

A POSTSTRUCTURAL FEMINIST EXAMINATION OF WIDOWHOOD IN *SO LONG A LETTER* BY MARIAMA BA AND *THE ONLY SON* BY JOHN MUNOYE

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH STUDIES

OF

THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

BY

PENNINA-PENEYAMBEKO NDESHIPANDA NAHOLE

201304169

APRIL 2020

SUPERVISOR: PROF. J. KANGIRA

Abstract

This thesis provides a poststructural feminist examination of widowhood in the novels *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba and *The Only Son* by John Munonye. The selected two novels were chosen because of the recurring themes on widowhood within them. The major objectives of the study were to examine issues surrounding death that directly affect widows as portrayed in the two novels, *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba and *The Only Son* by John Munonye; analyse how the two authors present widowhood in the two selected African novels from both poststructural feminist and womanist perspectives and explore emerging themes from the discussion. The study was qualitative in nature and data was analysed using a thematic analysis approach. The study observed that widows are socially stigmatized. In Africa, some widows are victims of ill-cultural practices and norms as portrayed in *So Long a Letter*. The study also argues that in some cases the widow is forced to stay in her matrimonial home, despite having strained relationships with her in-laws. The findings further indicate that some widows are denied their rightful inheritance by the in-laws. Equally, the study reveals that widowhood brings about financial deprivation. The study recommends further research on issues surrounding death that directly affect women in other literary texts.

Acknowledgements

This thesis was made successful through assistance of different people who helped to make it a reality. No words or expression are good enough to equate the gratitude that I owe the Almighty God who made it possible for this research a dream come true. He has been ever present throughout this journey as he saved me from the hindrances that could have prevented me from completing this course. I owe it all to him and I could never thank him enough. I would also like to express my deepest appreciation to my supervisor, Professor Kangira for his guidance, patience and for always pushing me to do my best, without his guidance and persistent help, I would have not managed to come this far. I am entirely grateful to you. To my University father and mentor, Dr Collen Sabao, may the good Lord continue to bless you abundantly for your amicable heart, your office is always welcoming and provides every needed help. To our father, Doctor Mlambo, you are a blessing to the institution as a whole. You always avail yourself when needed.

Furthermore, I would also like to extend my utmost gratitude to my big sister for her selflessness, and all the sacrifices she has made for me to complete this course. Thank you for always supporting and believing in each of my endeavours. To my sister Hambelela, remember when my computer crashed resulting in the loss of my chapters, I wanted to give up, and you spoke life into my situation. I will forever be indebted to you. More so, I would like to acknowledge my mother for her unwavering support and prayer, your prayers have brought me this far. To my precious grand-daughter Poline Ntinda, you had my back since day one, and you will forever be close to my heart. In addition, I would like to thank my friends Mr. Abisai Shetunyenga, Miss Frieda Indongo, Miss Abia Amupolo, Justy Shimhana, Meke Mungandjera, Martha Shimhopileni, Frieda Lazarus, Mirjam Kandume, Frieda

Ndashaala, Monica Nakale, Loini Pweya and Mr Nambudhi for their constant support, I bless the day I met you, you have brought so much light into my life.

To my brother and best friend Pinehas Kandjamba, your warm words encouraged me to do my best, thank you for always being there when I needed you. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to my day one Hosea Mathews, this is for you.

Finally, I would like to thank my classmates. A very special thank you to my “wifey” Ester Shikongo, your calm voice and spirit has always calmed me down.

May God abundantly bless you all people. No words can explain my gratitude.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my big sisters Lettie and Vistorina, for their continuous support and being my pillars of strength during this journey. Also to all the advocates and agents of goodwill.

Declaration

I, Penninna-Peneyambeko Ndeshipanda Nahole, declare hereby that this study is a true reflection of my own research, and that this work, or part thereof has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution of higher education. No part of this thesis may be reproduced, stored in any retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, or by means (e.g. electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior permission of the author, or The University of Namibia in that behalf. I, grant The University of Namibia the right to reproduce this thesis in whole or in part, in any manner or format, which The University of Namibia may deem fit, for any person or institution requiring it for study and research; providing that The University of Namibia shall waive this right if the whole thesis has been or is being published in a manner satisfactory to the University.

Penninna—Peneyambeko Ndeshipanda Nahole

Date

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Dedication.....	iv
Declaration.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
1.1. Introduction.....	1
1.2. Background of the study.....	1
1.3. Statement of the problem.....	2
1.4. Objectives of the study.....	3
1.5. Significance of the study.....	3
1.6. Limitation of the study.....	4
1.7. Delimitation of the study.....	4
1.8. Definition of terms used in the study.....	4
1.8.1. Culture.....	4
1.8.2. Feminism.....	5
1.8.3. Patriarchy.....	5
1.8.4. Widow.....	5
1.8.5. Gender.....	6
1.9. Organisation of the study.....	6
1.10 Chapter summary.....	6
CHAPTER TWO.....	8
2.1 Introduction.....	8
2.1.1 Purpose of Literature Review.....	8
2.2 Discussing the theoretical framework.....	8
2.3 Review of related literature on widowhood.....	10
2.4 Loss of property to the husband's relatives.....	12
2.5 Emotional, psychological and physical abuse.....	15
2.6 Depression and loneliness.....	19
2.7 Cultural and religious practices beliefs and norm.....	22
2.8 Forced remarriages.....	28
2.9 Difficulty in social interaction and social stigma.....	29

2.10 Financial or economic hardships	31
2.11 Single parenting and home maintenance	32
2.12 Loss of social status, sense of belonging and identity	34
2.13 Hatred among women	35
2.14 Chapter summary	36
CHAPTER THREE	38
3. Introduction.....	38
3.1 Research approach and design	38
3.2. Population	39
3.3 Sampling	39
3.4 Procedure	40
3.5 Data analysis	40
3.6 Research ethics.....	40
3.7 Chapter summary	41
CHAPTER FOUR.....	42
4.1 Introduction.....	42
4.2 Summary of the texts	42
4.2. 1 So Long a Letter.....	42
4.2.2 Summary of <i>The Only Son</i>	43
4.3 Loss of properties to the husband’s relatives and mourners	44
4.4 Emotional, psychological and physical abuse.....	47
4.5 Depression and loneliness.....	50
4.6 Cultural and religious beliefs and norms	53
4.7 Forced remarriages.....	56
4.8 Difficulty in social interaction and Social stigma.....	58
4.9 Financial hardship and poverty	59

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1. Introduction

The study examined widowhood in *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba and *The Only Son* by John Munonye from poststructural feminist and womanist points of view. This chapter is an introductory chapter. Firstly, it defines the background of the study, the statement of the problem and outlines the research objectives. The chapter further explains the significance of the study, delineates the study, explains the limitations and delimitations of the study and concludes by providing definitions of key terms.

1.2. Background of the study

Studies on the representation of widowhood are crucial to society yet this area is understudied (Sossou, 2002). Potash (1986) argues that although widows constitute as much as 25 percent of the adult female population in many African societies, they have been a topic of little interest to researchers. Sossou (2002) believes that death is inevitable, and it can come anytime and most married women in all parts of the world experience it at one time or another. According to Sandy (2001) African widows, irrespective of their ethnic groups are among the most vulnerable and destitute women in the region. Owen (2001) argues that the research into the nature and effect of widows' mourning rites has been scant although the practice violates many basic principles contained in all key international human rights conventions. The United Nations (1995) affirms that despite the fact that widows make up a large proportion of the women population in all societies, research concerning their plight and status in developing countries is lacking. Hence, this study's intention was to critically

analyse the representation of widowhood in *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba and *The Only Son* by John Munonye. Even though widowhood is one of the most challenging and stressful times when the bereaved women need to be supported, they are neglected and oppressed the most during this point in time (Sosou, 2002). Moreover, the individual suffering of a widow is made social, and her body becomes a metaphor for suffering (Ramphele, 2018).

Kapuma (2011) proclaims that widowhood is one of the issues that people do not talk about freely. Kapuma (2011) further explains that it is a taboo and the dead cannot be spoken about. Yet it is an issue that is increasingly becoming common in our communities because of the number of deaths occurring. Widowhood spells hardship, a period of untold deprivation, seclusion and impurity (Ohale, 2012). The two selected African novels explore the humiliation that African widows endure. The novels depict the challenges surrounding death that directly affect widows, some of which are the loss of property to the husband's relatives, emotional abuse, difficulty in social interaction, heavy task of taking over responsibilities, financial or economic hardships, loneliness and depression and single parenting. Manal (2015) contends that widowhood is an extremely difficult and problematic stage in a woman's life. The focus of this study, therefore, was to critically interrogate how widowhood is represented in *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba and *The Only Son* by John Munonye.

1.3. Statement of the problem

The concern of this study is to explore how widowhood is represented in the novels *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba and *The Only Son* by John Munonye. The social position of the widow in many African societies is not clearly defined and made safe and respectable. Sossou (2002) argues that the behaviour surrounding mourning is inherently gendered. Rituals have more to do with exalting the position of the dead man than allowing a real outlet for the widow's grief. According to Ohale (2012), there is so much that still needs to be done

in order to salvage the African widow from overwhelming cultural impositions. Few studies (Ohale, 2012; Ogunyemi, 1985) have been conducted on widowhood. These studies mostly dwell on the perpetuation of the patriarchal project, thereby creating a gap for this study, This is because of the observed fact that it appears that there are a few studies that focus on issues surrounding death that directly affect women and this study seeks to contribute towards filling that gap. This study thus intended to examine how widowhood is represented in the selected African novels using poststructural feminist and womanist approaches.

1.4. Objectives of the study

The major objectives of the study are to:

- discursively examine issues surrounding death that directly affect widows as portrayed in the two novels, *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba and *The Only Son* by John Munonye;
- analyse how the two authors present widowhood in the two selected African novels from poststructural feminist and womanist perspectives; and
- explore the emerging themes from the discussion.

1.5. Significance of the study

It is envisaged that the study will contribute to the existing body of literature on widowhood by going beyond the mere discussion and focus on the perpetuation of the patriarchal project and focusing more on issues surrounding death that directly affect women. This study, it is hoped, may benefit the agents and advocates of goodwill in fighting for the wellbeing of widows.

1.6. Limitation of the study

This study was limited to two novels only as well as the analysis of the representation of widowhood in *So Long a Letter* (1980) and *The Only Son* (1966). As a result, the findings cannot be generalised to other novels and themes.

1.7. Delimitation of the study

Best and Kahn (1993) define delimitations as boundaries of the study that enable the researcher to point out clearly what is concluded in the study. The study was delimited to the representation of widowhood in *So Long a Letter* (1980) and *The Only Son* (1966) only.

1.8. Definition of terms used in the study

It is of great importance to define the prominent terms used in a study that are crucial to understand the concept widowhood. The terms that are defined are culture, widow and widowhood.

1.8.1. Culture

Culture is an expression and practice of ones' adopted ways of behaving or doing things. Thus, culture is a diverse way in which people of the same roots behave and respond to life. According to Sossou (1993) culture is the interpretative and managing mechanism of society. Similarly, Masule (2014) defines culture as an integral part of every society that encompasses the different behavioural traits and norms that its members carry and practise. It may be in the form of feelings and expressions that people have learnt throughout their lives; or inherited customs that have been passed down from one generation to another.

1.8.2. Feminism

A movement that empowers women, to be aware of themselves and fight for equal rights without putting men down and other woman down (Mills, 2001). Maguire (1987) defines feminism as a belief that women universally face some form of subjugation or exploitation; a commitment to uncover and understand what causes and sustains oppression, in all its forms and a commitment to work individually and collectively in everyday life to bring to an end all forms of oppression. Masule (2014) defines feminism as a philosophy that seeks to redress the injustices and imbalances that feminists believe women undergo at the hands of a patriarchal society. According to Nashongo (2016) feminism is mainly associated with women's rights and it is usually defined as an active desire to change women's position in society in order to improve the quality of their lives.

1.8.3. Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a social and cultural system that is entirely dominated by men. Sultana (2012) defines patriarchy as a set of social relations between men and women. 'Generally speaking, it is a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women '(Iitula, 2018, p.48).

1.8.4. Widow

A widow is a married woman whose husband has died. Sossu (2002) defines the term widow as any woman who has survived or outlived the spouse.

1.8.5. Gender

Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being female or male and the relationship between women and men, and girls and boys (Ambunda & De Klerk, 2008). It refers to those female and male differences that are not biological but a result of social constructs.

1.9. Organisation of the study

This study comprises five chapters. Chapter One provides the following components; introduction of the study, background of the study, statement of the problem, significance of the study, limitations of the study, and definition of key terms. Chapter Two presents the review of related literature and discusses the theoretical frameworks in which the study is couched. Chapter Three explains the research methodology employed by the study. Chapter Four, the analysis chapter, examines issues surrounding death that directly affect widows; analyse how the two authors present widowhood in the two selected African novels from poststructural feminist and womanist perspectives; and explores the emerging themes from the discussion. Chapter Five is the conclusion of the study and provides a summary and recommendations.

1.10 Chapter summary

This chapter introduced the study “A poststructural feminist examination in *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba and *The Only Son* by John Munonye”. It focused on the background of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives and significance of the study, limitation of the study, delimitation of the study and the definition of terms used in the study. The next

chapter, which is Chapter Two reviews related literature with the goal of contextualising the current study in the pre-existing corpus and presents the theoretical frameworks.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Chapter One introduced the research and it presented the background information, the statement of the problem, the aim and objectives of the study that would help the researcher to investigate the problem under investigation. The goal of the research is to critically examine and explore how widowhood is represented in two novels, *So long a letter* by Mariana Ba and *The Only Son* by John Munonye. This chapter critically engages related literature to give context to the current study.

2.1.1 Purpose of Literature Review

Fanger (1985) describes literature review as an immersion into the subject, exploring what is already known about the topic and link it to the problem under investigation.

2.2 Discussing the theoretical framework

The study utilises two theoretical approaches in the analysis of the texts. It utilises Womanism and Poststructural Feminism. Womanism (Walker, 1983) is a theoretical approach that attempts to subvert the shortcomings of main wave feminist theories by bringing in the cultural import to the analysis of issues affecting women. Walker (1983) observes that, “Womanist theory, while diverse, holds at its core that both femininity and culture are equally important to the woman's existence”. In this conception, one’s femininity cannot be stripped from the culture within which it exists. The womanist seeks to answer the ultimate question of how to equitably share power among the races and between the sexes (Ogunyemi, 1985). As such, the study examined the representation of widowhood in an

African context. The theory was relevant given the study's argument that most of the issues affecting African widows are culturally engrained. Hence, the study breaks new ground by focusing on the nexus between widowhood and African cultural practices. In other words, the study's discussion located widowhood within African cultural contexts.

Weems (1994), as cited by Ebunoluwa (2009, p. 229) describes Africana womanism as, "An ideology created and designed for all women of African descent". The theory is foregrounded in African culture and mainly focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires of African women. It critically addresses the dynamics of the conflict between mainstream feminist approaches, the black feminist, the African feminist and the Africana womanist. Walker (1983) cited in Ebunoluwa (2009, p. 229) explains womanism and a womanist as:

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

The above quotation shows that womanism as a theory is holistic and does not discriminate between male and female. It advocates for completeness and wholeness of all the people, whether male or female. Concurring, Dove (1998) states that, "African womanism brings to the forefront the role of African mothers as leaders in the struggle to regain, reconstruct, and create a cultural integrity that espouses the principles of reciprocity, balance, harmony, justice, truth, righteousness and order." (p. 535). In essence womanism "furnishes a vision

where the women and men of different colours coexist like flowers in a garden yet retain their cultural distinctiveness and integrity” (Collins, 2001, p. 11). The coextended of males and females is further cemented by Aegerter (2000, p. 67) who believes that womanism is “a philosophy that has wholeness and healing for all Black people.” Nashongo (2016) opines that womanism is concerned with the survival of all people and, at the same height, allows both black men and women to live freely and interact in a non-threatening environment.

Ebunoluwa (2009, p.228) explains that Feminism, as a theory, “shares the view that women’s oppression is tied to their sexuality.” This means that women are oppressed because of their gender – because they are women. Poststructural Feminism (Butler, 1990) on the other hand, is a feminist theory of language. Conceived from the Structural Linguistics studies of De Saussure (1966) and Butler (1990), the theory examines how the politics of gender and gender equality are enacted through language (Sabao, 2013). It provides theoretical foundations for the analysis of the manner in which language is used to de/construct relations between the masculine and the feminine. In the context of the current study, the theory is very apt because literary texts can be conceived of as cultural constructs – reflections of societies and cultural practices. Poststructural Feminism imagines language as a tool for the negotiation of social relations – gender relations specifically (Sabao, 2013). As such it is apt in that literature as a cultural and linguistic construct embeds within with processes of negotiating gender identities and gender relations within societies and cultures. Using the theory we are able to, by examining language usage and linguistic choices, examine and critically interrogate representations of widows in the texts.

2.3 Review of related literature on widowhood

Widowhood is the state of having outlived your spouse. According to Ntozi (1997) rituals, forced remarriages, harassment, rejection, loneliness, poverty, loss of status, fear of the future

and depression characterise the process of widowhood. Sossou (2002) states that widowhood is likely to impact far less traumatically upon men than women at the hands of their society. For instance, men are not really expected to cry and they have no rituals to perform. Sossou (2002, p. 201) further states that in the African traditional set up, women are expected to demonstrate grief openly and to show the intensity of their feelings in a more formalised way than men.

There is, in as much as preliminary studies have established, a paucity of critical literary scholarship that concern itself with the representation of widowhood in African imaginaries. Ohale (2012) observes that there are numerous neglected issues in African literary discourse, but only a few are as neglected as the problems associated with widowhood. Although death is one phenomenon that levels all humanity, Africans deem the subject taboo and too eerie and morbid to be openly discussed.

Instead of focusing on issues surrounding death that directly affect women, it seems the existing literature dwells much on the perpetuation of the patriarchal project in which men must continue to domineer over the women and the feminine must continue to fight for recognition. Ogunyemi (1985) for example, examines widowhood in Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather* from a womanist perspective. Ogunyemi (1985) argues that the novel assumes a womanist stance, achieved on different levels and terms involving the care of male and female children. Even at the vulnerable level of widowhood, women must continue to fight for recognition and equality with the males. Despite there being a clear and robust attempt to debunk or subvert the tradition of male writing in which female characters are often relegated to the margins of the culture, and confined to the domestic private sphere, little if any literature dwells on widowhood (Zulfiqar, 2016).

The perpetual subjugation of the feminine is largely due to cultural and religious beliefs and norms such as inheritance and polygamy (Ohale, 2012). Examining West African literary texts whose context is Islam, Zulfiqar (2016) explains how the Quran is used to perpetuate polygamy (an institution women often find repressive). The main justification provided in the Holy Quran for allowing polygamy is to solve the problems of orphans and widows. Widowhood is thus seen as a reduction of the feminine to a position of dependency and thus, a problem that needs to be resolved by men. The current study seeks to argue that the paucity of literary discourses on widowhood and the “discussion of an aspect of death with respect to widowhood rites, has been abysmally neglected in literary discourse. This neglect which seems to stem from certain aspects of the African culture” (Ohale, 2012) is alarming. For instance, a widow is considered as an outcast in the normal society of men and as a creature at war with the world beyond until she frees herself by fulfilling all widowhood rites (Okoye, 1998).

2.4 Loss of property to the husband’s relatives

Research into representations of widowhood in African fiction evinces that widows do not just lose their husbands, but they lose their property as well to their husbands’ relatives. Sossuo (2002), for example reveals that as soon as the husband’s death is announced, the widow’s ordeal begins. The announcement of the death of the husband brings chaos in the matrimonial house. Ohale (2012) proclaims that the deceased husband’s family swoops on his property, leaving the widow extremely poor and unable to provide for herself. In relation to the selected novels, in *The Only Son*, Chiaku lost her land to her late husband’s brother. As soon as people learn of the husband’s death, mostly the husband’s relatives start to swipe at the possessions that they have been eyeing in the matrimonial home. Manal (2015) confirms that widows are marginalised and discriminated against in property ownership. Nzewi (1989)

asserts that the husband's relatives demand a list of the man's property, holdings, investments, bank accounts and other properties from the widow to ensure that they take everything that belongs to their relative. In most cases the deceased's family does not give the widow her share of her late husband's possessions. Nzewi (1989) further states that, the widow is further required to take an oath to prove that she has not hidden any essential information on her husband's wealth. Basically, the widow is tortured into revealing information about the husband's worth so that his family can have absolute access to it.

The husband's relatives seize property during the bereavement, whilst the widow is mourning and vulnerable, and cannot gather the strength to fight back. Acholonu (1999) observes that a widow is a victim of a whole gamut of obnoxious widowhood rites aimed at making her die within the mourning period of about one year. In the event of this happening within a period of one year as desired, the relatives then take the widow's and her late husband's possessions which they have left behind. Furthermore, most brothers-in-law are ever ready to disinherit her and drive her out of her marital home. The deceased relatives take advantage of the widow's vulnerability during the bereavement and do everything in their power to leave the widow homeless, landless and penniless. This study thus analysed how the loss of properties to the husbands' relatives affect widows. This is very disrespectful because instead of comforting the widow, the deceased's relatives fight for possessions. Widows are supposed to be provided for as they are the needy in this case but in contrast people milk widows dry.

Andreas (2001) also argues that in some African cultures it is believed that it is customary and part of tradition to inherit things from their loved ones when a husband dies. In most cultures, the inheritance system which also discriminates against women (daughters) by their exclusion as heirs to the property of their natal families extends to widows also as they are precluded from inheriting their deceased husband's property, especially landed property (Chukwu- Okoronkwo 2015). This inheritance system does not disqualify women as heirs

because of their wrong deeds, but simply because they are women. The fact that they are born as women takes away inheritance privileges. The inheritance system shuts out widows and deprives them of the crucial benefit. In this light, women are viewed as not worthy of inheriting their families' properties. In fact, in some African cultures they are considered as part of the property to be inherited. As such, women experience inequalities in many important parts of their lives. These are mainly caused by the patriarchal society that believes that women are not important like men and do not deserve to own valuable things. The study therefore aims at, using two novels, *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba and *The Only Son* by John Munonye, examining and critically engaging these issues and their representation within the texts.

Even the bible attests that widows should be protected and looked after. For example, "Take care of the any widow who has no one else to take care of her" (1 Timothy 5: 3). Although the holy bible encourages generosity towards widows, people do not provide for widows but take from them. Moreover, the deceased's relatives ignore the fact that the widow needs the property as much as they need it; they thus deny widows the rights of ownership. This makes the life of the widow very difficult as she is left with nothing to sustain herself with in her everyday life. The very widow who is still traumatised and struggling to process everything that has been happening around her has to make plans for where to live and what to use as she has lost everything she had to the husband's relatives. This is against God's command in the holy bible when he gave an instruction:

At the end of every three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in the same year and lay it up within your towns. And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands (Deuteronomy 14:28-29).

In the past, people took pride in giving to the widows because that is where God's blessings lay. They understood the notion that widows and other marginalised people are God's representatives on earth and whatever you do to them you are doing it to God. However, in today's world widows are disowned upon the death of their husbands.

Also, widows are unable to fight for their possessions because they cannot afford legal fees and some do not know the legal procedures. Furthermore, in some cases the widows' inheritance rights are not protected. Owen (2011) asserts that widows across a wide spectrum of cultures and religions are often among the very poorest of the poor, due to the discrimination they experience in matters of inheritance, land and property rights. Hence, widows not only mourn for the loss of their spouses but are thrust in poverty, unable to provide for themselves and for their children as portrayed in *The Only Son* novel. Spouses fail to make inheritance wills, which is the only powerful tool to speak for the widow and fight for her inheritance rights. Religious and cultural practices alone are not strong enough to prevent people from dispossessing the widow of any properties. This change in status is very sad because instead of being independent and taking care of their own needs, widows occasionally end up as beggars.

2.5 Emotional, psychological and physical abuse

Widows are abused physically, psychologically and emotionally. Women become victims of abuse once they lose their husbands, mainly at the hands of their husbands' relatives and society at large. A study conducted by Orabueze (2004) concludes that in Africa widowhood brings to a peak all the humiliation, suppression, degrading and maltreatment. In relation to *The Only Son* novel, Chiaku was maltreated by Amanze together with his wives. Owen (1994) confirms that Third World experiences indicate that widows of all ages, and from

different backgrounds and cultures, are likely to be subjected to multiple forms of discrimination, neglect, cultural and psychological oppression and abuse.

According to Bartky (1990), to be psychologically oppressed is to be weighed down in the mind and it is to have a harsh dominion exercised over one's confidence. Psychological oppression kills one's confidence and the way one views herself or himself, and may influence the way one is viewed by others. This results in low self-esteem, fear and anxiety. As a result, widows are unable to break their silence, due to fear. Thus, when widows are abused psychologically, they may suffer from eternal trauma and shame. This experience may scare them and prevent them from getting married again, as this becomes an eternal nightmare to widows. Widows are scared to go through the same bad experience that comes with widowhood.

Bartky (1990) further explains that from the time of her husband's death to the time of her own death, the deceased's relatives and society blame the widow for the passing of the much needed man. In most African cultures, a widow is blamed for her husband's death, especially when they had a strained relationship or when he was rich. Lasebikan (2001) supports the view that among the Yoruba, one hardly finds a man whether a monogamist or polygamist, who dies an untimely natural death as the unsuspecting wife turns an immediate suspect. This applies to many African cultures. Chukwu- Okoronkwo (2015) further explains that:

One of the horrendous nightmares that may confront a woman at the death of her husband in various African cultures is the oftentimes scandalous accusations from the deceased husband's relatives of having a hand in the man's death irrespective of how peaceful they might have lived, especially when the woman had not been in a good relationship with them. (p. 5)

Widows are often subjected to domestic violence, including sexual, social, physical and emotional which leads to trauma and injury. In some cultures, widows are made to sleep with the deceased's body. The trauma is further exacerbated by the fact that the deceased's brothers sleep with them (widows) without their consent. The deceased's relatives brutally beat up the widow, whenever she tries to break her silence, and speak up against the maltreatment and sometimes a widow is beaten up for no apparent reason. Alokani (2013) maintains that domestic violence that occurs in private within the family affects the physical and psychological wellbeing of women; and as such, it erodes the position of women both at home and in the society at large. The confidence and self-esteem of the widows are destroyed by the violence that they endure. Also, widows may end up in bad physical states and are victims of different sickness.

Even at their lowest, widows are maltreated by their husbands' relatives whilst they are mourning. This may cause psychological trauma which leads to wounds that may never heal. Idialu (2012) describes the treatment of widows in Africa as inhuman and as geared towards dehumanising the victims. Idialu (2012) further views such treatment as a painful psychological experience that can affect the individual throughout her lifetime. As a result, a widow may end up experiencing sleep disorders, fear of recurrence, guilt, depression and nightmares throughout her lifetime.

Edet (1992) states that the death of a husband spells a period of imprisonment and hostility to the wife. The death of a husband robs her of freedom and happiness. She becomes a victim of all bad things one may think of. Sossou (2002) asserts that the widow is expected to be a hospitable host, serve the guest and put on particular garments wear a particular dress during the mourning period. The dress that a widow is made to wear is mostly uncomfortable, and degrades the widow. In *Song a Letter* novel, Ramatoulaye served her husband's relatives and the mourners. Widows are starved in some cultures during the bereavement when they are

already psychological, mentally and physically drained. Even though everyone grieves differently, widows are obligated to grieve in a particular manner. Grieving happens unconsciously thus it is difficult to do it when forced to do it. It is supposed to be done voluntarily (Hangula, 2016).

Ohale (2012) accents, noting that “the Igbo widow is often subjected to unutterable cruelty to which she is expected to fully comply and that she is mandated to sit on the bare floor, take no bath or change her clothes, wail loudly every morning until the husband is laid to rest, shave her hair, including pubic hair, dress all in black, never laugh or wear makeup, abstain - from sex and live in seclusion while depending on others for support throughout the six-month or one-year mourning period”. One of the reasons for widow abuse is to silence widows. Widows are attacked physically mostly by their in-laws when they attempt to ask for their inheritance. The deceased’s family physically attacks the widows in order to scare and silence her when she tries to claim her inheritance rights. When widows are abused, they may become voiceless and scared to speak up against oppression. As a result, they give in and accept oppression. Sometimes they are just brutally attacked because they are widows, and not because they did something wrong.

Sossou (2012) notes that, women all over the world are subjected to a wide range of violations of their human rights simply because they are female. According to Sossou (2012) women are a social group that has suffered great violation of their human right than all other social groups. Women’s rights are violated all over the world, not because they do wrong things, but just because they are women. Katembo (2015) describes any act of violence to which females are subjugated primarily because of their female gender identity and perpetuates female subordination as violence against women. Mashiri (2013) argues that;

Gender based violence against women encompasses a wide range of abuses that range from; sexual threats, sexual harassment, exploitation, humiliation, assaults, molestation, domestic violence, torture, harmful traditional practices, including early marriage, which substantially increases maternal morbidity and mortality. These are forms of gender-based violence against women that cannot be overlooked nor justified on the grounds of tradition, culture or social conformity. (p. 18)

As such, Sossou (2012) argues that the responsibility to champion the cause of fighting inequalities against the women is in the hands of all women, especially, the educated African women and scholars. Women are the ones who feel, know pain, and suffer the consequences of inequalities against women. Therefore, they should intensify the urge to conquer inequalities, with the help of the informed fellow women.

2.6 Depression and loneliness

Widows are likely to suffer from depression and loneliness. People who do not have spouses have significant depression and suicidal ideations than people with spouses (Sridevi, 2014a). According to Mlambo and Kandemiri (2015), no matter how many occasions one encounters death, one can never readily accept it. In most cases; the only person whom a married woman can share her distress and pain with is her husband. Therefore, when a woman loses her husband, she bottles up an abundance of emotions as well, and bottling up emotions could take her life. Arguably, when a woman loses her husband, she loses her therapist in him as well. Widowhood is associated with a multitude of adverse physical and mental health outcomes including psychological distress, physician visits and institutionalization, and higher rates of morbidity and mortality (Hughes & Waite, 2009; Hagedoorn et al., 2006; Manor & Eiesenbach, 2003; Prigerson, Maciejewski, & Rosenheck, 2000; Wilcox et al., 2003; Zhang & Hayward 2006). The rates of depression are found to be still high two years

after a loss of a spouse (Turvey et al, 1999). A study conducted by Sridevi (2014b) concludes that the non-institutionalized single elders are showing significant death depression than coupled elders. The most common emotions that appear in widows are sadness, longing for the past life as a couple, loneliness and a certain trepidation over life in the future (Stapić and Vuletić, 2013). In relation to the novel *Song Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye suffered from depression.

In addition, the loss of a spouse has a negative impact on the widow's wellbeing for up to four years after bereavement (Benne et al., 2005). She usually has to make some adjustments so that she can get used to functioning without the deceased. In other words, death complicates the social equilibrium of the bereaved family or community (Hangula, 2016).

Widowhood is considered as one of the most distressing of all life events (Holmes & Rahe, 1967). According to Bharathi, Sriedevi and Kumar (2015) depression is the common mental problem in widows and it is viewed as a serious outcome of the feeling of loneliness. Marriage changes the relationship spouses had with other people before they got married. Some spouses cut off friends when they get married; as a result widows get lonely once they lose their husbands because they had their companions in their husband, as portrayed in the novel *The Only Son*. Kapuma (2011) goes on to say that the death of a husband is a painful experience which leaves the wife devastated, confused and without hope. Timely or untimely, death is one of life events which leave the affected in shock. It is very difficult to accept and comprehend. The thought of living without the person they once lived with is scary and disturbs the mind. The fear of not coming home to their significant other and expecting a text or call from their husbands as usual, and the thought of carrying out activities alone that were normally shared with the husband may flood their minds. It is so difficult to carry on with life's plans without the person whom one made those plans with. All these thoughts may feel

and look insurmountable in the widow's mind and disturb it. Collen (1988) supports the view that losing a wife or husband is much more difficult, because burdens that were previously shared must now be borne alone, and that can be stressful.

The death of a spouse may be the most extreme of life's crisis as this serves most of the deepest emotional bonds established in a lifetime (Chukwu-Okoronkwo, 2015). The death of a husband breaks the widow's heart and crashes her whole world. Her emotions run high during this period. The widow may endure many sleepless nights and anxious days. She may be holding on to old memories which can lead to depression.

Owen (1998) states that widowhood tends to impact more traumatically on the woman, changing forever the way she is perceived and consequently affecting her self-image. Widowhood is the most stressful stage in a woman's life as she has to adjust to her new life. Most people, who are supposed to be her support system, turn their backs on her as presented in the novel *The Only Son* when Chiaku was mistreated by her husband's brother. The early days of widowhood are so hectic, because at her lowest she still has to deal with her selfish in-laws, interrogating her and depriving her everything that rightfully belongs to her. This is evidenced in *So Long a Letter*.

Beaver & Miller (1992) contend that the loss of a spouse is a great loss, and for some the greatest stressor of life for both women and men alike. A spouse plays a significant role in any relationship. Widows or widowers often feel secluded (Bondevik and Skogstad, 1998). Manzoli, Villari, Pirone and Boccia, (2007) claim that widows suffer from depression and may die soon within the mourning period. In relation to the selected novels, in *So Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye suffered from depression, due to the traumatic events she experienced. According to Cicak (2010) "widowhood can be preceded by very different circumstances, which, if unpleasant, promote the alleviation of stress and the heaviness of loss: low level of

emotional closeness, poor marital quality, and violence in the marital relationship or disease affecting the partner and requiring long-term care with great psychological and physical effort on the carer's part" (p.4).

Manal (2015) claims that widows are often suspected of having caused the death of her husband, thus, are often discriminated against. According to some African beliefs, when the husband dies the wife has contributed, but when the wife dies, it is seen as God's will. In this case death does not just rob the woman of her husband but also isolates her and destroys the loyalty and the bond that they would have built for years as well.

2.7 Cultural and religious practices beliefs and norm

In Africa, widows are victims of harmful cultural and religious beliefs and norms (Sandys, 2001). One major factor which contributes to female oppression is culture (Iitula, 2018). Iitula (2018) further argues that the deprivation of women's rights and opportunities as well as restricting and disregarding women's freedom over themselves is caused by the fact that all power is placed in the hands of men, hence silencing women as they are controlled by men. Widows are no exception to this; in fact a woman endures even more oppressive cultural practices when she becomes a widow. Ngongkum (2016) observes that widowhood is a universal human phenomenon shaped by factors such as the culture within which people function. Sandys (2001) proclaims that the widows' deprivation and stigmatization are influenced by ritual and religious symbolism. This study thus analyses how cultural and religious practices surrounding death affect widows within African societies and cultures.

In most cases widows go through challenges because of the cultural norms such as widow purification, that they are expected to conform to. Widows endure unhuman, life-threatening and demeaning practices which leave them broken and damaged. These norms also include

varying degrees of physical isolation and a state of ritual contamination or impurity calling for purification (Sossou, 2002). According to a recent United Nations report on discrimination against women in Africa, “widows, irrespective of their ethnic affiliations, are among the most vulnerable and destitute. This situation is fuelled by cultural practices/beliefs, patriarchal domination and inheritance laws which militate against the rights of the widows.” (Ngongkum, 2016). This means that traditional cultures and patriarchy work hand in hand to victimise the widow.

Kapuma (2011) states that, widows suffer and are subjected to rituals that are a health hazard and sometimes heart-rending. A widow may be subjected to drinking the water that was used to wash the husband’s corpse (Chukwu- Okoronkwo 2015). In such cases, widows are forced to compromise their health through cultural rituals. Widows take health risks that may claim their lives in the name of cultural and religious practices. This is supported by Baloyi (n. d.) who states that in some African traditions grieving is accompanied by different traditional rituals, depending on who has died and how they have died.

African communities are supposed to be supported and protected by their cultures, but they are confronted with ‘cultural practices’ which often leave the widow victimised and broken. Ngongkum (2016) observes that in Africa, a widow is expected to formally and publicly demonstrate her grief and heartfelt feelings. She is also expected to mourn her husband to prove her innocence to show that she is not at fault and responsible for her late husband’s death. Sossou (2002) also attests to this by saying that in the African traditional set up, women are expected to grieve openly and to show the intensity of their feelings in a more formalised way compared to men. Some widows who had strained relationships with their husbands are also forced to mourn the deceased husband in a special way as represented in *Song Long a Letter*. Having to fake emotions is suffocating, especially when the widow has

bad memories of the deceased husband and is expected behave as if the deceased husband was a good one when in actual fact the widow's heart is bleeding.

Many mourning customs therefore diminish a widow's attractiveness by desexualising her through dress codes and her entire appearance, as well as placing taboos on her participation in social activities (Bremmer & Van Den Bosch, 1995). Mourning customs reduce the widow's worth, making her less appealing to men. For instance, Ngongkum (2016) observes that the widow's head is shaved, given sackcloth to wear for a year and abandoned to hunger and loneliness in a dark room. Widows are accused of being guilty for their husbands' deaths when they refuse to conform to the cultural norms.

The widow is made vulnerable and required to go through all the customs or traditions and rituals with no questions (Kapuma, 2011). Labeodan (2002), for example, indicates that many Yoruba women have been silenced by culture, as presented in *So Long a Letter*. Women are not allowed to question oppressive cultural practices. Instead, they are forced to adhere to them gracefully. They are made to believe that their whole existence depends on culture and they may face consequence if they lose their cultural roots and go astray. In addition, Chukwu- Okoronkwo (2015) confirms that mystery is built around certain practices and failure to fulfil these requirements is a taboo which leads to death or ostracism. Chukwu- Okoronkwo (2015) further claims that these practices mystify and enslave widows. Wrath is pronounced upon their lives when they refuse to comply with the cultural norms. Women have no choice but to accept oppression as normal due to societal constructs engraved in the minds of both men and women normalising this inhumane and despicable practice (Iitula, 2018). Most of these cultural practices are cages that imprison women and hinder their healing progress.

Widows accept many of the practices because they are under obligation, not because they are pleased with it. They often accept to have the mourning rites and practices applied to them because non-compliance is viewed as disrespect for their deceased husbands, themselves and the community. The fact that widows are viewed as carriers and transmitters of bad luck and defilement that are detrimental to the community compels them to comply unquestioningly with these rites and practices, even though it is a painful and distressing experience (Manal, 2015).

Sossou (2012) reveals that widows are treated differently from widowers. Usually it is the widows who are expected to dress differently and not the widowers. Sossou (2012) also states that widows and not widowers endure the most humiliating rituals such as covering their heads, eating specific food, crying all the time and sitting at one place for a long time. This demonstrates that death related cultural and religious practices are highly gendered and biased against the feminine. Sossou (2012) highlights that while most African societies respect mourning rites because they possess cultural values, it is also important to observe and acknowledge that many of them are gendered. Sossou (2012) explains that it is important to note that it is usually the widows who are expected to dress differently and not the widowers.

African cultural practices and values are the pillar of most Africans lives. Emeka (2012) states that the traditional African values include the sense of community life, respect for authority and elders, sense of language and proverbs, as well as good human relations. Emeka (2012) further outlines that dead people are treated with great respect as they are believed to have a special relationship with the living. The researcher finds this belief controversial since some people die without having had a close relationship with the living. So, it is not convincing to say that some relationships are only created through death. For instance, how does a husband, who had a strained relationship with his wife when he is alive,

get his spirit claimed to have a special relationship with the living as soon as he dies? To some extent, the view that the dead have a special relationship with the living, exposes the irrelevance of some cultural beliefs and practices.

Maluleke (2012) contends that traditional cultural practices reflect the values and beliefs held by members of a community for periods often spanning for generations. Cultural and religious practices are instilled in children and when they grow their minds are already rooted in these beliefs and values. Thus, it becomes difficult for them to resist cultural practices in their adulthood, as portrayed by Ramatoulaye in *So Long a Letter*. According to Yankuzo (2014), within the global cultures, African societies are forced to accept uniform moral principles of what is right and wrong. However, what is regarded right or wrong in one society may not be right or wrong in the other. The researcher believes that, some culturally acceptable beliefs and practices are not always in favour of people's wellness, they thus need to be redefined.

Widows in developing countries also endure cruel and institutionalised social ostracism dictated by traditional and cultural practices associated with mourning and funeral rites, discrimination and oppression (Sosuu, 2002). This supports the researcher's view that some culturally acceptable practices are life threatening. It is to be imagined that mourning usually involves some core beliefs, spiritual practices and equally, some expected behaviour as a symbol of expressing grief (Hangula, 2016). Setsiba (2012) further elaborates that mourning can be both a conscious and unconscious process which binds the mourners to the loved one who has passed away. It is inconsiderate in this regard to condition the way different people mourn their loved ones. People are different individuals, with different feelings, and react differently to the events of life. Bereaved people do not always behave in a way that does position them as in need of support from others (Setsiba, 2012). This does not mean that they

are least affected or not affected at all, but it is just the portrayal of the fact that different individual react differently.

Instead of upholding the dignity and protecting the rights of its people, African cultures generally subordinate the rights of African women, widows to be specific. Widows are silenced into submission and acceptance of these practice as culturally appropriate and respectful in honour of the dead (Hangula, 2016). Thus, Sossou (2012, p. 208) believes that there is a need to break the spirit of domination and empower women. Hence, Sossou's observations below should be considered if the situation is to change.

Widowhood practices are closely tied to cultural and traditional beliefs about death, ghosts, inheritance, feminine roles, family structure and family relationships. The overpowering belief in the ability of the ghost of a dead person to come back to dispute and haunt all kinds of things and relatives has reinforced and perpetuated the age-old practices of widowhood in Africa.... The belief that death brings corruption and the dead still have contact with the living, especially their closest partners in life, is one of the reasons used for subjecting widows to inhuman and humiliating customary practices. The satisfactory completion of these ceremonies, rituals and practices are therefore believed to help restore the balance and security, which the death had sought to overthrow. The people, due to superstitious beliefs, rationalise these practices with the argument that they perform important functions, such as giving the widows protection from their powerful deceased husbands. (Sossou, 2002, p. 4)

The above citation proves that widows adhere to oppressive cultural beliefs and practices simply because it is believed that one suffers the consequences if they fail to adhere to and/or submit to these cultural practices.

2.8 Forced remarriages

In some cases, the widow is forced to stay in her matrimonial home, even though she has strained relationships with her in-laws. Concurring, Manal (2015) confirms that in many African contexts, the daughter-in-law is forced to remain in the matrimonial home even after the husband's death. Some cultures believe that the death of a husband does not discontinue the marriage. Rather it is just a short break that may continue soon after the burial. Thus, a woman is believed to have been married to the whole family and not just her husband and may be inherited by her husband's relatives once her husband dies. She is then forced to marry the deceased husband's brother without her consent; the widow's feelings and wishes are not taken into consideration. The widow inheritance practice has a negative effect on the widow's life as she is forced to spend the rest of her life with someone she barely knows and does not love. This culture violates the widow's rights since marriage is supposed to be a mutual decision and not forced.

A widow may be inherited by her late husband's brother to provide her with support and protection (Ogutu, 2001). However, that is not always the case; in most cases the in-laws do not inherit the widow out of love and the desire to take care of the widow and her children, but they do it for their own interest and to fulfil their own desires. Kapuma (2011) maintains that a widow may be inherited by her in-laws so that they control her property and children. This shows that widow inheritance is not done out of love, but out of greed. According to Manal (2015), it is materialism that causes the in-laws to demand that the widow remains in her in-laws' home and marries the now late husband's brother, and such demands are most likely motivated by greed, especially the in-laws' wish to keep their deceased son or relative's wealth in their home. As such, the deceased's brother marries the widow not out of love but out of greed. The deceased' family believes that they will still have access to the property and children as long as the widow is married to one of them.

According to Pauw (1990) some African widows' marriages are not terminated by the deaths of their husbands but have been, as it were, only temporarily interrupted to be continued after the period of mourning, ideally by an agnate of the late husband. In such instances, marriage is not brought to an end by death (Ogotu, 2001). Instead, widows are viewed as objects that belong to the whole family – property to be inherited together with all other immovable. As a result, the husband's family controls her even when the man she was married to has passed on. Despite the death of the husband, the widow may forcefully still be regarded as their in-law. Sleaf (2011) notes that widow inheritance is very dangerous, therefore is a harmful traditional practice. The researcher agrees with this view, because widow inheritance is mostly done without the widow's consent as portrayed in *So Long a Letter*.

On the contrary, some widows remarry for financial reasons. Widows who are not financially stable may give in, and get inherited by their husband relatives for financial security; whereas financially stable widows reject this idea simply because they can take care of their own financial needs. Mehta (2000) stresses that through economic success; a woman would be self-sufficient and, at the same time, be able to provide for her family. Many African women are able to repossess themselves and shun the myopic view of being marginalised by males, through economic independence (Nashongo, 2016). Clearly, the widow inheritance practice does not applaud women's dignity, respect and equality because of their gender. Hence, this study's argument that such a cultural practice that contributes to the relegation of women to a state of subservience need to be critically interrogated and redefined.

2.9 Difficulty in social interaction and social stigma

Widows are socially stigmatized. Herek (2009) defines stigma as the inferior status, negative regard, and relative powerlessness that society collectively accords to people who possess a particular characteristic or belong to a particular group or category. In this case, widows are

discriminated against due to the fact that they were once married and lost their husbands to death. While this form of discrimination is naturally uncalled for because, being a widow is not a crime, but fate and it cannot be avoided, it still commonplace within many African cultures. In addition, Ramphele (2018) proclaims that widows are prevented from participation in public ceremonies and celebrations. Widows are treated differently, they are viewed as worthless, irrelevant and of no importance.

Bharti (2015) states that widows are regarded as bad omens; as a result they are excluded from all auspicious events. He further reveals that, women in general and widows have always been a subject matter of subjugation and discrimination since time immemorial. Widows are stereotyped by society. Furthermore, widows are restricted to holding positions of authority in society, since they are not given opportunities. They are discriminated against and excluded from holding superior positions which in turn kills their confidence and self-esteem.

The social discrimination against women starts at bereavement. Widows are isolated during the bereavement. This instils a feeling of imprisonment especially as a result of being shunned by their community in the name of cultural beliefs associated with widowhood (Manyedi *et al.* 2007:78). Using the same logic, Manal (2015), points out that the widow's freedom of association and her right to community belonging is also removed.

Bharti (2015) notes that women have been excluded and deprived from family matters and societal functions. He further states that widows are viewed at most social gatherings be it a marriage, child birth or house warming ceremonies in a bad and suspicious manner. He goes on to argue that widows are not allowed to give blessings even to their own newly married children as it is believed that these blessings will turn into a curse and misfortune, as a result the newly married bride would also become a widow (Bharti, 2015). People always have

negative thoughts about widows and yet these may be just thoughts that do not even have substance. As a result, people do not associate with widows which leads to their ultimate discrimination.

Social stigma has instilled, in many widows, the fear of being judged. Kapuma (2011) asserts that people say offending things around widows, as a result widows may be scared to accept help from people, because no one seems to understand what they endure. Widows may end up distancing themselves from people because it is even more hurtful when people distance themselves from them first. Many widows have vented that the most torturing experience they went through is when they were left alone with no one to talk to (Kapuma, 2011). Social stigma may lead to segregation and stress. Hence, widow discrimination is one of the ways in which widows are abused in families (Chukwu, Emek, Kalu, Obi and Scent, 2014). No one wants to be seen or to be associated with widows. When one becomes a widow, she is pushed to the fringes of society, degraded and dehumanised and this affects her emotionally.

2.10 Financial or economic hardships

Widowhood brings with it financial deprivation. The widow is now faced with the mammoth task of having to singlehandedly provide for the family when the husband is no more. In cases where the husband was the only bread winner in the family, the widow has to carry on with the responsibility of providing for the family. Owen (2011) states that, widows across a wide spectrum of cultures and religions are often among the very poorest of the poor because of the discrimination they experience in matters of inheritance, land and property rights. The death of the husband leaves the widow wealthless, because the husband's relatives inherit their wealth. This is mostly the case when there is an inherent absence of an inheritance will.

Widowhood is associated with financial strain, the assumption of new tasks in household management and changes in social relationships, all of which may exacerbate or mitigate psychological distress (Umberson, Wortman, & Kessler, 1992). Widowhood often increases economic hardship (Lillard & Waite, 1995; Stimpson, Kuo, Ray, Raji, & Pek, 2007; Utz, 2006). Women are likely to suffer from economic strain when widowed (Lee et al., 1998) especially when a household wholly depends on the widow financially. With the death of the spouse, and all financial responsibilities now needing to be handled by the wife; the widow endures financial difficulties as presented in the selected novels.

In most cases in Africa, married spouses fail to invest in life insurance, to secure their family's future financially. Also, some men prohibit their wives from getting jobs. Some deprive their wives education opportunities believing that women are meant to be housewives and do all the domestic chores, while men are meant to be the financial providers of the family. As a result, with no job and when the household's sole breadwinner dies, the widow will struggle to put bread on the table as evinced in the selected novels under study. Kambarami (2006) supports the view that in some African culture, men are socialised to view themselves as bread winners and heads of households whilst women are taught to be obedient and submissive housekeepers.

2.11 Single parenting and home maintenance

Bringing up a child is a challenging responsibility; thus it becomes overwhelming when it's not shared. The African proverb, 'It takes the whole village to raise a child' shows that raising a child is the responsibility of many people. The task of parenting alone is one of the issues surrounding death that directly affect widows. Parenting includes supporting the physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing of a child. One parent may be unable to provide a child with all these needs.

A widow may fail to make time for her children because as a single parent she is responsible for taking care of everything else in the family. When the parent fails to keep a close eye on the family s/he may miss out on the most important stages of the child's life. Also, s/he may be unable to control what is happening in his or her child's life. This parental dilemma is represented in *So Long a Letter*. Spending time with her children alone may even affect the widow negatively because it can remind her of the deceased husband; his absence would be felt in this regard.

Spousal death represents the reconfiguration of the daily decisions and routine responsibilities that were once shared by both spouses (Carey, 1979-1980). When a woman loses her husband, she becomes the sole decision-maker in their household as evinced in *Song a Letter*. Some decisions can be sensitive and need to be thought out and discussed before they are made as highlighted in *So Long a Letter*. In cases where a woman does not have a husband, bad decisions are likely to be made and these may have negative repercussions. Gupta (1999) contends that a change in one's marital status has a significant effect on an individual's performance of routine housework. Thus, a woman performs more work when she becomes a widow. When one spouse dies, the surviving spouse becomes responsible for all the necessary tasks of household management, including those tasks that were performed by their deceased spouse (Carr, Nesse, Reidy, Wortman, Utz, 2004). Tasks such as building the house and renovating the house are mostly carried out by the men thus when they die, women may fail to keep their houses in shape. Sometimes the widow may try to adopt her husband's responsibilities when she can, and by so doing she may neglect her other responsibilities.

2.12 Loss of social status, sense of belonging and identity

Being married and living together appears to be appreciated by partners as it gives them a feeling of security and sense of identity (Nashongo, 2016). People's qualities may change when they get married due to the fact that they now have to accommodate their spouses in every area of their lives. When a person lives with a partner for many years, it may seem that he or she complements his or her thoughts, as a result when that person is lost to them; they feel they have lost themselves at the same time (Blair and Noel, 2012). The immediate implication of this is that they need some time to find themselves again and reconstruct a new identity (Klass, Silverman and Nickman, 1996).

The death of a spouse sets off a series of adjustments in which the surviving spouse redefines a social reality that reflects their new status as a widowed person (Carr, Nesse, Reidy, Wortman, Utz, 2004). Berger and Kellner (1970) maintain that when a woman and man officially get married, they redefine their individual identities and construct a social reality that is shared by both marriage partners. As a result, when the marriage is broken by the death of one spouse, that shared social reality and individual identity is also broken (Carr, Nesse, Reidy, Wortman, Utz, 2004).

In most cases, women lose their sense of belonging when they lose their husbands. Belonging involves "the feeling, belief and expectation that one fits in the group and has a place there, a feeling of acceptance by the group, and a willingness to sacrifice for the group" (Chavis &McMillan, 1986, p. 10). The widow may become unaccepted by her community when she loses her husband. As a result, she may consider reallocating. Kuyela (2014) argues that, in most African societies, widowhood represents a 'social death' for women. It is not just that they have lost their husband, the breadwinner and supporters of their children, but widowhood robs them of their status and confines them to the fringes of society where they suffer discrimination and stigma. This shows that society, ties a woman's worth to her

husband. As soon as she loses her husband, she loses her worth and dignity as well. The social status of a woman is conferred through a man; hence, in the absence of a man, she herself becomes a nonentity and suffers a social death (Sandys, 2001).

Blair and Noel (2012) affirm that considering that we interpret life's ups and downs together with our partners, in most cases it happens that when we lose our partner, we lose the foundations of our identity as well. We have to gradually build a new life in a period when we are exhausted physically and emotionally. Sossou (2002) argues that while it is understandable that death is always shocking, especially to those closely associated with the dead person, it is important that they get back to normal life again. Sossou (2002) further claims that for most women, the death of a husband or a spouse has an extra significance because it represents not simply the loss of a partner, a friend and a breadwinner but it also results in a radical change in a woman's social stature and lifestyle.

2.13 Hatred among women

In most cases other women are responsible for the widows' sufferings. Among the Igbo, the patrilineal sisters of the deceased husband retain intense influence over what happens in their family, and this means near-tyrannical power over the women married by their brothers (Sossou, 2002). In Islamic culture, women are given the privilege of looking after their deceased brother's widows and taking care of them during the bereavement as portrayed in *So Long a Letter*. Most of these women see this as an opportunity to exploit the widows, especially if they have been holding grudges against them. They will take advantage of this opportunity and plot their revenge. It is believed that when patrilineage daughters made up their minds to be troublesome when they have been put in charge, no one could deal with them (Amaduime, 1987). These women become hostile to the widows. The reason for putting them in charge is mostly to ensure that the bereaved are well taken care of during this

difficult time. However, this powerful position of these so-called ‘female husbands’ in addition to their full control over funerals could in part explain the rigorous widowhood rituals they put their lineage brothers’ wives through (Sossou, 2002).

Mangena (2013, p. 13) argues that “women are not only victims, but they also victimise. Women are not always sources of life, they destroy life and when they do such actions they should not be justified.” The researcher agrees with this sentiment. Nowadays, there is a cry that women are being victimised by men, for no apparent reasons. Although, no one wants to talk about this, women are not always victims. Women are also victimisers mostly to people who are weaker than them; widows are among the weak and marginalised social groups that women victimise. This shows that, most women are just like men, the only difference is that they are not powerful enough to victimise everyone.

Generally speaking, women also fuel the patriarchal project. Women give men the privilege to oppress other women. In other words, the bridge that men use to get to women is built by other women. Women themselves hold the ladder for men to climb up to where the woman is hiding to go and disturb her peace. Nashongo (2018) supports the view that African women may also act as oppressive agents toward other women. In other words, women get presented with opportunities to protect and save their fellow women, but they just turn these opportunities into battlefields to fight the marginalised women, such as widows. Furthermore, they use their positions and relationships with men as weapons to attack widows (Nashongo, 2018).

2.14 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the researcher reviewed related literature by other scholars which share affinities with the study under investigation. This chapter critically engaged with other

scholars' views, and the researcher tried to link them with the problem under investigation. Factors that affect widows such as loss of property, depression, financial and economic hardships, difficulty in social interaction and social stigma and emotional, psychological and physical abuse were examined to support arguments for the existing gap. The next chapter, Chapter Three presents the research methodology that was employed by the study as well as a preview of data analysis methods used for the interpretation of the findings of the research.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3. Introduction

In Chapter Two, the researcher reviewed literature by other scholars related to the current study. The researcher critically engaged with the ideas of other authorities' views and attempted to contextualise the current research within them. In this chapter, the researcher describes the methodology used in the collection and analysis of data. The chapter examines the research design, the population of the study, the sample, and data gathering instruments as well as the advantages and disadvantages of using each of these instruments.

3.1 Research approach and design

Firstly, one needs to take into consideration the subject of enquiry in a study in order to appreciate why specific instruments are used and where are applied. According to Prior (1997) a research design is like a chosen research manual that suggests that the knowing subject be questioned, queried, interrogated or enticed into revealing to the investigator some conscious aspects of social life or social behaviour. This study adopted the qualitative approach in examining how widowhood is represented in the two novels under study. The approach is justifiable since "Qualitative research seeks to probe deeply into the research setting to obtain in-depth understandings about the way things are, why they are that way, and how the participant in the context perceives them" (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009, p. 12). The major concern of qualitative research is meaning and interpretation of various aspects of social life. Hence, the qualitative approach was used in this study to gain an in-depth understanding of the concept widowhood as reflected in the selected texts. The research design is also considered as the primary planning of the research from the first step to the last.

It guides the researcher in collecting, analysing and interpreting observed facts. Haralambos (2003) defines it as the way of producing and analysing data so that the theories can be tested accepted or rejected. It therefore refers to the basic procedures and means of which the identified problem is investigated. Without a systematic way of producing knowledge, the findings can be dismissed as guesswork.

At times the researcher is encouraged to become an active participant in the social milieu that he/she has elected to study. The research design will therefore instruct the researcher on how to enter the field, how to find informants and negotiate with the gatekeeper and how to analyse resultant data. The study does not require fieldwork and is thus restricted to being a desktop research, dependent on the researcher's interpretations as well as secondary sources. .

3.2. Population

Fox and Bayat (2007) emphasise that population is any group or individuals that share similar characteristics and represent the whole case that is involved in a study. The population of this study comprises African novels written in English by Munonye (6) and Ba (4) which include the theme of widowhood. The selected two novels were chosen because of the recurring themes about widowhood.

3.3 Sampling

The study used purposive sampling to select the two novels, *So Long a Letter* (1980) by Mariama Ba and John Munoye's *The Only Son* (1966). The novels were purposively selected because they both focus on the theme of widowhood.

3.4 Procedure

The researcher first acquired the two novels. The data was collected by reading the selected texts through the critical theoretical lens of Womanism and Poststructural Feminism. The data collected was analysed and interpreted using the theoretical explications of poststructural feminist and womanist theories to meet the objectives of the study. Kothari (2004) observes that literature students present a critical analysis of some writer with a liberal use of quotations from the works of the author under discussion. Therefore, this study employs critical analysis by substantiating with evidence from the texts, the representation of “widowhood” through the characters.

3.5 Data analysis

Data, in this qualitative study, was analysed using a thematic analysis approach. The study used thematic analysis to explore how widowhood is represented in the selected African novels. The interpretation of data was done by incorporating the tenets of the two theories, Womanism and Poststructural Feminism.

3.6 Research ethics

The researcher sought permission from the University of Namibia Research Ethics Committee (UREC) to conduct the study. This study largely made use of printed materials already in the public domain and thus no human subjects were involved. However, to ensure objectivity in this study, the findings were reported in full guided by the theories and objectives. All sources used in the study are acknowledged.

3.7 Chapter summary

In this, the researcher presented an overview of the research methodology guiding this study. In the next chapter, the data analysis chapter, the researcher explores the representation of widowhood in African literature as portrayed in *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba and *The Only Son* by John Munonye using Poststructural Feminist and Womanist theories as tools for framing the analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the representation of widowhood in African literature as portrayed in *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba and *The Only Son* by John Munonye. The chapter utilises two theoretical approaches in the analysis of the texts. The analyses are couched within the theoretical explications of Womanism and Poststructural Feminism. In this analysis, the researcher is guided by attempts to achieve the following objectives of the study as set in Chapter One, and which are to:

- examine issues surrounding death that directly affect widows as portrayed in the two novels, *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba and *The Only Son* by John Munonye;
- analyse how the two authors present widowhood in the two selected African novels from Poststructural Feminist and Womanist perspectives; and
- explore the emerging themes from the discussion.

4.2 Summary of the texts

4.2. 1 So Long a Letter

In *So long a Letter* the author explores how the death of a husband brings misfortune upon the widow's life and everything that surrounds her. *So long a Letter* is a semi-autobiographical account; it tells a story of Ramatolaye who was abandoned by her husband of many years and the father of her twelve children Modou who decided to take a second wife. Modou's second wife was no other than his daughter's best friend and classmate Benetou. Modou neglected his first wife of many years with whom he had built his fortune

and their children after his decision to marry Benetou. He then established a luxurious life for Benetou. Firstly, Modou withdrew Benetou from school, and started paying Benetou a monthly salary. In addition, Modou bought Benetou a luxurious house and car, whilst the first wife and their children used public transport. It was not long before Ramatoulaye lost her husband to young Benetou, that she lost her husband to death as well. Ramatoulaye was forced by culture and religion to show respect to her late husband, despite the fact that Modou had failed to carry out his husband and father duties in his final years. Ramatoulaye had to give up her identity and dignity to honour Modou who did not want anything to do with her in his final years. Also during the bereavement she had to serve her late husband's relatives and all the mourners. In the end Ramatoulaye faced the challenges of raising teenagers alone.

4.2.2 Summary of *The Only Son*

The Only Son tells a story of Chiaku, a young widow who had to raise her son alone when her husband dies. Chiaku's life is centred around her son. She does everything in her power to ensure the wellbeing of her son. When Chiaku's husband dies, she is only eighteen years old and her son Nnanna is barely six months old. Chiaku endures rejection when her husband dies. Her brother-in-law Amanze together with his wives maltreat her and Nnanna. She becomes a nobody in their eyes of her brother in-law Amanze, his wives and their children. They would always provoke her, and abuse her when she tried to speak up. Amanze seized Okafo's land and many other things, leaving Chiaku and Nnanna living in destitute. Amanzi gave Chiaku infertile land and when Chiaku asked for a better land he always reminded her that the son was a child and that she herself was a woman, a stranger in the family. In the end, Chiaku and her son Nnanna were rescued by Chiaku's brother Oji, when he asked them to go and live in their father's land. Chiaku and her son Nnanna accepted the offer and moved to

live among her family, since Amanze and his wives had sworn that Chiaku and Nnanna must die. This was a perfect chance for Chiaku and Nnanna to escape.

4.3 Loss of properties to the husband's relatives and mourners

In *So Long a Letter*, Mariama Ba shows how widows are denied their rightful inheritance by their in-laws, despite the fact that they may have both worked for the fortune. Ramatoulaye, the narrator in *So Long Letter* endured poverty when her husband died following the Senegalese culture that demands the widows to sacrifice their possessions as gifts to their family in-law. This is also observed by Andreas (2001) who opines that in some African cultures it is customary and part of tradition to inherit things from a relative when he dies in order to treasure their memories. Ramatoulaye had to bless Modou's family with her possessions, even though Modou had stopped providing for Ramatoulaye and their children after marrying his second wife Benetoulaye. Ramatoulaye sadly had to give her hard earned possessions to her in-laws who did not help in obtaining those possessions. This emphasises the widow's subordination to her in-laws (Shumbamhini 2004). They disempower and dispossess the widow with regards to issues of her own matrimonial property (Chimhanda, 2002; Chiweza, Chidyaonga, Kachika, Kamanga & White, 2002; Oduyoye & Kanyoro, 1992). Ba (1980, p. 4) attests to this by stating that "This is the moment dreaded by every Senegalese woman, the moment when she sacrifices her possessions as gifts to her family in-law."

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator was displeased with the behaviour of a certain woman who took left-overs with her. Instead of being sympathetic towards the widows who had lost their breadwinner, the woman took what was left of the food. The narrator says:

My horizon lightened, I see an old woman. Who is she? Where is she from? Bent over, the ends of her *boubou* tied behind her, she empties into a plastic bag the left-

overs of red rice. Her smiling face tells of the pleasant day she has just had. She wants to take back proof of this to her family, living perhaps in Ouakam, Thiaroye or Pikine (Ba, 1980, p. 8).

This woman is not even related to the deceased or the widows, and yet she openly grabbed Ramatoulaye's possessions. The author shows that some people do not come to the funeral with the intention of mourning the deceased and comforting the bereaved, but they come to enrich themselves by stealing from the widows. Human greed leads them to take advantage of such opportunities, because they obtain material things they have not worked for, without being held accountable for their actions. Furthermore, the fact that this lady has access to the bags of rice in the bereaved home shows that Ramatoulaye's house was disorderly during the bereavement and that no one was in control of Ramatoulaye's possessions.

Ba reveals that widows experience injustices. This is supported by Masule (2014) who opines that feminists believe that women undergo injustices and imbalances. The fact that Ramatoulaye comes from a large family in their town, with acquaintances at all levels of society, as a school teacher on friendly terms with the pupils' parents, and had been Modou's companion for thirty years made the mourners to bless her with gifts mostly with bank notes. Unfortunately, the lion share ended up in the hands of Modou's relatives, Benetou and her greedy mother, leaving Ramatoulaye destitute. This demonstrates the injustices and agony endured by widows. The proceeds are not divided accordingly. Ramatoulye is the deserving one and yet she ended up moneyless. The proceeds went to the relatives of the deceased and Benetou's mother even though Ramatoulaye needed the money the most because she had lost her provider. Besides, the money rightfully belonged to Ramatoulaye because it was given to her. Thus, the "family-in-law takes away with them a wad of notes painstakingly topped, and leaves us utterly destitute, we who will need material support" (Ba, 1980, P. 8).

Furthermore, Manal (2015) indicates that many widows are denied their rightful inheritance in sub-Saharan Africa. John reveals the effects of the absence of the deceased's will. In *The Only Son*, Chiaku and her son Nnanna lost their fertile land and other possessions to her husband's brother Amanze when her husband died, despite the fact that, "By custom, everything there, including the tree belonged to the first son, and Nnanna had the right to his late father's property" (Munonye, 1966, p. 11). Custom alone could not protect Chiaku and her son's inheritance rights. One can assume according to Munonye that words and cultural beliefs on inheritance alone are not enough to protect the heirs' inheritance rights. Amanze together with his wives grabbed Chiaku and Nnanna's possession.

The author reveals that besides the will there is no other strong and solid weapon that can protect the widows' and orphans' inheritance rights. Others are just words of the mouth and beliefs of the heart and mind. As long as there are no measures that can be taken to punish those who grab the widows' and orphans' possessions, the grabbing of properties continues. This is evidenced by the fact that after grabbing the fertile land from Chiaku and her son, Chiaku's brother-in-law Amanze confiscated the pods which were plucked by Nnanna from the kolatree as well. Thus, the absence of Okafo's will led to the loss of his wife's and son's properties to his brother Amanze and his wives. Thus, Chiaku was unable to make a claim; she just vulnerably watched her brother-in-law Amanze confiscate everything that rightfully belonged to her. It was impossible for Chiaku to deal with Okafo's affairs after his death.

White, et al., (2002:29) observes that property dispossession against widows is a form of violence against women which threatens their rights. The dispossession of the widow itself is a long and complex process emanating from the interplay of the construction of gender roles and images, the plurality of legal norms, poverty and cultural factors. The solution to this problem may lie in such laws, institutions, cultural factors, gender equality and justice

4.4 Emotional, psychological and physical abuse

In *So Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye is the epitome of emotional and psychological abuse. Ramatoulaye endured every kind of abuse; when her husband died. Even at her lowest, Ramatoulaye's vulnerable self was expected to host her late husband's relatives, her co-wife's relatives and every special mourner. This is confirmed by Sossou (2002) who observes that during the mourning period the widow is expected to be a hospitable host and serve the guests. Adhering to the cultural demands, Ramatoulaye had to be a hospitable host to her husband's relatives and her co-wife's family, providing drinks or food, accommodation and everything they needed. Thus, Ramatoulaye's cultural and religious practices were a source of pain on her vulnerable self.

As a widow, Ramatoulaye did not receive the support she needed; instead, she was expected to give support to other people. Furthermore, given the fact that death is a tragic event which no one prepares for, the mourners were supposed to contribute food and other necessities to feed the people during the bereavement, because Ramatoulaye had not budgeted for Modou's death expenses. It was an untimely and unplanned event. In contrast Ramatoulaye had to spend the little that she had to feed them. Cultural practices that are supposed to look out for people and protect people's wellbeing make people's lives miserable. Furthermore, these practices are gendered and encourage the subjugation of women. This is the time when Ramatoulaye lacks strength and just needed a shoulder to lean on and yet Modou's family and Benetou's family exploit her. This tortured Ramatoulaye emotionally. As confirmed by Idialu (2012) such treatment as a painful psychological experience that can affect the individual throughout her lifetime

Ramatoulaye endured the pain and agony of being obligated to look after people who are physically and emotionally well during her distress. In actual fact, the work of the mourners is to take care of the widow, to console her, comfort her, and give her all the necessary

emotional, physical, material and psychological support so that she can get through her distress and get back on her feet again, but for Ramatoulaye, it was not the case. Ramatoulaye's experience of being obligated to look after the mourners and her in-laws is contrary to Nwoye (2005) who argues that the bereaved families need the necessary support from familiar people to allay their pain. This is evidenced below:

The widows are forced to give up their personalities, dignities, becoming a thing in the service of the man who has married her, his grandmother, his father, his mother, his sister, his uncle, his aunt, his male and female cousins, his friends. Her behaviour is conditioned: no sister-in-law will touch the head of any wife who has been stingy, unfaithful or inhospitable. (Ba, 1980, p.8)

Secondly, Ramatoulaye was forced into mourning the man who had mistreated her and made her life miserable. Modou abandoned Ramatoulaye after his decision to take a second wife. He stopped providing for her wife of many years, leaving her to take care of their twelve children alone. Although polygamy is an accepted practice in Islamic culture, Modou was supposed to marry his second wife with the knowledge and consent of his first wife, but he chose to betray his first wife Ramatoulaye. In addition, Modou was supposed to continue taking care of his first wife and children after marrying a second wife. Ramatoulaye was silenced simply because she believed that the dead have a special relationship with the living; as a result she had to be good to her deceased husband to avoid the wrath of failing to accept cultural and religious customs. Dead people are treated with great respect as they are believed to have a special relationship with the living (Emekam, 2012). After all that Modou did to Ramatoulaye, culture still demanded that she mourns her husband in a dignified manner, although her heart was still feeling the pain inflicted on her by Modou. Arguably, Modou is not worthy of the respect that Ramatoulaye is forced to give him.

One lady humiliated Ramatoulaye in her own house after the burial. This behaviour is explained by Orabueze (2004) who observes that in Africa, widowhood brings to a peak all the humiliation, suppression, degrading and maltreatment. Ramatoulaye was abused emotionally and psychologically by a stranger for disapproving her evil deeds. This lady was collecting the left-overs of rice in a plastic bag without anyone's approval. She also spoke quite hurtful words to Ramatoulaye and made fun of her loss. She hurt Ramatoulaye's dignity and made her feel helpless when she said, 'Lady death is Just as beautiful as life has been' (Ba, 1980, P.8). This woman humiliates and disrespects Ramtoulaye simply because she is a widow. The fact that she collected leftovers in the plastic bags openly and was unapologetic for her action shows that she does not fear and value Ramatoulaye as a person. This demonstrates that widowhood allows the grieved woman to be oppressed in every possible way.

Chiaku is the essence of pain. His brother in-law Amanze together with his wives physically abused her. Amanze brutally attacked Chiaku when she asked him about her husband's possessions that he had grabbed. Idialu (2012) argues that the treatment of widows in Africa is inhuman and geared toward dehumanising the victims. Amanze tries to silence Chiaku whenever she is protecting her son Nnanna. This illustrates how widows are always silenced. When Chiaku rebukes Amanze when he says bad things about Nananna, Amanze silences her. Amanze restrains Chiaku from protecting Nnanna against harm. Chiaku is not allowed to protect her son as a mother. Further, Amanze's wives say bad things to Chiaku, "with your dirty mouth you say such things, woman?", said Adagu's mother. 'I can now see you've no shame in you. 'You have no shame in you' (Munonye, 1966, p.3). Adagu's mother was talking to Chiaku as if she was talking to a small child forgetting that she's a mother just like her, and a married woman although she has lost her husband to death. Chiaku gets abused not because she is troublesome, but just because of the fact that she does not have

a husband. Her vulnerability attracts abuse. Not even once did someone show up to rescue her from the hands of Amanze and his wives'. Never was it mentioned that there is a movement that protects widows in the book. Nevertheless, Chiaku tried to break her silence and fight back, but she never succeeded and her abusers never backed off because she did not have a protector. This demonstrates that some widows are not safe in their environments. Nashongo (2016) outlines, the need to deal with such behaviour patterns through organised movements by observing that, Womanism theory is concerned with the survival of all people and, at the same height, allows both black men and women to live freely and interact in a non-threatening environment. This is encouraged by the fact that the marginalised such as widows live in threatening environments.

4.5 Depression and loneliness

In *So Long a Letter* the story begins with Ramatoulaye lamenting the distress that the loss of her husband has brought upon her life. Holmes & Rahe (1967) affirm that widowhood is one of the most distressing of all life events. Ramatoulaye is filled with fear of the future; she experienced highly stressful and traumatic events from the abandonment of her family by her husband to the sudden passing of her husband Modou. Ramatoulaye's marriage with Modou did not end peacefully, thus Modou's departure just brought back all the bad memories since Modou had betrayed her in his final year. This is evidenced below:

Today, I am a widow. Modou is dead. How am I to tell you? One does not fix appointments with fate. Fate grasps whom it wants, when it wants. When it moves in the direction of your desires, it brings you plenitude. But more often than not, it unsettles, crosses you. Then one has to endure. I endured the telephone call which disrupted my life (Ba, 1980, P.1).

Ramatoulaye had no company and friends after the death of her husband because she had to observe a *mirasse*, a forty-day period of mourning and isolation. During this period, she had nothing to help her take her mind off things; she was thus overwhelmed by thoughts. Given the fact that Ramatoulaye had a lot of challenges to contend with, such as the chaos in her house caused by the bereavement, her fate of having been neglected by the man with whom she had spent the best days of her life, and the father of her twelve children. She thus needed something to cushion her distress. The holy bible also supports this view that widows need to be visited during their distress (James 1: 27). In contrast Ramatoulaye was prohibited from conversing with other people; her religion demanded that she isolates herself. As such, Ramatoulaye did not have anyone by her side to keep her company. This resulted in depression and loneliness. This is illuminated when she says:

The walls that limit my horizon for four months and ten days do not bother me. I have enough memories in me to ruminate upon. And these are what I am afraid of, for they smack of bitterness (Ba, 1980, p. 9).

Although Modou was not the best husband, his death still left his first wife in great agony. This is also expressed by Mlambo and Kandemiri (2015) who submit that one can never readily accept death. Ramatoulaye finds it hard to make peace with her husband's death; she was in denial. And this is evinced through her lamentations when she says, "Modou Fall is indeed dead, Aissatou. The uninterrupted procession of men and women who have 'learned' of it, the wails and tears all around me, confirm his death." (Ba, 1980, p.3) Modou was her husband and love of her youth. Despite the fact that things did not end well between them; they had beautiful memories to be treasured. Hence, losing him was a horrible experience as she says, "This condition of extreme tension sharpens my suffering and continues till the following day, the day of interment" (Ba, 1980, p.3).

Ramatoulaye found herself in a very difficult position as she was forced by traditions to mourn respectfully the man who had abandoned her. Her husband's decision to take a second wife still haunted her. She notes:

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 had to bear. I think... But my despair persists, but my rancour remains, but the waves of an immense sadness break in me! (Ba, 1980, P.13)

On the other hand, in *The Only Son*, Chiaku had a beautiful relationship with her late husband, thus adjusting to widowhood was a challenge. Chiaku did not just lose her husband, but she lost her companion too, with whom she had spent her best days. Chiaku's world changed drastically when she became a widow. This is supported by Bharathi, Kumar and Sriedevi (2015) who opine that widows suffer from depression and it is viewed as a serious outcome of the feeling of loneliness. She felt alone because she had lost her significant other who always lit up her dark days. Whenever life was unfair to her, she always remembered the good memories of her late husband and ended up feeling lonely. Chiaku's husband was hardworking, so seeing broken walls in her house broke her heart and made her wish that her husband was still alive to fix them. The fact that she is now solely responsible for putting bread on the table saddens her because she once had a husband who gave his all when it came to cultivating. Collen (1988) concurs with the view that losing a wife or husband is much more difficult, because burdens that were previously shared must now be borne alone, and that can be stressful.

This is evidenced when she recollects that “Once, she had lived with a husband who was full of kindness and humour. He was young and energetic. He tilled the ground faster than most men did, and tapped a dozen palm-trees three times a day” (Munonye, 1966, p.14).

4.6 Cultural and religious beliefs and norms

Mariama Ba exposes demeaning cultural practices endured by widows. It is vital to note that, in *So Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye and her co-wife are victims of the oppressive cultural and religious practices. Instead of being in favour of the widows, succinctly, these cultural practices demean and dehumanise widows. Although widowhood rituals are intended to show public respect for the dead and are proof of the inconsolable sadness of the widow, they expose the widows to psycho-emotional and physical indignity (Gunga, 2009).

Ramatoulaye was given a period of four months and ten days to mourn Modou. During this period, she was expected to behave in a way that disturbed her peace as she honoured her late husband. This means that Modou was honoured at the expense of Ramatoulaye’s happiness and wellbeing. As such, the author reveals that the cultural and religious practices are in favour of the dead man than his widow. Walker (1983) observes that the womanist theory, while diverse, holds at its core that both femininity and culture are equally important to the woman's existence. This demonstrates that issues that affect women are mostly fuelled by culture. Widows’ deprivation and stigmatization are influenced by ritual and religious symbolism Sandys (2001). Even though Modou was not upright to her when he was alive, Ramatoulaye had to observe this moment of deprivation which is equated with strict restrictions. The mourning period isolates the widow from people and this leads to loneliness, fear of others, and breeds a negative self-esteem. This mourning period degraded Ramatoulaye; she was not even allowed to make appearances in public or take part in important occasions. She was shut out from all the important matters.

Although Ramatoulaye, was prepared to perform all the rituals gracefully, she knew that it was a bad idea since her mind was filled with bad memories and depressing thoughts. She did it anyway because, having been socialised within the religion and culture since her childhood and she was aware of the apparent consequences of failing to adhere to these customs. This is supported by Iitula (2018) that people often accept oppression as normal due to societal constructs engraved in the minds of both men and women normalising inhumane and despicable practices. Ramatoulaye is thus entitled and obligated to conform to cultural and religious practices although they bring her discomfort. This is evidenced when she says:

I hope to carry out my duties fully. My heart concurs with the demands of religion. Reared since childhood on their strict precepts, I expect not to fail. The walls that limit my horizon for four months and ten days do not bother me. I have enough memories in me to ruminate upon. And these are what I am afraid of, for they smack of bitterness (Ba, 1980, p.9).

During the mourning period, Ramatoulaye changed her mourning clothes every Monday and Friday, as prescribed by her religion and culture. This is a form of deprivation of hygiene and leads to discomfort especially in women. Ramatoulaye had to sacrifice her health and hygiene in the name of culture. Kapuma (2011) asserts that widows suffer and are subjected to rituals that are health hazards and heart-rending. Ramatoulaye's back is propped up by cushions, her legs outstretched, and her head is covered with a black wrapper. She also took purifying baths to cleanse herself simply because she is regarded as tainted and unclean. Manal (2015) also reveals that widows are viewed as carriers and transmitters of bad luck and defilement that are detrimental to the community, thus the community compels them to comply unquestioningly with these rites and practices, even though it is a painful and distressing experience. These practices are oppressive, as they give false beliefs to the victims. Ramatoulaye has always carried herself well and, she thus needed no purifying baths to make

her clean. However, the practices tie the widow's worth to her husband since there were certain rituals that had to be observed by the widow in her new status.

Widowhood rituals expose surviving spouses, particularly widows, to certain levels of indignity (Gunga, 2009). Ramatoulaye and Benetou's hair was undone by the sister-in-law simply because widows are not allowed to look attractive during the bereavement period. These cultural practices destroy the widows' confidence and reduce them to silent victims. They are made to look unpresentable when they are supposed to be the centre of attention. They were subjected not only to loss of status but their whole being. Culture deprived Ramatoulaye and Benetou of worthy things. Both Ramatoulaye and Benetou had to treat their late husband Modou with reverence. The expression of emotional grief was expected from the widows, although he had neglected Ramatoulaye a few years before he died.

Gunga (2009) notes that elderly married women and widows have been psyched into believing that the rituals are for the widows' benefit and of their children too. As such, Ramatoulaye did not have a choice, but to conform to the unbearable expectations placed on her since she was not allowed to rebel against the demands of her culture. This is evidenced when she laments, 'I hope to carry out my duties fully. My heart concurs with the demands of religion. Reared since childhood on their strict precepts, I expect not to fail' (Ba, 1980, p.9).

In the same vein, Nwachuku (1992, p.61) demonstrates that the African cultural concept of widowhood is retrogressive in that it generates and encourages abuse of human dignity through widow stereotyping and stigmatisation, and also through perpetuating further psychological violence to a person who is already grief-stricken at the loss of a dead spouse.

Thus, Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1980) unveils the harsh realities of cultural practices endured by widows. Chimhanda (2002, p.154) also submits that such practices can cause

serious physical discomfort for a person already emotionally stressed in mourning. Even though Ramatoulaye was at her lowest during the bereavement of her late husband, tradition still demanded the most from her. These cultural practices demean and distress the widow as she endures the unpleasant cultural rituals. Ramatoulaye's walls were blackened:

The smells of the stale sweat and food blend as trails in the air, unpleasant and nauseating. Cola nuts spat out her and there left red stains: my tiles, kept with such painstaking care, are blackened. Oil stains on the walls, balls of crumpled paper. (Ba, 1980, P. 8)

Shumbamhi (2004) concludes that traditional culture has become internalised in such a way that it oppresses women socially and economically.

4.7 Forced remarriages

In many African cultures, the widow must be inherited by a brother of the deceased. For instance, in *So Long A Letter*, Modou's younger brother approached Ramatoulaye insisting on remarrying her. This cultural practice is explained by Manal (2015) who opines that in many African contexts, the daughter-in-law is forced to remain in the matrimonial home even after the husband's death. Modou's younger brother, Tamsir, says to Ramatoulaye, 'When you have "come out" (that is to say, ended your mourning period), I shall marry. You suit me as a wife, and further, you will continue to live here, just as if Modou were not dead' (Ba, 1980, p.59). Tamsir did not wait for Ramoutoulaye to get out of her mourning period and give her time to regain her right state of mind for him to ask for her hand in marriage. Furthermore, he was supposed to wait for at least a year before approaching his brother's widow. As such he is reminded, "Did you ever have any affection for your brother? Already

you want to build a new home for yourself, over a body that is still warm. While we are praying for Modou, you are thinking of future festivities?” (Munonye, 1966, p.60).

Tamasir saw his brother’s death as an opportunity to elevate himself and get himself a better life. In concurring with this inhumane practice, Kapuma (2011) maintains that a widow may be inherited by her in-laws so that they control her possessions. This exposes his desperation to live a better life on Ramatoulaye’s account. The fact that he did not even give his sister in-law space and time to mourn her late husband shows that he lacks respect for the dead and the widow. In some African cultures, widow inheritance is a significant practice because it is done in the interest of widows. For Tamsir, it is a different case. Tamsir did not want to marry Ramatoulaye with the aim of adopting his late brother’s husband and father duties, but he wanted to fulfil his own desires and interest. Tamsir wanted to use Ramatoulaye as a platform for self-aggrandisement. Additionally, Tamsir did not even consider Ramatoulaye’s feelings for him. In this case widows are portrayed as objects that can be passed from one man to another. Tamsir did not see the need for Ramatoulaye to decide or speak for herself, but treated her as an object of the patriarchal enterprise.

Although Ramatoulaye adhered to all practices imposed on her by culture and religion, she rebuked Tamsir. Ramatoulaye’s bravery is supported by Dove (1998) who espouses that African womanism

“...brings to the forefront the role of African mothers as leaders in the struggle to regain, reconstruct, and create a cultural integrity that espouses the principles of reciprocity, balance, harmony, justice, truth, righteousness and order.” (p. 535).

For thirty years of marriage, Ramatoulaye has been silenced even about things that disturbed her peace. She finally broke her silence and challenges the status quo by putting Tamsir in his place. She says, “This time I speak out, my voice has known thirty years of harassment” (Ba,

p. 60). This demonstrates the power of a financially independent woman. Ramatoulaye is a high school teacher and could afford to take care of herself and her children, thus she was able to live on her own terms. As an independent woman, Ramatoulaye was able to make independent decisions. One can only assume that, some widows submit to widow inheritance with the hope of securing a better future for themselves and their children. As for Ramatoulaye, she has already been doing well even before Modou's death. Thus, there was no need for her to get remarried to someone she did not love.

However, the society did not take Ramatoulaye's decision kindly. Ramatoulaye's people were disappointed in her. She was viewed as a stubborn woman. What Ramatoulaye did was an abomination in her culture, as she herself confirms when she says, "My successive refusals gave me in town the reputation of a 'lioness' or 'mad woman'" (Ba, p. 73). If it was not for Ramatoulaye's firm decision to refuse her suitor's proposal, she would have been remarried to one of them without her consent. One may argue that a widow has to stand her ground in order to live her life on her own terms, because society does not protect widows and consider their needs and feelings, but instead pressures them into suffocating religious and cultural practices.

4.8 Difficulty in social interaction and Social stigma

In the texts under study, widows are subjected to discrimination and relegated to marginal roles by the unfair cultural systems. Widowhood tends to impact more traumatically upon women than men, altering forever the way they are seen by society and affecting their self-image (Owen 1996:8). In *The Only Son*, the widow Chiaku was socially stigmatised when she lost her husband Okefa. People from her husband's village stopped valuing her. Furthermore, Amanze's wives would always abuse her verbally. Kapuma (2011) observes the proliferation of such behaviours in African societies when she asserts that people say offending things

around widows, as a result widows may be scared to accept help from people, because no one seem to understand what they endure. She was often shut down and silenced whenever she wanted to express herself and pour out her heart, as demonstrated by what she was told by Adagu's mother, "With your dirty mouth you say such things, woman?" 'I can now see you've no shame in you.' (Munonye, 1966, p.9)

4.9 Financial hardship and poverty

Women are likely to suffer from economic strain when widowed, especially when a household wholly depends on the widow financially (Lee et al., 1998). *In So Long a Letter*, the widows suffer financial hardships because of Modou's financial negligence. Modou squandered money when he was alive. Instead of buying an affordable house for Benetoulaye, and securing money for the future, he built the SICAP villa, four bedrooms, two bedrooms, two bathrooms, pink and blue, a large sitting-room flat, built at his own expense at the bottom of the second courtyard for Lady Mother-in-Law. He bought furniture from France for his new wife and furniture constructed by local carpenters for Lady Mother-in-Law (Ba, p.10). Benetou's house and its contents were acquired by a bank loan granted on the mortgage of 'Villa Fallene', where Ramatoulaye lived. Modou continued the monthly payments of seventy five thousand francs to the SICAP. These payments were to go on for about ten years before he could attain ownership of the house. The fact that he had not fully paid for this house when he died, resulted in Benetou losing the house because she could not afford paying for it. He failed to leave money for his family, and left them in debt, "Dead without a penny saved. Acknowledgement of debts? A pile of them: cloth and gold traders, home-delivery grocers and butchers, car purchase instalments" (Ba, 1980,p. 10). As a result, the widows endured economic hardships.

The fact that Modou was the sole bread winner led to Benetou's financial difficulties and poverty. Young Benetou wholly depended on Modou financially; as a result, she endured financial hardships after Modou's death. Benetou could no longer afford the luxurious life which Modou had introduced to her. With reference to widows in Zimbabwe, Shenje (1992:53) and Wermter (2004:4) attests to this noting that as a group, they are the poorest of the poor and possibly the most vulnerable. Modou withdrew Benetou from school following his decision to take her as his second wife; she thus suffered financially because she had no qualification to her name. Additionally, Benetou had never worked in her life, so she lacked work experience. It was difficult for Benetou to find a job that could afford her the life that she was used to. For Benetou, everything was given to her on a silver platter. She thus lacked survival skills, hence, could not afford the luxurious life she was used to after Modou's death. The salary that Modou would always pay Benetou when he was alive discontinued after Modou's death.

Okafo's widow Chiaku in *The Only Son* also endured economic hardships when her husband died. Given the fact Okafo carried her husband and father duties when he was alive, Chiaku never lacked when he was alive. Her husband did not make ensure that she would be provided for when he died. Chiaku thus depended on selling at the market to sustain herself.

4. 10 Single parenting and home maintenance

Mariama Ba has shown us through Ramatoulaye that parenting becomes a burden to a widow when she loses her husband. As the old saying, "It takes the whole village to raise a child," Modou's absence made parenting overwhelming for Ramatoulaye. Raising teenagers was quite challenging to her. She also observes this when she says, "My grown children are causing me a great deal of concern" (Ba, 1980, p. 79). Ramatoulaye found her three children

Arame, Yacine and Dieynaba smoking in the room, this shocked her because she did not expect this from her children. She was unable to save her children from modernity.

When Ramatoulaye's sons returned home injured by a motorcyclist, because they were playing recklessly in the street, Ramatoulaye felt helpless and guilty and thought that her parenting skills had failed her children. She thought she could have done better by raising her children to be more responsible. As a result of poor parental care and guidance caused by divorce, separation or death of a partner, children are exposed to potentially damaging situations (April and Olaleye, 2010).

Ramatoulaye's daughter Assatou falls pregnant and this also burdens her. Ramatoulaye had to learn this from an outsider. The fact that Ramatoulaye does not have a partner makes it hard for her to notice everything that is happening in her household. Thus is because she always preoccupied with things to do since she is now responsible for taking care of every single thing in the household. This is explained by Gupta (1999) that a change in one's marital status has a significant influence on an individual's performance of routine housework and duties. It was hard for Ramatoulaye to give close attention to all her children, thus she was always in the dark regarding issues concerning her own children. She laments:

How could I guess that my daughter, who had calmed my anger during the cigarette affair, was now indulging in an even more dangerous game? Merciless had surprised me again as usual, without any weapon with which to defend myself' (Ba, 1980. p.85).

Furthermore, the fact that Ramatoulaye is solely responsible for all the duties that she was supposed to share with her husband makes it hard for her to manage everything on her own. Ramatoulaye is over burdened with household responsibilities, which makes it impossible for her to give all her twelve children undivided attention. Children are likely to behave better

when they are raised by both of their parents, because they help each other where the other partner lacks experience. Her parenting knowledge alone could not keep her children on the right path of socialisation. The fact that she gave her children a little attention, could be the reason her children went astray. The child is morally, mentally upright and emotionally balanced when the caring responsibilities are carried out by both parents (Tenibiaje et al. 2011). When children are brought up by a single parent, it makes life more demanding and challenging on the parent (Nkereuwem and Udisi, 2016). Hence Ramatoulaye's lament:

Was I to be blamed for having given my daughters a bit of liberty? My grandfather did not allow young people in house. As for myself, I let my daughters go out from time to time. They went to the cinema without me. They received male and female friends. I created a favourable atmosphere for sensible behaviour and for confidence. And the result is that under the influence of their circle they have acquired the habit of smoking. And I was left in the dark, I who wanted to control everything (Ba, 1980, p. 81)

Ramatoulaye's eldest children were responsible for looking after their younger siblings. After the death of the father, children usually must assume greater responsibilities (Shumbamhinhi 2004). Sometimes the mother brings them into the labour force to try and compensate for the loss of their father's labour (Chen 1998, p.423 – 424).

In *The Only Son*, Chiaku failed to keep her house in shape after the death of her husband. The immediate implication of this is that some work can only be carried out by men, and in their absence this work is left undone. Thus, Chiaku's house looked different because the man who was responsible for putting it in shape was no more. Notably, "The red-mud compound walls had begun to crumble with neglect and were covered in places by lichen and creepers" (Munonye, 1966, p. 14).

Furthermore, Chiaku had a tough time disciplining her son Nnanna. Nnanna would always refuse to take orders and heed instructions from his mother and answer her back. The fact that Chiaku had a soft spot for her son Nnanna, made it more challenging for her to raise Nnanna to be a more responsible and respectful child. When Chiaku instructed Nnanna to peel cocoyam for supper and fetch firewood, Nnanna scratched his head and objected: “We will hunt today. I won’t have time for any other thing” (p2). Even when Chiaku insisted with a serious tone, “Hunt for your head! See that you peel the yams and fetch firewood. You hear me?” Nnanna objected again, even raising his voice and saying. “I will not have time for that” (p.3). After this their conversation even got tenser. This is revealed when she says:

May your mouth be sealed rather than utter those words again she shouted I have a son of your age and yet I have to do everything myself I’ve told you, I must go out to hunt,’ he reaffirmed. ‘Villain!’ she thundered. ‘I suffered because of you and yet you refuse to do anything in the house. The mother who brought you into this world does not get anything from you in return! Let me tell you, Nnanna, you are not behaving at all well.’ ‘Did I ask anybody to bring me into the world?’ He said light-headedly (Munonye, 1966, p.3).

4.11 Loss of social status, identity and sense of belonging

Chiaku lost her sense of belonging, after her husband’s death. She felt like a stranger in a place she once called home. She was no longer feeling welcome where she once thought and felt she belonged. She ended up leaving the environment she was used to, because it was no longer safe for her. She did have reasons for staying in the house that she built with her late husband. This shows that a married woman’s existence is partly, if not completely, tied to her husband. Thus, when she loses her husband, some part of her gets lost as well. Although Chiaku was still living in the house she occupied with her husband, she still lacked a sense of

belonging. This shows that to belong somewhere is more than just having a place to stay. This is supported by Chavis and McMillan & (1986, p. 10.) who observes that belonging involves “the feeling, belief and expectation that one fits in the group and has a place there, a feeling of acceptance by the group, and a willingness to sacrifice for the group”. Umuodia was no longer a welcoming environment for Chiaku; she was no longer comfortable living there, and she could no longer do the things she used to openly without having to worry about being judged. She makes a single mistake and is attacked by Amanze with his wives. She was filled with the fear of being punished and questioned for behaving the way she did. This emphasises the importance of being sensitive to the widow’s emotions and needs. Chiaku did not have a caring and supportive family, and a sense of community after the death of her husband. She was not accepted as a member or part of her community by Amanze and his family. This is evidenced below,

Why then should she continue to stay? What could she do in Umudiobia? Chiaku felt of being encompassed by danger. Even the familiar shrill sounds of insects irked her this night and every distant noise seemed to her like the echo of her sorrows in Umudioba (Munonye, 1966, p.14).

It is significant to note is that one interprets life’s ups and downs together with one’s partner, and as such, with the loss of a partner one also loses the foundations of one’s identity. A new life has to be gradually built in a period when both parties are physically and emotionally exhausted (Blair and Noel 2012). Chiaku lost her identity when her husband died. Everything about her changed. She was no longer the free woman who was full of life and choice. She now lived for her son only. As a result, when her son Nnanna decided to go a different way and be educated in ways she could not comprehend, her world was shattered and her life meaningless.

Chiaku lost her social status when her husband died. She became a nobody and was not taken seriously or respected. This is supported by Sandys (2001) that the social status of a woman is conferred through a man; hence, in the absence of a man, she herself becomes a nobody and suffers a social death. Even children who were younger than her son Nnanna made fun of her and insulted her through her son. This is evidenced by the utterance, “You will suffer today, you and your short mother” (p.7). Being human and an elder alone is not enough to earn Chiaku respect. The author manages to expose the fact that society ties the worth of women to their relationship status. In the absence of her husband, no one feared or respected Chiaku. This is supported by Kapuma (2011) who asserts that people say offending things around widows This is exemplified here;

“Dare you talk to me like that?” he objected and regarded her sternly. Do you forget that you are a woman?” (Munonye, 1966, p.9).

His wives raise their cases to him too when they have been wronged by Nnanna, but he does not rebuke them nor remind them that they are women, but yet he rebukes Chaiku when she tries to protect her son and reminds Amanze that Nnanna is no stranger but he is his brother’s son so he thus deserves to be treated fairly just the way Amanze treats his own children.

Additionally, the status of being a widow decreases the widows’ importance in society. This is further explained by Sandys (2001) who submits that the social status of a woman is conferred through a man; hence, in the absence of a man, she herself becomes a nonentity and suffers a social death. For Benetou, her name evaporated into thin air when her husband died. Benetou was just like Modou’s shadow although he would do everything for her. The fact that Benetou could not make anything for herself, made her insignificant in the society when her husband died.

4.12 Hatred among women

The fire that burns widows is mostly fuelled by fellow women as demonstrated in the two texts under study. In *The Only Son*, women are presented as perpetrators of other women's suffering – responsible for their fellow women's misery. Although these women do not get to other women directly, they gang up with men against other women and ignite the fire for men to burn their fellow women. As a result, there is need to identify the root cause of gender inequality and to imagine the possibility of setting up fair and just systems in society. Womanism as a theory “furnishes a vision where the women and men of different colours coexist like flowers in a garden yet retain their cultural distinctiveness and integrity” (Collins, 2001, p. 11).

In *The Only Son*, Munonye demonstrates how women use their positions to oppress other women. This is supported by Nashongo (2016) who opines that women use their positions and relationships with men as weapons to attack widows. As soon as Amanze returned after a round of the five palm, his wives came in each with a child in hand and angry faces. Before Amanze could put down the climbing robe and the tapping knife, his wives had already started reporting Nnanna to their husband,

“He nearly tore off my daughter's ears’, shouted Adagu's mother, as if to a deaf ear.

‘He crushed the boy's shoulder blade,’ cried out the other.” (Ba, 1980, p.8).

In reporting Nnanna to their husband, these women prompted Amanze to summon Chiaku to his house to make her pay for her son's sins. These two women did not consider what Adagu and Obieke could have done to provoke Nnanna to hurt them. Instead of protecting Chiaku, they give the impression that she sent her son Chiaku to come and hurt their children. Adagu's mother accused Chiaku of being responsible for her son's behaviour: “It was his mother who sent him” (Munonye 1966, p. 8). Thus, women use other women, especially those who are weaker than them to please men and get attention.

Moreover, Munonye presents women as the weaker version of the masculine. This is explained by Nashongo (2016) who postulates that African women may also act as oppressive agents toward other women. Women in *The Only Son* are not innocent. They oppress the weak and afflict pain on them. Amanze's wives brutally attacked Chiaku when he was trying to protect herself from Amanze's beating. When Chiaku was fighting with Amanze, she fell on Obidia, one of Amanze's wives. Instead of rescuing the poor woman, 'she tore her unplaited hair, biting and clawing' (Munonye, 1966, p. 12). Obidia further hit Chiaku on the face with her loosely-clenched fingers and raked her nails across the woman's cheek (Munonye, 1966, p. 13).

In *So Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye's misfortunes were caused by a fellow woman. Benetou is the reason Ramatoulaye has a heavy heart mourning her late husband Modou. Ramatoulaye complains: "The presence of my co-wife beside me irritates me" (Ba 1980, p. 4). Sharing a room with the person who "stole" her husband and broke her marriage was unbearable to Ramatoulaye. She was disturbed by the fact that she had to sit next to her co-wife and get the same attention with her during the bereavement; Ramatoulaye complains, "Our sister in law gives equal consideration to thirty years and five years of married life. With the same ease and same words, they celebrate twelve maternities and three" (Ba, 1996, p. 4). This is caused by the fact that her co-wife was her first born daughter's friend and classmate. Had Benetou rejected Modou's marriage proposal Ramatoulaye would have mourned her husband in peace.

Furthermore, Benetou and her greedy mother took the money that belonged to Ramatoulaye which she had received from people during the bereavement. She received more money because she was a well-known teacher and on top of that she had a beautiful relationship with her learners' parents. Unfortunately, the money that she received ended up in the hands of Benetou and her mother. This shows that women steal from other women who are vulnerable.

This is supported by Mangena (2013, p. 13) argues that “women are not only victims, but they also victimisers”. Munonye demonstrates that women oppress other women when they have power. One can assume that women can just be as oppressive as men when they are in power. Given the opportunity they even use the sharpest tools to destroy and harm other women.

The person who was emptying bags of rice (stealing) in Ramatoulaye’s house is a woman. Women lack compassion towards their fellow women. This woman knew that Ramatoulaye had lost her husband but still goes on to take all the little of what was left. The author exposes the selfishness and greed of women. She forgets that Ramatoulaye is human too, and needs the rice she is taking just as much she needs it. Women celebrate when other women are going through difficulties. They hate to see other women being treated well by men. For instance, Adagu was intimidated by the fact that Amanze did not discipline Chiaku the way she expected him. Adagu wanted Amanze to be hard on Chiaku.

Of course, it’s all Amanze’s fault.’ She bit her lower lip and shook her head with much bitterness. ‘Amanze pampers you and gives you the courage to behave the way you do.’ (p.9)

Women do not embrace and support their fellow women’s choices. Ebunoluwa (2009) explains Womanism is a theory that seeks to urge women to love other women. Farmata forced Ramatoulaye into marrying Daouda, although she knew Ramatoulaye did not want to marry him. Farmata went as far as pronouncing curses upon her life because she refused to remarry. She says,

“You have rejected a messenger sent to you by God to reward you for your sufferings. God will punish you for not having followed the path towards peace. You have

refused greatness! You shall live in mud. I wish you another Modou to make you shed tears of blood “(Munonye, 1966, p. 72)

Ba exposes the fact that women do not always stand in solidarity with other women. During Ramatoulaye’s bereavement, women failed to observe a moment of silence to show compassion towards Ramatoulaye. They turned the bereavement into their meeting point and girls’ talk.

“Women were gathered in a corner making noise, resonant laughter, talking loudly, slapping hands and making strident exclamations. The purpose of the gathering was forgotten as friends who had not seen each other for a long time hugged each other noisily. Some discussed the latest material on the market. Others indicated where they got their woven wrappers from. The latest bits of gossip were exchanged. They laughed heartily and rolled their eyes and admired the next person’s *boubou*, her original way of using henna to blacken hands and feet by geometrical figures on them” (Ba, p7).

This is mockery towards the bereaved.

4.13 Chapter summary

This chapter presented a Poststructural Feminist examination of widowhood in *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba (1980), and *The Only Son* (1966) by John Munonye. Both authors demonstrate how widows face injustices within the societies they are socialised in or married into because of both cultural and religious sanctions. In both novels the widows lose their properties to their husband’s relatives. The novels further reveal that women cause other women’s sufferings. Additionally, the novels show that parenting becomes a burden to a

widow when she loses her husband. The next chapter presents the conclusion and recommendation for this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The study examined the representation of widowhood in *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba and *The Only Son* by John Munonye. The analysis was done through the lenses Poststructural Feminist and Womanist theories. The main concern was to examine how widowhood is presented in the two selected novels by the authors, as well as to analyse issues surrounding death that affect bereaved widows. The major objectives of the study as explicated in Chapter One were to:

- examine issues surrounding death that directly affect widows as portrayed in the two novels, *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba and *The Only Son* by John Munonye;
- analyse how the two authors present widowhood in the two selected African novels from Poststructural Feminist and Womanist perspectives; and
- explore the emerging themes from the discussion.

5.2 Findings

This chapter presents the findings and conclusions as well as the recommendations. The findings of this study are presented in line with the specific objectives of the study. The following summary presents the findings:

5.2.1 Objective one: Examine issues surrounding death that directly affect widows as portrayed in the two novels, *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba and *The Only Son* by John Munonye;

The study revealed that there are issues surrounding death that directly affect widows such as the loss of property to mourners and the deceased's relatives. As soon as the death of the husband is announced, the mourners and the relatives of the deceased begin to grab the property leaving the widow destitute and in poverty. The widow is left struggling to maintain her life as all the life essentials that she may have had are taken by the very people who are supposed to comfort her and become her providers in her husband's absence. The fact that the widow is expected to focus and observe mourning rites, makes it impossible for her to keep an eye on her property, as a result it is sometimes stolen. The widow is unable to follow up on her lost items because first of all she does not know who took her property, and secondly, in most cases there is no provision for an inheritance will.

Religious and cultural customs are also issues that affect widows. In most African cultures there are death rituals that are performed and the belief is that failure to observe these practices is followed by wrath. In *So Long a Letter* Modou's first wife and widow endured oppressive cultural and religious practices. She was only allowed to bath and change her mourning clothes once in a week. She had to sacrifice her health and hygiene in the name of culture. There is no technical reason for this, and this seems to be simply a practice that robs the widow of her dignity. Furthermore, Ramatoulaye was expected to mourn Modou in a dignified manner even though he had mistreated her in his last days. Culture demanded that Ramatoulaye bless her husband's relatives with her possessions. One may argue that this was an unfair practice. Firstly, Modou had mistreated Ramatoulaye, so his family was ideally not worthy of Ramatoulaye's blessings. Secondly, Ramatoulaye is the one in need, thus she was

not supposed to shower people with her possessions. In, addition, Ramatoulaye was expected to reduce herself and make herself worthless to serve her co-wife's mother, her husband's relatives and the rest of the mourners. Ramatoulaye's culture and religion inflicted more pain on her when she was supposed to be grieving the death of her husband.

Another issue surrounding death that directly affects women is widow inheritance. In most African cultures. As evinced in the novels, it is believed that the death of a husband does not end marriage. It is just a short break, and it shall resume with the inheritance of the deceased's estate, including the widow, by the relatives. This practice does not consider the widow's feeling and needs, since it is done without her consent. Modou's younger brother insisted on inheriting his brother's widow Ramatoulaye. The fact that Ramatoulaye is an educated teacher, and a financially stable mother and widow, made it easy to for her to reject Modou's proposal. However, because of her assertiveness for her right to choose what she wants, she was labelled as a mad woman.

5.2.2 Objective two: Analyse how the two authors present widowhood in the two selected African novels from Poststructural Feminist and Womanist perspectives

Widowhood is presented as a period of deprivation and oppression in *So Long a Letter* and *The Only Son*. Chiaku was oppressed and deprived of the things that rightfully belonged to her. Pain was not inflicted on her for being troublesome but because she is a widow. Thus, according to Munonye, being a widow makes a woman a victim of abuse. Furthermore, Ramatoulaye is portrayed as a voiceless individual who suffers in silence even in suffocating situations. Ramatoulaye pleases her religion at the expense of her own happiness. She conforms to the distressing practices of isolation, uncomfortable mourning clothes, renders herself as a hospitable host to her late husband's relatives, her co-wife's mother and the special mourners, and giving away her hard earned assets.

5.2.3 Objective three: Explore the emerging themes from the discussion

Various themes have emerged from this study. Single parenting and home maintenance are some of the themes that emerged from the study. The study revealed that, when women lose their husbands to death, parenting becomes a challenge. This has been portrayed in both novels. In *So Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye struggles to raise her teenagers. She lacks knowledge on how to keep her children grounded and save them from the shortcomings of modernity. As a result, her daughter Assaitou falls pregnant; her sons are run over by a motorcycle because they were playing recklessly on the road and her three daughters are caught smoking cigarettes. In *The Only Son*, the fact that when Okafo dies the only person who was left in his wife's life was their son Nnanna and this made Chiaku to be very soft with her son. As a result, she could not discipline him and groom him into a more responsible and respectful man. Nnanna always refused to take his mother's orders and perform his duties. Furthermore, Chiaku failed to keep her house in shape when her husband died; given the fact that he was the only one between the two of them experienced in that area.

The other theme that emerges from the discussion is depression and loneliness. The study revealed that widows suffer from depression and loneliness. In *So Long a Letter*, the narrator Ramatoulaye suffers from depression when her husband dies. In accordance with her religion, Ramatoulaye had to observe a four month and ten days period of isolation after her husband's death. Given the fact that Ramatoulaye was betrayed and neglected by her late husband in his final years, Ramatoulaye's mind was filled with nothing else but bad memories of her husband. As a result, she ruminates upon this memory during her isolation period. The author manages to raise awareness on the dangers of keeping a distressed person in isolation. Ramatoulaye's period of isolation just made her bottle up thoughts, because she had nothing to occupy herself with and was prohibited from unwinding her mind, hence the depression. In *The Only Son* Chiaku's husband was her companion; hence she becomes lonely when he dies.

Chiaku did not have companions in Umudobia after her husband's death. People who were supposed to be her companions, her brother-in-law Amanze and his wives were her enemies. Chiaku always felt alone in her matrimonial house after her husband's death. She would sit down feeling lonely thinking about the good old days she spent with her deceased husband.

Physical, emotional and psychological abuse is also one of the themes that emerged from the study. As represented by the two authors, the status of being a widow automatically attracts abuse in most parts of Africa. Most widows in Africa are the embodiment of pain as a result of physical, emotional and psychological abuse. In *The Only Son*, Chiaku suffered all types of abuse when her husband dies. Her brother-in-law Amanze would always beat her up when she demanded her property which he had grabbed illegally. Amanze's wives also insulted her. Amanze's wives always found pleasure in abusing Chiaku verbally. They insulted her in the presence of their children and Nnanna's presence. They would address and talk to her as if they were talking to a small child. In *So Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye is the embodiment of pain.

Another theme that emanated from the discussion is hatred among women. In most cases women are the reasons widows are oppressed, endure difficulties and go through shame. In *So Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye's offering was illegally taken by women, and her leftover food was taken by her fellow women. Furthermore, Ramatoulaye could not mourn her husband with a light heart because of her co-wife who is the reason Modou betrayed her. Also, Ramatoulaye's neighbour, Fartima, pronounced curses upon Ramatoulaye's life for rejecting Tamsir's marriage proposal. In *The Only Son*, Amanze's wives were the reason he abused Chiaku. They prompted Amanze to abuse Chiaku. They also ganged up with Amanze against Chiaku. These women took advantage of the fact that Chiaku did not have a husband to protect her and abused her verbally. They even made fun of her pain.

Financial difficulties and poverty are also some of the themes that emerge from discussion. In *So Long a Letter*, Benetoulaye endured financial difficulties and poverty when her husband died because he was the sole breadwinner. She thus ended up homeless, because she could not afford the house's monthly instalments that her husband used to pay.

5.3 Contribution to knowledge

The researcher observed that in Africa widows suffer because of cultural and religious death practices imposed on them. In so doing, awareness is created to revisit, reconsider and abolish these practices. Furthermore, the widow's minds are enslaved with distracting and disturbing beliefs. The authors argues for the irrelevance of these practices. The researcher also observes that women lose their possessions because there is no will, as a result there's no inheritance control. The study thus conscientises married people on the importance of having an inheritance will to ensure that their families are provided for when they die. Moreover, some widows end up in poverty when their husbands die because they solely depend on their husband financially. This study teaches spouses to always invest in life insurance so that their wives' future finances are secured. Also, women should learn to be financially independent so that they do not suffer financially when their husbands die.

Another observation from the study is that being educated gives women freedom of choice. This study thus encourages women to get an education and strive for financial freedom, to be able to make independent choices because; most widows give widow inheritance because they need men to provide for them. In concurring, Mehta (2000) stresses that through economic success; a woman would be self-sufficient and, at the same time, be able to provide for her family. Furthermore, the study observes that widows and women in general are voiceless. They do not speak out against and rebuke those who violate their rights. Society it seems, has various ways of muting the voice of women through cultural and religious

sanctions. The study advises widows and women in general to always protect their peace and break their silence against oppression.

Finally, the study notes that the oppression of widows and women in general is not entirely caused by the patriarchal project, but women also contribute to the oppression of other women. In so doing, the focus will shift from entirely blaming men to woman to woman violence. Additionally, the study encourages women to stand in solidarity to fight against inequality.

5.4 Recommendations

The study observed various issues surrounding death that directly affect widows. It examined how widowhood is represented in *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba and *The Only Son* by John Munonye. Therefore, further research in the following areas is recommended:

- To examine issues surrounding death that directly affect women in other literary texts.
- To analyse the role of literature in breaking the silence of the voiceless.
- To compare the representation of widows with the representation of widowers in African literature.

5.5 Conclusion

The study has examined the representation of widowhood in the two selected novels *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba and *The Only Son* by John Munonye. The researcher notes that the oppression of widows is mostly fuelled by religious and cultural practices. The study also observes that the oppression of widows and women in general is not entirely caused by the patriarchal project, but women also contribute to the oppression of other women. Apart from that the study observes that with the loss of a partner one also loses the foundations of one's

identity. Finally, the various recommendations that need to be addressed in the field of related studies by researchers were given.

References

- Acholonu, R. (1999). Women in the African Novel and the Quest for Human Rights. In C. Opara (Ed.). *Beyond the marginal land: Gender perspectives in African writing*. (pp. 97-100). Port Harcourt: Belpot.
- Aegerter, L. P. (2000). Southern Africa Womanism and Postcoloniality: A direct approach. In D. Gover., J. Conteh-Morgan & J. Bryce (Eds.). *The post-colonial condition of African literature*. (pp. 67-74). Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc.
- Amaduime, I. (1987). *Male daughters, female husbands: Gender and sex in an African Society*. London, Zed Books Ltd.
- Ambunda, L., & De Klerk, S. (2008). Women and custom in Namibia: A research overview. In O.C. Ruppel (Ed.), *Women and the custom in Namibia: Cultural practices versus gender equality* (pp.43-82). Windhoek, Namibia: Macmillan Publishers.
- Ba, Mariama. (1981). *So Long a Letter*. London: Heinemann.
- Baloyi, L. (2014). The African Conception of death: *A cultural Implication*, 222-243. Retrieved from <http://iaccp.org/sites/default/files/stellenbosch>
- Beaver, M. L., & Miller, D. A. (1992). *Clinical social work practice with the elderly*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Best, A., & Khan, J. (1993). *Research in education* (6th ed.). New York: Prentice Hall.
- Bharathi, P., Sridevi, G., & Kumar, K. B. (2015). Gender difference and age factor in loneliness, depression and social network effects of widowhood. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 5(11), 179-186.

- Bharti, A. (2015). Widowhood in Rural Setting: Problems and Prospective. *Educational Quest: An Int. J. of Education and Applied Social Sciences*, 6(3), 1-6.
- Bondevik, M., & Skogstad, A. (1998). The oldest old, ADL, social network, and loneliness. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 20(3), 325-343.
- Bremmer, J., & Van Den Bosch, L. (1995). *Between poverty and the pyre: Moments in the history of widowhood*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Carey, R. G. (1979-1980). Weathering widowhood: Problems and adjustment of the widowed during the first year. *Omega*, 10(2), 163-174.
- Carr, D., & Utz, R. (2001). Late-life widowhood in the United States: New directions in research and theory. *Ageing International*, 27, 65-88. <https://doi:10.1007/s12126-001-1016-3>
- Carr, D., House, J. S., Wortman, C., Nesse, R., & Kessler, R. C. (2001). Psychological Adjustment to sudden and anticipated spousal loss among older widowed persons. *The Journals of Gerontology. Series B, Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 56, 237-248. <https://doi:10.1093/geronb/56.4.S237>
- Chukwu, C. C., Scent, G.A.T., Emeka, J.O., Obi, C.U., & Kalu, E.O. (2014). Violence against women in Igbo land and South-east Nigeria: A critical quest for change. *Internal Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 6(2), 49-58.

- Chukwu-Okoronkwo, S. O. (2015). Culture of Widowhood Practices in Africa: Deinstitutionalizing the plights of women and communicating development through theatre. *American Journal of Social Science Research*, 1(2), 71-76.
- Collins, P. H. (2001). What's in a name? Womanism, black feminism, and beyond. *The Black Scholar*, 26(1), 9-17.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Educational design: planning, conducting and evaluating Quantitative and qualitative research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Cuddon, J. A. (1991). *A dictionary of literary terms and literary theory* (3rd ed.). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- De Saussure, F. (1966). *Course in general linguistics*. New York: Mac Graw Hill.
- Dove, N. (1998). African Womanism: An Afrocentric theory. *Journal of Black Studies*, 28(5), 515-539. Retrieved from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2784792>.
- Ebunoluwa, S. M. (2009). *Feminism: The quest for an African variant*. (Unpublished Master's thesis). Babcock University: Ilisan-Remo, Ogun State.
- Edet, R. N. (1992). Christianity and African Women's Rituals. In M. A. Oduyoyu & M.R.A. Kanyoro (Eds.). *The will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the church in Africa*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Gay, L. R., Mills, G. E., & Airasian, P. (2009). *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and application* (9th ed). Upper Saddle River: Pearson Educational International.

- Gupta, S. (1999). The effects of transitions in marital status on men's performance of housework. *Journal of marriage and family*, 61(3), 700-711. <https://doi:10.2307/353571>.
- Hagedoorn, M., Van Yperen, N. W., Coyne, J. C., van Jaarsveld, C. H., Ranchor, A. V., vanSonderen, E., & Sanderman, R. (2006). Does marriage protect older people from distress? The role of equity and recency of bereavement. *Psychology and Aging*, 21, 611-620. <https://doi:10.1037/0882-7974.21.3.611>
- Hangula, T. O. (2016). *Literary representations of stigmatisation and myths surrounding death in the novels The Purple Violet of Oshaantu by Neshani Andreas and The Other Presence by Francis Sifiso Nyathi*. (Master's Thesis). Windhoek: University of Namibia.
- Hughes, M. E., & Waite, L. J. (2009). Marital biography and health at mid-life. *Journal of health and social behaviour*, 50, 344-358. <https://doi:10.1177/002214650905000307>.
- Idialu, E.E. (2012). The inhuman treatment of widows in African communities. *Current Research Journal of Social Sciences* 1(4), 6–11.
- Iitula, L.K. (2018). *Authoring the unspeakable, moralising the public sphere: A literary examination of social commitment and the artistic vision in Sifiso Nyathi's oeuvre*. (Published Master's thesis). Windhoek: University of Namibia.
- Kapuma, G. A. (2011). *Widowhood Perspectives of Pain, Challenges and Healing*. Presented at NetAct Gender equality workshop. South Africa: Stellenbosch University, August 1-3.

- Katembo, A. (2015). *Reducing cases of gender based violence in Mashonaland central province: Zimbabwe*. (Master's thesis). Durban, South Africa: Durban University of Technology.
- Klass, D., Silverman, P., & Nickman, S. L. (1996). *Continuing bonds: new understandings of grief*. (Eds.). Washington D. C.: Taylor & Francis.
- Kuyela, T. (2014). Southern Africa: Alleviating the pangs of widowhood. Retrieved from: <https://allafrica.com/stories/200702140501.html>.
- Labeodan, H. A. (2002). Beyond Critique: A Philosophical Appraisal of some Cultural Practices Infringing on the Rights of Women in Yorubaland. In D. Akintunde & H. Labeodan (eds.), *Women and the Culture of Violence in Traditional Africa*. (pp. 68-78). Ibadan: Sefer Books Ltd.
- Lasebikan, E. (2001). African Culture and the Quest for Women's rights: A General Overview. In D.O. Akintunde (ed.), *African Culture and the Quest for Women's Rights*. (pp. 11-12). Ibadan: Sefer Books.
- Lee, G. R., Willetts, M. C., & Seccombe, K. (1998). Widowhood and depression: Gender differences. *Research on Aging*, 20, 611–630. <https://doi:10.1177/0164027598205004>.
- Lillard, L. A., & Waite, L. J. (1995). Till death do us part: Marital disruption and mortality. *American Journal of Sociology*, 100, 1131–1156. <https://doi:10.1086/230634>.
- Maguire, P. (1987). *Doing participatory research: a feminist approach*. Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts.
- Mamphela, R. (2018). *Political Widowhood in South Africa*. South Africa: The MIT Press.

- Manala, M.J. (2015). African traditional widowhood rites and their benefits and/or detrimental effects on widows in a context of African Christianity. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71(3). <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102>.
- Mangena, T. (2013). Theorising women existence: Reflections on the relevance of the Africana womanist theory in the writing and analysis of literature by and about Zimbabwean women. *International Refereed Research Journal*, 4 (1), 7- 14.
- Manor, O., & Eisenbach, Z. (2003). Mortality after spousal loss: Are there sociodemographic differences? *Social science and medicine journal*, 56, 405-413. [https://doi:10.1016/S0277-9536\(02\)00046-1](https://doi:10.1016/S0277-9536(02)00046-1).
- Manyedi, M.E., Koen, M.P., & Greeff, M. (2003). Experiences of widowhood and beliefs about the mourning process of the Batswana people. *Health SA Gesondheid* 8(4), 69–87. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hsag.v8i4.146>.
- Manzoli, L., Villari, G., Pirone, G. M., & Boccia, A. (2007). Marital status and mortality in the elderly: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Social Science & Medicine*, 64(1), pp. 77–94.
- Mashiri, L. (2013). Conceptualisation of gender based violence in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(15), 519-532.
- Masuku, J. (1999). *Research in language literature and communication*. ZOU: Ultech Press.
- Masule, C. M. (2014). *A comparative analysis of the depiction of women in Sifiso Nyathi's God of women and William Shakespeare's Othello* (Published Master's thesis). Windhoek: University of Namibia.

- McMillan, D., & Chavis, D. M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 14(1): 6-23.
- Mehta, B. J. (2000). Violence and representation: The slave-woman's body in Maryse Conde's *Segou*. In D. Gover., J. Conteh-Morgan & J. Bryce (Eds.). *The post- colonial condition of African literature* (pp. 75-90). Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc.
- Mlambo, N., & Kandemiri, C. (2015). Articulating the unsayable: An explanation of visible voices in Sifiso Nyathi's *The Other Presence*. *Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 4 (10), 53-64.
- Munonye, J. (1966). *The Only Son*. Lusaka: African Writers Series.
- Nashongo, J. M. (2016). *An analysis of the way black African women in cohabitative relationship as portrayed in ten selected African short stories*. (Published Master's). Windhoek: University of Namibia.
- Nesse, R.M., & Wortman, C.A. (2005). (Eds.), *Spousal bereavement in late life* (pp. 167–192). New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Nnaemeka, O. (1997). Introduction: Imagining knowledge, power, and subversion in the margins. In O. Nnaemeka (Ed.), *The politics of Mothering: Womanhood, identity, and resistance in African literature* (pp.1-25). London, UK: Routledge.
- Nnaemeka, O. (1997). Urban spaces, women's places: Polygamy as sign in Mariama Ba's novel. In O. Nnaemeka (Ed.), *The politics of Mothering: Womanhood, identity, and resistance in African literature* (pp. 162-191). London, UK: Routledge.
- Noel, B. & Blair, P. D. (2012). *I wasn't ready to say goodbye: surviving, coping, and healing after sudden death of a loved one*. Naperville, Ill.

- Nwoga, D.I. (1989). Widowhood practices in Imo State. A conference paper presented on Widowhood practices in Imo State, Nigeria, June 6–7.
- Nwoye, A. (2005). Memory healing process and community intervention in grief work in Africa. *ANZJFT*, 26 (3), 147-154.
- Nzewi, E. (1989). Widowhood practices: A female perspective. A conference paper on Widowhood practices in Imo State, Nigeria, June 6–7.
- Ogunyemi, C. O. (1985) *Womanism: The dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in English*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Ogutu, G.E.M. (1995). *Ker Jaramogi Is Dead: Who Shall Lead My People? Reflections on Past, Present and Future Luo Thought and Practice*. Kisumu: Palwa Research.
- Ogutu, G.E.M. (2001). *Ruth: Change and Continuity in Luo Widowhood Rights and Privileges: Leviratic Union (Wife/Husband 'Inheritance') Revisited*. Kisumu: Sundowner Institute Press.
- Ohale, C. H. (2012). *The Perpetuation of Injustice against Women*. Chicago: The Forum on Public Policy.
- Okoye, J. N. (1998). Customary Practices against Widows in Nigeria: The Igbo experience. Paper presented at a two-day Seminar Organized by the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, Awka, Anambra State.
- Orabueze, F. (2004). The Feminist Crusade Against Violation of Women's Fundamental Human Rights: Mariama Ba's *So Long A Letter* and Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*. In S. Konoye & N.C. Anyadike (Eds.), *Women in the Academy: Festschrift for Prof. Helen Chukwuma*. (pp. 111-116). Port Harcourt: Pearl publications.

- Owen, M. (1996). *A world of widows*. London: Zed Books.
- Owen, M. (1998). *A World of Widows*. London: Zed Books.
- Owen, M. (2001). *Widowhood: Invisible women, secluded or excluded, in the Women 2000 Report*. United Nations: New York, NY.
- Owen, M. (2011). Widowhood issues in the context of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 13(4), 616–622.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2011>.
- Owen, M. 1994. The world of the widow. *People and the Planet*, 3, 2-17.
- Pauw, B.A. (1990). Widows and ritual danger in Sotho and Tswana communities. *African Studies* 49(2), 75–99. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00020189008707728>
- Potash, B. (1986). *Widows in African societies*. California: Stanford University Press.
- Prigerson, H. G., Maciejewski, P. K., & Rosenheck, R. A. (2000). Preliminary explorations of the harmful interactive effects of widowhood and marital harmony on health, health service use, and health care costs. *The Gerontologist*, 40, 349-357.
<https://doi:10.1093/geront/40.3.349>.
- Ramphela, M. (1996). Political widowhood in South Africa: The embodiment of ambiguity. *Daedalus* 125(1), 99–117.
- Sabao, C (2013). The sexual politics of the female body in contemporary Zimbabwean youth sociolects in interpersonal communicative contexts. *Journal of Pan African Studies* 5 (10): 80 – 88.

- Setsiba, T. H. S. (2012). *Mourning rituals and practices in contemporary South African Townships: A phenomenological study*. (PhD dissertation) University of Zululand: South Africa. Retrieved from <http://uzspace.uzulu.ac.za/handle/10530/105514>.
- Sleap, B. (2001). Widows and AIDS: Redefinitions and challenges. Panos AIDS Programme; Widows without rights. (Accessed on 24 November 2010). Retrieved from <http://www.widowsrights.org/Widows%20and%20AIDS.pdf>.
- Sossou, M. A. (2002). Widowhood practices in West Africa: The silent victims. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 11, 201-209.
- Sridevi, G. (2014). Death Anxiety and Death Depression among Institutionalized and Non-Institutionalized elders. *International Multidisciplinary E-Journal*, 3(6), 21-35.
- Sridevi, G. (2014). Depression and Suicidal Ideation among Institutionalized and Non-Institutionalized elders. *International Multidisciplinary E-journal*, 3(4), 213-224.
- Stimpson, J. P., Kuo, Y. F., Ray, L. A., Raji, M. A., & Peek, M. K. (2007). Risk of mortality related to widowhood in older Mexican Americans. *Annals of Epidemiology*, 17, 313–319. <https://doi:10.1016/j.annepidem.2006.10.006>.
- Thompson, L.W., & Walker, A. J. (1989). Gender in families: Women and men in marriage, work, and parenthood. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 51, 845-871.
- Turvey, C.L., Carney, C., Arndt, S., Wallace, R.B., & Herzog, R. (1999). Conjugal loss and syndromal depression in a sample of elders aged 70 years or older. *American journal of psychiatry*, 156, 1596-601.

- Umberson, D., Wortman, C. B., & Kessler, R. C. (1992). Widowhood and depression: Explaining long-term gender differences in vulnerability. *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*, 33, 10–24. <https://doi:10.2307/2136854>
- United Nations (1995). *The world's women*. New York: United Nations.
- Utz, R. L. (2006). Economic and practical adjustments to late life spousal loss. In D. S. Carr, Vuletić, G. & Stapić, M. (Eds.), *Spousal Bereavement in late life*. (pp. 45–61).
- Walker, A. (1983). *In search of our mother's garden: Womanist prose*. London: Phoenix.
- Webster's New Word College Dictionary*. (2008). Cleveland, Ohio: Wiley publishing.
- Wilcox, S., Evenson, K. R., Aragaki, A., Wassertheil-Smoller, S., Mouton, C. P., & Loevinger, B. L. (2003). The effects of widowhood on physical and mental health, health behaviour's and health outcomes: The Women's Health Initiative. *Health Psychology*, 22, 513–522. <https://doi:10.1037/0278-6133.22.5.513>
- Zhang, Z., & Hayward, M.D. (2006). Gender, the marital life course, and cardiovascular disease in late midlife. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68, 639–657. <https://doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2006.00280.x>
- Zulfiqar, S. (2016). *African women writers and the politics of gender*. England: Cambridge Scholar Publishing.