



## To End the War: A Global Agenda of Focu-Feminism

Nkechinyere Chukwu<sup>[a],\*</sup>; Abayomi Awelewa<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>PhD, Department of English, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.  
 \* Corresponding author.

Received 6 October 2021; accepted 17 October 2021  
 Published online 26 October 2021

### Abstract

Most gender inclined theories are aimed at awareness creation on experiences of women in order to promote their welfare. However, there is contention about the practicability of some of them because of their insensitivity to race and class. The controversy arises from the fact that none of them has the capability to *completely* tackle oppression against women, because, one which is applicable to a particular woman's situation in a certain cultural background, might be totally unfeasible to another in a different cultural environment. This contention is what this study perceives as an intra-theoretical war, which focu-feminism emerges to end. Focu-feminism argues that women's oppression varies from one circumstance to another and from one cultural background to another; each woman, therefore, requires to focus on herself and employ an approach she considers most suitable to overcoming oppression of any kind. The aim of this study is to investigate the global feasibility of focu-feminism with a view to ascertaining its applicability to the situation of the African woman. Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* is used for this investigation.

**Key words:** Feminism; Focu-feminism; Gender Studies; Mariama Ba; Womanism

Chukwu, N., & Awelewa, A. (2021). To End the War: A Global Agenda of Focu-Feminism. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 23(2), 49-56. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/12316>  
 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/12316>

### INTRODUCTION

Among the problems that constitute impediments to societal development especially in Africa, gender

affiliated factors seem to be the most pronounced. Though they negatively affect the progress of society in general, women bear their brunt in particular. Fidelia Nwobi (2018, p.114) defines gender as “the difference between men and women in a given society with regard to right, entitlements and obligations”. Gender stratification is worse in Africa where roles are constructed and apportioned to individuals based on being male or female. In traditional African society for instance, girls are expected to do domestic chores that are considered menial like cooking, washing of plates and clothes, sweeping and nursing of younger ones while waiting to be married. Boys are expected to engage in other tasks that are considered herculean like cutting of firewood, making of mounds/heaps, climbing of palm and coconut trees, and others. At the commercial domain, men maintain economic independence and comfortability through engaging in lucrative businesses while women are expected to stay at home to give birth to many children or at most engage in petty businesses whose economic worth amounts to almost nothing. Women suffer a lot in a society whose belief system is built on gender inclinations. Joseph A. Mayaki and Emmanuel E. Omobowale (2021, p.72) note that in such society, the term, ‘woman’ socially connotes “a form of inferiority, rather than ... humanity”.

As awareness on human right increases, people begin to resist injustice against women. Different individuals and groups begin to engage in protest against the perceived injustice through their various platforms. Literary writers and critics are among those who use their ideological platforms to engage in the protest. One of such is feminist ideology, which was championed by women to particularly address how women are being treated and how they are supposed to be treated in society. Feminism is a struggle that is geared towards welfare of women. Elizabeth Janeway (1973, p. viii) perceives the struggle as “a fight for the very right to fight, to assert one's [women's] demands. To declare that one's [women's] ambitions and needs are as important as those

of men". Mainstream Feminism did not enjoy impressive acceptance from women of African descent as well as women of colour because according to Mobolanle Sotunsa (2008) and Sandra Nwokocha (2018), it failed to take their peculiarities into consideration. Bell Hooks (1998, p.1,845) agrees with the above view by stating that "racism abounds in the writings of white feminists re-enforcing white supremacy and negating the possibility that women will bond politically across ethnic and racial boundaries".

Stephen Eyeh (2012, p.67) ascribes unacceptability of feminism to "racial discrimination, lack of representation of black women's interest and inability to accommodate the menfolk especially from the perspective of the radical feminists". Ezinwanyi Adam (2012) corroborates Eyeh's opinion by stating that feminism was warmly accepted in Africa but its radical variant was not well received by African women because it negates Africa's esteemed socio-cultural values. Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi's dislike for feminism (particularly its radical model) is made obvious by pointing out the difference between it and womanism. According to her, "if the ultimate aim of radical feminism is a separatist, idyllic existence away from the hullabaloo of the men's world, the ultimate aim of womanism is the unity of blacks everywhere under the enlightened control of men and women" (1985, p.70). For the reason of the above limitation found in feminism, Julie Hare quoted by Clenora Hudson-Weems (1998, p.18) suggests that "women who are calling themselves black feminists need another word to describe what their concerns are.... Women of African descent ... [who] embrace feminism do so because of the absence of a suitable existing framework for their individual needs as African women". Alice Walker proposes womanism as an alternative ideology to fill the gap identified by Hare. She defines a womanist as:

A black feminist or feminist of colour ... A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually, Appreciates and prefers women's emotional flexibility (values tears as a natural counterbalance of a laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, and/or non-sexually, committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically for health. Traditionally universalist, loves music, Loves dance, Loves the moon, Loves the spirit, Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the folk, Loves herself (1983, pp.xi-xii).

The idea of 'a woman to love other women sexually' in Walker's proposition obviously shows her support for lesbianism, which is "an abominable act both in African culture and traditional religion, and Christianity" as Adam (2012, p.77) noted. Walker's womanist ethos is detested by African women owing to its negative implication on Africa's 'sacred orientation on sexuality', which is central to family life as important aspect of her culture. It is not acceptable and cannot be appropriated in African domain; such act is an anathema in African environment where family life that is situated in a marriage between a man

and a woman/women, is tenaciously held as a part of the people's culture.

The limitations in the feminist and Walker's womanist ideologies incited contention and led to intra-theoretical war among scholars. This prompts Okonjo-Ogunyemi to propose an African domesticated womanism as an alternative ideology. It is meant to meet the peculiar needs of black women in their distinctive environment. It advocates cohesion between black men and women to work out their progress. But Zoe Wicomb flaws Okonjo-Ogunyemi's stance on the basis of uncertainty about sincerity of black men in term of the cohesion agenda. Her apprehension is obvious in the following query: "how can we fail to infer that empowering black men advocates the mimicking of white patriarchy?" ((1996, p.46). Nwokocha's position further substantiates Wicomb's apprehensive opinion by arguing that "... black cohesion is good if men are sincere allies" (2018, p.38). George Gallup (2002) further ascribed this apprehension to the suspicion that some men would be difficult to convince to enter into teamwork with women because they believe that associating with matters that concern women is an indication of weakness.

To this study, cohesion between black men and women is not a problem for the African woman, but it probes the feasibility of this 'cohesion' in a patriarchal society like Africa where it seems to be a man is to be everything and to be a woman is to be nothing. According to Alex Chinwuba Asigbo and Emeka Nwosu :

The womanist disposition is that which sees the woman, not as the man's rival but his complement and help mate; which appreciates deeply the vital role of the African woman in the scheme of things and is comfortable with it. *It is a mental disposition which sees the woman's husband as her crown hence it is her duty to protect that crown.* (Italics mine) (2016, p.221).

Considering the position of Asigbo and Nwosu on the role of the African woman in a marital relationship as the womanist views it, this study believes that the black woman would always be ready to comply with the man in order to make the suggested cohesion work. But the metonymic statement of Asigbo and Nwosu in the following expression, '*which sees the woman's husband as her crown hence it is her duty to protect that crown*', further exacerbates apprehension about the real aim behind the cohesion agenda of the womanist. This is because the metonymic statement seems to put the man in a position of authority to reinforce his superiority over the woman; and the protection of this superior position and its antecedent control over the woman, is what the womanist points out as the duty of the woman. However, serious caution needs to be taken in making such proposition to avoid what appears to this study as a subtle enforcement of subjugation on the woman. If such proposition is not carefully handled, it would defeat the main goal of most gender inclined ideologies and make nonsense of their common emancipatory

project. This study is apprehensive about the cohesion between black men and women as upheld by Ogunyemi's womanist approach because Africa is a patriarchal society. Considering the fact that patriarchy as noted by Abigail Eruaga (2018, p.212) "places authority, control, superiority and supremacy in the hands of the male, father, brother and uncle, provided that such a person is a male in contradistinction to a female", subjugation of women is inevitable in such sphere. This apprehension is hinged on the fact that "patriarchal ideology is socially, culturally and religiously ingrained and operates through the exploitation, inferiorisation and dehumanization of women" (Eruaga, 2014, p.44). Moreover, owing to the fact that African culture is embedded in patriarchy, men would always tend to exert control over women. How possible is it to convince men to collaborate with women in such environment and even if they agree, how genuine is the agreement? Besides, Ogunyemi's womanism lacks global viability; its sole focus on the welfare of the black people gives it racial sentiment since non-black people are not included in its welfare scheme. This makes it look like repeating the same racial insensitivity that limited the universal acceptance of mainstream feminism. Owing to this limitation, this study thinks there is a need for a literary approach that could be universally applicable to the situation of every woman irrespective her peculiar cultural background and unique experience.

Furthermore, it is the position of this study that the black woman without doubt, would always be ready to enter into teamwork with the man as the womanist upholds but it wishes to inquire: what option does the womanist make available to the Nigerian woman in her unique domain where most men believe that her role starts and end in kitchen and bedroom? Men who hold this kind of belief would not want to collaborate with women in important matters which they believe are exclusively theirs. What option of survival does the womanist present to an Egyptian woman in such an area where wife battering seems to be a part of religious injunction for the man as seen in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*? As a child, Firdaus recalls that her "father ... knew very few things in life..., how to beat his wife and make her bite the dust each night" (El Saadawi, 1983, p.12). What suggestion does the womanist give the girl-child from the Northern Nigeria where marriage is rigidly regarded as the first and last bus-stop of a woman and marital choices must be made by her father or other men with total exclusion of the girl to be married? For instance, Naja in Yero's *Naja* is denied the right to make a choice of a life partner. Her father forces her to marry a man older than her father's elder brother, because he uses her for debt settlement between him and the creditor (the suitor). She faces verbal abuse as well as physical battering from both men for failure to comply with docile behaviors expected of women from their community. What does the womanist expect a girl in such a hellish

marriage that negates all possibilities for her development and self-actualisation to do?

Even though the womanist frowns at the proposition of the radical feminist who advocates a total 'done away' with men, but the womanist fails to give the woman an alternative feasible option that could help her to fulfill her destiny in case she encounters any unbearable difficulty in the course of her cohesion with men. Besides, the womanist idea of 'cohesion' cannot be effectively applied to the unique situational experiences of different women across the globe. What this lapse communicates is that there is a need for another theoretical approach that is not only applicable in a certain confined environment but globally applicable irrespective of a woman's cultural background and unique experience. Focu-feminism is proposed to fill this gap and to finally end the intra-theoretical war.

Focu-feminism as proposed by Onyeka Iwuchukwu (2015, p.77) opines that "oppression and subjugation of women comes in different forms, shapes, and magnitudes predicated by each woman's cultural background and circumstance". It therefore "proposes the need for each woman to focus on herself, her peculiar circumstances, and cultural background for liberation from perceived oppression, for empowerment and self-actualization" (Iwuchukwu, p.77). Focu-feminism upholds that oppression against women comes in different forms to different women in distinct cultural backgrounds; every woman, therefore requires to look inward and employ a strategy she considers most suitable for overcoming oppression of any kind. This is owing to the fact that whatever strategy of survival employed by a particular woman might not be efficacious to another woman's circumstance due to the distinctive nature of each woman's oppressive experience as well as the peculiarities of the environment in which she finds herself. Placed within the premise of focu-feminism, Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* depicts how two major female characters who find themselves in different oppressive marriages adopt different approaches to overcome owing to their focus on their inwardness and the peculiarities of their situation and background, thus validates the feasibility of focu-feminism to the situation of the African woman.

---

## FOCU-FEMINIST READING OF MARIAMA BA'S SO LONG A LETTER

---

What makes *So Long a Letter* different from other novels is its epistolary style. Ba uses the novel to convey two major messages. Firstly, with the character of Ramatoulaye, she leaves a focu-feminist note for all African and non-African women, that there is no hard-and-fast rule for women's emancipation; but self-awareness is the key that can propels a choice for any kind of distinct assertiveness and emancipation that a

woman desires. Secondly, Ba uses Aissatou's reaction to her unique marriage situation to debunk "... the notion that a woman must compulsorily become married and [stay married] in order to have a fulfilled life" (Sophia Ogwude 2013, p.191). However, the later opinion requires to be expressed with extra caution to avoid misinforming and giving African women who are allies of radical feminists the license to abandon African esteemed way of life and go astray. This is because exclusive consideration of self-actualisation accomplished by Aissatou after walking out of her marriage might compel a reader of the text to perceive marriage as bondage for the African woman. But placing side by side the responses of the two women to their unique circumstances, to a greater extent, would demystify such opinion; and most importantly reveal Ba's focu-feminist alliance.

In her letter to Aissatou, Ramatoulaye chronicles their pathetic experiences in their different marriages, which are unique in various ways. While informing the addressee of her (Ramatoulaye's) past and present situations, the addresser sympathetically takes her through the memory lane of how her (Aissatou's) mother-in-law forces a second wife on her husband and he fails to resist his mother's cajoled gesture; instead, "Mawdo Ba agrees to go to the rendezvous of the wedding...[with the new girl, Nabou]" (p.30). This makes him to abandon his first wife, Aissatou and her four sons without considering the sacrifices she has made to sustain their marriage for many years. The implication of the abandonment is that "[f]rom then on, you [Aissatou] no longer counted. What of the time and the love you had invested in your home? Only trifles, quickly forgotten. Your sons? ... you no longer counted, any more than did your four sons" (p.30). She was "advised to compromise" by not leaving the marriage because "[b]oys cannot succeed without their father" (p.31) but Aissatou chooses to walk out of the marriage with her sons, leaving a letter of divorce for her husband. In her letter to Mawdo Ba, she clearly rejects him in the following words, "I am stripping myself of your love, your name. Clothed in my dignity, the only worthy garment, I go my way" (p.32).

Aissatou walks out of the marriage because she could not bear the hurt and humiliation caused by her husband's betrayal. She does not believe that a woman should stay and perish in a marriage where mutual love and respect are not maintained between a couple. Though she does her best to establish her home on the platform of love, peace and unity but intrusion of her mother-in-law gets the relationship soured. She decides to leave the marriage and pursue self-actualization through education. Her friend commends her courageous reaction thus:

And you left. You had the surprising courage to take your life into your own hands.... And instead of looking backwards, you looked resolutely to the future. You set yourself a difficult task; ... books saved you.... They enabled you to better yourself. What society refused you, they granted: examinations sat and

passed took you also to France. The school of interpreters, from which you graduated, led to your appointment into the Senegalese Embassy in the United States. You make a very good living. You are developing in peace ... (Ba, 1981, pp.32-33).

Although she was forced out of the marriage by her husband betrayal, her reaction would not please the womanist who might perceive this as being negatively radical; this study views it otherwise. The African society would expect her as a woman and mother to be glued to such marital relationship even when it does not favour her at any angle; but her rejection of that option shows that she has looked inward and clearly understands that leaving the marriage is the most suitable choice for fulfilling her destiny as seen in the above excerpt, thus substantiates the position of the focu-feminist of inward-looking for a woman to overcome oppression of any kind. Her choice affords her the opportunity to acquire education, good job and better living condition. Her friend's commendation confirms the advantage of her new choice in the following expression, "[h]ow I envied your calmness during your last visit! There you were, rid of the mask of suffering. Your sons were growing up well, contrary to all predictions. You ... [are] the courageous pioneer of a new life" (p.34).

Similarly, Ramatoulaye makes every possible effort for her marriage with Modou Fall to work out. She works very hard to meet his domestic needs and to maintain unity and peace in the home by loving and respecting his people (her in-laws). This effort is appreciated by Tamsir, her brother-in-law, who tells her, "he [your husband] praises you for the quarter of century of marriage in which you gave him all the happiness wife owes her husband, his family, especially myself, his elder brother, thank you. You always held us in respect. You know that we are Modou's blood" (p.37). Her high level of cooperation is obvious in the way she "... completely sacrifice[s] herself in order to make her man happy" as Asigbo and Nwosu (2006, p.226) prescribe. According Ramatoulaye, "I loved my house. You can testify to the fact that I made it a haven of peace where everything had its place, that I created a harmonious symphony of colours. ... I love Modou. You can testify to the fact that, mobilized day and night in his service, I anticipated his slighted desire" (p.56).

After all these, what she gets in return for her love and kind gestures towards her husband, Modou Fall, is betrayal. Without informing her, he married their daughter's classmate and friend, Binetou and abandoned Ramatuolaye and her twelve children. She recounts the effect of the abandonment in the following words, "I lived in a vacuum. And Modou avoided me. Attempts friends and family to bring him back to the fold proved futile.... He never came again; his new found happiness gradually swallowed up his memo of us. He forgot about us" (p.46). While thinking of how committed and faithful she has been to him but receives the opposite treatment, Ramatoulaye is overwhelmed by the hurt of the betrayal

even after his death. In a letter written to her friend, Aissatou, she recounts her pain in the following excerpt:

My efforts cannot for long take my mind off my disappointment. ...But my despair persists but my rancor remains, but the waves of an immense sadness break in me! Madness or what? What inner torment led Modou Fall to marry Binetou? And to think that I love this man passionately, to think that I gave him thirty years of my life, to think that twelve times over I carried his children. The addition of a rival 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 disapproval (Ba, 1981, p.12).

Her effort in the day-to-day running of the home as seen in chapter nine of the novel, is a demonstration of her sincere commitment to the complementarity project campaigned by the womanist. This is obvious in her act of being the first person to wake up in the morning and the last person to go to bed in the night in a bid to meet the domestic needs of the family. The skillful combination of her career as a teacher with daily management of the home makes her an epitome of a dutiful African woman, who in her multi-task capability maintains a healthy balance between her career and the management of her home. According to her, "I loved Modou, compromised with his people. I tolerated his sisters, who too often would desert their own homes to encumber my own" (p.19). She reveals that:

Every night when he went out he would unfold and try on several of his suits before settling on one. The others, impatiently rejected, would slip to the floor. I would have to fold them again and put them back in their places; and this extra work I discovered, I was doing only to help him in his effort to be elegant in his seduction of another woman, [Binetou] (Ba, 1981, p.38).

Her forbearance of all inconveniences is a proof of her compromise and acceptance of the man (Modou Fall) as the womanist offers as a way the black woman can ensure a harmonious relationship with men, yet it does not make the man to cooperate with her. While Ramatoulaye is doing her best to ensure that their marriage works out, her husband is doing the contrary. His frequent absence at home and avoidance of food with flimsy excuses do not portray him as a reliable ally. His hypocritical acts keep his wife worried all the time. She reveals that:

I thought of his absence, all long. He had simply said, 'Don't expect me for lunch.' I thought of other absences, quite frequent these days, crudely clarified today yet well hidden yesterday under the guise of trade union meetings. He was also on a strict diet, 'to break the stomach's egg,' he would say laughingly ... (Ba, 1981, p.38).

Besides, her cooperation with the man is evident in her effort to contribute to meeting the material and financially needs of her family. She, in collaboration with her husband opens a joint account from which they cater for their capital projects like house. But to her greatest disappointment, she discovers after the death of her husband that "[a]lthough the title deeds of his house

bear his name, it is nonetheless our common property, acquired by our joint savings. Insult upon injury! (p.10) Modou Fall abandons their joint bank account so that he could save enough money to meet the needs of his new wife, Binetou whom he places on "a monthly allowance of fifty thousand francs, just like a salary due to her" (p.10). He does not care to know how his first wife and twelve children are faring. Modou Fall proves that he is not a trustworthy ally, thus confirming the apprehension of Nwokocha and Wicomb on the womanist notion of cohesion between men and women.

Although Ramatoulaye commends Aissatou's courage to walk out of an abusive marriage and focus on self-actualisation, she neither displays any hostile nor vindictive attitude towards her husband. She also acknowledges the progress made by Aissatou after she walks out her marriage but she does not indicate any intention of leaving her own marriage even when it is also abusive. It appears that Adam forms her opinion about Ramatoulaye based on the above reasons. In her essay, she describes Ramatoulaye as "an extremist who either refused to or ignorantly did not assert herself well and her position as a wife not just mother. She rather placed herself in the position of a 'slave' who slaves herself out – does everything possible in order to please her master(s)" (p.86). Her opinion seems to be formed based on her misconception of Ramatoulaye's *choice* to maintain a peaceful and harmonious family life as an African woman *as being non-assertive*. Adam fails to put into consideration the reasons for Ramatoulaye's actions and reactions to the major and minor situations as events unfold in the text and their contributions to the development of the novel's plot. She equally fails to acknowledge her sensitivity to her African background, which guides her to make and focus on a choice that helps her to overcome her situation as the focu-feminist suggests. Perhaps, the above reasons are dependent on Adam's personal conception of assertiveness. Dorothy Etuk defines

... assertiveness ... [as] the comfort of the [protagonists] to express their view and need without stepping on others, ... Assertive people realize they want to have a long term relationship with people, ... in-order to do this, [they] do not create barriers with anger or humiliation, instead, they contrive positive means of over-coming their limitations (Etuk, 2013, p.296).

Etuk's conception of assertiveness would aid in understanding Ramatoulaye's responses to the issues in her life. To this study, Ramatoulaye's responses are in alignment with focu-feminist orientation not that of non-assertiveness. Besides, her ability to exercise the right to take control of the situations in her life without having to be cajoled is commendable. Her assertiveness is obvious in the courage to choose and employ approaches she considers most suitable for overcoming her situations irrespective of anyone's opinion and suggestion. Her firm

position in the early part of the story where she decides to stay in the marriage without having to succumb to the pressures of people's opinion is assertiveness in a distinctive form.

Conceivably, Ramatoulaye looks inward and concludes that the option chosen by Aissatou would not be appropriate for handling her peculiar situation even though their marital experiences share certain similarities. Despite the pressure that is mounted on her by her children, family members and friends to leave the marriage, she sternly maintains her decision to stay. Daba, her daughter advises her to "[b]reak with him, mother! Send this man away. He has respected neither you nor me. Do what Auntie Aissatou did; break with him... I can't see you fighting over a man with a girl of my age" (p.39). In addition, friends urge her to seek magical powers for the restoration of her marriage but she rejects the option because according to her,

To act as I was urged would have been to call myself into question I was already reproaching myself for a weakness that had not prevented the degradation of my home. Was I to deny myself because Modou had chosen another path? No, I would not give in to the pressure. My mind and my faith rejected supernatural power. They rejected this easy attraction, which kills any will to fight. I look reality in the face. (Ba, 1981, p.49)

She considers that walking out of a marriage she has invested twenty-five years with twelve children does not worth it. She rather decides to employ a strategy she thinks could help her to survive the situation as focu-feminists espoused. She adopts 'forgiveness, focuses her attention and care on her children, keeps herself busy with her daily duties, and goes to a cinema centre to watch didactic movies' as survival strategies. According to her,

Leave! Draw a clean line through the past. ... What would now be recorded, there would hold no love, confidence, grandeur or hope. ... 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 on forgiving. (Ba, 1981, p.40)

She makes it clear that "[y]es, I was well aware of where the right solution lays, the dignified solution. And, to my family's great surprise, unanimously disapproved of by my children ... I chose to remain [because for me, that is the most appropriate option]" (p.45). She instead employs focu-feminist strategy of looking inward to devise a strategy most suitable for overcoming the problem.

As much as she decides not to leave the marriage, at the same time, she would not want to yield to the depression caused by the betrayal. Engaging herself with her daily duties becomes a strategy rather than thinking about the soured marriage. She reveals that "I faced up to the situation bravely. I carried out my duties. They filled the time and channeled my thoughts." (p.52) Besides, she goes to a cinema centre to watch interesting movies in order to keep her mind out of the depressive situation, and their didactic messages convey healing to her injured emotion. She chooses to engage in other activities that

give her pleasures as survival strategies as the focu-feminist upholds and it works out for her. She captures the advantages of the survival strategies in the following words:

The early shows at the cinema filled me with delight, gave me the courage to meet the curious, gaze of people. ... What a great distraction from distress is the cinema! Intellectual films, those with a message ... all these were my companions. Learned from them lessons of greatness, courage at perseverance. They deepened and widened my vision of world.... The cinema inexpensive means of recreation, can thus give health pleasure." (Ba, 1981, pp.51-52)

Later, Ramatoulaye reveals to her friend why she does not want to leave her marriage. According to her, "I am one of those who can realize themselves fully and bloom only when they form part of a couple. Even though I understand your stand, *even though I respect the choice of liberated women, I have never conceived of happiness outside marriage*" (pp.55-56) (emphasis mine). Her position in the above statements implies that even though the situation in the marriage is not satisfactory, she would rather devise a means of surviving in it than walking out; she has looked inward and understood herself as a person who attaches value to family life. One of her strategies for surviving the 'heat' in the marriage is obvious in the following words, "[m]y love for my children sustained me. They were a pillar; I owed them help and affection" (p.53). This portrays her as a quintessential African woman. Africans attach a great value to family life because they believe that if individuals are well raised in good families; the larger society would become a better one. She strongly believes that "[t]he success of a nation ... depends inevitably on the family" (p.89) and raising well-nurtured individuals becomes her contribution to this success.

Unwavering position of Ramatoulaye in other issues that develop in the later part of the novel is enough evidence to locate her in the realm of assertiveness. She refuses a marriage proposal from her former suitor, Daouda Dieng then married with children, who proposes to remarry her after the death of her husband but she chooses not to accept the proposal in the following statement, "it is not that the presence of my young children poses a problem; he could have filled the role of the father who had abandoned them. But... my own personal refusal is the only thing that conditions me" (p.66). She respectfully but bluntly tells him that she does not want to come between him and his family, knowing fully well that it is the intrusion of another woman that puts her marriage asunder. Her reason is obvious in a letter to Daouda Dieng in which she addresses him in the following words, "[y]ou are chasing after a woman who has remained the same, Daouda, despite the intense ravages of suffering. ... Abandoned yesterday because of a woman, I cannot lightly bring myself between you and your family" (p.68).

Her unequivocal disposition in the course of their discussion does not portray her as a non-assertive person. She, in a non-violent manner confronts gender based injustice against women in the following query “[w]hen will education be decided for children on the basis not of sex but of talent?” (p.61) In another assertive manner, Ramatoulaye enlightens him about women’s right thus, “We [women] have a right, just as you have, to education, which we ought to be able to pursue to the furthest limits of our intellectual capacities. We have a right to equal well-paid employment, to equal opportunities. The right to vote is an important weapon” (p.61). Her image as revealed by her statements above places her quite contrary to Adam’s perception of her. Her disposition here portrays her as a woman that is aware of her right. Nevertheless, her reaction to her husband’s treatment in particular as seen in the beginning of the novel, is neither docility nor gullibility as Adam’s opinion of her presumably suggests. To this study, her decision to remain faithful and committed to the marriage is *a choice which she intentionally makes* because she thinks that such choice is the most appropriate to achieving that, which she considers most important than any other thing in her life -- *staying in a marriage* as she makes known to her divorcee friend in chapter seventeen of the novel.

The outspokenness she displays in a response to Tamsir, her late husband’s brother’s request to inherit her, is a clear indication of a healthy assertive disposition. She refuses to be used for what she describes as completion of his collection of wives. She emphatically tells him, “[y]ou forget that I have a heart, ... that I am not an object to be passed from hand to hand. You don’t know what marriage means to me: it is an act of faith and of love, the total surrender of oneself to the person one has chosen and who has chosen you. I emphasized the word ‘chosen’ ” (p.58). Her emphasis on the word ‘chosen’ implies that her marriage to Modou Fall and her reactions to the issues that arise in the relationship are the choices she intentionally makes. Her commitment to him majorly depends on her own choice to marry and stay with him. Her rejection of Tamsir is summed up in her resolute statement, “I shall never be your wife” (p.58). It takes a self-confident, sincere, positive-minded, courageous and assertive individual with a good sense of self-worth to respond that way, and these are qualities with which Ramatoulaye is made of.

---

## CONCLUSION

---

Examination of the two major female characters in Ba’s *So Long a Letter* confirms the validation of focu-feminist orientation to the African woman’s situation. Ba uses their actions and reactions to the issues in their lives to file their distinctive assertiveness, thus unveils her focu-feminist posture. Their unique responses to their

peculiar situations are embodiments of focu-feminist ideal approach for overcoming oppression of any kind, not only for women in African vicinity but also for others in the global domain, thus confirming global feasibility of focu-feminism.

---

## REFERENCES

---

- Adam, E. E. (2012). African womanism and the home: The three perspectives of womanhood in Mariama Ba’s *So Long a Letter*. *Gender Issues: International Journal of the Feminism/Womanist Theorists*, 4, 76-91.
- Asigbo, A. C., & Nwosu, E. (2016). Feminism aesthetics and the womanist Agenda: A re-reading of Zulu Sofola’s *The Sweet Trap*. In E. Nwabueze (Ed.), *African female playwrights: A study of matter and manner* (pp. 220-229). Enugu: ABIC Books.
- Ba, M. (1981). *So long a letter*. Translated by Modupe Bode Thomas. Dakar: Heinemann.
- El Saadawi, N. (1983). *Woman at point zero*. London: Zed Books.
- Eruaga, A. O. (2014). Surviving patriarchal bridle through bonding: Jude Dibia’s Erika in *Unbridled. JALAL.: A Journal of Language and Literature*, 5(1), 43-55.
- Eruaga, A. O. (2018). Patriarchy and illusion of women empowerment in Ahmed Yerima’s *Jakadiya*. In A. Osisanwo, K. Adebisi-Adelabu and A. Mosobalaje (Eds.), *Literary and linguistic perspectives on Orality, literacy and gender studies* (pp.211-220). Ibadan: Kraft Books.
- Etuk, D. (2013). Celebrating female assertiveness in Emecheta’s *second-class citizen and destination Biafra*. In S. Ogwude (Ed.), *Writing the Female Image in African Fiction* (pp. 295-310). Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Eyeh, S. (2012). Feminism and womanism as binary theory of complementary. *Gender Issues: International Journal of the Feminism/Womanist Theorists*, 4, 53-75.
- Gallup, G. H. (2002). *The gallup poll*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Hooks, B. (1998). Black feminism: History perspective. In H. P. Liggins, et. al (Eds.), *Call and response: The riverside anthology of African American literary tradition*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Hudson-Weems, C. (1998). African womanism. In H. P. Liggins, et. al (Eds.), *Call and response: The riverside anthology of African American literary tradition*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Iwuchukwu, O. (2015). Focu-feminism: A panacea for self-assertion and self-actualisation for the Nigerian woman. *OFO: Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 5 (1& 2), 77-94.
- Janeway, E. (1973). Women: their changing roles (The great contemporary issues). In E. Janeway (Ed.), *The contemporary accounts from the New York Times*. New York: New York Company.
- Mayaki, J. A., & Omobowale, E. B. (2021). In the shadows of apartheid: Social malady and poetry therapy in Ndlovu’s poetry. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 22(2), 69-76.

- Available at <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/12071>. (Accessed 21 August, 2021)
- Nwobi, F. (2018). Culture and women participation in politics. In E. Obi, C. Obiora, N. Ebisi, & I. Ezeabasili (Eds.), *Contemporary gender issues* (pp.114-124). Onitsha: Abbot Com.
- Nwokocha, S. C. (2018). Theorising Nigerian feminisms: A reflection on the controversies surrounding the (Ir)relevance of mainstream feminism to cultures other than the west. In A. Osisanwo, K. Adebisi-Adelabu, & A. Mosobalaje (Eds.), *Literary and linguistic perspectives on Orality, literacy and gender studies* (pp. 33-42). Ibadan: Kraft Books.
- Ogwude, S. (2013). Victims as survivors in the meta narratives of J.M. Coetzee. In S. Ogwude (Ed.), *Writing the female image in African fiction* (pp.192-207). Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Okonjo-Ogunyemi, C. (1985). Womanism: The dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in English. *SIGNS: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 11(1), 63-80.
- Sotunsa, M. (2008). *Feminism and gender discourse: The African experience*. Sagamu: Asaba Publications.
- Walker, A. (1983). *In search of our mother's gardens: Womanist prose*. New York: The Women's Press.
- Wicomb, Z. (1996). To hear the variety of discourses. In M. Daymond (Ed.), *South African feminisms: Writings, theory, and criticism 1990-1994* (pp.45-55). New York/London: Garland Publishing Inc.