

# Racial Segregation and the saga of communal Blend: A Perspective on Mariama Bâ's *Scarlet Song*

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Mariama Bâ's *Scarlet Song* is a sort of shock to optimistic terms such as 'multiculturalism', 'multi-racialism' and 'globalisation' in the post-colonial context. The novel proves how such holisms and their assumptions of global cultural syncretism attempt lamely to simplify the theoreticians' task at the cost of an adequate diagnosis of the competing nature of the plural sociosphere. The novel *Scarlet song* reveals how the commonest integrative method marriage - negates the concept of globalisation. The novel presents the conducts of characters within a trans-cultural setting. Marriage is the most revealing of institutionalised inter-personal relations, it seems to offer infinite angles. It is, in fact, the most appropriate site, for testing the degrees of tolerance and compromise necessary for fostering enduring cross-racial and cross-cultural relations. The context of the text undoubtedly suggests that its protagonist exemplify different degrees of imperviousness that run counter to the postmodern ideal of collapsing races, cultures and other matrices of identity.

Key words: globalization, cross-cultural, cross-racial, relations, identity.

The research article is an attempt to critically assess Mariama Bâ's *Scarlet Song* from a deconstructionist, neocolonial point of view by analyzing its contested political grounds. The present article acknowledges the fact that already a sufficient work has been taken place in race relations within Africa and the Diaspora. However, it makes clear that the contemporary social conflicts of the continent are still preoccupied with what Linda Hutcheson (1988) calls "the presence of the past" (p.4). Ironically, Africa's progress towards modernity and racial integration depends upon the cultural spheres of influence that its black and white communities hold today. Bâ's novel *Scarlet Song* thus revolves around the mixed-race marriage between Micelle and Ousmane. The tensions that tear their marriage apart are a metonymy of the wider socio-economic conflict that has remained unresolved in the post-colonial era. Besides economic conflict, the impact of cultural difference and identity play a great role in identifying gender roles. Thus, while the Gueye family is at the centre of the conflict, the article claims that the firing range for the battle extends beyond the domestic and psychological spaces. In her presentation of parents, parents –in –law and Ousmane's' friends, the writer has trained a critical eye on the varying and often conflicting perceptions of characters, whose sensibilities have been shaped by different circumstances and cultural orientations. It is in this sense that the novel resonates with allegorical overtones while communicating its message. The text is a veiled attack on Africa and its erstwhile European colonizers. The metaphor of the *Scarlet song* seems to add credibility to the view that cultural difference, in which everyone decides to sing their song, is a recipe for disaster. In the text, both families and individuals seem to be waging their battles of rejection, identity and denial of choices made by their children. This is the canvas from which Bâ seeks to convey her message of hope and despair, with regards to the dilemmas that mixed racial communities have to grapple with in a fractured society. Thus, though Bâ upholds the dictum 'unity in diversity', there seems to be no solution at the end of the novel.

Mariama Bâ's *Scarlet Song* exposes a complex web of relations that show how gender intersects with race, class and culture in the meeting of Africa and Europe, especially in the marital relationship. *Scarlet Song* tackles

polygamy through the interracial marriage between Ousmane and Mireille. Education proves to be the glue that brings them together, despite the racial and cultural differences. The two fall in love in an educational setting when they were studying in Dakar. The moment Mireille's diplomat father discovers the liaison; he dispatches Mireille back to France with the hope that once out of sight they would be out of each other's minds. But the plan backfires; Ousmane and Mireille remain in contact with each other in the form of love letters. It continues until Ousmane goes to Paris to marry her and bring her back to Dakar. On their return to Senegal, Mireille finds Yaye Khady's role as the matriarch over-bearing. Yaye Khady casts Mireille in the perverted role of her rival: the woman who has robbed her of her son. Yaye Khady's machinations, very well supported by Ousmane's male ego and his faith in African tradition, finally result in her son's decision to return to the African roots. Ousmane, therefore, decides to marry Ouleymatou, his childhood girlfriend resulting in a polygamous household for Mireille.

The central theme of the novel is the east-west encounter at the familial level, which is presented through the convention of a paired woman. Mireille, the female protagonist, irrevocably suffers the excruciating pangs of polygamy. She is a white girl, a stranger to the inexorable grip of religion and tradition in African society. Ousmane is a Muslim hypocrite who uses religion for selfish ends. His male ego and black pride are the outcomes of his attachment to religion. Ousmane's character discloses the picture of a society in which men exploit religion for their benefits. The novel also depicts the negative impact of colonial education on the male personality of Ousmane who has the least consideration for philanthropic values such as mercy, pity, peace and love.

*Scarlet Song* reveals that abuses and transgression of duties abound in polygynous marriages. It presents the conflict evident in interracial and intercultural marriages in the post-colonial Africa. The novel demonstrates the harsh universal reality that the East is East and the West is West and the twain shall never meet. Ousmane is in love with Mireille and will marry her, but he hides his passionate involvement with Mireille from his parents. It becomes quite apparent the moment Yaye Khady stumbles upon Mireille's photograph. Ousmane tells his mother that it is of a movie star, and then returns to France to marry. He purposefully hides his intentions. According to the African code of conduct, to marry without the consent of parents is inconceivable, and if done so at all, the offence is unpardonable. Conversely, Ousmane does not have the guts to disclose his secret love before his parents, since he knows that the idea will not be tolerable to their religious bent of mind.

Ousmane anticipates the reaction of his family and community to him marrying not only an outsider but also a white woman. The novel presents the arguments floating in Ousmane's mind of his parents' rejection of Mireille and his community, viewing him as a traitor and thus most likely losing his revered position within his family and community. Ousmane is further affected by the disapproval expressed by his friends who believe that mixed marriages should be avoided and that they are not necessary. In their view, interracial marriages served a purpose during the colonial period of advancing the black man financially and socially. They express the view that "a man should look for a wife among his people" and that "whites are racists" (38). His friends provide evidence to support their viewpoint and emphasise that black and white people do not share a common history, interests or goals and should thus remain separate. Ousmane tries to convince himself that a possible solution would be to put his love for

Mireille and being her husband in one compartment and being Yaye Khady's son in another. In this way, he would be able to hold onto his black identity and satisfy the collective on one hand and the other he would be able to have love and satisfy his interest. The reason which Ousmane attempts to use to find a solution may have been possible if all individuals interpreted culture and identity in the same way. Ousmane initially views culture as being a source of self-knowledge and self-respect. This view is later adapted when he forms a relationship with Ouleymatou.

The tension which the two main characters experience during their marriage arises from the fact that in this society marriage is not an individual contract, but rather that it is connected to family and community. Ousmane views his community and culture with loyalty and commitment and this comes to the fore when he receives a letter from Mireille expressing her deep commitment and love for him and requests that they wait to marry when she is legally of age to do so. The letter ends where she writes, "Just tell me what to do and nothing else but you will matter. Write to me. I shall be waiting" (36). At this point Mireille is asking Ousmane to decide on their future whether they will be together or if they will separate. The letter adds to the confusion of Ousmane who is already torn between the two worlds; that of his family and community and the other includes Mireille.

The letter meant that he now had to give serious thought to his position that he had to make a choice between two irreconcilable decisions, which either would bring heartache. [...] On the one side, my heart draws me to a white girl ... on the other, my own people. My reason fluctuates between the two, like the arm of balance on which two objects of equal value are weighed (36).

The lines convey Ousmane's internal conflict in having to choose, the one representing the collective the other representing his individual identity. The community is described as holding him and crushing him with its tentacles. The community is described as; "The more he strove to break free the tighter the coils enfold him" (36). Ousmane questions whether it would be possible to break free from this grip without amputating a part of him, without bleeding to death.

Ousmane's mother, Yaye Khady, finds it difficult to come to terms with the union of her Senegalese son and the French-born Mireille. Her mind is flooded by preconceived ideas of her white daughter-in-law failing to fulfil the duties expected of her. Yaye Khady's reaction to her new daughter-in-law is never generalised to the rest of the women in the community and can therefore only be read as a response to the specific situation. The women in the novel are not depicted as a homogenous group. Even though instances of female solidarity and friendship are depicted, women are also portrayed as being responsible for the victimisation of others. There could be a number of reasons for this type of relationship developing. In an attempt to understand Yaye Khady's dislike of her daughter-in-law; one reason could be that Mireille is an outsider and would remain so because of the close connectedness of the group along lines of traditions, customs and values. Secondly, that she represents the coloniser and the experiences which the mother experienced with white people during this period. Another reason could be that Mireille represents the loss of the ideal which Yaye Khady had of what her daughter-in-law would be; that is she would be able to mentor her and her daughter-in-law would help in the house. Finally, Mireille also represents the loss of her son who she

views as a central figure in her life. Yaye Khady's continuous interference between Ousmane and Mireille forces him even further to satisfy the will of his mother and his community and thus he respond by rejecting and alienating Mireille.

The role of women and the position which they hold in society often influences their relationships with others and the decisions which they make. This in turn could possibly influence the way in which other women are positioned in society and could even serve to marginalise women. The women in *Scarlet Song* are not a homogenous group and are divided along lines of caste, class, race and generational differences. Instances of friendship are formed but are also contrasted by women victimising other women along these lines. The primary focus of discussion will be to illustrate the conflict which arises between race, caste and gender particularly in a society which disapproves of the mixing of individuals across race, castes and culture. The interracial marriage between Ousmane and Mireille is a departure from the norm and hence the consequence of disapproval from family members and the community. Mireille in many ways represents the outsider figure in her husband's community. She is not of Senegalese descent and is considered by many as being not of "pure blood". She remains marginalised because she is unable to speak and understand Wolof and the traditions and practices of the Wolof people. She remains alienated even though she has adopted Islam and is further ridiculed by some when she is unable to practice it correctly. Mireille remains the outsider because others struggle to place her within the familiar structures of their society. The motive driving the behaviour is different for each character, for some it is historically derived, who perceive Mireille as being a representative of the French coloniser. To others such as Yaye Khady, she symbolises a threat to the traditional foundation of her respected position in her caste and her community which she values greatly.

The relationship between Ousmane and Mireille allow different viewpoints to be presented regarding interracial marriage and the dilemma which often arises; does one completely assimilate to the western culture? Should western culture be relinquished in favour of African culture? Or is it possible to live in both worlds? Each of these questions demands that the individual make a choice which in turn has implications for those involved. The choice made carries a responsibility not only for the individual but also for the family and community. The direction which the individual takes often has far reaching consequences. The consequences range from conflict between individuals to conflict within the individual. These are questions which Ousmane and Mireille are confronted with but also which the respective communities grapple with. However, this is not only evident in the Senegalese community but also Mireille's parents struggle to accept their daughter marrying Ousmane because of his race and religion. Culturally in Senegal she remains an outcast which is fuelled by her mother-in-law's rejection of her. It can be argued that Yaye Khady's rejection of Mireille is not necessarily personal, but rather a rejection of what she represents. Her disapproval of white women is expressed long before she meets Mireille, when she warns Ousmane before leaving for Paris to be on guard for "white women on the lookout for black men" (59). Her rejection of white women can therefore be attributed to her ingrained beliefs and assumptions. She states angrily;

A Toubab can't be a proper daughter-in-law. She'll only have eyes for her man. We'll mean nothing to her. And I who dreamt of a daughter-in-law who'd live here and relieve me of the domestic work by taking over the management of the house, and now I'm faced with a woman who's going to take my son away from me. I shall die on my feet, in the kitchen. (66)

The statement shows her infinite affection for her kith-and kin, for her husband, and above all, it shows her unbounded attachment to homely duties as a part and parcel of her being. The expression shows the readiness of African Muslim woman to die for her home and family. She is the symbol of peace and homely harmony. She becomes an incarnation of successful and well-contented womanhood. But at the same time, her failure to liberate herself from the experiences of her limited world is not a small error. She should have been able to accommodate Mireille in her family under her guardianship, if not in the capacity of a mother, but at least as a mother-in-law. But she is reluctant to accept Mireille to be a daughter-in-law. She is, therefore, not a flawless woman. Her utterances are also not free from authoritative touch.

For Yaye Khady, the issue is not only of either racial or sexual difference but one of woman's power and familial control. Yaye Khady can never accept the domination of those whom she thinks she has a right to control by virtue of her position as a mother and mother-in-law. This biased attitude enables her to make no effort to teach or integrate Mireille into the circle of 'undisputed principles.' On the contrary, she is determined to break the married life of Mireille and Ousmane. As a part of her plan, she rudely intrudes the couple's privacy even on Sunday mornings by walking straight into their bedroom without knocking and without offering any apologies. Legally or ethically, there is no such written rule or unspoken principle that gives mothers-in-law a right to walk into their married son's bedroom. Her conscious attempts to break her son's happy married life prove her to be a typical type of mothers-in-law who follow their own way of life. The statement in the novel makes clear the typical nature of mothers-in-law:

There are mothers-in-law who act like veritable rivals to their daughters-in-law. They suck the younger woman dry with their insatiable demands and it comes to a showdown they always get the better of it, as a single tear from them is sufficient to have the hussy repudiated.(72)

The statement shows Yaye Khady to be one of the typical types of mothers-in-law who always crave for the authority sanctioned by tradition. Her callous attitude towards Mireille results in her conscious attempts to get rid of her and regain her own dominant position in the family.

Jeanetter Treiber presents an observation made by Laretta Ngcobo on African family structures in an attempt to understand the relationship between the three women, Yaye Khady, Mireille and Ouleymatou in the novel. Treiber cautions that this is a general observation and does not necessarily apply to all African families, but it is relevant to



this novel (120). She provides a general understanding of the relationship between the mother-in-law, son and Mireille which offers a possible explanation for the tension between the two women. She explains that there are strong ties between mother and son and that the daughter-in-law adds tension to this relationship. The two women are often in constant conflict competing for his love and income. The mother relies on her son to provide for her financially but simultaneously the mother-in-law is seen as a tutor or mentor to the young woman. Fathers-in-law appear to be uninvolved and remain outside the conflict arising from this relationship (Ngcobo in Treiber 119).

In relation to the novel, Yaye Khady assumes that Mireille's view of marriage will exclude family and community. Yaye Khady is further angered that her white daughter-in-law will deny her the status granted to her by her caste. Being of a higher caste, her biggest fear is that she will lose her high position in society. A brief overview of the role of caste in Wolof society is necessary to understand the issues presented in the novel. According to Siga Fatima Jagne, the Wolof is a society structured along caste systems which place great value on the privilege which caste allows (2). The caste that an individual is born into determines the expectations, privileges and traditions of that person but also the status which the individual will be granted (3). Traditionally, marriage between members of different castes was seen as impossible, and even unacceptable (3). These prejudices between castes play a crucial role in dividing families as seen with Aissatou and her husband in *So Long a Letter*. They create division within communities and eventually division on a larger societal scale. The reference to the caste system and the concern expressed by Mireille's mother-in-law is similarly seen in *So Long a Letter*. Ramatoulaye writes about Aissatou's mother-in-law, a Princess of the Sine, who refuses to accept her son's marriage because she is the daughter of a goldsmith. The mother-in-law steps in and in her rejection of Aissatou chooses another wife for him. Mawdo Bâ her son, in his attempt to main his individualism, asserts that "marriage is a personal thing" and remained firm in his commitment but unfortunately loses the battle against his mother and finally submits to the pressure. His determination was not enough to resist the will of his family and his caste.

However, Yaye Khady's rejection of Mireille is based on race and not caste distinctions, her disapproval originates from the realisation that a daughter-in-law who is a foreigner is probably even worse than someone from a lower caste. The mother not only disapproves of their interracial marriage but also of Ousmane and Mireille's son, Gorgui. Not only does she deny her daughter-in-law the right to belong but she also rejects her grandson. The birth of Gorgui, her grandson, reinforces her disapproval of interracial marriage. Yaye Khady's rejection of Mireille denies her legitimacy as a wife and her rejection of Gorgui further denies Mireille as a mother. Yaye Khady describes the baptism or naming ceremony as being without the "usual ostentatious display" (124). Even though the baptism followed the religious traditions associated with such ceremonies, Yaye Khady was upset that there were no feasts which often accompanied such family ceremonies. She believes that once again the white woman has cheated her of her privileges; firstly, when there was no wedding ceremony and secondly, because of the absence of festivities at the baptism. It is therefore not the lack of cultural tradition which she grieves but rather the power and control which is her privilege in the necessary "obligations" of exchanging of gifts and preparing feasts. She describes the day as being "sadder than a day of mourning" (125). Yaye Khady experiences suffering because of the birth of Gorgui; she sees him as a blemish on her race. Ousmane, on the other hand, expresses concern about his son always living "on the

fringes of two worlds” (124). Ousmane foresees that his son will have to endure continual conflict because of the clash between these two worlds. Ousmane’s decision to have a quiet baptism can be viewed as an act of denying his son the right of a legitimate son.

The view of the community as a provider of traditions, values and culture for some is also contrasted as a source of marginalisation and pain for others. A number of women in this community play a very important role in achieving or striving to achieve what they believe to be the common interest of the group often to the detriment of some. It is with the help and support of many women in the community that Yaye Khady and similarly Ouleymatou manage to destroy the marriage between Ousmane and Mireille. Yaye Khady gains the sympathy of the women in her community when she expresses her unhappiness at acquiring a white daughter-in-law who would be unable to help her with her everyday chores. Ouleymatou manipulates the already tense relationship between Yaye Khady and Mireille and offers to do the ironing. This open display of fulfilling the daughter-in-law’s role immediately wins favour with Yaye Khady. This overt display of cultural tradition is covertly disguising the manipulative intentions of Ouleymatou. Ouleymatou who recognises the financial stability which Ousmane will afford her sets her sights on seducing him. Apart from the financial gain, she is also aware of the status that she will obtain by marrying Ousmane.

The novel, thus, suggests how patriarchal ideology and practices are already prevalent in traditional Senegalese society. The text also makes clear that an indiscriminate reliance on tradition re-establishes patriarchal power and is collaborative with colonial ideology. Bâ critiques these aspects of the African traditional society by highlighting this harsh reality prevalent in the post-colonial era. On the other hand, Bâ also questions whether the search for African authenticity is fruitful and valid in constructing a post-colonial identity. Through the suffering and anguish of Mireille, Bâ proposes a feminist perspective by the inclusion of gender conflict.

The following observation by Talpade illustrates Bâ’s stance in presenting the role of race, ethnicity and class in gender relations:

The text thus, undoubtedly, makes a feminist claim. It is by making Mireille, the white, European woman the main female character and by portraying her as victim of Ousmane’s traditionalist and essentialist politics. Bâ exposes herself to a possible critique by those who insist on a fundamental difference between the concerns of Western women as opposed to those of African women or women of colour, especially since Mireille is a representative of the French middle class. According to this view, the categories of race, ethnicity, and class must play a predominant role in the analysis of gender relations, and feminists who ignore these categories make universal claims on “false” epistemological grounds, thus ultimately undermining the cause of women of colour and participating in their oppression. (1984: 333-58)

Bâ's novel exposes the universality of patriarchal oppression, but simultaneously it shows how the European woman's cultural background and experience differ from that of her Senegalese counterpart. The following observation by Ngcobo on African family structures reveals the relationship between the three main women in the novel: Mireille, Ouleymatou and Yaye Khady.

The arrival of the daughter-in-law introduces an added strain and a triangular one in the relationship between the mother, the son and his wife. The mother and the wife see themselves as competing for his love and income....In short, this is a complex triangle of relationships. But in spite of all the conflicts there are strong ties that bind mothers to their sons on the one hand, and mothers to their daughters-in-law on the other....Without the support of her son, she [the mother] is redundant, especially if she is beyond child-bearing age. The authority to keep secure the home and well-provided for lies with him....And between the mother and the daughter-in-law there is the ever present awareness that the two have a lot in common—that they will always be outsiders in the family lineage of their husbands. The share disadvantages and the young woman can always learn from the older woman; one serving apprenticeship, the other tutoring....And in all this, fathers-in-law emerge uninvolved and unscathed. It could be said that they are outside the whole play for power and security. (1988:145)

While this observation is very general and certainly does not apply to all African families, it is very much applicable and relevant to the present novel. It reads like a commentary on the main characters of the novel. The tension between the three women is caused by an unusual situation, namely, the disruption of traditional pattern by the intrusion of a European woman. The three women's co-existence becomes impossible or unbearable mainly because of cultural and class difference. The three women struggle for security and the preservation of their cultural identity within the social fabric: Yaye Khady is dependent on her son for future financial security, Ouleymatou has no education which makes her marry a man who belongs to the elite and can provide financial security, and Mireille is not financially dependent on Ousmane. She can work and support herself. Her dependency on Ousmane is rooted in her position as a foreigner in Africa. Another factor that has resulted in her acceptance of her present position is the fact that she has now become unwanted in her own country with a black child. Mireille lacks the necessary support system for survival.

The significant thing is that all the three women are dependent on Ousmane owing to their sex. Moreover, they lack an awareness of their condition; they definitely have no 'feminist' consciousness. In this respect, the women follow socially approved dogma. Yaye Khady and Ouleymatou's Iago-machinations evidently show the impact of communal code of conduct on them. As a result, Yaye Khady consciously endeavours conniving against Mireille to keep her away from Ousmane. Ouleymatou along with her friends attempts to find out the means to exert a pull on Ousmane and extricate Mireille from Ousmane's life. She always believes Mireille as an intruder to be eliminated, the rival to be dethroned, and an outsider to be



kicked off. Mireille, on the other hand, pursues her own sophisticated way of life altogether ignoring these women. Throughout the novel these three women continue fighting with one another, without understanding the importance of collective feminine strength.

The above situation reveals the reality evident in Senegalese society in relation to the lack of compassion among women in the African society. The novelist, therefore, delivers a message that women should come out of the petty squabbles and be able to surmount the feminine limitations in a patriarchal society. Instead of fighting among themselves, they must gather together to fight against their common predicament and liberate themselves from the devilish tentacles of patriarchy.

The novelist also pinpoints how Mireille's treatment as an intruder becomes a chronic in Yaye Khady and Ouleymatou's psyche. This feeling is related to the racial bias. In fact, both of them are Muslims and deem themselves to be the true followers of Islam. Ironically, they do not have proper familiarity with the teaching of Islam. The actual message of Islam is: whosoever embraces Islam becomes Muslim as much as the original Muslims are. Unfortunately, Mireille suffers the pangs of being an outsider in real life because of the treatment given by the Muslims. This sort of behaviour on behalf of Muslim community is altogether against the spirit of Islamic laws and teachings.

A close reading of the text reveals the fact that Mireille is also a victim of her own excessive emotional involvement with a callous fellow like Ousmane. It is totally ironic that Mireille, an educated woman, does not feel it necessary to know the facts about her husband and his family before walking into this marriage. She knows a little about Africa and its culture before approving this married life. In reality, she has learnt about Africans only through media in France. While in France, she mentions in one of her letters to Ousmane about Africa and her own personal convictions.

The letter echo a kind of awakening on the part of Mireille. It illustrates her determination to preserve her own identity and the values she cherishes. The letter unambiguously makes clear her readiness to sacrifice any of her ideals which Ousmane would not accept. The letter, in addition, reveals some of the aspects of African life she gathers from media and in the form of warnings given by the well wishers. She is more particular when she mentions the heart rending stories about the miseries of women and about the callous treatment offered to them in African patriarchal societies. The letter, undoubtedly, replicates Mireille's awareness of some of the stakes involved in marrying an African male. She is already acquainted with the fact that some sacrifices will have to be made in accommodating herself in the African traditional patriarchal fabric. But there

is a big difference between what she has perceived and the actual reality of living in Dakar, with a man who, as Lamine points out, never makes any sacrifices/concessions; but always demands concessions/sacrifices from others.

Quite ironically, Mireille decides to marry Ousmane and puts herself in trouble. She experiences the endless rounds of common conflicts inherent in the life of any couple; she also suffers from the other attacks. The total callous behaviour of Ousmane and his family, especially Yaye Khady, leads her to think that they completely want to bury her alive and resurrect her as another woman, who would have nothing in common except her physical appearance. It is evident from the statement:

She was shaken in her most firm and innermost convictions. Her experience in Africa resulted in a loss of her own identity...as everyday ended a little more of the courage with which she had armed herself when she left her own country and turned herself into a rebel, by marrying an African. (99)

Mireille's decision to abandon her own country and her own people makes her a victim. She fails to recognize that she needs many years to build and ground herself in African modes and manners. Mireille's biggest mistake comes from the fact that she does not actively follow a woman's network and adamantly refuses to participate in any of the traditional events that are a part of Senegalese life. Her education does not help her to understand the fact that other women living by her side perform all the traditional tasks and always play the role given by their community. The women like Yaye Khady, her mother-in-law, Ouleymatou, her co-wife, Rosali, her friend, and Ali's wife follow the communal life and are aware of their specified roles as women in the African traditional setting. Unfortunately, Mireille adopts a classiest attitude towards them and loses valuable ground of comfort. In fact, she owns women like her sister-in-law and friend, Soukeyna and Rosali, at her disposal; but she does not make enough use of them. It is Soukeyna who makes her conscious about Ousmane's involvement with Ouleymatou and advises her to save her married life. In addition, Rosali also advises her to visit her parents-in-law without her husband and bring something for them to wear on special occasions. She also makes it clear that the generous acts of kindness solve many problems in the African context. Rosali also advises her:

Don't shut yourself up in your room brooding when your husband is entertaining his friends. A cheerful welcome from you will be your trump card if outsiders try to break up your marriage. (96-97)

Rosali makes sincere attempts to make Mireille conscious about the general routines she should follow as a Senegalese daughter-in-law. Rosali's soul intention is to make Mireille understand the African cultural heritage so that her marriage could be saved. Ousmane also on his part attempts to elucidate the significance of Senegalese music and the

contribution of Africans to the civilization. Besides, he attempts to make Mireille conscious of his love for all that is African. But Mireille simply neglects Ousmane's pleadings and expresses her dislike for all that is African.

In traditional African family, a significant amount of importance is always attached to friends and relatives. They are treated all the time with immense reverence and incredible hospitality. Mireille simply fails to understand the reality that just one cheerful smile can do wonders and result in miraculous impressions on the family friends and relatives. It will undeniably support in making her better position in African family structure. But Mireille's urbane style of life essentially guides her to disregard all these straightforward means. She fails to appreciate the secret of successful relationships that straightforwardness in the little affairs of life endows one with unending fulfillment. And in the African context, it really proves beneficial for an individual to gather gold. Her utter negligence towards these plain secrets of life ultimately results in unending sufferings for her. However, she attempts to present an astute analysis of her position by attempting to support herself and the depressed position of African women in general. She reflects:

But the he reason they do not leave is cowardice, fear of assuring responsibility for themselves. They are kept prisoner by the habit of not thinking for themselves, not taking any decisions, not seeing with their own eyes, of letting others take over. It's not long before they crumble. They are eaten with suffering. They don't know the meaning of liberty. (161)

Mireille rationally ponders over the despondent situation of women in African socio-economic surrounding. She emphasizes that these women remain subservient because they easily surrender themselves to the circumstances. She believes that these women forever recognize the tentacles of marital relationship due to cowardice. They do not grab the possible opportunity but rather submit themselves to the patriarchal obligations because of the fear of responsibility. They are indeed accustomed to these things and remain the prisoners of the canons of tradition. These women do not think for themselves and are unable to take any strong decision, and therefore, allow the others to take hold of them. According to Mireille, these women do not know the meaning of liberty in its real sense.

Mireille's unreceptive approach towards African life style and her utter negligence towards the feelings of other women show her natural inclination towards the elite, refined life. Her altogether ignorance towards the African traditional way of life furthermore proves to be one of the dominant factors in Ousmane's decision to return to the African way of life. It results in Ousmane's attraction towards African blood, Ouleymatou. Mireille finds herself to be a desperate creature the moment she comes to know about Ousmane's treachery. She is unable to remain by her own conception of liberty though in

the beginning she talks about the freedom of women from all sorts of restrictions. Thus, like Ramatoulaye in *so long a Letter*, Mireille decides against reason. The statement from the novel illustrates the mental struggle that Mireille undergoes:

Pathetically Mireille chose to stay. She attributed no greatness to her attitude. Her choice was not an evasion nor cowardice, but the only possible choice for a woman in love ... for a woman with a black child on her hands... for a woman who has burnt her bridges behind her. (162)

Mireille thinks over all the possibilities before reaching to the decision and realizes that she has no other alternative. She cannot go back home because in any case her parents would not accept the grandchild that has been fathered by a black son-in-law, Ousmane. She never considers that she could, on the basis of educational qualifications, support herself and the child. Her emotional dependence on Ousmane, in spite of his double dealings, hinder her from being self-reliant: “But, bewitched and ungrateful as Ousmane was, she would be living, feeling beside him, that sovereign power he still possessed to awaken her whole being.” (161)

At the outset, Mireille audaciously asserts the equality of status in marital relations; ironically, in the end, she herself accepts submissiveness. Bâ’s novel proves through the character of Mireille that the lack of feminist consciousness, the voluntary acceptance of submissive role and antagonism result in women’s repression by patriarchy. The novel demonstrates that all these factors also play dominant role in the colonizer’s society. When Mireille’s father sends her back to France, her mother does not protest. Mireille’s mother has recognized her husband’s dominance throughout her life. The eventual effect is that she is deprived of any kind of authority even in the matter of her own daughter’s future. She is presented as incompetent of thinking or making judgments for herself. Mathaldi’s acceptance of the female role of meekness enables her to accept her husband’s pronouncements. The statement from the novel vividly shows how Mireille’s mother accepts the submissive role in her own marital life:

Mathilde de La Vallee hesitated ... as memories came back. When she heard talk of the problems of women’s liberation, she remained indifferent. In her life, only husband counted. She pampered him, obeyed him and anticipated his slightest whim. (78)

The statement explains the role that Mireille's mother plays in her married life. Besley, the renowned scholar, writes with regard to women in Western societies:

Women as a group in our society are both produced and inhibited by contradictory discourses. Very broadly, we participate both in the liberal humanist discourse of freedom, self-determination and rationality and at the same time in the specifically feminine discourse offered by society of submission, relative inadequacy and irrational intuition. The attempt to locate a single and coherent subject-position within these contradictory patterns of behavior can create intolerable pressures. One way of responding to this situation is to retreat from the contradictions and from discourse itself, to become 'sick'—more women than men are treated for mental illness. (1985: 45-64)

Besley's statement reveals a conflict for individual women within Western societies, whereas in Bâ's novels, the conflict appears among several culturally diverse women. The post-colonial society, in which the diverse women live side by side, is presented here as the one that isolates women rather than bringing them closer. The novel *Scarlet Song*, thus, offers no positive model of female identity. But the novel illustrates negative role of the female models. Mireille loses her reason as a result of her conservatism. Consequently, despite her apparent commitment to social change and hatred of conventions, Mireille remains a product of her culture. Ouleymatou, on the other hand, is portrayed as an unpleasant character, grasping and selfish. Furthermore, the end of the novel suggests how she too loses her new-found source of material well-being.

Like her mother, Mireille chooses to conform to western middle-class definitions of her gender and accepts her subordination in marriage. She gives up the network of women, gives up courting her in-laws, and recoils inward. Her enthusiasm for life wanes with every new day. She sits lonely in her unclean home, either feeling sorry for herself, resenting her predicament, or waiting for her husband to return to her. She spends endless time in reading his letters, reminiscing over what had been their ideal love for each other. She anticipates that the child growing within her will be a stepping stone to reconciliation, harmony, and the rebirth of their love. But the child is born a Gnouloule Khessoule, a child which is "Not black! Not white!" (164)

The tragedy of the birth of this child lies, to a great extent, in the Senegalese family's rejection of a mulatto. Yaye Khady, who welcomed Ouleymatou's son with open arms and with baptism rituals, treats her mulatto son with disdain. Obioma Naemeka, in her edited book *The Politics of (M)othering*, quotes Francois Lionnet:

Mulattoes have been called many different names within specific cultural contexts: Métis, half breed, land mixed blood. These expressions always carry a negative connotation, precisely because they imply biological abnormality and reduce human reproduction to the level of animal breeding. (1997: 13)

Odile Cazenave argues that when perceptions of these children are limited to a biological economy, they are automatically rejected by the societies into which they are born. (Odile, 1989: 125) Yaye Khady's reaction, therefore, does not come as a surprise, given that the mother of the child was never integrated into the family. Ousmane also, in discussions with his friends on what they see as the rebirth of Africa and the evolution of black woman, states: "That type of cross-breeding impoverishes and exploits Africa." (122) He argues: "When the children of these marriages grew up they would become the harshest and most contemptuous racists, except those mulattoes whose mothers had adopted the African lifestyle" (Ibid). It does not occur to him that these children can only absorb the limited, racist thinking and teaching of people like him. Of course, he holds no monopoly on such attitudes.

Mireille is justifiably offended by the inherent social criticism in the label "neither white nor black" with which her son is branded. She is caught up in a psychological dilemma. If the society has been generous and mature enough to embrace open heartedly this human baby, this child would have brought immense joy to its mother. But quite contrarily, a mother is compelled to think of murdering her own child due to social restrictions imposed on her by the communities from both the sides. This is very ironical because real Islamic teaching is that all human beings are equal and they are to be treated as brethren. To prove this point, an example can be quoted from prophet's personal life. Ahmed Akbar in his studies gives an example from Mohammad Prophet's life. He points out that Hazrat Bilal, a Negro by birth, was treated by Mohammad Prophet with great honour and love. But ironically, these good examples and teachings are conveniently connived at in society in general, and in Ousmane's family, in particular. Thus, the child instead of bringing joy becomes the cause of great trouble and social taunting and criticism which simply shows narrow, dogmatic attitude of people who have failed to assimilate a woman of foreign racial roots.

The novel presents Mireille to be the true anti-racist, a noble humanitarian in who are reposed loyalty, love, courage and sacrifice. She becomes crazy at the instant she realizes that her husband has deceived her. She feels disgusted with him and his antagonistic family. However, she resolves not to be crushed by the prejudiced black society and tries to live bravely. She soon becomes conscious of the fact that she has become an exile in her own country, unacceptable to her parents with a black child and an unwanted intruder in her adopted country. She thinks: "They might have welcomed Mireille back, without the child. But the colored child existed, an embarrassing piece of evidence." (160) In a fit of anger and confusion, she pastes Ousmane's love letters all over their room. She searches for her own physical imperfections that have driven off Ousmane



into the arms of black woman. She is flooded with nausea and resentment for Ousmane and for herself. She feeds her son with a fatal dose of sleeping tablets crying vehemently:

There's no place in this world for the Gnouloule Khessoule! A world of filthy bastards! A world of liars! You, my child, you're going to leave this world! Gnouloule Khessoule!...

A drowsy Ousmane Gueye was greeted by a disheveled naked woman screaming, 'Dirty nigger! Liar! Cheat! Adulterer! Its better with your nigger woman, isn't it? Answer me! You love your little Blackie better than your Gnouloule Khessoule!' (164)

The child, the part and parcel of Mireille's love for Ousmane, is finally put to death. The murder/mercy-killing of the child ultimately raises a question 'Can a mother be so cruel?' The answer to this question is clearly evident in the state of affairs that lead Mireille to perform such an act. At one level, this apparently cruel act appears to be the outcome of violent reaction of Mireille's disillusion with Ousmane. On the other level, one can interpret this action as an act to relieve the child from the tortures of racial prejudices in future, if the child is allowed to grow further.

The two men Djibril Gueye, Ousmane's father and Ali, Ousmane's friend have their role in polygamy in *Scarlet Song*. Djibril, a deeply pious man with strong religious beliefs, accepts Mireille as a new member of family. In the end, Djibril Gueye is not so sure that Mireille and Ousmane's monogamous marriage in Paris is also made in Senegalese Heaven. The recognition from the facts surrounding Ousmane and Mireille's marital life in Senegal enable Djibril to approve Ousmane's secret marriage with a local girl. In the cultural view of Djibril, this secret local marriage is made on both: the Earth—the Senegalese cultural reality—and in Heaven—as Moslems. Though Moslem, Ali rejects Djibril's view, so in an unprecedented but in a sincere manner, he advises Ousmane to divorce Ouleymatou. He even warns Ousmane with a belief that he may have been acting under Ouleymatou's spell. However, it is not clear why the text does not comment on Djibril's silence regarding Ousmane's marriage to Ouleymatou. One may surmise from this textual silence that Bâ may be giving a tacit recognition to the intractable issue of polygamy or interracial marriage in the Senegalese society. One message can be heard loud and clear over this silence: Bâ is somehow ambivalent on the larger cultural question of polygamy in *Scarlet Song* and *So Long a Letter*.

*Scarlet Song* presents racism to be such a cruel monster that allows neither white nor black or colored to escape its murderous grip. Sarvan, a distinguished scholar of Mariama Bâ, argues that the novel is fully committed to a strong undercurrent of sympathy for Ousmane and also love and loyalty for everything that is African. According to Sarvan, the African element is shown in the vibrant, colorful descriptions such as Ouleymatou's dressing, cooking and her son's baptism. But the truth is that throughout the novel Mariama Bâ never condones the actions of Ousmane. It is through the protesting voices of Ali, Rosali and Soukeyna, Mariama Bâ lashes at Ousmane as a Muslim hypocrite who tries to hide under the canopy of religion using it as a cover for his male ego and black pride. He simply ignores the basic values of religion such as generous heart, compassion and charity as taught by his father. It is due to his callous treatment Mireille is caught up in a psychological trauma. Mireille becomes powerless and is unable to cope with the situation. She eventually becomes mad when she kills her son and stabs Ousmane with a knife. Ouleymatou and Yaye Khady, however, do not experience similar contradictions because neither of them has ever been exposed to such embarrassing situations in life. They do not feel solidarity with Mireille and no guilt in rejecting her. In the

Senegalese Islamic tradition, Mireille ever remains an intruder, a threat, and an element of colonial imposition. The novel constructs a feminist discourse by bringing together these women of opposed socio-historical and cultural backgrounds, and by demonstrating that they all have a common predicament in spite of their differences. In a nutshell, the novel presents the predicament of women's oppression as a universal reality.

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