly appearance. Oh, please help me, all you my ancestors. If I become pregnant – hm ..." She nursed her belly, and felt her rather sore legs. "If I should be pregnant" (pp. 44-45).

Nnu Ego's suffering because of her desire to fall pregnant in order not to disappoint both husband and her father shows the predicament in which traditional African

women tend to find themselves, especially after marriage. African women's suffering due to the lack of pregnancy, Emecheta shows, causes symbolic violence: those women who are unmarried long for marriage, not knowing the challenges embedded in it, whereas those who are married usually tell unhappy stories because of marriage-related issues, childbearing being the thorniest. Maybe this is the irony of African marriage as explored in the novel, that Emecheta shows that according to the African culture a true marriage is the one in which childbearing plays a significant role or an integral part. Marriage, as it still is today in Africa, signifies the extension of families. Emecheta shows that instead of being a smooth adult with children, a marriage without children is a grievous downfall, especially from a maternal point of view. This is the reason till today some marriages in Africa still fail because the couples that do not have children, with the blame is always heaped upon the wife. Nnu Ego laments:

But I am not a woman any more! I am not a mother any more.
The child is there, dead on the mat. My *chi* has taken him away
from me. I only want to go in there and meet her ... (p. 62)
"They all agreed that a woman without a child for her husband
was a failed woman," (p. 62).

Whereas it may be true that some men are negligent to their wives' problems, it is also true that others spend a lot of their fortunes to assist their wives to conceive and raise families.

3.2.7. Motherhood

Kisser (2010) argues that Buchi Emecheta applies a Western feminist ideology of 'motherhood,' which criticizes the African patriarchal aspects of 'mothering.' The author states that motherhood is the central focus of women's isolation and oppression in which women are dumped into thinking that it holds a promise of sovereignty or free expression (Ibid, 2010). This statement is accentuated by Nnu Ego, the protagonist in the novel. She sacrifices herself to bring up her children not only to be proud of her accomplished motherhood but also that her sons will in future help her in her old age. Emecheta attempts to offer both the audience and critics the patriarchal meaning of motherhood through Nnu Ego. Nnu Ego begs money from Naife to feed their children, but he says that "it's your responsibility to feed your children as best you can." Naife's

words indicate that a woman is a slave to a man, she is in fact the subject of oppression by the patriarchal society; she is a prisoner imprisoned by her love for her children.

Omar Sougu (2002) argues that in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego is a mirror through which ideas of motherhood are reflected. Nnu Ego lives in a society which not only believes that the ability to conceive makes a woman complete, but she also earns respect if she bears male children. In this kind of a society, a woman faces neglect or humiliation if 'she does not produce children,' (Balatbhai 2011). Therefore it seems that women in such societies are bound to produce proof of their womanhood so that they not only become mothers, but also 'worthy mothers of male children,' (Ibid, 2011). Nnu Ego, a protagonist and a woman bound by traditional Ibuza expectations, is conscious that women who bear male children earn respect in society. Cited in Nyanhongo (2011), Steady highlights the plight of African women:

The black woman's situation is different and amongst the things that make her situation different is the lack of choice in motherhood and marriage ... enforced silence and a variety of other forms of oppression intrinsic to various societies which still plague African women's lives and must inevitably be at the crux of the African feminist.

In some African customs, the fundamental role of a woman is to become a mother. In this context, motherhood comprises childbearing and bringing up these children, looking after them and their father, washing clothes and cleaning the family house, fetching firewood from the mountain or bush, and even ploughing the fields to produce food. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta criticises the traditional view of the ideal Ibuza motherhood. To her, traditional motherhood enslaves women as wives while emancipating men as husbands from gender-based enslavement. The dialogue between Nnu Ego and her husband, Nnaife, demarcates the gender-based line of responsibilities between wives and husbands:

"You are to give her children and food, she is to cook and bear the children and look after you and them," (p.71)

The author remarks: 'Nnu Ego realised that part of the pride of motherhood was to look a little unfashionable and can drawl with joy'. Nnu Ego says, "I can't afford another outfit, because I am nursing him, so you can't go anywhere to sell anything," (p.80). Moreover, the author shows that children are precious to a traditional African woman

and that motherhood is a huge challenge that should be handled by both parents. However, the author implies that the onus of childbearing and raising children rests squarely on the shoulders of the mothers. In other words, the writer shows that in most cases it is only the mothers who experience family challenges as fathers are away. Here the author shows through which mothers go as they bring up their children alone. The following consecutive quotes indicate the helplessness and hopelessness that underpin typical African motherhood:

Oshia, do you want to die and leave me? Stop this sickness. I have nothing else to give you. Please stay and be my joy, be my father, and my brother, and my husband – no, I have a husband I don't know whether he is alive or dead (p.104).

Adaku tells Nnu Ego:

In Ibuza sons help their father more than they ever help their mother. A mother's joy is only in the name. She worries over them, looks after them when they are small; but in the actual help on the farm, the upholding of the family name, all belong to the father ... (p.122)

On her way to their room, it occurred to Nnu Ego that she was a prisoner, imprisoned by her love for her children, imprisoned in her role as the senior wife. She was not even expected to demand more money for her family; that was considered below the standard expected of a woman in her position. It was not fair, she felt, the way men cleverly used a woman's sense of responsibility to actually enslave her. (p.137)

Emecheta cautions women who still believe that true motherhood is accomplished by sacrificing their lives. She highlights the pain of the challenging work of bringing up children who might not take care of their mothers when it matters most. In other words, the author is concerned about the quality time some traditional African women spend on perfect motherhood when there is no guarantee of their children taking care of them in turn. Nnu Ego's death accentuates this view. The author remarks about Nnu Ego's last days in the following quotes:

However, what actually broke her was, month after month, expecting to hear from her son in America, and from Adim too who later went Canada, and failing to do so (p.224).

After such wandering during one night, Nnu Ego lay down by the roadside, thinking that she had arrived home. She died quietly there, with no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to her. She had never really made many friends, so busy had she been building up her joys as a mother (p. 224).

3.2.8. Position of the chief wife

In certain African cultures wives in polygamous marriages do not occupy the same social status. The one married first occupies the highest marital position and becomes the senior or chief wife. Culture and tradition expect her to oversee other junior wives, and should always show a stern character against all odds, and as such she will serve as an exemplary to them. Buchi Emecheta voices her grudge against this cultural expectation. Chief wives are human beings just like other people; they have feelings and emotions. The insensitivity to this point is shown by Agbadi when he makes love to Ona in the same courtyard, which results in his chief wife's sudden death.

In *Joys of Motherhood*, Buchi Emecheta shows how Ibuza culture and custom perpetuate the ill-treatment of chief wives. The writer shows that African women married in polygamous matrimony sometimes suffer the consequences of their seniority in marriage. Agbadi believes that as a chief wife, Agunwa should show no emotions to their love-making; she should show a keen sense of maturity and tolerance. He says:

... You are wrong, Idayi, to suggest she might be sore or bitter just because last night with Onal I amused myself a little. Agunwa is too mature to mind that. Why, if she behaved like that what kind of example would that be to the younger wives? (p. 22).

The author further expresses her disappointment with how marriage, traditionally viewed as an act of self-fulfilment and a social graduation, especially for women, limits women's mobility, and, to some degree, enslaves them. Culture and tradition expect chief wives to be taciturn, let alone in serious family cases where they cannot voice their concerns or worries. The writer shows that in some cases, a traditional, polygamous marriage relegates senior wives to mere beggars and slaves in their marriages. Furthermore, the author refutes the polygamy practice in which senior or chief wives are used as instruments for harmony-keeping by their polygamous husbands. She says:

On her way to their room, it occurred to Nnu Ego that she was a prisoner, imprisoned in her role as the senior wife. She was not even expected to demand more money for her family; that was considered below the standard expected of a woman in her position. It was not fair, she felt, the way men cleverly u-

sed a woman's sense of responsibility to actually enslave her (p.137).

3.2.9. Culture and tradition

Religion, custom, and tradition implicate each other; they all underpin the lifestyle led by a people at a given period. In both the selected texts the issue is handled differently by these African women writers. Simone de Beauvoir in her book, *The Second Sex* (2006), argues that 'one is not born, but becomes, a woman.' The implication here is that 'womanhood' is an ideological cultural construct. Ideological cultural constructs determine societal expectations from a person. These constructs are gender-based. In most African societies, for example, it is debauchery for a woman to propose love to a man. Women always take instructions from men, hence their dormant participation in decision-making processes. In one of her interviews, when asked about the African traditional custom, Buchi Emecheta responded:

In Africa if a man's wife dies, he generally mourns for forty days, but a widow would have to mourn her husband's death for seven to nine months, wear black, and she wouldn't go into other people's houses, so many restrictions which do not apply to the men (p. 96).

Buchi Emecheta, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, gives a picture of the Ibuza culture. In a traditional Ibuza culture, a chief's chief wife is buried with her slave girl. When Agbadi's chief wife, Agunwa, dies, her slave girl must accompany her master. The medicine man accordingly calls her: she should wilfully jump into the grave. The author recounts:

Then her personal slave was ceremoniously called in a loud voice by the medicine man: she must be laid inside the grave first. A good slave was supposed to jump into the grave willingly, happy to accompany her mistress, but this young and beautiful woman did not wish to die yet. She kept begging for her life, much to the annoyance of many men standing around. The women stood far off for this was a custom they found revolting. The poor slave was pushed inside shallow grave, but she struggled out, fighting and pleading, appealing to her owner.

The quotation above implies that Ibuza women are owned just as any other property; a woman's life is comparatively cheaper than a man's, and that the Ibuza custom informs the society's attitude towards rituals. Furthermore, the writer refutes the Ibuza tradition and custom in which women feel helpless to things that belittle their status as human beings. The fact that 'Ibuza women stood far off' from when the slave is pushed into the grave and killed, shows how the Nigerian traditional customs oppress women

as a marginalised group; they do not feel happy about the incident, but they must obey the prescriptions of their (barbaric) custom.

3.3. Conclusion

Chapter three focused on thematic issues that highlight aspects that help understand how Buchi Emecheta looks at the life of a woman in an Ibuza traditional society. It outlined patriarchy, a polygamous marriage, marriage and childbearing, women as objects, sex and gender, pregnancy, motherhood, the position of the chief wife, and culture and tradition. The chapter further highlighted the misery endured by women in Ibuza, Nigeria. Based on the depiction of the main characters in this novel, one tends to assume that the writer, Buchi Emecheta, demonstrates how colonialism has brought confusion in the lives of Ibuza people. They are caught between traditional and modern lifestyles, something which often brings about drastic changes. Chapter four will focus on the same thematic issues as explored by Mariama Bâ.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE DEPICTION OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL WOMEN IN *SO LONG A LETTER* (Mariama Bâ)

4.1. Introduction

The story of Mariama Bâ's novel takes place in an Islamic Senegal. The author depicts Muslim women living within a patriarchal culture in which the religious tenets subjugate women to male authority. It is worth mentioning that the novel's protagonists are members of the post-colonial elite. In this novel, unfair expectations continue to be placed on many African women. For example, in some parts of Africa, they may be required to do domestic chores and satisfy their men's needs, and to complement this by bearing male children. Therefore, the discussion of issues explored in this novel will bring to light the various ways in which women are subjugated, that is, the social norms and practices that contribute to women's oppression. Like Buchi Emecheta, Mariama Bâ explores similar issues of culture and tradition, marriage, women as objects, and solutions to challenges faced by women.

4.2. Thematic Issues in *So Long a Letter*

4.2.1. Culture and tradition

Mariama Bâ is a West African woman writer and uses her book, *So Long a Letter* as a basis for highlighting the empowering and disempowering impact of particular types of education for women in the traditional African-Muslim context of Senegal (Latha, 2002). The examination of the narrative indicates that religious education can alleviate the marginalization of Muslim women in Senegal and other countries through investigating the differences between Islamic principles and cultural practices. With secular education considering the current hybrid identities in postcolonial and other areas, this approach might empower Muslim women to become socially and politically active, thereby reconstructing their status in societies in which traditionalism often overpowers both basic Islamic principles and state legislation designed to promote women's rights (Ibid, 2002). Bâ reflects the importance of women's education in her acceptance speech for the Noma Award for *So Long a Letter*, in which she quipped: "People must be instructed, cultured, and educated, so that things can advance" (Stringer, 1996 cited in Latha, 2002). The theme of education forms part of Ramatoulaye, a French-educated school teacher who has moved to the USA after her husband, Modou, married a second wife. Her experience provides an insight into frustrations that characterise nations in transition from the colonial past. Postcolonial identities are always shifting, and religion plays a significant role in this regard. Khatami (2001) states that traditions in predominantly Muslim societies usually comprise thoughts that have become habits, and beliefs and deeds of people have become institutionalised in society on the basis of past practices. To understand this claim, it is important to investigate the effects of education on women in a traditional African-Muslim context. The author further argues that postcolonial women writers' searches for alternatives to existing degrees of oppression and their perceptions on glorifying or denigrating traditions differ according to class, background, level of education, political awareness and commitment (Katrak, 1995 in Latha, 2001). For example, born in a French-educated family in Senegal, as a Muslim woman Bâ was expected to conform to expectations of a traditional Senegalese society. Therefore, *So Long a Letter* can be read as a semi-autobiographical depiction of a woman living in the specific socio-cultural setting of a particular time in her country's history.

In her book, *So Long a Letter* (2008), Mariama Bâ shows how a Senegalese society uses culture or tradition to oppress women; they are expected to do things that, still in these modern days, are against their will. She uses the phrase 'installed in my house'

to express her frustration and disappointment about the whole arrangement. Furthermore, the author highlights the plight of women who are in polygamous marriages. As a modern woman, an educated woman, Mariama Bâ seems to shun the traditional wedding which prescribes the presence of the second wife in case of the death of their husband. Moreover, the writer refutes the status conferred to the daughters-in-law. They are expected to satisfy the interests of the whole immediate family members, something that relegates them to the object status.

To further illustrate and challenge the women's objectified status promoted by a Senegalese Muslim culture, the author uses the phrase '... a thing in the service of ...' to show her anger towards, and suggests the abolition of, such cultural practices. Ramatoulaye tells Assotou, her childhood friend, about what happened during the funeral service of their polygamous husband, Modou:

The presence of my co-wife beside me irritates me. She has been installed in my house for the funeral, in accordance with tradition (p.4) and, worse still, beyond her possessions she gives up her personality, her dignity, becoming a thing in the service of the man who has married her, his grandfather, his grandmother, his father, his mother, his brother, his sister, his uncle, his aunt, his male and female cousins, his friends (p. 4).

In *So Long a Letter*, Mariama Bâ explores the theme of traditional Islamic polygamous marriage as means to objectify women as wives. Some African societies still expect total obedience from the daughters-in-law. However, often some families take this as an advantage to harass daughters-in-law, especially those who are in no way related to the husbands' clans. The author shows this social injustice with which her husband's clan treats the widows. The author challenges the culture that is unchanging though there have been changes over some periods.

Ramatoulaye is both frustrated and disappointed at the negative attitude shown towards her by people who should be supportive instead of exploitive to her; she has no powers to deny that which is ordained by tradition or culture. The writer emphasises the plight of the married Senegalese Muslim women. She shows that Senegalese Muslim traditions and customs make hard expectations of daughters-in-law. In a Senegalese society, daughters-in-law are expected to be servile to their husband's immediate relatives; they should demonstrate their loyalty through generosity and hospitality, regardless of their socio-economic conditions. These expectations put

more burdens on the daughters-in-law in question, apart from the already heavy responsibility to ensure the smooth running of the burial of the husband.

Seen differently, the writer defies Senegalese mores and traditions which are blind to circumstances under which these traits should be displayed. Ramatoulaye says:

... no sister-in-law will touch the head of any wife who has been stingy, unfaithful or inhospitable(p. 4).

4.2.2. Marriage

Marriage, which should equally benefit both partners, tends to be a nightmare to some Senegalese wives. Mariama Bâ shows that some Senegalese married men do not respect their marriages as their wives do. Some men renege on promises they make when they first meet their wives-to-be; they promise to always support them, but as time goes on, they abandon their families through extra-marital affairs. The act of infidelity sometimes leaves wives, children included, distraught and rejected.

Mariama Bâ shows that in some cases promiscuous men, due to their careless loaning and spending of money during their lifetimes. This creates problems for their families. Modou Fall, Ramatoulaye's husband with whom she has born twelve children, is dead and has left behind lots of bank debts. The situation is compounded by Moduo Fall who marries Benitou, a girl young enough to be his daughter, and buys his new mother-in-law an expensive house – all these at the expense of his family. Her friend, Assitou, who is also a widow, is in the predicament; they are both tormented by their in-laws' behaviour promoted by culture and custom. She tells Assitou that:

In our different ways, we suffered the social constraints and heavy burdens of custom... I tolerated their spitting, the phlegm expertly secreted under my carpets(pp.19-20).
... with consternation, I measure the extent of Modou's betrayal. His abandonment of his first family (myself and my children) was the outcome of the choice of a new life(p.10).

Furthermore, some Senegalese Muslim men are not thankful for the marital service rendered to them by their wives. The writer argues that, through their submissive service to their husbands, women become slaves in their marriages, on the one hand, while, on the other, allowing patriarchy to reign unchecked. Men's unchecked patriarchal attitude pains, and renders the African marriage a house of hostage for most women. The author shows that, though some African men tend to marry many

wives to extend their clans, as the culture and custom dictate, this propinquity often results in heavy responsibilities, both morally and materially. This is because African men are insatiable. Modou and Ramatoulaye have born twelve children, but what surprises the latter is that the former still marries a girl young enough to be his daughter; this pains Ramatoulaye who might agree if the co-wife were her age, at least. Ramatoulaye says:

And to think that I loved this man passionately, to think that I gave him thirty years of my life, to think that twelve times over I carried his child. The addition of arrival to my life was not enough for him. In loving someone else, he burned his past, both morally and materially. He dared to commit such an act of disavowal (p.13).

According to African custom and tradition, a daughter-in-law should demonstrate her womanhood upon her arrival at her husband's homestead or at her house. In Sepedi for example, there is a proverb that says 'lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi,' which literally means 'an accomplished wife dies at the home of her husband.' Mariama Bâ` refutes this attitude which certain societies in Africa still practice. In African countries such as Senegal, women, under the guise of marriage, are treated as family tools. Instead of creating harmony between clans, Bâ shows that marriage may turn the very people who should form one's pillars of strength into one's worst enemies. She says: "My sisters-in-law believed me to be spared the drudgery of housework" (p .20). Senegalese Muslim societies celebrate marriage as the epitome of good parenthood. The mother of the bride is usually praised for having raised a girl who has now become a woman. Bâ, however, shows that marriage sometimes leaves behind the brides' parents helpless:

I need a child beside me,' she said, 'to fill my heart. I want this child to be both my legs and my right arm. I am growing old. I will make of this child another me. Since the marriage of my own children, the house has been empty (p. 29).

4.2.3. Women as Objects

Objectification of women takes various forms. In this book, Mariama Bâ demonstrates that the fate of the Senegalese Muslim women is decided by either men or the family of one's husband. The author gives an example of Benitou. Her mother marries her to Modou to accumulate wealth. In this case the author shows how some girls are seen as commodities.

Furthermore, the fact that the Ramatoulaye is not consulted about Modou's intention to marry a second wife is indicative of men's insensitivity towards women's feelings. Though in some cases it might be men's prerogative to dictate terms in life, it is essential to inform women as partners in their intentions lest be squabbles.

To further illustrate and challenge the women's object status as prescribed by the Muslim culture, the author uses the phrase '... a thing in the service of ...' to show her anger towards and the abolition of such cultural practices. Ramatoulaye tells Assotou, her childhood friend, about what happened during the funeral service of their polygamous husband, Modou, (p. 4). The arrangement of the funeral service for Modou's burial has left more pain on her mind. Modou still expect her to be generous – never mind the mournful situation in which she finds herself. What worries more is the fact that in Senegal Muslim society, women victimise one another.

4.2.4. Solution to Challenges faced by African Women

Mariama Bâ encourages African women, especially those facing challenges in their marriages to stand firm and acknowledge the chance to regain their humanity through positive self-esteem.

If today moral fatigue makes my limbs stiff, tomorrow it will leave my body. Then, relieved, my legs will carry me slowly and I shall again have around me the iodine and the blue of the sea. The star and white cloud will be mine. The breath of wind will again refresh my face. I will stretch out, turn around, I will vibrate." (p.13)
'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 raise our vision of the world, cultivate our personality, strengthen our qualities, to make for our inadequacies, to develop universal moral values in us. The word 'love' had a particular resonance in her. She loved us without patronizing us, with our plaits either standing on end or bent down, with our loose blouses, our wrappers. She knew how discover and appreciate our qualities (p.17).

4.2.5. Motherhood

In her book, *So Long a Letter*, Mariama Bâ shows that while motherhood could be self fulfilling, there could be however situations which might prove motherhood a tiring exercise in a woman. The depiction of Ramatoulaye's character as a woman has spent

her most of her life as a mother, but who at the end receives no recognition from her husband, Mariama Bâ shows how risky the contemplation of motherhood could be.

In addition, Mariama Bâ shows that a traditional marriage imposes challenges upon the senior wives. The writer, like Buchi Emecheta, is in fact opposed to the polygamist marriage in which wives share the ownership of the husband, which culminates into causing one wife more pain than its actual cause. Her standpoint emanates from the Muslim religion that allows polygamy or the African cultural marital practice that, in case of the death of the husband, the second wife should mourn her husband's death at the home of a senior wife. Ramatoulaye uses the word 'install' to show her disapproval of the presence of her co-wife in her home; she has no powers to deny that which is ordained by either tradition, culture, tradition, custom or the combination of them. The writer emphasises the plight of married African women.

Mariama Bâ shows that married African men do not respect their marriages just as their wives do. Men renege on promises they had made when they first met the wives-to-be; they promise to always stand by their wives, but as time goes on, they abandon their families through extra-marital affairs. This infidelity leaves married wives, children included, distraught and rejected.

Mariama Bâ shows that in some cases promiscuous men, due to their careless loaning and spending of money during their lifetimes, put their families in predicaments. Modou Fall, Ramatoulaye's husband with whom she has born twelve children, is dead and has left behind lots of bank debts. Her friend, Assitou, who is also a widow, is in the predicament; they are both tormented by their in-laws' behaviour promoted by culture and custom. (p. 10).

4.3. Conclusion

Chapter four focused on culture and tradition, marriage, women as objects, the solution to challenges faced by African women, and motherhood. Like Buchi Emecheta, Mariama Bâ expresses agony towards certain practices still promoted by some African traditional societies. Mariama Bâ demonstrates that Muslim religious tenets oppress women. According to the Muslim religion, a man is allowed to marry many wives. The second or subsequent marriages should take place with the consent of the first wife. While not opposing the tenets of the Muslim religion, Bâ laments that

it has shortcomings; some Muslim men do not observe the protocol in informing a senior wife about a husband's intention to marry another wife. Seen from another perspective, Bâ is not happy with forms of Muslim norms and values which deny women an opportunity to express their grievances. Furthermore, the writer seems to suggest that there should be some transformation in such societies to free women from these social impediments.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, the study focused on the status of women in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter*. The study conducted qualitative research with document analysis as the approach. The study used document analysis to examine thematic issues explored in the selected texts as experienced by, and directly impact, women in traditional African societies. Based on this understanding, the study believed that challenges faced by female characters in the selected texts are representative of traditional African women in their daily lives. To thoroughly comprehend the authors' perspectives about their lives, various thematic issues were examined as explored by the same and other writers in African Literature.

Thematic issues explored and examined in the selected texts are patriarchy, religion and custom/tradition, marriage, pregnancy, motherhood, sex and gender, the position of the chief wife, objectification of women, and solutions to challenges faced by African women. Patriarchy is an ideological social construct that assists men to oppress women as a marginalized group of people of the other sex. Religion and custom or tradition, as debatably designed from a patriarchal perspective, enforces and legitimizes the inferior position and status of women in traditional African societies.

In traditional African societies, pregnancy informs the marital status of women as wives. Failure to bear children for the husband's clan means infertility. A barren woman is emotionally tortured, and at times replaced by the junior wife. Often than not, women regarded as infertile feel incomplete, and, in some cases, are sent back to their fathers' homestead. I think this tendency is an unfair deal because barrenness is not a deliberate choice, but God's ordinance. As such, prospective partners should accept and acknowledge that everything is a creation by God, and if the tendency should persist, it should be similarly applied to infertile husbands.

Pregnancy implicates motherhood. Emecheta, in the Nnu Ego's character, shows just how failure to fall pregnant can lead to the failure of a daughter-in-law's marriage. The writer connotatively refutes this condition as a guarantee of the bride's stay in the marriage because the same is not said with men; it is always wives to blame.

Marriage is a union between a woman's and a man's clans. It is meant to equally benefit the partners. The sole purpose of marriage in traditional African societies is to extend the husband's clan. However, both the writers see marriage as a form of women's enslavement; it gives men powers to control women's lives. The authors treat a polygamous marriage as a mechanism to treat women as either sex or exchange objects.

Closely connected to marriage is the issue of sex and gender. Sex refers to the biological difference between a boy and a girl and does not determine one's psychological capacity. Gender refers to a social construct that differentiates activities and rituals from men's or women's. In both the texts, the authors point out injustice inflicted upon women as wives, often under the cloak of either religion or custom.

In a polygamous marriage, there exists a hierarchy of wives. The woman married first is called the chief wife. The authors point out that, according to African custom and tradition, a chief must not complain; she always leads by example. Moreover, the writers explore the challenges faced by chief wives in polygamous marriages. They are in fact against the practice of a polygamous marriage because it both tends to turn women into sex objects results in family squabbles between polygamous wives.

Solutions to challenges faced by traditional African women include forming groups to help one another, getting a western education to venture into new cross-cultural avenues to learn more, developing self-confidence to confront whatever challenges that come their way. Lastly, women do not see things the way men do. Women explore issues to which men are generally blind. Based on the transformative point of view, feminist writers challenge practices ordained by old traditional African societies which do not apply in modern life.

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