

Marital Stressors and Management of Psychological Problems in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*

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Abstract

This study examines how marital conditions trigger psychological problems in African cultural society, focusing on Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*. It also explores the underlying causes and management strategies of emotional pains in socio-cultural settings. The study adopted Freudian Psychoanalytic theory that focuses on the causality of the psychic and emotional conflicts being experienced by individuals in society. The findings revealed that betrayal of trust, economic hardship, untimely death, intra-family pressure, family background, co-wife antagonism, religious beliefs and traditional practices are serious marital stressors that trigger psychological and emotional problems in marriages/family units in African society. These stressors have some adverse effects on patients, including depression, phobic anxieties, insomnia, posttraumatic stress disorders, behaviour disorders, and so on. The study also found that psychological suffering is managed in several ways, such as writing, adjustment strategies, distractive techniques, sublimation, medical treatment, etc. The research concludes that couples should be faithful to their partners, ensures mutual understanding and never allows family pressure and customary laws and practices to interfere in their marriages. However, where there are stressors, couples should endeavour to adopt effective coping strategies to promote marital health and improve quality of life.

Keywords: Psyche, Sufferings, Treatments, Women.

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INTRODUCTION

African female writers have, over the years, portrayed women and the girl-child as epic-centre of their literary productions. The complementary role of women in fictional works of male writers reflects their representation in the symbolic world. Since the brutal experiences and welfare of women are focal points in the works of most writers, there are predominantly thematic preoccupations such as betrayal, oppression, marginalisation, social injustice, economic exploitation and gender inequalities, to mention a few. Without mincing words, female writers are in a better position to recount the horrible predicaments of womenfolk in traditional African societies and also to reverse the ugly trends and improve the health and psychological well-being of women and children in particular and society at large. Though women press home their demands verbally and through peaceful protests, many of them have consistently interrogated challenges suffocating their aspirations, dreams and drives for self-actualisation in sociocultural settings through writings. Most of these literary texts convey writers' thoughts, feelings, perceptions and beliefs, which are the underlying motivations for such works. Among the fictional works that belong to their category are autobiographical novels, which portray the personal experiences of authors purposely recreated to alleviate psychic and emotional pains, transform society and improve quality of life.

The prevailing cases of marital conflicts and divorce in African societies have been a major concern to researchers, religious leaders and conflict mediators in recent times because of their psychological effects on spouses, family members and society. If not urgently addressed, marital conflicts often trigger various forms of psychological problems that eventually lead to terminal illnesses and the sudden deaths of individuals. Marital conflicts can be defined as “the state of tension or stress between marital partners as the couple try to carry out their marital roles” (Tolorunleke, 2014:21). Since family members are relational, any problem facing a member affects the psychosocial and emotional wellbeing of the entire system. So, a healthy family should be devoid of triggers of psychological suffering that could affect lives within the family unit and society. It should be characterised by trustworthiness, mutual love and affection, spousal support, effective communication and interpersonal relationships, to mention a few. This study, therefore, examines the management of psychic and emotional conflicts triggered by marital conditions in traditional societies, as evident in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*. It will also explore conditions that are responsible for emotional distress in marriage and the reactions of individual characters in the novel.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on marital stressors and psychological problems are predominant in every society, and they shall be reviewed in this work. It becomes important to show their relationships with the current study and ascertain the areas of departure from previous research. For instance, Cherekar (2016) explores the theme of polygamy in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* and finds that women characters are the eventual victims of the institution of marriage. He also observes that “the women characters in her novels suffer both psychological and physical torments resulting in their subjugation in post-colonial Africa”(26). This research will add value to the current work that examines the psychological problems triggered by marital stressors in Mariama Ba's text. Panirao (2014) dwells on the analysis of famous selected African women writers, thus; Mariama Ba (Senegal), Nadine Gordimer (South Africa) and Buchi Emecheta (Nigeria), with a view to interrogating gender identity and racial issues as thematically presented in work. The scholar explored how African women writers subvert racial issues and

gender relations by relocating feminist theories in an African literary context (173). Cherekar, in another study, explores female friendship in *So Long a Letter*, written by a black diasporic woman writer and examines “the impact of race, class and gender on women’s relationships. It interrogates how women face the challenges of patriarchal institutions to subjugate them through polygamy, neo-colonialism, constraints of tradition, caste prejudices, political instability and the patriarchal subjugation”(407). The author found that “the healing powers of female bonding, which allows women to overcome prejudice and survive, to enjoy female empowerment, and to extend female friendship into female solidarity that participates in nation building”(407).

Apart from Mariama Ba’s novel, scholarly works on women by other female writers also abound. One of these is Akung’s (2012) study that explores feminist dimensions in Sefi Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come* which focuses on a child's growth from adolescence to childhood. It x-rays the various growth forms the heroine becomes aware of in her environment and how it affects her. The research also seeks to explore how these dimensions help shape the woman's vision. It further examines Nigeria's socio-economic and political landscape and how it affects the psychology of women. Akung established that “the new feminist novels explore new dimensions that would help the woman’s cause. These dimensions include: education and career, activism and participation. The women are no longer the occupiers of the solitary spaces in the kitchen; they are now at the forefront leading other women to achieve their goals” (114). This study adds value to the current work as both address the issue of female oppression in a patriarchal society. However, this research will deviate by focusing on the management of psychological problems triggered by marital conflicts in a patriarchal society.

Also, Ibeku (2015) on his part examines Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* and the issue of feminism in African novels. It focuses on the different tenets of feminism and acknowledges that radical feminism is an offshoot of violence. It argues that radical feminism is a radical reaction to dehumanisation, humiliation, and violence. The researcher established that the study “seeks to address the issue of feminism and how characters subject to a series of humiliation leads to a radical approach to gaining their freedom (427). Fwangyil (2012) based her study on the promise that patriarchal moulded structures ensure that women remain in perpetual slavery. It, however, examines “the type of oppression women face from infancy to adulthood as portrayed in Nawal El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero* and the measures taken by the women to free themselves from the shackles of male domination and oppression”(15). The study maintained that female oppression is to the detriment of women and society; therefore, it should be discouraged and completely eradicated. Tolorunleke (2014) found that many factors have combined to affect marriage institutions, thus causing many problems that young and old married couples must face.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted both the Freudian Psychoanalytic theory and the Feminist approach to foreground the discourse and analysis. The psychoanalytic approach focuses on the underlying factors that are responsible for the psychic and emotional conflicts of individuals in society. This theory is traceable to psychoanalysis which Sigmund Freud founded. According to NOUN (2014), “psychoanalysis is geared towards understanding individuals by uncovering desires hidden deep within the mind and revealing their connections with the unconscious surface”(252). This affirms the submission that “the chief function of the psychoanalytic critic is to reveal the true content, and thus to explain the effect on the reader of a literary work by translating its manifest elements into the dormant, unconscious determinants that make up their

suppressed meanings” (Devardhi, 2009:437). Generally, the application of psychoanalytic theory to literary texts could be made by focusing on the background of the author, the psychic motivations of characters, the psychological effects of the texts on readers and the symbolic interpretation of the work through the use of language. According to NOUN (2014):

By interpreting the symbolic nature of the work, we gain insight into the psyche of the author. Psychological criticism can also focus on the character of a work, analysing their motives, desires and conflicts even though these characters are fictional. Characters, as well as their underlying traits, are often drawn from real people and therefore can display some of the same psychological patterns(252).

The above statement reveals that psychoanalytic theory can be employed to investigate the unconscious mind of the author of a literary text and also to find out the hidden drives that are responsible for the psychic and emotional conflicts of characters in society as presented in any literary work of art. While corroborating the foregoing, Hossain (2017:41) states that “psychological criticism deals with the work of literature primarily as an expression, in fictional form, of the state of mind and the structure of the personality of the individual author.” Apart from studying the author and characters, this psychological approach can also be “used to interpret the relationship between the text and the reader”(252). This implies the psychological effects of literary works on readers as they carefully reflect on the symbolic themes and the figurative expressions used in the texts. Corey (2013:5), in his opinion, found that the psychoanalytic approach views people as being significantly influenced by unconscious motivation, conflicts between impulses and prohibitions, defence mechanisms, and early childhood experiences.” In clarifying this view, the scholar maintains that:

Psychoanalysis emphasises motives, it focuses on hidden or disguised motives, which helps to clarify literature on two levels, the level of writing itself and the level of character action within the text. Psychoanalysis gives emphasis on the subject and tries to explain what is the relationship between meaning and identity to the psychic and cultural forces(41).

By and large, Corey has made it emphatically clear that psychoanalytic literary theory has become a tool that could be used “to explain the characters’ behaviour and motivations”(43). Therefore, in this study, our main focus will be on the exploration of psychologically traumatised characters and the techniques they adopted to manage their marital stressors in society.

This paper also adopted feminist theories, specifically the Western and African strands because of the thematic preoccupations and contextual nature of the text. The Radical type of Western feminism and the Motherist form of African feminist perspective is employed in the chosen novel. Feminism as a theoretical approach is centred on cultural, educational, social and economic values for women. It is a twentieth-century movement that emerged to champion equal rights and opportunities between men and women in all spheres of life. Ibeku (2015) established that feminism is women-oriented and concentrates on issues that concern women. It is a literary movement that tends to bring about a change in society, especially in how women are treated; it tries to discourage discrimination and humiliation of women; it focuses its attention on the emancipation of women (427). The foregoing view implies that women are employing this channel to eradicate the male dominance and patriarchal institution that seems to hold them captive economically, politically, socially and even religious-wise. This submission corroborates Wilany’s (2017) stand that feminism is a belief in equality for women

in terms of social, political and economic activities. It is a movement which is controlled based on the belief that women are not defining factors that form social identity or someone's social (sic) politics and economic right"(116). The application of this literary perspective to the analysis of literature has exposed several societal norms and social constructs against women, especially those that subjugate, sideline or deprive women of their rights with their male counterparts. Western feminist movements could be classified into radical, liberal, humanistic and lesbian feminisms. However, for the purpose of this study, the Radical feminist strand shall be examined to foreground the descriptive and qualitative analysis of the literary text.

Radical Feminism, as a type of feminism, is fundamentally against patriarchal institutions and male dominance in society. It aims at dismantling every form of oppression, marginalisation and exploitation of women for the advantage of their male counterparts. It agitates for the elimination of the patriarchal structure for the benefit of all. In this paper, we shall explore how characters exhibit radical feminist tendencies against the Islamic religious and traditional beliefs and practices that were constituted right from the primordial era to favour men folk in society. Apart from the western types of feminism, there are also several variants of African feminism which include *Womanism* proposed by Chinkwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi, *Stiwanism* by Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, *Nego-feminism* by Obioma Nnaemeka, *Femalism* was coined by Chioma Opara, *Snail-sense feminism* is a theory introduced by Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, *Cultural feminism* by Buchi Emecheta and *Motherism* which was coined by Catherine Obianuju Acholonu. As Africa's alternative to Western feminism, Motherism focuses on motherhood, nature, guidance, protection and nurture, among others. According to Ocholonu (1995), Motherism implies that "A motherist protects and defends *family* values. A motherist seeks for Truth, and true knowledge, sees no *others* but recognizes all as outward manifestations of one Divine Principle (112). In furthering her explanation of the concept, the scholar argues that: "A mother hates to see others suffer; hates to kill, hates wars; hates oppression, injustice in all its forms. A motherist loves progress, prosperity, and success; he/she loves to see things work and will go to any length to ensure equity and equanimity in his environment" (112-113). The above assertion shows that Motherism has no sex barriers because it encompasses tolerance, love, understanding and endurance, partnership, pity, cooperation and so on. Being a library-based research, the primary text was judgmentally chosen based on its thematic importance to the objectives of the study and qualitatively analysed employing both psychoanalytic and descriptive methods.

Psychological Problems in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*

Mariama Ba is a famous Francophone female writer of prose fiction who was born on April 17, 1929, in Senegal. She was a Muslim author and renowned feminist who engaged the Islamic tradition and practices that were oppressive to Senegalese women in particular and African womenfolk at large. Though Mariama Ba died on August 17, 1981, after a protracted illness and before the publication of her second novel, her first novel, titled, *So Long a Letter* (1981) which her the first Noma Award for Publishing in Africa, still attracted wide criticism by research, especially from the feminist perspective. Her second fictional work is *Un Chant écarlate* (Scarlet Song) which was published in 1986. In *So Long a Letter*, the Senegalese novelist, through autobiographical and epistolary techniques, presents two childhood friends and women, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, who "lost" their husbands in a Muslim cultural society that upholds a polygamous system of marriage. The first victim is Aissatou, the daughter of a goldsmith. She divorced her husband, Mawdo, whose mother persuaded him to marry a young girl, Nabou (his first cousin), to fulfil the Muslim tradition of polygamy. She refused to accept the polygamous system and quit her marriage. Senegalese tradition upholds polygamy, so both

friends, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, are expected to endure happiness and frustrations in their marital homes. The characters of Ramatoulaye, Aissatou, and Jacqueline experience betrayal of trust in their marital lives, and this triggers psychological pains in them, leading to divorce in the case of Aissatou, a mental disorder for Jacqueline. At the same time, Ramatoulaye resolved to cope with her bitter experience and manage the consequential emotional pains. In the novel, several conditions are responsible for marital distresses, which should be examined in this study.

a) Religious Beliefs and Cultural Practices: The writer vividly reveals that Ramatoulaye felt betrayed by her husband, Modou Fall, who married another wife after thirty years of their marriage. Eventually, her husband dies of a heart attack, but the letter is written while the narrator participates in “Iddah”, a mourning ritual performed by all widows that lasts for four months and ten days. In the narrative, there is obvious oppression and dehumanisation of both friends in their various marriages, and such agents of oppression are basically the Islamic religion, the culture of the people that promotes polygamy as a system of marriage as well as fellow women who are supposed to antagonise the anti-women practices and beliefs. All these factors trigger psychic and emotional pains in the central women characters.

b) Intra-family Conspiracy: Another condition that causes emotional disturbance in the minds of the heroine and her friend is the intra-family conspiracy. Again, the novelist reveals that Ramatoulaye and Aissatou had to struggle against the patriarchal system and conspiracy of their fellow women. In fact, Lady Mother-in-law, Ramatoulaye’s mother-in-law and her sisters-in-law visit unannounced and abuse her hospitality and patience. In her letter to Aissatou, who is a divorcee, Ramat expresses her psychological and emotional pains after her husband’s betrayal, her sufferings, maltreatment, humiliation and disrespect at the hands of her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law, disappointments from her daughter, Aissatou, and so on. In the case of Aissatou, her mother-in-law never respects nor recognises her existence. It is recounted that, “She lived in the past, unaware of the changing world. She clung to old beliefs. Being strongly attached to her privileged origins, she believed firmly that blood carried with its virtues, and, nodding her head, she would repeat that humble birth would always show in a person’s bearing”(26). The major contention here is that of social classification; between the upper class and the downtrodden, which Aissatou’s family represents. Mawdo’s mother, Aunt Nabou, feels dejected over his son’s choice. According to the narrator, “her ‘only man’ was moving away from her, through the fault of this cursed daughter of a goldsmith, worse than a groit woman. The groit brings happiness. But a goldsmith’s daughter!...she burns everything in her path, like the fire in a forge”(27). She has two daughters who are happily married but disapproves of his son’s marriage to a goldsmith’s daughter, so she decides to get him another wife, young Nabou, who happens to be Mawdo’s cousin. The phobic anxiety of losing his aged mother if he refuses to marry Young Nabou makes him succumb to her pleasure. These are his mother’s words: ‘My brother Farba has given you young Nabou to be your wife, to thank me for the worthy way in which I have brought her up. I will never get over it if you don’t take her as your wife. Shame kills faster than disease’(30). Her mother’s belief is that a goldsmith’s daughter does not have dignity nor honour; rather, “for some people the honour and chagrin of a goldsmith’s daughter count for less, much less, than the honour and chagrin of a Guelewar”(31). All these are claims that Aissatou’s mother-in-law utilised to relegate and frustrate her until her eventual exit from her marriage. Though Mawdo has a genuine love for Aissatou, she can cope with her husband’s betrayal of trust and the imminent marital competition that will surface in a short while.

Through the narrative, the novelist has revealed that religion and traditions contribute to women's psychological sufferings in traditional societies because most of the norms, doctrines, beliefs, ordinances and practices are designed to men's advantage. In the text, every woman is expected to be completely submissive to her husband and his family members and observe every ritual rite as reported personally by the heroine. Though both female characters suffer emotional pains, the radical feminist tenets foreground the actions and behaviours of Aissatou; hence she quits her marriage when her husband marries another wife. Ramat exhibits the attributes of an archetypal African woman and mother, as demonstrated in the narrative. She refused to quit her marriage like her friend, Aissatou, who divorced her husband and travelled overseas. African mothers are known to be cooperative, courageous, peaceful, patient and accommodating, to mention a few.

c) Women and Class Struggle: The womenfolk cause certain challenges that also trigger emotional disturbances in the minds of their fellow women, as displayed in the narrative. For instance, Aissatou's mother-in-law initiated the idea of a second wife for her son and even threatened to commit suicide should he fail to comply with her. Also, Binetou's mother encouraged her daughter to marry Modou Fall instead of completing her education. These women's decisions have consequential effects on individuals and families, which they are supposed to safeguard. They allow the customs and traditions of their people to strangle the lawful marriages of their fellow women. Besides, women are supposed to question certain cultural practices that reveal injustice, inequality and oppression in traditional societies. Still, in the text, the protagonist reports the supportive roles of women in promoting acts that relegate women to the background. Married women, who Ramat and Aissatou represent, are therefore seen as appendages and secondary citizens whose dreams and aspirations can be suffocated like that of Binetou and Ramat's impregnated daughter. Both girls dropped out of school while those responsible for their pregnancies moved on with their plans. All the foregoing experiences are underlying motivations that trigger various categories of psychological problems in the narrative. However, the primary purpose of this study is to examine the coping measures adopted by the major female characters in alleviating their emotional and psychic pains with a view to promoting their personal and intrapersonal relationships and improving psychological well-being in their society.

d) Co-wife Struggle: In the narrative, the heroine faces challenges that trigger anxieties in her mind, especially as a mother of twelve children. She recounts her experiences in a series of letters she sends to her intimate friend and 'sister', Aissatou. The flaws of Ramat's faithless husband deconstruct the hopeful years they shared together in the past as a couple. This aggravates her deep distress as a faithful wife to Modou Fall. She cannot imagine her husband stooping so low to marry his daughter's close friend and age mate and abandoning her first wife and their children. The thoughts of the betrayal of trust exhibited by Ramat's husband create anxieties in her and necessitate the restoration of emotional conflicts in the narrative. Both friends experienced emotional distress, and since they could apply self-management strategies, they never allowed their condition to lead to depression, like in the case of Jacqueline, who was hospitalised.

e) Pressure of Single Motherhood: The pressures of single motherhood equally contributed to the emotional pains experienced by Ramat later in the narrative after the death and funeral rites of Modou Fall. Since she refused to re-marry, she had to take sole responsibility for all her children, which she did not find easy. Everything became worse owing to modernisation, which brought about certain changes in the behavioural patterns of Ramat's children. Their exposure to modern life exposes them to heinous acts but as a widow, she tries to check her

children's excesses, particularly as three of her daughters indulge in smoking while her sons play recklessly in the street. However, the situation becomes uncontrollable, for her daughter, Aissatou, gets pregnant by a Law student. This is yet another issue that borders the narrator in the literary text is the unexpected news of Aissatou (Ramatoulaye's daughter), who got pregnant with her boyfriend, Ibrahima Sall and a Law student who promised to marry her after her delivery. This was initially disclosed by Farmata, the griot woman of cowries, until everything came to reality. The disappointments brought unto the family by the children could be traced to Modou Fall's neglect and failure to instil discipline in the family while he was alive. Ramat, at this point, assumes the duty of an African woman, a mother who must rise to the task of providing every needed support to her family, especially her pregnant daughter.

f) Betrayal of Trust and Bankruptcy: Ramatoulaye suffers severe psychological and emotional pains after the death of her husband, whom she believed betrayed her. In the narrative, the heroine discovers the secrets of her husband after his death. Ramat further reposts regrettably that her husband was "dead without a penny saved. Acknowledgement of debts? A pile of them: cloth and gold traders, home-delivery grocers and butchers, car-purchase instalments"(10). Ramat, in the narrative, laments over her personal neglect and the squandering of their hard-earned money (from a joint account) on his new wife and her mother:

The star attraction of this 'stripping: the origins of the elegant SICAP villa, four bedrooms, two bathrooms, pink and blue, large sitting room, a three-room flat, but at his own expense at the bottom of the second courtyard for lady mother-in-law. And furniture from France for his new wife and furniture constructed by local carpenters for a lady. Mother-in-law (10).

The exposure of Modou Fall's secrets can trigger psychic and emotional pains in the minds of individuals, especially his wife, Ramat. The narrator also reveals that; "This house and its chic contents were acquired by a bank loan granted on the mortgage of 'Villa Fallene', where I live. Although the title deeds of this house bear his name, it is nonetheless our common property, acquired by our joint savings. Insult upon injury! (10). Ramat decries the squandermania disorder of Modou Fall while he was alive, which also contributes to her emotional pains, thus:

Four million francs borrowed with ease because of his privileged position, which had enabled him to pay for Lady Mother-in-Law and her husband to visit Mecca to acquire the title of Alhaja and Alhaji; which equally enabled Binetou to exchange her Alfa Romeos at the slightest dent (11).

Ramat, however, was able to see the reason why her husband abandoned the joint account they both operated in the past. According to her, "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"(11). With this financial autonomy, Modou was able to take certain decisions. It was reported that "having withdrawn Binetou from school, he paid her a monthly allowance of fifty thousand francs, just like a salary due to her"(11). It was also recounted that he "gave in to all the conditions of the grasping Lady Mother-in-law and even signed a paper committing himself to pay the said amount. Lady Mother-in-Law brandished the paper, for she firmly believed that the payments would continue, even after Modou's death, out of the estate"(11). In the narrative, she loses confidence in men and rejects other marriage proposals from Modou Fall's elder brother, Tamsir, with three wives and numerous children, and Dauda Dieng.

Management of Psychic and Emotional Sufferings

Mariama Ba has demonstrated to the world through *So Long a Letter* that in traditional African societies, as could be found elsewhere, several stressors/conditions are responsible for the psychological and emotional pains of spouses and families at large. However, these marital distresses can be managed effectively through various coping strategies, which shall be examined.

a)Personal Coping Skills: The novelist portrays Ramat as a character who, despite her psychological pains, draws on her personal capabilities and adjustment skills to alleviate her sufferings to improve her quality of life. According to her, “To overcome my bitterness, I think of human destiny. Each life has its share of heroism, an obscure heroism, born of abdication, of renunciation and acceptance under the merciless whip of fate”(12). Another condition that gives Ramat hope despite her predicament is her self-reliance and realisation as a complete human being, this;

I think of all the blind people the world over, moving in the darkness. I think of all the paralysed the world over, dragging themselves about. I think of all lepers the world over, wasted by their disease. Victims of a sad fate which you did not choose, compared with your lamentations, what is my quarrel, cruelly motivated, with a dead man who no longer has any hold over my destiny? (12).

The condition of certain physically challenged and sick citizens is enough for individuals to reflect on their personal lifestyle in society. From the above statements of Ramat, one could affirm that there is not much difference between the bereaved and the blind, the paralysed and all lepers across the world since their condition remains permanent, unlike the mourners who can move on with their lives. However, Ramat expresses her inability to overcome her psychological pains because of the gravity of the betrayal;

My efforts cannot for long take my mind off my disappointment. I think of the suckling baby, no sooner born than orphaned. I think of the blind man who will never see his child's smile. I think of the cross the one-armed man has to bear. I think. But my despair persists, but my rancour remains, but the waves of an immense sadness break in me! (13).

In order to alleviate her emotional pains, Ramat resolves to repress the unpleasant memories and experiences surrounding the marriage of her co-wife, Binetou. She speaks that, “Alone at last, able to give free rein to my surprise and to gauge my distress. Ah! Yes, I forgot to ask for my rival's name so that I might give a human form to my pain” (40). Ramat is capable of adapting to her ugly experience by seeing herself as more advantageous compared to Binetou, her young co-wife. She asserts in the narrative that; “I told myself what every betrayed woman says: if Modou was milk, it was I who had all the cream. The rest, well, nothing but water with a vague smell of milk”(41).

Ramat has the legal right to file a divorce suit against her husband and quit marriage as her friend, Aissatou, did or heeded her own daughter's advice, but she acted on the contrary. The novelist, therefore, portrays her as the epitome of an African mother and wife who cannot abandon her marriage for another woman and allow her children to face maltreatment. Her stand over her betrayal distinguishes her from other female characters in the novel. Ramat, by her actions, represents a prototype of African women who do not see divorce as the only option

to tackle the issue of polygamy, which dominates most communities, especially where the Islamic religion is practicable.

b) Psychic Reflection on Similar Ordeals: In the narrative, Ramat consoles herself with the depressive episode of Jacqueline (African from Ivory Coast), whose parents advised her to marry a non-Ivorian, but she refuses. Unfortunately, her playboy and Senegalese husband called, Samba Diack, abandoned her for another wife which almost claimed her life. Ramat is the epitome of African women who would not allow their marital problems to cause them emotional and psychic sufferings such as depression and mental disorders. She recounts the ordeal of Jacqueline, who was suffering from mental illness.

Ramat does not want to experience emotional depression that will eventually lead to psychiatric illness like the case of Jacqueline in the narrative. The narrator recounts that Jacqueline suffered from a mental illness triggered by disappointment. According to her, “With his sharp eyes, accustomed to judging, he looked into those of Jacqueline in order to discover in her soul the source of the distress disrupting her organism”(47). The medical doctor who heads the Department of Neurology found that the cause of Jacqueline’s illness is psychological rather than bacterial infections. It is reported that;

In a soft, reassuring voice, which in itself was balm to this over-strung being, he explains: ‘Madame Diack, I assure you that there is nothing at all wrong with your head. The X-rays have shown nothing, and neither have the blood tests. The problem is that you are depressed, that is... not happy. You wish the conditioning of life were different from what they are in reality, and this is what is torturing you (47).

The above submission reveals that a patient’s expectation could also trigger his/her emotional conflict and degenerates into psychiatric illness, such as the case with Jacqueline in the narrative. The physician presents the solution to the health problems, thus;

Moreover, you had your babies too soon after each other; the body loses its vital juices, which haven’t had the time to be replaced. In short, there is nothing endangering your life. You must react, go out, and give yourself a reason for living. Take courage. Slowly, you will overcome. We will give you a series of shock treatments with curare to relax you. You can leave afterwards’(47).

Ramat emotionally suffers from the distress caused by the betrayal and untimely death of her husband, Modou Fall, but she has to avoid experiencing mental illness like Jacqueline. She has learnt from Jacqueline’s deal to adjust to every stressor, specifically those triggered by marital issues. She concludes that “from then on, my life changed. I had prepared myself for equal sharing, according to the precepts of Islam concerning polygamic life. I was left with empty hands. My children, who disagreed with my decision, sulked. In opposition to me, they represented a majority I had to respect (48).

c) Cinema as Distractive Strategy: Another technique that helped Ramat to cope with her emotional distress triggered by the marital stressor in the narrative is the role of cinema therapy. Research has shown that Gary Solomon created and popularised Cinematherapy when he wrote on the use of movies as a form of expressive therapy apart from music, art, dance and writing, among others. It entails using films or movies to alleviate emotional pains and psychic conflicts by distracting one’s mind from unpleasant events to exciting characters, storylines and actions

in the programme being watched. The movies give emotionally disturbed patients insight into their challenges and help to activate their conscious awareness and how to cope with their health problems in real life.

Ramat's courage to attend the cinema without her spouse helps her to overcome the emotional distress that would have eaten her up. She refused to stay at home and allowed her psychological pains to get worse, so she found the cinema house as the only place she could recover quickly from her predicament. She attested to the healing effect on herself "The early shows at the cinema filled me with delight. They gave me the courage to meet the curious gaze of various people. They did not keep me away for long from my children"(54). The narrator reveals that emotional and psychic pains are released through watching movies and meeting people who also visit the cinema hall for similar purposes. The bereaved widow and narrator further express the psychotherapeutic efficacy of the cinema show thus:

What a great distraction for distress is the cinema! Intellectual films, those with a message, sentimental films, defective films, comedies, thrillers, all these were my companions. I learned from them lessons of greatness, courage and perseverance. They deepened and widened my vision of the world, thanks to their cultural value. The cinema, an inexpensive means of recreation, can thus give healthy pleasure (54).

The experiences and lessons obtained through the cinema shows serve as distractive strategies, shifting the mind of Ramat from her unpleasant memories to sedative and mood-enhancing events. Thus, the cinema helps regulate her unhappy mood and provides supportive measures to promote her quality of life. It also serves as cathartic or purgatory therapy, helping patients explore their personal emotional and psychological sufferings. The protagonist's belief in the efficacy of cinema therapy shows that emotional pains are often alleviated after watching humorous movies with pleasant themes and background musical sounds.

d) Radio Programme as Distractive Technique: Music or song is a vital aspect of radio broadcast that presenters use to stimulate and sustain the interest of listeners during programme presentations. It serves as a prelude, interlude or conclusion of a piece of drama, news, soap opera and so on. The music that is produced through radio programmes has great psychological effects on patients, especially when the artists and music played are within the preferences of the hearers. Apart from the use of cinema, the character identifies (the) radio programme as a distractive technique that helps to alleviate her emotional distress. She states that: "The continuity of radio broadcasts was a great relief. I gave the radio the role of comforter. At night the music lulled my anxiety. I heard the message of old and new songs, which awakened hope. My sadness dissolved"(55). Radio presenters are skilful in their selection and playing of music because they are conscious of the therapeutic effects of songs and musical accompaniments on individuals for the growth and development of society.

Several songs and music that are being broadcast on radio stations daily evoke both pleasant and unpleasant memories in listeners. So, in the novel, Ramat experiences emotional relief by listening to music from a radio programme, which probably conveys themes and images that are excitatory, minds soothing and tranquillising. Music has healing effects on emotionally disturbed individuals based on their content or subjects, artists, preferences, tones, rhythms and instruments employed by the performers. The state of mind of listeners also determines the kind of music required at a particular moment, as most are needed to heal emotional wounds such as anxieties, depressive symptoms and posttraumatic stress disorders, to mention a few. Radio music and songs are utilised to enhance mood and improve psychological well-being by

distracting the minds of people from their unpleasant experiences. Sometimes, radio presenters may play the music that reminds listeners about past life and current conditions and also console bereaved families, provide coping skills and help to modify negative behaviours. The novelist has therefore shown that listening to music, as Ramat does in the narrative, especially those that emanate from radio programmes, inspires, gives insights, and stabilises patients' emotions.

e) Children as Supportive Strategies: Ramat has a love for her children, and vice versa, which equally helps alleviate the tragic character's psychological pains. In the narrative, one could see that Ramat's children serve as companions and mood stabilisers. She quickly asserts in the narrative that "Distressing awakenings succeeded the nights. My love for my children sustained me. They were a pillar; lowed their help and affection" (55). The love Ramat's children have for her is also reported by the narrator, who reveals that "I shed tears of joy and sadness together: joy in being loved by my children, the sadness of a mother who does not have the means to change the course of events" (56). Ramat also seeks solace in the peaceful co-existence and happiness that reigns in her family, even though she experiences emotional pains caused by Modou Fall's disappointment. She declares that:

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 made peace with his family. Despite his desertion of our home, his father and mother and Tamsir, his brother, still continued to visit me often, as did his sisters. My children, too, grew up without much ado. Their success at school was my pride, just like laurels thrown at the feet of my Lord and master (58).

In African society, the presence of children gives hope and emotional relief to parents, especially those experiencing psychological pains. In this novel, Ramat consoles herself with her children and their academic records at school.

f) Solace in Writing: The human psyche is a reservoir of repressed memories, feelings, thoughts, perceptions, instinctual drives and beliefs that are both pleasant and unpleasant. They are hidden in the unconscious part of the mind, right from childhood to maturity, and thrown up to the consciousness by certain underlying conditions. In the narrative, the novelist presents writing as another psychotherapeutic strategy that can help alleviate psychic and emotional conflicts in society. People employ expressive therapy as a form of externalising their life-threatening challenges, traumatic experiences, afflictions and marital problems, to mention a few. Writing can be perceived as a therapeutic activity and technique for emotional disclosure, purgation and distractions with a view to reducing dysfunctional thoughts, negative feelings, beliefs and maladaptive behavioural patterns.

Through the epistolary technique of letter writing, the writer activates past (childhood) memories that are pleasant until adulthood, when both of them get married in spite of all odds. Ramat and Aissatou have similar traumatic experiences that triggered diverse reactions: the former refuses to quit her marriage but lost her husband to another woman and death while the latter quits her marriage and travels abroad to settle down. In essence, the entire narrative revolves around Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, who are victims of Islamic religious and African cultural practices, specifically marriage in Senegal. The ladies, who are archetypes of complementary characters in society, employ the epistolary technique (letter writing) to share their emotional pains and the adjustment strategies adopted by Ramat to promote her personal health and improve her quality of life. In the narrative, Ramat laments thus, "...I am beginning

this diary, my prop in my distress. Our long association has taught me that confiding in others allays pain”(1). This statement sums up the reason this character seeks solace in writing to her friend, who also experienced emotional pains triggered by the decision of her husband to practice the polygamous system. Ramat’s words are pathetic as they convey the emotional turbulence she passes through in life.

The study has shown that people can write about their pleasant and unpleasant life experiences to enhance their emotions and promote interpersonal relationships in their society. It is against this background that Rama resolved to employ the epistolary technique, not only to intimate readers about the motivations underlying the emotional distress, anxieties and depressive symptoms of the major female characters but also to create the consciousness about the psychotherapeutic importance of writings as emotional purgatory mechanism and self coping skill for emotionally disturbed patients. Also, in order to alleviate her emotional pains, Ramat psychologically reflects on their neighbourhood, physical environment, schools, and so on, which are pleasant, excitatory and tranquillising. All these are captured in the novel with the clinical goal of restoring her personal health and well-being.

g) Talking Therapy: Words are powerful psychotherapeutic tools that could be employed by therapists in dousing pent-up emotions and psychological sufferings in most societies. This technique is common among Africans, especially during the death of loved ones such as family members, bosom friends, colleagues, neighbours or kinsmen. Africans live a communal lifestyle, and so they share their feelings, ideologies and concerns together for the betterment of society. They hardly believe in the spirit of individualism when it comes to issues that affect peace, health and the general well-being of people. In the novel, there are instances of scenes where sympathisers console and encourage the bereaved, particularly the chief mourners and widows, with words. According to the narrator;

Comforting words from the Koran fill the air; divine words, divine instructions, impressive promises of punishment or joy, extortion to virtue, warnings against evil, the exaltation of humility, of faith. Shivers run through me. My tears flow, and my voice joins weakly in the fervent ‘Amen’ that inspires the crowd’s ardour at the end of each verse (5-6).

The above expressions are meant to provide an emotional stimulant to the bereaved in the text. Also, Ramat recounts the Imam’s words about Modou Fall’s new marriage; “Yes, Modou Fall, but, happily, he is alive for you, for all of us, thanks be to God. All he has done is to marry a second wife today. We have just come from the mosque in Grand Dakar where the marriage took place”(38). These utterances are mind soothing and so Ramat compares the Imam’s words to the removal of thorns from the way for Modou’s brother to make his remarks. According to Tamsir;

Modou sends his thanks. He says it is fate that decides men and things: God intended him to have a second wife, there is nothing he can do about it. He praises you for the quarter of a century of marriage in which you gave him all the happiness a wife owes her husband, his family, especially myself, his elder brother, thank you. You have always held us in respect. You know that we are Modou blood(38).

There is absolute tension in the house due to the bad news that has been broken to Ramat by the Imam and Modou’s elder brother. However, in order to douse the pent-up emotions and psychic conflicts created in the home, Tamsir says; “You are the only one in your house, no

matter how big it is, no matter how dear life is. You are the first wife, a mother for Modou, a friend for Modou”(38). These statements are verbal means of alleviating emotional pains, and elders thoughtfully express them in traditional societies.

h) Eulogaic Poetry Therapy: In addition to the foregoing methods of addressing the emotional pains of the major character in the narrative, the writer vividly presents the peculiar documentation of eulogistic performance as a part of the management of psychological sufferings triggered by death as chronicled in the novel. According to the narrator and protagonist: “As for ourselves, we have been deserving, and our sisters-in-law sing the chorus of praises chanted at the top of their voices. Our patience before all trials, the frequency of our gifts find gratification and reward today” (4). The narrator further reveals that;

Having washed their hands in a bowl of water placed at the entrance to the house, the men, back from the cemetery, file past the family grouped around us, the widows. They offer their condolences punctuated with praises of the deceased.

In traditional African societies, there are elegiac poems rendered in honour of the deceased and the bereaved, especially the widows, as in the case above. Here, the attributes of the deceased, his greatest achievements and the need for his protection over those family members left behind form the content of the elegies, which are usually performed before the burial of the corpse. Ramat is able to recount her experience thus;

‘Modou, friend of the young as of the old...’
‘Modou, the lion-hearted champion of the oppressed...’
‘Modou, at ease as much in a suit as in a caftan...’
‘Modou, good brother, good husband, good Muslim...’
‘May God forgive him...’
‘May he regret his earthly stay in his heavenly bliss...’
‘May the earth rest lightly on him!’(5)

However, in some cases, such as the foregoing one, elegies are rendered after interment to console the bereaved, as demonstrated in this text.

i) Prayers and Supplications: In most socio-cultural settings, the consolation of emotionally distressed people such as the bereaved, unemployed, divorced and those physically sick, to mention a few, is woven with prayers and supplications. Oftentimes, prayers are offered unconsciously to alleviate the psychic and emotional pains of individuals through distractions, allusions, support and coping strategies. In this novel, Ramat could not conceal the therapeutic role of prayers as a method of alleviating her emotional distress after the death of her husband. According to her words, “Where to lie down? Middle age demands. I hold tightly onto my prayer beads. I tell the beads ardently, remaining standing on the legs of jelly. My loins beat as to the rhythm of childbirth. Cross-sections of my life spring involuntarily from my memory; grandiose verses from the Koran and noble words of consolation fight for my attention (2-3). The writer in this narrative has revealed that prayers and supplications are ways of enhancing the emotional pains of patients, especially the bereaved in African societies, as demonstrated by the character above. Her belief in the Holy Koran's words goes a long way in relieving her psychic and emotional sufferings.

CONCLUSION

The author presents various psychological problems triggered by marital stressors, their effects on characters and the techniques adopted by the emotionally wounded people in a Senegalese African society where Islamic religion and culture practices uphold a polygamous system. While the marital conflicts in the narrative resulted in emotional depression, maladaptive disorders, posttraumatic stress disorders, adjustment disorder, phobic anxiety and so on, the author, through the character of Ramat, adopted stress management strategies such as personal coping skills, psychic reflection on similar ordeals, cinema and radio programmes as distractive strategies, children as supportive techniques, solace in writing, talking therapy and eulogistic poetry therapy. The study shows that people who are experiencing health and psychological problems triggered by marital conflicts could adopt the measures examined in this narrative as this will improve their well-being in society.

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