

**PATRIARCHY AND ITS DISCONTENTS: DIVORCE, FATHER ABSENCE AND  
FEMALE OPPRESSION IN MARIAMA BA'S *SO LONG A LETTER***

**Chukwuka Eugene OFIE, PhD.**

Department of English and Literary Studies, Dennis Osadebay University, Asaba, Delta State,  
Nigeria.

Email Address: [ofie.chukwuka@dou.edu.ng](mailto:ofie.chukwuka@dou.edu.ng) and [ofiechukwuka@gmail.com](mailto:ofiechukwuka@gmail.com)

**Abstract**

This paper examines the manifestations and consequences of patriarchy in Mariama Ba's *So Long A Letter*, with particular attention to divorce, absentee fatherhood, and the oppression of women. Drawing on Feminist Theory, especially African feminist perspectives, the paper interrogates how patriarchal marriage structures privilege male authority while marginalizing women within the family and society. The study argues that practices such as polygamy and male dominance contribute significantly to marital instability and divorce, which in turn foster paternal neglect. Beyond the suffering of women, the paper highlights the often-overlooked negative effects of divorce and father absence on children, including emotional neglect, insecurity and weakened social development. Through close textual analysis, the research demonstrates that patriarchy functions not only as a system of gender oppression but also as a social force that disrupts family cohesion and undermines child welfare. The paper concludes that *So Long A Letter* presents a compelling evaluation of patriarchal values and calls for more equitable family structures that protect the well-being of women and children.

**Keywords:** Divorce, Absentee, Fatherhood, Women, Oppression.

**Introduction**

Marriage and family structures play a central role in shaping individual identity and social relationships in many African societies, yet they often reinforce oppressive gender hierarchies under patriarchal norms. Patriarchy- a social system privileging male authority and dominance over women and children – influences cultural expectations of marital roles and parental responsibilities (Sylvia Walby 1990: 20). In *So Long A Letter*, Mariama Ba portrays these patriarchal structures through polygamy, male privilege and marital abandonment, exposing emotional and social consequences that extend beyond women to the children in fractured households. Mariama Ba criticizes a system that prioritizes male authority at the expense of family cohesion.

Mariama Ba's epistolary novel illustrates the pervasive influence of patriarchy by foregrounding Ramatoulaye's experience of abandonment after her husband Modou, marries a younger woman. Ramatoulaye's reflections reveal the emotional toll of male privilege as she mourns both lost intimacy and the social instability it creates, "Leave? Start again at zero, after living twenty-five years with one man, after having borne twelve children?" (41). Through this passage, Maiama Ba illustrates how patriarchal expectations constrain women's agency while

restraining family life, leaving women and children to cope with fractured relationships. Scholars note that patriarchy not only limits women's choices but also subjects them to social stereotyping and marginalization, reinforcing gendered power imbalances (Femi Olaleru 2020: 53 and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi 1996:18).

Although much critical attention has focused on female oppression, the negative effects of divorce and father absence on children remain underexplored. Research into family dynamics finds that children from divorced families face emotional, social and psychological challenges. For example, Paul R. Amato notes that "children who experience father loss through divorce demonstrate lower self-concept and increased emotional stress compared with peers from intact families" (2005: 75). Similarly, Josee Bakhita observes that divorce disrupts parent-child relationships, often weakening emotional bonds and increasing anxiety among children. (2024: 45). In Mariama Ba's narrative, Ramatoulaye's children face the dual burden of emotional insecurity and limited patriarchal family guidance, illustrating how patriarchal family breakdowns extend their impact across generations.

This study therefore, investigates patriarchy and its discontents in *So Long A Letter*, focusing on how gender oppression, divorce and father absence shape the lives of women and children. Guided by Feminist Theory, particularly African Feminist perspectives, and informed by sociological insights on family and divorce, the paper argues that patriarchy functions not only as a system of female oppression but also as a force that undermines family cohesion and child wellbeing.

Through textual analysis and interdisciplinary evidence, this research highlights Mariama Ba's condemnation of patriarchal norms and the urgent need for more equitable and responsible family structures.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The present study is anchored in Feminist Theory, specifically African feminist perspectives as well as sociological theories on family and child development. These frameworks collectively provide the conceptual tools to analyze how patriarchal structures influence marital relations, divorce, absentee fatherhood and the resulting effects on women and children in Mariama Ba's *So Long A Letter*. While Feminist Theory foreground the power imbalances and systemic oppression experienced by women, sociological approaches offer insight into the structural and psychological consequences for children within disrupted family systems.

### **African Feminist Theory**

African Feminist Theory extends global feminist thought by emphasizing the interaction of gender, culture and socio-economic factors in shaping women's lived experiences. Unlike the Western feminist model, which often universalize women's struggles. African feminist Theory considers how colonial histories, traditional customs and social expectations intersect with patriarchy to restrict women's agency. (Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi 1996: 17). Scholars

argue that African women navigate a dual burden: conforming to societal expectations while asserting autonomy in oppressive environments (IfiAmadiume 1987: 32).

In the context of *So Long A Letter*, this theory explains how women like Ramatoulaye and Aissatou respond to patriarchal norms that sanction polygamy and marital abandonment. African Feminist Theory provides a lens to interrogate not just the personal experiences of female characters but also the structural inequalities that sustain their oppression, highlighting the broader social and cultural dimensions of patriarchy (Oyeronke Oyewumi 1997: 58).

### **Patriarchy and Power Relations**

Patriarchy as a theoretical construct, describes a system of social organization in which men maintain dominance over women through cultural, economic and institutional means (Sylvia Walby 1990: 20). Within African societies, patriarchal norms often legitimize practices such as polygamy, child custody biases and male-centred decision-making in marriage, thereby reinforcing gender hierarchies (IfiAmadiume 1987: 40). Feminist theorists highlight that these norms affect not only women but also the children in patriarchal families, who often experience emotional neglect or limited social support due to male absenteeism (Paul R. Amato 2005: 70).

By framing divorce and absentee fatherhood as products of patriarchal power, this study examines the interconnected consequences of male dominance, including the marginalization of women and the psychological vulnerability of children. Patriarchy is therefore conceptualized not merely as a cultural backdrop but as a structural mechanism that perpetuates inequality across generations.

### **Sociological Perspectives on Family and Child Development**

Complementing the feminist lens, sociological theory focuses on the family as a social institution and examines how disruptions, such as divorce or absent parenting, influence child development. Research demonstrates that children who grow up without consistent paternal presence are more likely to experience emotional insecurity, social maladjustment and academic challenges (Josee Bakhita 2024: 46).

Family systems theory also posits that each member's wellbeing is interdependent; thus, the destabilization of one part of the system – for example, through male absence or marital breakdown – has ripple effects on all members (Andrew J. Cherlin 2009: 102).

Applied to Mariama Ba's narrative, these insights allow the researcher to analyze children's experiences as direct consequences of patriarchal and marital structures, rather than incidental by product of adult decisions. By integrating feminist and sociological perspectives, the study positions children not only as passive observers but as active participants affected by systemic inequality.

### **Integration and Application to the Study**

The integration of African Feminist Theory and sociological family theory enables a multidimensional analysis of *So Long A Letter*. This framework allows the study to:

- i) Critically interrogate the structural and cultural foundations of patriarchy.
- ii) Examine the lived experiences of women navigating polygamous and patriarchal marriages.
- iii) Explore the negative effects of absentee fathers and marital instability on children's emotional, social and developmental outcomes.
- iv) Connect literary representations to empirical and theoretical research on gender, family and child wellbeing.

By adopting this combined framework, the research demonstrates that patriarchy functions as a socially and culturally embedded system that harms both women and children, reinforcing Mariama Ba's critique while situating it within broader theoretical and empirical discourses.

### **Literature Review**

Scholarly engagement with Mariama Ba's *So Long A Letter* has largely centred on its feminist evaluation of patriarchy, polygamy and women's marginalization in postcolonial African societies. Many critics view the novel as a foundational African feminist literary text that challenges gendered power relations while remaining culturally grounded. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi describes Mariama Ba's literary work as a narrative that "exposes the emotional and structural violence embedded in patriarchal marriage systems" (1996: 69). Similarly, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie argues that African women writers such as Mariama Ba interrogate patriarchy not only as a gendered system but also as a social institution that legitimizes male privilege and female sacrifice (Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie 1994: 102).

Several scholars have examined the theme of marriage and polygamy as central to Mariama Ba's feminist vision. Florence Stratton contends that *So Long A Letter* portrays polygamy as, "a socially sanctioned form of betrayal that fractures women's emotional security" (1994: 55). Through characters such as Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, Mariama Ba illustrates how polygamous unions destabilize marital trust and reinforce women's subordination. Aissatou's decision to divorce her husband has been widely interpreted as an act of resistance against patriarchal control. According to Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi, Aissatou's departure represents "a rejection of cultural practices that deny women dignity and self-worth" (1997: 88). These studies foreground female agency but primarily frame divorce as a gendered conflict between men and women.

While feminist criticism has richly explored women's oppression, fewer studies give sustained attention to the sustained attention to the social consequences of divorce and absentee fatherhood, particularly on children. Where children are mentioned, they often appear as background figures rather than central subjects of analysis. Yet sociological research

emphasizes that divorce and paternal absence have profound effects on children's emotional and social development. Paul R. Amato asserts that, "parental separation often weakens parent-child bonds, especially when fathers disengage from daily caregiving (2005: 80). This observation resonates with Mariama Ba's depiction of Ramatoulaye's family life, where paternal absence forces the mother to assume both emotional and economic responsibility.

Academic studies on father absence further demonstrate its negative implications for child wellbeing. Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur argue that children raised without active fathers are more vulnerable to emotional insecurity and social instability, observing that "father absence is associated with poorer outcomes in schooling, behavior and psychological adjustment". (1994: 41). Although these studies are sociological rather than literary, they provide an important framework for understanding the silent suffering of children in *So Long A Letter*. Ramatoulaye's children, who grow up largely without paternal guidance, embody what Andrew J. Cherlin describes as the "unintended casualties of marital breakdown" (2009: 119).

Recent African literary scholarship has begun to call attention to the intergenerational effects of patriarchy, though this remains an emerging area of study. Femi Oleru argues that patriarchal systems in African literature often reproduce "cycles of neglect that affect women directly and children indirectly" (2020: 58).

However, there is still limited critical work that explicitly connects patriarchy, divorce, absentee fatherhood and child suffering within Mariama Ba's novel. Most analyses isolate female oppression without extending the discussion to how patriarchal practices destabilize family structures and shape children's lived experiences.

This study addresses this gap by foregrounding children as significant thought often overlooked, victims of patriarchal family systems in *So Long A Letter*. By synthesizing feminist literary criticism with sociological research on divorce and father absence, the present research extends existing scholarship beyond gender oppression alone. It argues that Mariama Ba's assessment of patriarchy encompasses not only the marginalization of women but also the emotional and social vulnerability of children, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of the novel's social vision.

### **The Silent Stakeholders: Child Vulnerability and Development in *So Long A Letter***

Within *So Long A Letter*, the instability produced by polygamy, divorce and paternal withdrawal creates a social environment in which children are rendered particularly vulnerable. From a sociological standpoint, the family functions not only as a site of emotional bonding but also as a primary institution of socialization, economic support, and identity formation (Talcott Parsons and Robert Freed Bales 1955:15). When this structure is disrupted as seen in Modou's abandonment of Ramatoulaye's household- the consequences extend beyond the marital relationship and significantly affect children's developmental trajectories.

Sociological theories of the family, particularly structural functionalism, traditionally frame the father's role in terms of provision, authority and social regulation. However, more recent perspectives emphasise emotional availability and consistent parental engagement as central to child wellbeing. Modou's absence represents not just physical withdrawal but a breakdown of parental responsibility, destabilizing expected caregiving structures. This aligns with developmental research indicating that children in father-absent households are at greater risk of emotional distress, lower academic achievement and behavioral challenges (Michael Eric Lamb 2010:6, Paul R. Amato 2005:96).

The narrative illustrates effects through the diverse reactions of Ramatoulaye's children. While some display resilience, others exhibit confusion and emotional strain, suggesting that vulnerability is mediated by maternal support, economic stability and social environment. This reflects the ecological systems theory of child development, which posits that children are influenced by multiple layers of interaction, from immediate family to broader cultural systems (Urie Bronfenbrenner 1979:21). In Mariama Ba's depiction of Senegalese society, patriarchal norms that legitimize polygamy contribute structurally to family instability, thereby shaping children's developmental contexts.

Additionally, sociological research on divorce introduces the concept of "role strain", particularly for single mothers who must assume multiple responsibilities in the absence of a partner (William James Goode 196:98). Ramatoulaye embodies this strain as she navigates both emotional caregiving and economic provision. Although her resilience mitigates some negative outcomes, the narrative underscores the limitations of individual agency within systemic inequality. Children in such contexts may internalize gendered behaviours, with boys potentially reproducing patterns of paternal disengagement and girls adapting to models of endurance shaped by patriarchal expectations.

Importantly, African feminist perspectives caution against the uncritical application of Western nuclear family models. Communal and extended family systems often play a significant role in child-rearing across African contexts (Obioma Nnaemeka 2004:378). However, Mariama Ba's narrative complicates this assumption by demonstrating that extended kinship networks do not fully compensate for the emotional and maternal absence of an engaged father. Thus, the novel highlights a tension between cultural family structures and the lived realities of women and children within patriarchal systems.

By linking literary representation with sociological and developmental research, it becomes evident that the vulnerability of children in *So Long A Letter* is structurally produced rather than incidental. The text ultimately foregrounds children as critical yet often overlooked participants in the consequences of patriarchal family arrangements, reinforcing the need for a more inclusive feminist and sociological critique.

### **Culture, Patriarchy and the Problem of Totalizing**

Any reading that frames patriarchy as wholly oppressive in *So Long A Letter* must contend with the novel's careful embedding within Senegalese muslim culture.

*So Long A Letter* does not simply present patriarchy as an abstract system of domination; rather, it situates it within a network of religious, familial and communal values that complicate outright dismissal. The practice of polygamy, for instance, is not portrayed as a crude imposition but as culturally sanctioned and, at least in principle, ethically regulated. Yet, through Ramatoulaye's lived experience. Mariama Ba's reveals how such structures become asymmetrical in practice, privileging male desire while demanding female endurance.

Scholars often caution against reducing African cultural practices to mere instruments of oppression, arguing that such readings risk reproducing colonial binaries of "tradition" versus "modernity". However, Mariama Ba's narrative resists romantic cultural relativism. The emotional devastation caused by Modou's abandonment exposes how patriarchal norms- though culturally legitimated- can produce gendered harm. Thus, the novel invites a dual criticism: not of culture per se, but of how patriarchal interpretations of culture enable male authority to go unchecked. In this sense, patriarchy is neither culturally neutral nor culturally inevitable. It is historically contingent and open to contestation.

### **Agency Within Limits: Negotiation Rather Than Liberation**

A key tension in the novel lies in how female agency is imagined. Ramatoulaye's refusal to divorce Modou, despite his betrayal, has generated divergent interpretations. On one hand, her decision can be read as capitulation- a sign of internalized patriarchy that binds women to suffering in the name of duty. On the other hand, such a reading risks flattering the nuanced ways in which agency operates under constraint.

Ramatoulaye's actions suggest what might be termed "negotiated agency". She does not dismantle the patriarchal order, but she reclaims moral authority within it. By choosing to remain, she reframes endurance not as passive submissions but as an ethical stance rooted in maternal responsibility, spiritual conviction and self-respect. Importantly, her refusal is not silent; the epistolary form itself becomes a space of articulation, where she critiques the very system she appears to uphold.

In contrast, Aissatou's decision to leave her husband represents a more overt form of resistance, aligned with liberal feminist ideals of autonomy and self-realization. Yet Mariama Ba does not unequivocally privilege one model over the other. Instead, she presents a spectrum of responses available to women, each shaped by material conditions, emotional investments and cultural expectations. Agency, therefore, is neither absolute nor absent; it is relational, contingent and often compromised.

### **Re-reading the Ending: Ambiguity and Feminist Possibility**

The ending of *So Long A Letter* remains one of its most debated elements. Ramatoulaye's decision to reject Tamsir's proposal and to remain open- but not dependent on the possibility of love signals a subtle but significant shift. For some critics, this marks a quiet assertion of authority: she refuses to be reabsorbed into a patriarchal structure that would once again define her in relation to a man. Her closing reflections suggest a reorientation toward selfhood, education and the future of her children – particularly her daughters.

However, others argue that the ending stops short of radical transformation. Ramatoulaye does not explicitly renounce the system that enabled her suffering; instead, she carves out a space of dignity within it. From this perspective, the novel's conclusion reflects the limits of feminist resistance in a context where social belonging and personal identity remain deeply intertwined with patriarchal norms.

A more productive reading may lie in embracing the ending's ambiguity. Rather than offering a definitive resolution. Mariama Ba foregrounds the ongoing nature of struggle. Ramatoulaye is voice-measured, reflective and critical-embodies a form of intellectual resistance that challenges patriarchy not through sustained critique. The novel thus resists closure, suggesting that transformation is incremental and contested rather than immediate or total.

### **Beyond Binary Frameworks**

While it is possible to argue that patriarchy in *So Long A Letter* functions as an oppressive system, such a claim must be nuanced by attention to cultural context, the complexity of female agency and the text's refusal of simplistic resolutions. Mariama Ba does not present women merely as victims, nor does she depict liberation as straightforward. Instead, she reveals how women navigate, negotiate and at times resist the constraints imposed upon them.

Positioning patriarchy as “undilutedly oppressive” can be a powerful critical stance, but the novel itself invites a more layered engagement – one that recognizes both the structural inequalities of patriarchy and the subtle forms of agency that emerge within it. In doing so, *So Long A Letter* remains a vital text for rethinking the intersections of gender, culture and power in post-colonial contexts.

### **Female Oppression and Children's Vulnerability in Patriarchal Marriage in *So Long A Letter***

Mariama Ba's *So Long A Letter* presents patriarchal marriage as a system that simultaneously oppresses women and exposes children to emotional and social vulnerability. Through the experiences of Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, Mariama Ba demonstrates that patriarchy does not merely disadvantage women within marriage but also destabilizes the family structure, creating conditions in which children suffer neglect, insecurity and diminished parental care:

With consternation, I measure the extent of Modou's betrayal. His abandonment of his first family (myself and my children) was the outcome of the choice of a

new life. He rejected us. He mapped out his future without taking our existence into account (10).

I gave him thirty years of my life, to think that twelve times over I carried his child (13).

I ask myself questions. The truth is that, despite everything, I remain faithful to the love of my youth (59).

Aissatou, your namesake, is three months pregnant (84).

The novel thus portrays patriarchal marriage as a space of layered victimization, affecting women directly and children indirectly.

Female oppression in the novel is most evident in the patriarchal sanctioning of polygamy, which prioritizes male desire over female dignity. Ramatoulaye recounts the moment she learns of her husband Modou's second marriage, describing how he abandons his marital responsibilities without consideration for her emotional wellbeing, she reflects bitterly on her situation, asking:

I told myself what every betrayed woman says (41).

.... Leave? Start again at zero, after living twenty-five years with one man, after having borne twelve children? Did I have enough energy to bear alone the weight of this responsibility, which was both moral and material? (41).

I counted the abandoned or divorced women of my generation whom I knew (41).

I lived in a vacuum. And Modou avoided me. Attempts by friends and family to bring him back to the fold proved futile. One of the new couple's neighbours explained to me that the 'child' would go 'all a-quiver' each time Modou said my name or showed any desire to see his children. He never came again; his newfound happiness gradually swallowed up his memory of us. He forgot about us (48).

This exposes the limited choices available to women in patriarchal marriages where years of emotional labour and motherhood do not guarantee security or respect. Ramatoulaye's oppression lies not only in Modou's betrayal but also in the cultural norms that expect her silent endurance.

Similarly, Aissatou's marriage reveals how patriarchy suppresses female autonomy through family pressure and tradition. Mawdo's submission to his mother's insistence on a second wife illustrates how patriarchal authority extends beyond individual men to the broader social structure. Aissatou's rejection of this system is articulated in her letter of departure, where she declares:

I am stripping myself of your love, your name. Clothed in my dignity, the only worthy garment, I go my way.

Goodbye,

Aissatou (33).

This statement affirms female resistance, yet it also underscores the emotional cost of liberation, as divorce becomes the only viable escape from patriarchal oppression.

While women's suffering is foregrounded. Mariama Ba also draws attention to the vulnerability of children within patriarchal marriages fractured by polygamy and divorce. Modou's abandonment of Ramatoulaye results not only in spousal neglect but also in paternal absence. Ramatoulaye notes that after his second marriage:

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 looked reality in the face (51).

Leaving her solely responsible for raising their twelve children. This absence exposes children to emotional deprivation, as the father figure becomes physically and emotionally unavailable. The novel suggests that patriarchy enables such irresponsibility by excusing men from sustained paternal commitment.

Ramatoulaye's reflections reveal the psychological burden placed on children growing up without active paternal guidance. She expresses concern over their moral and emotional development, acknowledging the difficulty of raising them alone in a society that still privileges male authority. Her struggle highlights how children become silent casualties of patriarchal marriage, forced to adapt to instability created by adult decisions:

My grown children are causing me a great deal of concern (79).

The other night, I surprised the trio (as they are popularly known, Arame, Yacine and Dieynaba, smoking in their bedroom. Everything about their manner showed that they were used to it: their fingers holding the cigarette between their lips or raising it gracefully to their lips, inhaling like connoisseurs. Their nostrils quivered and let out the smoke. And these young ladies inhaled and exhaled while doing their lessons and their homework. They savoured their pleasure greedily behind closed doors for as much as possible to respect their privacy (80).

The children's vulnerability is further emphasized by Ramatoulaye's fear of societal judgment, as she attempts to shield them from the stigma associated with divorce and father absence.

Through these portrayals, Mariama Bâ presents patriarchal marriage as a structure that perpetuates inequality across generations. Female oppression and children's vulnerability are shown to be interconnected consequences of the same system — one that privileges male desire, legitimizes abandonment and minimizes the emotional needs of women and children:

“Bineta, a child the same age as my daughter Daba, promoted to the rank of my co-wife! I must face up to it” (40).

People talked of bewitchment. With determination, Daba begged me to react: “You are letting someone else pluck the fruits of your labour” (51).

I would take a seat with less and less embarrassment as the months went by. People stared at the middle-aged lady without a partner. I will feign difference, while anger hammered against my nerves and the tears I held back welled up behind my eyes (54).

Waiting! But waiting for what? I was not divorced ..... I was abandoned: a fluttering leaf that no hand dares to pick up, as my grandmother would have said.

I survived. I experienced the inadequacy of public transport. My children laughed at themselves in making this harsh discovery. One day, I heard Daba advise them “Above all, don’t let mum know that it is stifling to these buses during the rush hours’.

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).

*So Long A Letter* therefore critiques patriarchy not only as a gendered injustice but also as a social force that undermines family cohesion and children's well-being.

## Conclusion

This paper examined patriarchy and its discontents in Mariama Ba’s *So Long A Letter*, focusing on divorce, absentee fatherhood, female oppression and the vulnerability of children within patriarchal marriage structures. Through a feminist and sociological lens, the research shown that patriarchy in the novel operates not merely as a cultural tradition but as a systematic force that privileges male authority while destabilizing family life. By sanctioning practices such as polygamy and excusing male irresponsibility, patriarchal norms contribute to marital breakdown and the marginalization of women and children.

The analysis has shown that female oppression in *So Long A Letter* manifests through emotional neglect, limited marital choices and the social expectation of silent endurance. Characters such as Ramatoulaye and Aissatou embody different responses to patriarchal domination – endurance and resistance – yet both experiences reveal the profound costs imposed on women within unequal marital systems. Divorce, while offering a path to dignity and self-preservation, also emerges as a complex outcome that exposes women to social and emotional challenges rather than complete liberation.

Beyond women’s experiences, this research has foregrounded children as often-overlooked victims of patriarchal family structures. The absence of responsible fatherhood in the novel results in emotional insecurity, moral uncertainty and increased burden on mothers. Children’s vulnerability is presented not as an isolated consequence of individual failure but as a direct

outcome of patriarchal values that prioritize male desire over familial responsibility. In this way, *So Long A Letter* exposes how patriarchy reproduces inequality across generations, affecting both present and future family stability.

In the final analysis, Mariama Ba's *So Long A Letter* offers a powerful exploration of patriarchy by revealing its far-reaching consequences on women and children alike. By highlighting the interconnectedness of female oppression and children's vulnerability, this study contributes to ongoing feminist and literary discourse and draws attention to the need for more equitable and humane family structures in African societies and beyond.

## References

- Amadiume, Ifi. *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*. London: Zed Books, 1987.
- Amato, Paul R. The Impact of Family Formation Change on the Cognitive, Social and Emotional Well-Being of the Next Generation. *Future of Children*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2005, PP. 75–96.
- Ba, Mariama. *So Long A Letter* Translated by Modupe Bode-Thomas. London: Pearson Education Limited, 2008.
- Bakhita, Josee. Impact of Divorce on Parent-Child Relationships. *Journal of Advanced Sociology*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2024, PP. 43–54.
- Bronfenbrenner, Urie. *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979.
- Cherlin, Andrew J. *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today*. New York: Vintage Books, 2009.
- Goode, William James. *World Revolution and Family Patterns*. New York: Free Press, 1963.
- Lamb, Michael Eric (Editor). *The Role of the Father in Child Development*. 5<sup>th</sup> Edition. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley, 2010.
- McLanahan, Sara and Gary Sandefur. *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994.
- Nfah-Abbenyi, Juliana Makuchi. *Gender in African Women's Writing: Identity, Sexuality and Difference*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- Nnaemeka, Obioma. Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way. *Signs*, Vol. 29, No.2, 2004, PP. 357-385.
- Ogundipe-Leslie, Molar. *Recreating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations*. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1994.
- Ogunyemi, ChikwenyeOkonjo. *African Wo/Man Palava: The Nigerian Novel by Women*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Olaleru, Femi. Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in African Literature. *Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2020, PP. 50–65.
- Oyewumi, Oyeronke. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- Parsons, Talcott and Robert Freed Bales. *Family Socialization and Interaction Process*. New York: Free Press, 1955.
- Stratton, Florence. *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Walby, Sylvia. *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990.