

Subverting Male Hegemony in Patriarchal Spaces in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map Of Love* And Mariama Ba's *So Long A Letter*

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ABSTRACT

Gender issues have been of great concern in many literary discourses over the past two decades. Research done on gender and related areas identify patriarchy as a cause of discomforts, hurts and pains to the female gender across all cultures. Additionally, feminist scholars have regarded these patriarchal injustices as retrogressive, uncultured and destructive to the growth and development of women in society. Thus, many contemporary literary writers have come up to expose these patriarchal injustices through their fictional works, giving their female characters noble and elevated positions that relay them as important as their male counterparts. In this regard, this study joins the corpus of literary discourses in assessing the different ways through which male hegemonic practices affect the well-being of women and how they have tried challenging these prejudices in their contexts as expressed by Mariama Ba in *So Long a Letter* and Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*. It uses Feminism Literary Theory as propounded by Simone De Beavoir and Hellen Cixous to assess the different injustices exercised in these societies and how the affected females navigate their ways to survive in such toxicity. The study establishes that male hegemony and its effects on females is ridiculing, degrading and sickening. These practices are also universally experienced by women. However, the females have tried to voice their traumatic experiences and come up with ways of subverting these injustices such as education, friendship, sisterhood and self-narration. Thus, both Soueif and Ba have contributed significantly in conveying messages concerning women's identity and associations and that they support feminist views which encourage females to fight for their freedom in the patriarchal world.

Key words: Male hegemony, patriarchal injustices, subverting

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the discriminative male hegemonic practices that female characters are forced to reckon with in their patriarchal contexts of existence and how they impede their growth and development. These undertakings that cause them pain and discomfort, as expressed by the two writers, not only denies them their dignity but also distort their identity leading to embarrassment, degradation, subjugation and stigmatization. However, Soueif and Ba use strong and assertive female characters to speak against these subjective patriarchal practices as seen in Ramatoulaye, Aissatou, Anna, Layla, Isabel and Amal's case. This paper thus supports feminist views aimed at fighting against the imprisonment of women in patriarchal societies and join the fifth UN Sustainable Development Goal in visualizing the disregard and eradication of all forms of discrimination and gender-based violence against girls and women across the world. The conclusion of this paper asserts that Ba and Soueif have depicted patriarchy and its effects on female

characters in their different communities and that through self-narration a platform of healing is availed.

Patriarchal Injustices in *The Map of Love* and *So Long a Letter*

Patriarchy, a culture in society that aids men to dominate over women, is expressed as a form neocolonialism (Spivak, 2012). Some of the ways patriarchy manifests itself include polygamy, objectification of females through practices like wife inheritance, early marriages, payment of dowry and choosing their spouses, loss of identity upon marriage, objects of sexual pleasure, economic dominance by the males, male recklessness, lack of inheritance rights to women and female genital mutilation among other practices as explained below.

Objectification of Females

This refers to the act of treating people (females in this case) as if they are objects, without rights or feelings of their own. Cixous (1976) avows that objectification manifests itself through a number of cultural practices that are eminent in patriarchal cultures and societies. The first is when a woman is denied feelings of her own hence, a husband is to be chosen for her. Ba uses Ramatoulaye, Aissatou and Jacqueline to show her rejection of this kind of objectification. These three refuse to adhere to their parents' demands of marrying the men their parents thought were fit for them and proceed to get married to men of their choice, Modou Fall, Mawdo Ba and Samba Diack respectively. Ramatoulaye recalls the experience of how her mother rejected Modou, how she never demanded much of a dowry from him apart from love and dedication to sustain the marriage, and how much more sacrifices she had made including rejecting Daouda Dieng' who was more reasonable than Modou. But she preferred the latter, celebrating their marriage without dowry and in disappointment of her family, relatives and the whole town (p.18). Ramatoulaye, unlike her parents, is unconcerned with dowry, what matters to her is "a home that she could call her own, a man she would love and cherish and children to crown the marriage" (Nwapa, 1992). Wealth and material gain was the least of her problems.

In the same way, Soueif portrays the act of marrying off young men and women without the privilege of letting them explore and choose their spouses on their own as an oppressive cultural practice. When Tahiyya suggests that Amal marries her two sons in Egypt so that they be close to her, she disagrees saying that "nobody marries anybody off any more," and "each one acts with his own head" (p. 102). And with this, Amal does not force her sons to marry at her own convenient time.

Secondly, in *So Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye's self-narrative protests against objectification of widows when she laments over the time when a woman becomes an object in the family of the man she is married to, especially in the unfortunate circumstances of her husband's death. The 'stripping' of the widows of their properties and dignity as a sign of service is an instance of dehumanization to these widows. Ngwoke & Ahaotu (2020) affirm that "African widows are subjected to dehumanizing experiences and are culturally bound to be inherited by their late husband's brother" (p. 7). Ramatoulaye narrates:

This is the moment dreaded by every Senegalese woman, the moment when she sacrifices her possessions as gifts to her family-in-law—becoming a thing (object) in the service of the man who married her. (p.4).

The terse and sombre tone in the quote shows the docility and pain that women have to bear as they submit to bias practices during the mourning period. Furthermore, even the little condolence funds that these women are given by the other mourners are taken by the in-laws therefore leaving them "utterly destitute" when they are the ones "who will need material support" (p.8).

Wife inheritance is another form of female objectification that feminists regard as responsible for treating women as objects which can easily be passed from one male hand to the other. This practice is denounced

by Ujowundu (2013) as dehumanizing. He says that it treats widows like cowards, of less dignity and as ordinary women without the ability to make their own decisions. This is why Ba uses Ramatoulaye's refusal of Tamsir to express her stand on wife inheritance. Her radical feminist voice of opposition to this degrading practice comes out: "My voice has known thirty years of silence, thirty years of harassment" (p.60). In her rejection of wife inheritance, Ramatoulaye says: "You forget that I have a heart, a mind that I am not an object to be passed from hand to hand" (p.60) and that "I shall never be the one to complete your collection" (p.60) This means that inheriting a wife makes the woman an object to be collected and kept by the man for prestigious purposes. Thus, the writer not only condemns the practice of wife inheritance but also brings to light some of the misconceptions and distortions of Islamic religion teachings used to enhance it. Tamsir, for instance, portrays such abuse when he can barely take care of his three wives and numerous children yet he is still eyeing another wife, Ramatoulaye (Rabiatu, 2014). Thus, from the feminist voices, self-narratives, which elucidate the politics of gender from the feminine perspective are a form of healing to the minds and souls of these objectified women.

So Long a Letter further amplifies the postcolonial feminist voice of the African woman by asserting that women are not objects such as plates of food to satisfy the ego of men when and where they deem necessary. This is what Ramatoulaye says with regards to Mawdo's objectification of Young Nabou that, "Thus, to justify himself, he reduced Young Nabou to a 'plate of food'. And, for the sake of 'variety', "men are unfaithful to their wives" (p.35). This supremacy of instincts (id-psychoanalysis) when it comes to men justifying their nefarious acts of marital betrayal is what the feminist voice is opposed to.

Soueif also portrays women who are regarded as objects of sexual pleasure to men in patriarchal contexts. George (2020) affirms that in patriarchal societies "the sole aim of a woman's existence, according to erroneous belief, is to satisfy the man" (p.3). In *The Map of Love*, this is evident through how men view women and how their dressing codes and roles are moderated. In the instance when Isabel visits the tomb in Tawasi to learn more about her culture, she meets Sheikh who sexually objectifies her at the door. Instead of the sheikh asking her in and inquiring what mission she had, he tells her to come closer, looks up and into her face then asks if she has come to marry him (p. 238). From this scenario, it can be deduced that the sheikh sees nothing much in Isabel apart from being a wife; and that that is the only thing she should ask for.

Another scenario is when Anna attends the Khedive's Ball during the Egyptian Winter Season. As Anna wears a violet silk dress that she thought would adequately cover her and not cause any offence to the Moslem notables, she gets surprised that the male foreigners in that party watched happily and with apparent approval as their wives with "bare arms and almost bare bosoms danced with other men" (p.74). This scene that shocks Sheikh Hassouna al- Nawawi too, depicts women as objects of sexual pleasure, to be watched, tossed and exchanged regardless of their status. Saddik (2016) confirms that conservative societies, just like the one in which Anna and Hassouna exist, define women in terms of their physical characteristics, hence rationalization of patriarchal oppression of women is done by referencing to those physical characteristics.

Being that society has always viewed women as sexual objects, women themselves have indulged in this thought that they at times present themselves as preys to suffice the male ego. After Isabel has finished her discussion with the sheikh Isa's family and is about to leave, Sheikh's wife asks her if she's married. Isabel says that she's single and divorced without children but her mind is occupied with someone else whose feelings she does not know. Umm Aya agrees that the man could be having feelings for her but has a reason making him not to speak. However, when Isabel suggests that she intends to speak to him, Umm Aya disagrees and advises that she adorns herself, sit with him in a comfortable way and the rest will follow. Their conversation points out women as vulnerable and agents of victimization themselves (p.243). From the phrase 'you are a woman and you know the rest' (p.243) it is postulated that a woman in this society is viewed to have the abilities of just presenting herself to a man sexually or seductively and expect zero resistance from him. Likewise, a man cannot deny a woman once she presents herself in adornments and

scents.

In this regard, the cultural aspects which glorify patriarchy and its offshoots is one sided and blind to the reality that females too, are human beings with equal opportunities like those accorded to men. In the process of propagating these narratives of their experiences, this study argues that they are an avenue for healing (Friskie, 2020).

Emotional Violence

Other than being a source of moral decay, the Subaltern voice, antagonizes the traditional practice of male recklessness because it views this practice especially in Africa as detrimental to mental, emotional and physical health, and therefore, a source of trauma to the women trapped into it. Male recklessness is a chauvinistic practice that involves men openly engaging in extramarital affairs without minding the feelings and emotional well-being of their spouses. Patriarchal ideas give them the upper hand to defend their dubious acts even when they are wrong, and imprison women to remain understanding, honest, faithful and forgiving because that is the 'nature' of men. With this reasoning, staying in marriage is viewed as a success and great opportunity to women in these societies. Moreover, marriage is seen as a favour done to women.

In *So Long a Letter*, the narrative of Jacqueline, the wife of Samba Diack (p.44 – 47), as narrated by Ramatoulaye is a perfect illustration of this view. Jacqueline is suffering mental alienation and depression because her husband, Samba Diack, spends most of his time chasing slender Senegalese women. Regardless of the sacrifices Jacqueline has made just to feel comfortable in this marriage and to be accepted as a Senegalese (for she is from Ivory Coast), Samba Diack, Samba Diack betrays her and her children by openly making his adventures respecting neither her nor the children. Jacqueline later comes to realize his misconduct from “love notes, check stubs bearing the names of the payees, bills from restaurants and for hotel rooms that he has paid for” (p.42). From then on, the insidious pain torturing her lands her to hospitals with complains of nervous breakdown. And with this mental illness that eats her up and makes her wither, Diack is blossoming and unapologetic of his behaviour, as Ba puts it, while “Jacqueline cried, Samba Diack lived it up, Jacqueline lost weight: Samba Diack was still living fast. She complained of a distributing lump in her chest...a sharp point cutting through her flesh to her very bones” (p. 42). Ba, in an authorial intrusion voice through her main character Ramatoulaye, describes this illness in this manner:

Doctors, beware, especially if you are neurologists or psychiatrists. Often, the pains you are told of have their roots in moral torment. Vexations suffered and constant frustrations: these are what accumulate somewhere in the body and choke it (p. 46).

Had it not been the prompt advice from the Doctor from the Neurology department, Jacqueline would have lost her life out of depression. It is until Jacqueline realizes that she's suffering mentally and not physically, and she becomes free to share of her discovery to Ramatoulaye among other friends of hers that she is half-cured and morally uplifted. Ramatoulaye reminds Aissatou of this story quoting the doctor's response to Jacqueline's tests at the hospital, “Madame Diack, I assure you that there is nothing at all wrong with your head... The problem is that you are depressed. You wish the conditions of life were different from what they are in reality, and this is what is torturing you” (p.46). In order to deliver herself, the doctor advised Jacqueline to go out more often, reconstruct her reasons for living and be courageous for in due time, she would overcome.

The doctor's response to Jacqueline's unending illnesses is a true depiction of how emotional trauma can cost individuals. The cause of her illness is her husband's recklessness. However, this truth and encouragement gives her new reasons to live, rejuvenated and appreciative of her strength.

Stereotyping

As one pursues the narratives of self as espoused by women, it is possible to establish that these narratives are strongly opposed to stereotyping. Accordingly, stereotyping is a form of discrimination which women feel has been deployed by their male counterparts to maintain their control over them. Ofori (2013) postulates that stereotyping, which for a long time has been a great concern to many female writers, is discriminative and domestically abuses females. Women, however, having lived under such patriarchal setups, accept to live, obey and surrender fearing their fate if they resent or reject the standards as Ezeife (2016) observes that women “comply and surrender themselves to various unpleasant social practices” hence consciously and unconsciously submitting to these patriarchal societal notions. He gives the example of the Igbo society in Nigeria where ‘a woman’s position is not only elevated in marriage but her ego, self-importance equally; hence, the Igbo phrase *Di bu ugwu nwanyi* ‘Husband is the pride of woman’. These patriarchal ideologies, he explains:

...are used to (1) sustain that man is associated with possession (women are always in their custody as daughters and wives); (2) promote the cultural notion that man can never be disadvantaged; and (3) recognize marriage as a source of power for men and a form of respectability for women.

Ba also views stereotyping as a form of labeling that is intended to target women for stigmatization and finally dissuade and derail them from achieving their objectives in life. For instance, upon joining school, women are stereotyped to deter them from pursuing their educational dreams. Ba writes that “Being the pioneers of the promotion of African women, men called us scatter-brained. Others labelled us devils” (p.15). Such discrimination is a form of stereotyping whose function is to stigmatize and deter women from pursuing their emancipation goals. Stereotyping does not stop with name-calling. Ba continues explaining how Aissatou’s divorce plan met many disapprovals with reasons that were stereotyping women to vulnerability and helplessness, sentiments such as “boys cannot succeed without their father” (p.32). However, all these threats that are more or less truthful in patriarchal spaces did not stop Aissatou from divorcing Mawdo Ba.

Women are also stereotyped as docile people. In casting women as docile, the intent is to make them easy prey for manipulation, control and subordination (Barasa, 2017). Once again, Aunty Nabou is seen as the unintentional agent of these male schemes and ideologies. Through this she argues, “The first quality in a woman is docility...To tell the truth, a woman does not need too much education” (p.30). This argument is rejected by feminist scholars who insist that for women to overcome patriarchal injustices executed by men through stereotypical ideologies then they must have the will power and educational empowerment (Indumathi & Ravichandran, 2020). They also reject the argument that male thinking/personality is inborn (personality being a product of environment and hereditary) and is responsible for the belief that women are mere objects without feelings, hence cannot be hurt by marital betrayal. This stereotypical thought is responsible for ideologies such as “A wife must understand, once and for all, and must forgive; she must not worry herself about “betrayals of the flesh” (p. 35), an argument that Ramatoulaye rebuts by saying, “When one begins to forgive, there is an avalanche of faults that comes crashing down, and the only thing that remains is to forgive again, to keep forgiving. Leave, escape from betrayal!” (p. 42)

The Egyptian society as represented in Soueif’s text also reveals the tuning of women to be meek, docile and forgiving due to the societal stereotypes that elevates the man to greater positions. Women are expected to watch, follow orders and apologize even for mistakes which are not theirs. They take blames for mistakes committed by the men in the society and from their own children. There are several instances in the text where women feel that they should be blamed for the consequences befalling their men after their own decisions just because ‘a woman breaks or makes her home with her own hands’. These are the instances where feminist literary critics such as Yaqoob (2015) appraise literature as an arena for deconstructing

cultural stereotypes and reject male hegemonic structures. For instance, the last days of Edward before his death, when he kept to himself and could not share anything that was happening in his life troubles Anne more than anything. She kept wondering how to help him, and blamed herself for not being able to help him out of his suffering. In her attempts to salvage her dying husband, she not only draws him further away, but also gets herself into more depression. The effects of this guilty- conscience increases with Edward's death after sometime. Anna feels she is responsible for his death and that had she done better as a wife, he would not have died. Moving on with her life as young woman becomes tough until Sir Charles urges her to leave, look for a new life as a young woman and stop wasting her years mourning over someone who made decisions out of their will. After all, Edward had the choice to remain and enjoy his life in England instead of going to fight in the military service unit. Consequently, the results of Edward's choices now become Anna's burdens to bear. This causes insurmountable pain, grief and emotional torture that leads to psychological breakdown (p. 29). However, her relief from this experience comes from her hearty and numerous conversations with Sir Charles, her father-in-law and friend (p.33). This friendship is what leads to her healing when she finally moves to Egypt.

Secondly, Zeinab Hanim continues staying in an unfulfilling relationship with her husband because of the kids. Sharif al-Baroudi feels angry over his father abandoning them for war. He's always upset and disregards his father because of his actions. He pities his mother for continuing to stay in that marriage. However, when she asks her mother of it, she asks him where she should have gone to leaving behind her big children, hence she had to stay. She further defends him saying that it was not his fault that he abandoned them, the circumstances forced so. This incidence clearly shows Zeinab taking blames over the repercussions of her husband's choices and decisions. She even apologizes to her kids on his behalf since women are supposed to be submissive to their husbands and be dutiful mothers without questioning the authority and acts of men that oppress and subjugate them (Ada, 2012).

This perspective of indoctrinating women as beings designed to be docile is supported by the psycho-analytic angle of feminism, the oedipal conflict dimension which enables Aunty Nabou, in *So Long a Letter*, to prevail upon her son, Mawdo Ba to bow to her pressure and take Young Nabou-his first cousin to be his docile and uneducated second wife-thereby promoting polygamy. Ramatoulaye asks, "Faced with this rigid mother moulded by the old morality, burning with the fierce ardour of antiquated laws, what could Mawdo Ba do?" (p. 31). This implies that girls and women, according to African traditional culture, were and perhaps are not supposed to exhibit intellectual acumen. This depicts this culture as one which socializes women through stereotypes to be coy. In rejecting stereotyping, the self-narratives of women are unequivocal in their resistance of male domination and in the process, healing is assured (Friskie, 2020).

In *The Map of Love*, Nur al-Huda Hanim, who is considerably young and well educated is forced to return to her husband to guarantee her dignity and safety because her brother has vowed not to marry before she gets married although she's sad about it. Nur al-Huda who is barely twenty two, well-educated and of a light spirit, is very sad because she has been forced to return to her husband after seven years of separation because her brother who is older had vowed not to marry "until he saw her safe in her husband's house" (p. 194). From the above illustration, Nur did not just go back to her husband willingly but consented to make her brother happy and to uphold the society's standards yet she's educated. It is because of the power, influence, authority, control and dominance that Nur's brother has (as a man) that he forces his sister to get married, a common injustice in patriarchal societies and an act of imprisonment (Pheiffer & Mrryhaj, 2019).

Polygamy

Polygamy is the act of men marrying more than one wife. The feminist politics against women subjugation oppose polygamy which they accuse of causing degradation to women. Kanorio & Mwangi (2022) postulate that Ba presents to the reader a patriarchal society where the male individuals are at liberty to marry many wives without considering the women's decisions and opinions over the same. This biased freedom is

enhanced by patriarchal beliefs that a man is a king and the wisest of all in the society, hence, according to *So Long a Letter*, (p.4) patriarchy is the root cause for polygamy which in turn is responsible for betrayal and abandonment of first families (p.10). Polygamy is allowed in the Islamic religion and culture where a man is legally allowed to marry four or more wives provided he can fend for all of them (Ali, 1983). Kehinde (2022) also confirms that the issue of polygamy in Africa isn't new, it has been in existence before the coming of Western religion, education and colonization (p.1). However, this act allows men to do whatever they want sexually hence imprisoning the woman to an unfulfilling marriage and also leads to betrayal and emotional trauma to the first woman and family in the current generation.

To emphasize the enormity of this betrayal and the subsequent anguish it causes in the hearts of women, Ramatoulaye strings together a chain of rhetorical questions when she is informed of her husband's marriage to Binetou, thus:

Was it madness, weakness, heartlessness, irresistible love? What inner, confusion, torment that led Modou Fall to marry Binetou? Madness or weakness? Heartlessness or irresistible love? What inner torment led Modou Fall to marry Binetou? (p. 12, 13)

In contemplation, she recounts the duration their marriage had lasted and the pains Modou's betrayal caused her and her twelve children. Modou not only added a rival to Ramatoulaye but also "burned his past, both morally and materially" (p.14) by loving someone else after twenty five years of commitment. As it can be deciphered from the tone of these rhetorical questions, polygamy is a source of emotional, psychological and economic suffering for both women and children of the first family. Ramatoulaye honestly but sternly emphasizes the challenge of polygamy to Dauoda Dieng', a long-time married friend, who comes as a suitor after Modou's death. She refuses to destroy Aminata's home, having been abandoned because of another woman by saying that Daouda should not imagine that polygamy is easy, "Those who are in it know the constraints, the lies, the injustices that weigh down their consciences in return for the ephemeral joys of change" (p. 70).

Ramatoulaye speaks of how she had to survive several things after Modou's betrayal and abandonment: the assumption of all financial duties, shyness of being in public places without scrutiny, the moral duties of bringing up the children and the emotional torment that comes with such strains. She says "I was surviving. In addition to my former duties, I took over Modou's as well" (p.54) because Modou himself "was excising me from his life and was proving it by his unequivocal attitude." (p. 54). Abandonment exposes women to duties hitherto considered male (p. 33) such as lining up to pay electricity and water bills, buying foodstuffs and denial of companionship which Ramatoulaye, through strong-will, survived (p.54).

To show that the society advocates for women oppression, while the men continue to be seen as superiors, Ramatoulaye, whom has been treated spitefully by the late Modou all along has to not only share her possessions equally with her co-wife but also use her resources to feed all the mourners who come to grieve with them. Thereafter, she has to clean the place and uphold the cultural mourning practices for forty days while Modou, the irresponsible husband and father, is referred to as a champion during his funeral (Kanorio & Mwangi, 2022). It should be noted that Ramatoulaye's acceptance to be subjugated and to continue upholding her position as Modou's wife after the painful episodes of betrayal and abandonment shows that "Ramatoulaye admits that she lacks the courage to radically break away from polygamy but would rather endure it as a painful imposition from her religion and the society" (Ngwoke & Ahaoutu, 2020).

Ba dismisses the excuse of raw instinct (id) that is an escapist mechanism put in place by the patriarchal order in society to sustain their perpetuation of female objectification, hence, their continued disrespect for the rights of women. Raw instincts are symptoms of machismo- the raw pride in being male. She is emotional to this perpetuation of lies. Through Ramatoulaye, she laments that "For Mawdo, and through him all men, remain an enigma to me" (p. 34). Ba expresses her disregard for these kinds of ideologies that

defend the bestialities of men which “A wife must understand, must forgive, she must not worry herself about “betrayals of the flesh” (p.35).

Aissatou, who finds such ideologies and escapist mechanisms despicable, pathetic and biased, divorces Mawdo Ba after he betrays their love and her sacrifices by marrying Young Nabou “as a duty to make his mother happy” (p. 31), decides to quit and leave with her four sons. She makes these decisions even after warnings and advice such as “you don’t burn the tree which bears the fruit and boys cannot succeed without their father” (p. 32). Ramatoulaye remembers Aissatou’s decision as if it were yesterday when her own tragedy befalls her three years after (p.33). Aissatou cannot bear the torment and pains of betrayal and abandonment that women in polygamous marriages sever. She thus “strips herself of his love and his name, with her dignity as the only worthy garment” (p. 33). Her disgust for male ego and ideologies of upholding polygamy reflects in her contemptuous attitude towards Modou’s betrayal and disrespect she gains for him thereafter. She laments:

I cannot accept what you’re offering me today in place of happiness we once had. You want to draw a line between heartfelt love and physical love...If you can procreate without loving, merely to satisfy the pride of your declining mother, then I find you despicable (p. 34).

Ba gives other examples of women who had been betrayed, abandoned or divorced in this society and how for some, their lives turned messy and withered after the emotional breakdown that comes with polygamy. Ramatoulaye counts the number of women of her generation whom she knew had been abandoned or divorced and what became of them: few whose remaining beauty had been able to capture a man who added happiness to their lives, and others who had lost all hope of renewal and whom loneliness had very quickly led to death. What a great disadvantage! These disadvantages are the reasons why Kehinde (2022) rejects polygamy today by saying “Polygamy itself is not what hurts women, but the chauvinistic society that damages any hope of women achieving their dreams- such as keeping them from having jobs, education, or accomplishing their goals” (p.2). She adds that if Africans continue to have a culture that is tied to monotonous patriarchal undertones, women and their children will always be suppressed and crippled with the inability to actualize and fulfill their wishes and wants. From the experiences of these women in polygamous families, Ba equates polygamy to a certain kind of domestic tragedy (Ngwoke & Ahaoutu, 2020). The results of polygamy is disappointments, disintegrations and pains just as seen when Aissatou divorces Mawdo when the latter takes a second wife; Modou suffers financially and later dies prematurely after his controversial second marriage to his daughter’s friend .

The same resistance and rejection of polygamy is explicitly expressed by Soueif in *The Map of Love* through Amal’s refusal to marry the Basha. When Kadri brings up his message about The Basha’s (a married man) desires of marrying Amal in Tawasi, with the promise of taking care of her well, just like other women, and using the law of ‘a man has a right to four’ to execute his plans, Amal turns him down, seeing it as stealing another woman’s husband and destroying the wife’s life. She registers the emotional turmoil and financial strains that women go through when such happen. Rasiyya, in support of Amal’s reasoning, confesses that she would ‘slit her husband’s throat and drink his blood’ (p. 361) if she knew or was told that her husband has acquired another wife. The hatred with which these women regard polygamy, however, does not shake the men’s pleasure of indulging in it. For when Amal asks why she should steal someone’s husband and cause her pain, Khadra responds:

And why should her life be destroyed? She’s in her house and you are in yours. And if she doesn’t like it she can say so and she has her children and her apartment and her alimony. And he doesn’t look like a miser (p. 361)

To men, as reflected by Khadra’s response, the surplus of wealth or its adequacy leaves a room to add another wife, and neglect the earlier responsibilities, without considering the emotional wellbeing of the

affected spouses.

At this point, it is the position of this study that polygamy leaves women despised, relegated, abandoned and worn out, feeling that they could or must have had a hand in it even when they had no faults. Polygamy belittles women and lowers their self-esteem. The patriarchal ideologies that prevail in it regard the former women as inadequate of something or unable to suffice their husbands' needs which is a fallacy. In most cases, they ask themselves what the other woman has which they don't have. Sadly, affected women who wallow in bitterness and self-pity after experiencing the pains of polygamy intensely dip themselves into despair and nervous breakdowns that lead to their sudden loss of taste in life and finally death, while the perpetrators remain to add more wives and more lives hence Ramatoulaye concludes that, "To overcome distress when it comes upon you demands strong will" (p.43)

Materialism and Decision-making

Shafi (2022) posits that most African societies view women as fully dependent on men while men are viewed as gods with the ability to make all decisions and changes in their own lives and that of women. This patriarchal practice equates the man to a supreme being, powerful, in charge and whose decisions are absolute, a freedom that men misuse to underrate, objectify, own and oppress women. Ezeife (2016) echoes that this "envisages man as an overbearing, forceful and domineering personality in the society." The scenario in *The Map of Love* where Sharif Basha is angered by Anna when she withdraws her own money from the bank without informing him illustrates the societal expectation of economic dependency of women on men. The disappointed Sharif Basha tells Anna that this is an unacceptable act that may make people think that he is not generous to his wife. His anger makes her think for a moment that she has made the wrong choice. This disagreement over material ownership ignites several indifferent reactions. First, Anna starts to feel guilty and wrong for withdrawing her own money (p.284). Secondly, Sharif Basha is angry not because she withdrew money without asking him but because of the impression the society gets if a woman goes to the bank alone (p.284). Thirdly, this misunderstanding and surrender to her husband's feelings compel her to give out the money for charity use and not for what she intended to do with it (p.285). She makes a donation to the orphaned children through Mrs. Butcher.

This leaves trails of unanswered questions such as: what mistake is there in using your own money as a woman? Does she have rights to own anything? Can she easily make her own decisions? Does she have a voice over her own life? The most surprising turn of events is that instead of Anna standing on the truth for her freedom of speech and making her husband realize that she's an individual entity, an adult, entitled to her space in decision making, she ends up apologizing for what she did. Later, she gives out that money for charity, just to please her husband. This confirms the vulnerability of women in this community and the authority of men over women economically, leaving women voiceless and economically dependent on men. This act of heroism leaves women destitute and helpless, giving room to psychological trauma when they cannot survive their responsibilities. However, the pain of this situation is subdued when Anna shares the experience with Layla and is offered financial protection by Zeinab.

Ba also presents the dilemma of economic dependence of women on men through the narrator Ramatoulaye. In their marriage life, they form a joint account that was to help them steer several developments of their family and buy some pieces of land and house, which, surprisingly, are entitled in Modou Falls' name, giving all the access and authority to him anytime, while leaving Ramatoulaye at Modou's mercy and honesty. Were it not for Ramatoulaye's job as a teacher and her skillfulness in providing for her family as a responsible woman, she would have drowned in distress and helplessness after Modou's betrayal to marry Binetou and his preceding abandonment of his first family. To her disgust, after Modou's death when the two wives are to know what inheritance they have, she realizes that Modou spent all the money in the joint bank account, used the land they purchased with him to build for Lady Mother-In-Law and borrowed even more from banks and willing lenders to sustain the lavish lifestyle demanded by Binetou, lest he lose her!

Furthermore, he dedicated all his belongings to the said family and even paid a monthly salary allowance of fifty thousand francs to Binetou (having withdrawn her from school, to establish his rule) which would continue even after Modou's death. Ramatoulaye tells Aissatou of Modou's quest to be financially independent that "Now I understand the terrible significance of Modou's abandonment of our joint bank account. He wanted to be financially independent so as to have enough elbow room" (p. 12). The dishonesty and economic domination displayed by Modou in the above scenario is what feminists revolt against in their fight for equality for women.

Ironically, the suitors who come as 'wife-inheritors' to these widows in these societies are not only yearning to own their bodies but also to greedily grab the deceased's wealth that has been left behind. Hence, as the male domination over economic resources is passed from one perpetrator to the other the women continue suffering mercilessly. Ba as a feminist announces her disregard for this kind of patriarchal practice when Ramatoulaye openly and sternly refuses to be inherited and to be part of Tamsir's collections. His quest for adventure and greed for wealth and more powers cannot let him wait till mourning ends. His wives work for him and obey him regardless of his irresponsibility just as Ramatoulaye says that "Your income can meet neither their needs nor those of your numerous children" (p.60) hence "one of your wives dyes, another sells the fruit, the third untiringly turns the handle of her sewing machine"(p.60). However, Tamsir, respected as a god but offers nothing to these women apart from children dominates the women and rule them as his servants (p. 60). Ramatoulaye thus scornfully shuts Tamsir to purge himself of his dreams of conquest for she will never be his wife (p. 60). Funnily, even after Ramatoulaye turning down Tamsir and Daouda Dieng's proposal, she still had several other suitors, old men and young men, whom she equally turned down earning her the name 'lioness' or 'mad woman'. She wondered what beauty she still had after carrying twelve children, and withering due to stress, and the response was/is only one: they wanted the inheritance.

Finally, the disbelief that Modou has over Aissatou's economic ability to buy a car for Ramatoulaye is an illustration that women are expected to be poor and unable to own anything, unless with the support of men or rather their husbands. She narrates:

Modou surprised, unbelieving, inquired into the source of the car. He never accepted the true story. Like Mawdo's mother, he too believed that a goldsmith's daughter had a heart. (p. 56).

Identity loss in marriage

Another cultural practice that endeavors to portray women as men's property is that after marriage, a woman should automatically take up her husband's name. This is because in traditional African societies, a woman is told by her mother and other elderly women that through marriage, she is brought into a new household: that of her husband, hence "as an outsider within her newly adopted homestead, she is expected to live under the shadow and control of her husband and his parents, as well as his extended family" (Mutinda, 2007). Layla-al-Baroudi subverts this by refusing to use the husband's name as part of her own. This makes Anna wonder if this cultural practice is important. She records Layla's response over the same saying, "Why would I leave my name? She asked. 'When it is suitable, I am Madame Ghamrawi, but I am always Layla al-Baroudi'" (p.108). Seemingly, Layla uses both names for her own advantage interchangeably. Depending on the occasion, she can use the husband's name or hers.

Additionally, Anna Winterbourne loses her identity and family when she gets married to Sharif Basha. Trabelsi (2010) observes that her "new friendships and marriage, which defy cultural and national borders, are predicated upon the loss of her old, British friendships and privileges" (p.109). Being an English woman, culture demands that she learns and embraces the culture of the people to whom she is married. Hence, she becomes an Egyptian, losing her attachment to her friend Caroline and Sir Charles who are in Europe. She also becomes distant to her what friends in Egypt since they opposed intercultural marriage, especially Lord Cromer. Zeinab registers her concern over whether Sharif Basha will offer protect and

unfailing love to Anna after her sacrifices for their marriage to work saying that for Anna, “her whole life will change. Her people will be angry with her. And the British here will shun her” (p.229) and “She will be torn off from her own people. Even her language she will not be able to use” (p. 230).

Similarly, as an act of freedom and detachment from this cultural bearing, Aissatou strips herself of Mawdo’s name after his abandonment of her family and her three sons. As she divorces him, she not only disrespects his despicable decision but also ceases to use his name in the letter she writes to him: “I am stripping myself of your love, your name. Clothed in my dignity, the only garment, I go my way” (p. 34). This is why Makgwale (2022) opines that Aissatou’s refusal of being an option to Mawdo Ba portrays her stand as a radical feminist who subverts the detrimental submissive nature that women are conditioned to in their marriages which creates breeding grounds for more unchecked patriarchy in them.

CONCLUSION

SouEIF and Ba construct characters that denounce patriarchal injustices that have for a long time degraded, subjugated, discriminated and traumatized in their texts *The Map of Love* and *So Long a Letter* as explained in this paper. Ramatoulaye, Aissatou, Jacqueline, Anna, Isabel, Amal, Zeinab and Leyla are among the women who go through several prejudice in their patriarchal societies which leave them destitute and troubled. The troubles they go through in their different contexts include objectification, polygamy, stereotyping, economic dominance by their male counterparts, loss of identity upon marriage, blames for divorce and dysfunctional marriages. These leave them with psychological, emotional, moral, financial and physical wounds that they need to heal from over time. Consequently, the paper establishes that self-narratives are a form of healing to the affected females. Through narration of their experiences in their spaces, these women find strength, encouragement, support and motives that not only heal them but also give them hope for a better tomorrow as seen in Ramatoulaye’s case.

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