

EXPLORING SUBALTERNITY IN MARIAMA BÂ'S SO LONG A LETTER: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MARGINALIZED VOICES

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Abstract

The current study examines the unexplored subaltern features in Mariama Ba's 'So Long a Letter', emphasizing how the novel highlights marginalization of women's in both patriarchal and post-colonial society. The research specifically navigates the character of Ramatoulaye to uncover the complex experiences of a female protagonist confronting double oppression. The study aims to illuminate subaltern perspectives by exposing the silenced voices of women in the novel. The research is significant as it not only complements the previous studies for highlighting feminist perspectives but also draws attention to wider implications of exploring women's roles in doubly affected societies. The study endeavors to address the gap by utilizing qualitative method for theoretical and interpretative analysis to highlight its multifaceted approach. Through the use of Spivak's (2023) concept of subalternity from essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', the study explores Mariama Ba's translated version of 'So Long a Letter'. The findings reveal that the selected novel not only reflect feminist ideologies but also invites readers to explore its subaltern dimension, offering an insightful understanding of women's role in a doubly oppressed society.

Keywords: *Feminism, Post-Colonial, Patriarchal Society, Subalternity, So Long a Letter*

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1. Introduction

Subalternity refers to the group of voiceless people who are ignored and excluded from power structure and representation. The word 'subaltern' came from the Latin 'sub' meaning 'below' or 'under', and 'alter' meaning 'other' or 'alternate', suggesting a place of inferiority and subordination within a social hierarchy (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 2001). Antonio Gramsci introduced the idea in his Prison Notebooks (1929–1935), which defines marginalized classes as individuals who do not have the agency to actively participate in or affect power structures. Gramsci's (1971) analysis offers a framework for comprehending how these oppressed groups are systematically deprived of their rights as a result of the supremacy of a ruling class. The essay 'Can Subaltern Speak?' by Spivak (2023) further highlights the women as a subaltern in a doubly effaced society through the concepts of epistemic violence and figure of 'Sati' in Hindu codification law. The research aims to explore the subaltern elements of an epistolary novel, 'So Long a Letter' written by Senegalese Noble Prize winner Mariama Ba, translated by Modupe Bode-Thomas from French to English. For this purpose, study underscores Spivak (2023) to examine prominent features of subalternity and to comprehend marginalization of Senegalese women by influential fragments of society.

Although there are so many postcolonial concepts from various theorists that can be applied to analyze the novel, this study exclusively sticks to only one concept. The goal of limiting the scope is to conduct a thorough and focused investigation of subalternity in 'So Long a Letter', allowing a deeper understanding of its impact on marginalized individuals, particularly women, within dominant cultures. While novel has been a subject of investigation for many scholars, previous studies only focus on post-colonial feministic perspective embedded in the novel. The exploration of novel from the perspective of subalternity remains untouched, despite its need. This research intends to fill in the gap by investigating the subaltern elements from the concerned African novel as a whole and especially through the character of Ramatoulaye. In this way, the researchers expand study beyond textual analysis, providing valuable insights for postcolonial educators and scholars seeking to explore gender dynamics, cultural hegemony, and resistance in patriarchal society.

1.1. Research Objectives:

- To investigate the prominent features of subalternity in novel '*So Long a Letter*'.
- To identify the ways in which subalternity is portrayed through the character of Ramatoulaye in '*So Long a Letter*'.

1.2. Research Questions:

1. What are the prominent subaltern features in '*So Long a Letter*'?
2. How does the character of Ramatoulaye represent subalternity in Novel?

2. Literature Review:

Subalterns are result of marginalization caused by higher authorities and prominent state holders. According to Guha (1989), dominant narratives frequently emphasize the contributions made by "great men" such as aristocrats, national leaders, and colonial administrators, while reducing subaltern groups to the status of passive recipients of history, with little to no attention paid to or understanding given to their action. Guha (1989) argues that even postcolonial historians frequently repeated the colonial practice of elevating elite perspectives, criticizing both nationalist and colonial historiography for excluding subaltern voices. The complicated question of whether oppressed groups, particularly women, can speak for themselves in both colonial and postcolonial contexts is addressed in Spivak (2023). According to Spivak (2023), the desire of intellectuals and elites is to talk to or on behalf of the subaltern instead of alongside them, prolonging their silences. The nineteenth-century story of 'White men saving brown women from brown men' is criticized by for its representation of an Indian widow who self-immolates (Sati). The debate was dominated by male-dominated Indian society and colonial powers, not Indian women, even after Sati was prohibited (Spivak, 2023). Similarly, Özü and İren (2020) illustrates the combined effects of patriarchy and colonialism to worsen women's subaltern status.

Ballestrin (2022) presents the concept of 'subaltern feminisms' as a means of expressing the tension that develops between the feminist groups that originate from postcolonial and decolonial settings and hegemonic, frequently Eurocentric feminism. Using earlier research on the sexualization and exploitation of women under colonial rule by scholars such as Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, Ballestrin (2022) highlights how female bodies were previously in a metaphorical way correlated with occupied land, which makes them the first 'territory' occupied by the colonizer. In the context of Senegalese society, Mutunda (2007) critically analyzes the mechanisms of gender oppression, emphasizing the roles that both men and women can play in maintaining patriarchal systems. Ramatoulaye's decision shows a certain amount of weakness because she misjudges her own skills and holds onto antiquated ideas of marital bliss despite the truth of her husband's deceit, claiming that male control is frequently the cause of female dissatisfaction (Mutunda, 2007). According to M'Baye (2019), two significant events in the development of these identities in Senegal were the late nineteenth century and the

subsequent visit of British traveler Michael Davidson in 1949. Davidson's travelogue 'Dakar' captures the vivid, rebellious culture of black Senegalese people living on the periphery of colonial society, particularly the violence and prejudice experienced by LGBTQI individuals by making them feel "strangers in their own land" (M'Baye, 2019). In addition, M'Baye (2019) presents the idea of 'sutura,' a Wolof phrase that denotes protection, prudence, and modesty to represent a type of cosmopolitanism characteristic to Senegal that upholds equality and dignity in the face of complex colonial power relations.

The term 'subaltern' is not associated with any particular identity or social group, nor is it just an abstract concept used by political philosophers to frame conversations about political agency, claims Banerjee (2015). Rather, it is a common word that reflects a more comprehensive historical and social reality that has been studied by post-colonial historians, especially in relation to South Asia. It is a "name that no one has claimed" recognizes the varied and frequently fractured nature of subaltern identities, which defy easy classification and necessitate a more deliberate approach to representation and agency concerns (Banerjee, 2015). According to Champagne (1996), the protagonist 'Ramatoulaye' reflects the intersections of identity, culture, and gender in a patriarchal society. Additionally, Ramatoulaye's decision to reject suitors who fail to arouse true romantic love, signifying a crucial turning point in her personal growth (Champagne, 1996). The study conducted by Nazar (2016) investigates the ways in which the novel 'Our Lady of Alice Bhatti' depicts the existence of a subaltern lady in a postcolonial setting. In Pakistani society, Alice Bhatti is portrayed as a subaltern "Other," and the relentless abuse and humiliation she endures throughout the text is a reflection of her marginalized status. According to Nazar (2016), Alice is referred to as 'untouchable' in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, a designation that deprives her of autonomy and uniqueness and depicts her as someone condemned to suffer endlessly with no way out by limiting her to culturally assigned roles while men are respected and called by their full names. With a focus on the complexity of Afro-American identities, specifically involving women, Mathpati (2021) examines the important themes of racism and subalternity in Toni Morrison's book *Jazz*. Morrison emphasizes the link that forms among oppressed women, providing a feeling of solidarity amidst their common sufferings, in her portrayal of Violet's association with Dorcas's Aunt Alice (Mathpati, 2021). Additionally, Nawaz, Murtaza, and Hassan (2022) investigate Toni Morrison's work 'A Mercy' usage of household as a microcosm of America, where diverse epistemologies and plural thinking combine to create a space where coexistence is rife with power dynamics, reliance, and adaptation.

Using Gayatri Spivak's Marxist-Postcolonial paradigm, Mostafae (2016) examines 'Things Fall Apart' and 'No Longer at Ease', emphasizing the oppression of

women and the effects of colonialism on Igbo society. Their only responsibility is to serve males and perpetuate a false sense of their inferiority. The hyper-masculine worldview of Okonkwo devalues femininity, and the imposition of Western ideas and religion by colonization exacerbates cultural hegemony and further marginalizes women (Mostafaei, 2016). Similarly, Rasal and Tripathi (2018) examines 'The Calcutta Chromosome', from the ideas of the Subaltern Studies Group to bring attention towards the struggles and agency of those who are excluded. The novel asserts that the cry of the subaltern is not only for their current well-being but also for their proper place in the human condition, highlighting the need for recognition and voice that is shared by all (Rasal & Tripathi, 2018). Ratti (2020) examines complex relationship between justice, caste, and subalterns in 'The White Tiger'.

The novel's epistolary structure depicts marginalization using subaltern theory, concentrating on Balram Halwai's transition from oppression to agency. The subaltern's need to be heard in a society that often silences individuals on the fringes is reflected in the directness of the letters, which represent a personal plea for acknowledgment (Ratti, 2020). Furthermore, Ratti (2020) points out that language is essential to the subaltern narrative. Hassan, a Hazara, is made subaltern in *The Kite Runner* by both the larger socio-political conditions that enable such violence and Amir's failure to step in during Assef's savagery (Ghafoor & Farooq, 2020). Comparably, through her relationship with Rasheed and later, the contempt of Jalil's other wives, Mariam experiences the repressive powers of patriarchy in 'A Thousand Splendid Suns' (Ghafoor & Farooq, 2020). Moreover, Ghimire (2023) asserts that the deeply rooted patriarchal norms and cultural practices that rule their culture rendering the female characters in 'The Kite Runner' primarily invisible, excluded, and abused. Ghimire (2023) highlights novel's gentle depiction of the horrifying reality of women's exploitation, oppression, and lack of agency.

While subalternity in postcolonial literature has been the subject of several studies, especially in relation to the writings of Spivak and Gramsci, a thorough examination of Mariama Ba's 'So Long a Letter' from subaltern perspective is a significant lack. Few studies have particularly used Spivak's idea of subalternity to study the multifaceted representation of female silence, agency, and resistance in 'So Long a Letter'. The majority of existing work focuses on the overall oppression of women in postcolonial nations. Furthermore, limited research has demonstrated Ramatoulaye's character as it navigates the connection of gender, identity, and culture fitting with Spivak's (2023) claim that subalterns cannot communicate within dominant discourses. Consequently, by concentrating on Ramatoulaye as a subaltern figure and her fight for autonomy within the framework of Senegalese society, this research aims to fill this gap.

3.Methodology:

The research adopted qualitative method to conduct a theoretical analysis of ‘So Long a Letter’, specifically through the Spivak’s (2023) lens of *Can Subaltern Speak?* The researchers delved into explicit reading of the translated version of novel, focus-group observation and interpretative analysis to examine instances of subaltern as women in Mariam Ba’s ‘So Long a Letter’. Mariama Ba is a Senegalese author who is known for her feminist perspective for African women. The selected novel was her first novel, written in French, first published in 1980, and then translated to English by Modupe Bode-Thomas in 1981. It is an Epistolary novel; in the form of a letter written by Ramatoulaye to her childhood best friend Aissatou Ba. The analysis aims to reveal protagonist’s actions, interactions, and viewpoints as a Subaltern, struggling within the larger social and cultural Senegalese milieu.

4.Theoretical Framework:

The concept of Subalternity put forward by Spivak (2023) offers an in-depth insight to examine the complex relationship between dominant and ancillary in a Patriarchal society. According to Spivak (2023), the woman disappears between imperialism and patriarchy, leaving the gender-specific subaltern no opportunity to speak. This framework emphasizes the critical role of perspective in both constructing and challenging narratives. The research underscores part two and four of the essay ‘Can Subaltern Speak?’ Spivak (2023) asserts the concept of ‘epistemic violence’ explaining the way women are portrayed as ‘other’ through manipulation of power and knowledge in part two. The part four of the essay focuses on double oppression imposed by colonizers and patriarchal society on women.

5.Findings and Discussion:

The analysis of the selected novel presents an impeccable picture of Spivak’s (2023) subalternity through various female characters. The novel sets in 20th century Senegal, a country in Africa once colonized by French. The effects of colonialism made it difficult for their society to easily give freedom to native women; in result a patriarchal society took form where women were allowed to study, marry, and grow professionally with the approval of males that aligns with the view of Ballestrin (2022). While digging deep into the African novel, the analysis highlights the fact that elements of subaltern are scattered all over the text. There are various female characters that depict restricted mindset influenced by patriarchal society and cause hindrance in the way of other women. The novel also portrays female characters that are in the middle, often confused, as evident from Ramatoulaye’s character. However, the character of Daba, elder daughter of

Ramatoulaye and her friend Aissatou, whom she is writing the letters, have enough courage of taking actions for their own sake.

5.1. Life of Married Senegalese Women:

The initial pages of novel gave an introduction of married Senegalese women in accordance with their culture, norms, legal position, and problems leading their lives. The text states that when a woman suffers from widowhood, her in laws have an influence on her life. It said that women often sacrifice *'her possessions as gifts to her family-in-law; and, worse still, beyond her possessions she gives up her personality, her dignity, becoming a thing in the service of the man who has married her, his grandfather, his grandmother, his father, his mother, his brother, his sister, his uncle, his aunt, his male and female cousins, his friends'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 4). These lines have clear depiction of difficulties a woman could have in post-marriage life. Women willingly left their true identity behind and transform themselves completely in accordance to their In Laws and Husband wants. The silence to which women devote themselves consolidates with Spivak's (2023) subalternity which says that subaltern as women are more voiceless.

5.2. Social and Political Condition of women:

The Senegalese women live according to the new rules and laws which restricted them to live as they please. The two best friends Ramatoulaye and Assiatou got separated due to *'the profound choices made by New Africa for the promotion of the black woman'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 16). They could not resist it because they have to survive; Aissatou as an independent woman and Ramatoulaye as a devoted wife, mother, and daughter in law. The ratio of women in political system in comparison to men was *'Four women, four out of a hundred deputies'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 60). This ratio revealed the condition of women in Senegal where they make a minority of female deputies *'not even one for each province'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 60), out of hundred deputies. It refers to Spivak's (2023) idea that *'subaltern as female cannot be heard or read.'* Even they were so many but they were not able to make a huge noise for their own political representation. This scenario clearly depicts marginalization of women by their own men. With a colonial history, Senegalese women have no history on which they can stand and speak so; they act as true subalterns who cannot speak for themselves.

The Senegalese men were not ready to share of true amount of rights with women because of their harsh views about women. As Ramatoulaye stated in her letter, *'Men would call us scatter-brained. Others labelled us devils. But many wanted to possess us. How many dreams did we nourish hopelessly that could have been fulfilled as lasting happiness and that we abandoned to embrace others, those that have burst miserably like*

soap bubbles, leaving us empty-handed?’ (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 14-15). Ramatoulaye’s point of view gave an indication that men take women negatively. They wanted to possess women instead of hearing their wishes which result their dreams to vanish into bubbles as if they were never even formed.

When Ramatoulaye asked Dauda about the matter of female deputies, he replied her, *‘But you women, you are like mortar shells. You demolish. You destroy. Imagine a large number of women in the Assembly. Why, everything would explode, go up in flames’* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 60). His answer expressed patriarchal views which restrict women to enter into political world. They were silenced and were not allowed to interfere in national matters by men due to their skeptical views. Such marginalization of females reflect Subaltern concept that women will remain as mute as ever, if they are not allowed to operate as a healthy part of society.

5.3.Peculiar situation of Women:

In the personal lives of women, either married or unmarried, every female suffered. Ramatoulaye expressed her inner voice in the letter as said’ *‘In our different ways, we suffered the social constraints and heavy burden of custom’* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 19). They face *‘social constraints ..., and male egoism resists’* in their life. The Author stated them as *‘instruments for some, baits for others’* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 88). The lines have a very deep significance, showcasing the real worth and value of Senegalese females in their own society. As subalterns in a former colonized state, Senegalese women have been shadowed by norms, customs, and fate due to which they have been used for the interest of men.

Regardless of the marginalized situation, novel includes some women who took steps for themselves even once in a lifetime; Assiatou Ba preferred living independent over living in a tarnished relationship, Daba preferred to challenge her father, Jacqueline preferred her love, and Romatoulaye preferred living alone over indulging in polygamy and in result she got *‘reputation of a 'lioness' or 'mad woman'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 70). However, those who acted as puppet in front of others and let everyone pass over them were hollow from inside, like Binetou *‘was already dead inside ... ever since her marriage to Modou’* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 71). Living in such environment lead the protagonist to wonder about true happiness and meaning of life; *‘The word 'happiness' does indeed have meaning, doesn't it? I shall go out in search of it’* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 89).

5.4.Acceptance of Polygamy:

After facing difficulties of life and having no recognition for sacrifices, females were made to live in polygamy. They said, '*A wife must understand, once and for all, and must forgive; she must not worry herself about betrayals of the flesh*' (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 34) Ramatoulaye endured polygamy however Aissatou Ba was '*an innocent victim of an unjust cause*'. Also, she was '*the courageous pioneer of a new life*' (p. 34), leaving painful relationship behind she took criticism of the whole society. Aissatou Ba and Daba Fall do not fall into category of Subaltern although they live in same society with same problems but they had enough courage to speak for themselves. The presence of these two characters presents the fact that subaltern can speak but are not heard. They did not let others torture them or control their life. Hence, they are not Spivak's (2023) subaltern women resided in the shadow of men.

Polygamy was not at all considered a problem. Every second man was having more than one wife, approximately two or three. This insensitivity led Modou Fall marry Binetou without convincing his first wife and he ended up ruining her life. In a very casual way, his friends and religious scholar (Imam) informed her '*he is alive for you, for all of us, thanks be to God. All he has done is to marry a second wife today*' (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 37). They did not think about Ramatoulaye's emotional breakdown and took notice of her condition because polygamy was engraved in the roots of society. It portrays that how insignificant a subaltern could be, Modou married but his wife was notified by some outsiders. At that point, Ramatoulaye's silence represented the character of a true subaltern who can speak but decides not to do so.

5.5.Males and Females of Senegal in Comparison:

The supremacy of males was given a way by women such a Lady mother-in law of Modou. He bribed her '*to establish his rule*' (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 10) over Binetou. In return she happily handed over her daughter's life to a married man and father of twelve because '*she firmly believed that the payments would continue, even after Modou's death, out of the estate*' (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 10). According to Mariam Ba, a woman is similar to a ball which cannot be control once it is thrown. Likewise, women's life cannot be predicted after marriage because it depends on her husband. Binetou was handled likewise. Her marriage to Modou made her subaltern characteristics prominent, without taking an action; she married and lived silently with the man. Through her submissive approach, she tried to survive not to live and this is what makes her subaltern. Moreover, her character gave the perspective that a woman can live by '*the force of her devotion, despite the ageing of her companion*' (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 41). In contrast, man '*compares what he had with what he no longer has, what he has with what he could have*' (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 41). The difference in approach led both genders to ruin their

relationships; men tend to be oppressive but want women to be submissive. After Mouda Fall's death, his brother Tamsir wanted to marry Ramatoulaye but she rejected him instantly. The action reflects that Senegalese women do not have the freedom of choice even after their husbands were gone; other men were there to watch over them. They treated them as property; human without any self-reflective voice and mute for lifetime, even on the brink of death.

5.6.Ramatoulaye's Character:

The novel delves into the life of female protagonist Ramatoulaye who faced betrayal, polygamy, and widowhood. She was a teacher, a wife, and a mother of twelve. In her husband's side, she had a lot of in laws to cooperate with, especially mother-in-law and sisters in law. She tolerated their taunts about living separately and lavishly on their brother's money as one of her sisters-in-law mentioned '*your two housemaids!*' (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 20) in the household. She did it to make her feel ashamed. Despite all of the circumstances, she remained loyal to her husband, making compromises for his sake and loving him. At one point she stated about her marriage, '*I loved this man passionately, to think that I gave him thirty years of my life, to think that twelve times over I carried his child*' (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 12). She deeply tried to make the marriage succeed. She trusted him up to the extent that she did not doubt his selection of new suits for outing, every night and also suddenly getting their joint account separated. In letter to Aissatou, she regretfully said '*I discovered, I was doing only to help him in his effort to be elegant in his seduction of another woman*' (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 38). After realizing the betrayal, she doubted herself; as '*I try to spot my faults in the failure of my marriage*' (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 55).

Modou Fall did not take consideration of Ramatoulaye's life and her sacrifices; he went on marrying another woman of his daughter's age. His action led Ramatoulaye to believe that '*I was not divorced ... I was abandoned*' (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 52). She silently endured the pain of being abandoned by her husband in a marriage of thirty years. She wrote to Aissatou that the source of Modou's second marriage was not her in laws; however, she declared that the problem was in her husband itself. While condemning his action, she stated '*he burned his past, both morally and materially. He dared to commit such an act of disavowal*' (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 12). She began to ponder on the reason '*was it madness, weakness, irresistible love? What inner confusion led Modou Fall to marry Binetou?*' (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 11). Her repetition of this dialogue represents inner turmoil that whether she should continue to love and respect companion of her life or bash him against his act of polygamy, without taking her into account. Her constant pondering made her confused and silent on the situation.

She faced the hateful situation of polygamy for five years with utmost silence. She believed about Modou that *'his abandonment of his first family was the outcome of the choice of a new life. He rejected us. He mapped out his future without taking our existence into account.'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 9) With such a man, she did not want to waste herself. Thus, she focused on surviving; *'I was surviving. In addition to my former duties, I took over Modou's as well'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 51). She started doing things for ease regardless of what others think but within a limited boundary. She started going to cinema however, *'People stared at the middle-aged lady without a partner'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 51). She endured embarrassing moments but remained silent. Her muteness made her subaltern and totally marginalized in a triangle of polygamy. Further she declared, *'anger hammered against my nerves and the tears I held back welled _ up behind my eyes'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 51). The way she handled her husband's marriage was self-destructive. She did not even question him once, instead forced herself not to speak. She became complete silent for five years consistently. She proved that a subaltern remains silent and women as subaltern can be more marginalized than men.

She ignored others in pursuit of giving her children best life and brought up. It was difficult for her to start over, *'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?'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 39). She did nothing but remembering the old memories of past, made with Modou. In this process, she was so tarnished by thoughts that pain of betrayal got undergrounded with *'a refusal to fight it'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 52). She did not question Modou but keep asking herself several questions. She wrote, *'I ask myself questions. The truth is that, despite everything, I remain faithful to the love of my youth. Aissatou, I cry for Modou, and I can do nothing about it'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 56). Except crying, remembering and surviving through it, she did nothing for her right.

She thought she cannot do anything about it, but she forgot she was a working woman. She could take a stance at any moment like divorce or questioning her husband for the sake of their, long tenure of marriage. An educated woman with financial stability can speak up but Ramatoulaye proved her as a subaltern by not making any voice till Modou's death. She acknowledged, *'I am a schoolteacher.... I receive the greater share of money'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 6). However, her silence made her ordinary woman who cannot speak even provided with circumstances to speak. In addition to it, their children supported her as Daba said, *'Break with him, mother! Send this man away. He has respected neither you nor me. Do what Aunt Aissatou did; break with him. Tell me you'll break with him. I can't see you fighting over a man with a girl my age'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 39). Daba even suggested her to divorce him as a reaction to his marriage

but she preferred silence. She ignored everything and only tried to hold that thread of marriage which was getting weak day by day. She tortured herself instead of speaking her mind.

After five years of forbearance, Modou died. The first page of novel stated her situation, *'Today I am a widow'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 1), and the next page gave the information *'Modou is dead'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 2). In such situation her reaction remained just as expected from any woman, *'Where to lie down? Middle age demands dignity'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 2). Everything hitherto in this situation maintained her subaltern status likewise the next words, *'The presence of my co-wife beside me irritates me'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 3), continued tension in Ramatoulaye's in her subaltern status. She kept disturbed by her co-wife but did not speak for herself. Her silence showed that she did not even think of speaking for her right to stay alone for mourning. The situation refers to the condition of a middle-aged widow in Senegal; *'our sisters-in-law undo our hair, ... my co-wife and myself are put inside a rough and ready tent made of a wrapper pulled taut above our heads and set up for the occasion'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 4). At this stage, after completing her joint mourning period, she became grateful about *'Binetou, my co-wife, will return to her SI CAP villa. At last! Phew!'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 8). She waited for the problem to be solved rather than solving it by her. Further she forgave Modou rather than holding a grudge against him as *'I have forgiven him'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 57). Her decision of forgiving him added in her status of a subaltern who could do nothing, except leaving the matter with the death of the person.

As the norm of Senegalese society, her brother-in-law Tamsir came to propose her for marriage which she refused aggressively. At the very moment she rejected him, she revoked her status of subaltern. She wrote to Aissatou, *'I look Tamsir straight in the eye. I look at Mawdo. I look at the Imam. I draw my black shawl closer. I tell my beads. This time I shall speak out. My voice has known thirty years of silence, thirty years of harassment. It bursts out, violent, sometimes sarcastic, sometimes contemptuous'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 57). She refused his proposal by reminding all of them that widows are also humans as she said, *'You forget that I have a heart, a mind, that I am not an object to be passed from hand to hand. Tamsir, purge yourself of your dreams of conquest. They have lasted forty days. I shall never be your wife'* (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 58). Ramatoulaye's reaction to Tamsir's proposal upraised herself from subaltern status. After death of Modou, she did not want to let anyone else rule over her. At last, she speaks for herself.

After giving such a strong refusal, she got another proposal from Daouda Dieng for her hand. He was her mother's favorite and he also loved her passionately from the time of their youth, but that did not change anything, she independently made the decision

of not marrying him. She wrote to Aissatou that she wanted '*To be a woman! To live the life of a woman!*' (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 64). She clearly told her that, '*Thirty years later, my own personal refusal is the only thing that conditions me*' (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 66). After spending thirty years in silence, at the end, she spoke but in front of other men, who were trying to conquer her. Through this act, her status of subaltern is deeply concerned due to the fact that she speaks, she proved that marginalized can speak but according to their own will. Spivak points out that with what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak? The character of Ramatoulaye acted by her will and she made the decision by judging the situation.

For that reason, she was criticized by everyone. Her neighbor Farmata said, '*You have refused greatness! You shall live in mud*' (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 69). However, she wanted to live quietly and raise her children well, especially her daughters whom she cared a lot. At the end of novel, Ramatoulaye starts searching meaning of true happiness to live the rest of her life without any regret. She said, '*The word 'happiness' does indeed have meaning, doesn't it? I shall go out in search of it*' (Bode-Thomas, 1989, p. 89). Ramatoulaye remained loyal and faithful to her husband as a widow and forgave him just like Hindu women prefer Sati in remembrance of their husbands. However, her character showed that women are more pitiful as subaltern and can speak if they have enough courage.

6. Conclusion:

To conclude, the analysis demonstrates characteristics of Spivak's (2023) subalternity in Mariama Ba's translated version of '*So Long a Letter*'. This epistolary novel portrays complicated life of women especially married within a patriarchal society having roots of colonialism. The life of every woman reflects marginalization in personal, social, political and legal decorum of society. The protagonist Ramatoulaye exhibited subaltern characteristics till the death of her husband. However, she managed to overcome subalternity after the death of Modou. Therefore, presenting round character which adheres to Spivak's (2023) subaltern for thirty years of her life. Even in the later part, she took stance for others. Finally at the end of the novel she turned down the proposal of Daouda Dieng out of her own children, and the wife and children of Daouda Dieng. However, she liked him and wanted to spent the rest of her life with the compatible man but she chose to stay free and independent. She realized that she was a victim of polygamy and betrayal thus she did not want to make more victims. The further researchers can undertake studies on different characters from the novel. For instance, the comparison of Ramatoulaye and Daouda Dieng, Daba Fall and Aissatou Fall, Binetou and Nabou in their approaches towards life to understand their subaltern identity.

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