

Psychological and Sociological Impacts of Male Chauvinism on Women in *Beyond The Horizon* and *So Long A Letter*

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Abstract

This study explores the psychological and sociological impacts of male chauvinism on women in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* and Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter*. Using radical feminism and narcissistic theory as lenses, the paper qualitatively employs a textual analysis of the two novels to show how male chauvinism, as a belief that sees men as superior to women, and the oppression and relegation of women in patriarchal African societies, psychologically and sociologically greatly impacts women. The study reveals that emotional trauma, depression, loss of self-esteem, identity crisis, fragmentation of women, deep scars of psychological oppression, male superiority over women, economic disempowerment, and loss of autonomy are the main psychological and sociological impacts on women. The paper concludes by summarizing male chauvinism's psychological and sociological implications before recommending women's empowerment in African societies as a shield to male chauvinism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Male chauvinism, rooted in historical and cultural systems of patriarchy, functions as a powerful mechanism for sustaining male dominance while relegating women to subordinate roles. Derived from the 19th-century figure Nicolas Chauvin, a symbol of exaggerated loyalty to masculine ideals, the term has evolved to signify a deeply ingrained belief in male superiority, perpetuated through social norms, economic systems, and psychological conditioning (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). Feminist scholars such as Walby (2021) conceptualize patriarchy as a "system of social structures and practices that maintain male dominance". Within African societies, male chauvinism intersects with colonial legacies, traditional customs, and globalization, producing complex and enduring patterns of gender inequality (Nnaemeka, 2005; Oyèwùmí, 1997).

This study examines the psychological and sociological impacts of chauvinism in Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1980) and Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1995). Through the lenses of radical feminism and narcissistic theory, the research investigates how patriarchal ideologies like chauvinism fracture women's psychological well-being and social identity, perpetuating cycles of silence, dependency, and dehumanization. The paper proceeds as follows: the first section contextualizes male chauvinism within its socio-cultural and historical

framework; the second analyzes its psychological and sociological manifestations in Bâ's and Darko's novels; the third discusses how the chosen feminist theories illuminate the operations of patriarchy; and the final section emphasizes the implications of these findings for understanding women's resistance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Male chauvinism in African literature illuminates its manifestations in familial, cultural, and political contexts. Mavengano (2024), in her article *Patriarchal Power and Female Silence in African Fiction*, examines how male dominance in novels like *So Long a Letter* perpetuates women's voicelessness through marital institutions. She argues that Bâ's portrayal of polygamy reflects systemic misogyny but focuses primarily on familial dynamics, neglecting the broader sociological impacts of male chauvinism on women's mental health. Similarly, Langa (2020), in *Male Chauvinism and Family Interference in African Narratives*, critiques the role of extended families in upholding patriarchal norms, analyzing how male characters in *Beyond the Horizon* weaponize kinship networks to control women. While Nma's work highlights the intersection of tradition and male entitlement, it narrowly frames women's resistance as reactive rather than exploring their psychological resilience. Recent studies, such as Adebayo (2022) in *Gender and Trauma in Postcolonial Texts*, shift focus to the psychological scars of patriarchal oppression, linking Ramatoulaye's internalized suffering in *So Long a Letter* to postcolonial disillusionment. However, Adebayo's psychoanalytic approach overlooks the structural roots of male chauvinism, such as economic dependency and legal inequality. Conversely, Ibrahim (2021), in *Radical Feminism and African Womanhood*, employs radical feminist theory to critique systemic patriarchy in African novels but limits her analysis to institutional critiques without addressing the narcissistic behaviors of male characters that perpetuate interpersonal abuse. While these scholars have enriched our understanding of the familial and cultural dimensions of male chauvinism, gaps remain in exploring its dual psychological and sociological impacts through an interdisciplinary lens. For instance, Langa (2020) revisits male chauvinism in *Beyond the Horizon*, emphasizing familial interference in Mara's exploitation but neglecting how Akobi's narcissistic traits, such as entitlement and lack of empathy, intersect with systemic oppression to compound her trauma. This study diverges by centering radical feminism and narcissism theory to interrogate both the structural systems that normalize male dominance (e.g., polygamy, sex trafficking) and the individual pathologies that enable emotional and physical violence. Radical feminism, as articulated by Firestone (1970) and Millett (1970), provides a framework to dismantle patriarchal institutions like marriage and labor systems, while narcissism theory (Yeomans, 2019; Lasch, 1979) dissects the self-centered behaviors of male characters like Modou and Akobi, whose actions reflect fragile masculinity and a need for control. Focusing on Langa (2020), male chauvinism in *Beyond the Horizon*, emphasizing familial interference in Mara's exploitation, and Ibrahim (2021), radical feminism and African womanhood, both neglect narcissistic theory and the psychological and sociological impacts on women. In short, by addressing the two main dimensions —psychological and sociological impacts of male chauvinism—this paper provides a broader scope through the application of the two mentioned theories.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Psychological and Sociological Impacts of Male Chauvinism on Women in *Beyond The Horizon* and *So Long A Letter*

Literature often reflects the realities of social and psychological struggles within human societies. Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1980) and Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1995) are two powerful African novels that interrogate the impact of male chauvinism on women. Using radical feminism and narcissistic theory as critical lenses, the texts reveal how patriarchal systems and narcissistic male behaviors devastate women's lives. While radical feminism emphasizes the dismantling of oppressive structures like patriarchy, marriage, and religion, narcissistic theory highlights the selfish, exploitative, and manipulative traits of individual male characters. Both theories illuminate the psychological trauma and sociological disempowerment experienced by women such as Ramatoulaye and Mara.

Radical feminism in *So Long a Letter* and *Beyond the Horizon* sees patriarchy as the root cause of women's oppression. Ramatoulaye's suffering after her husband, Modou, takes a second wife without her knowledge, exemplifies how religion and culture normalize male privilege. Radical feminists would argue that polygamy functions not as a religious necessity but as a patriarchal instrument to preserve male dominance. Also, *Beyond the Horizon* depicts Mara's forced marriage and subsequent trafficking as the extreme outcome of patriarchal systems that treat women as property. For radical feminists, Mara's exploitation reveals how institutions like marriage and economic dependency are constructed to maintain female subordination.

Thus, radical feminists believe that Ramatoulaye's betrayal and Mara's dehumanization are not isolated incidents but products of a systemic patriarchy that privileges men while silencing women.

Narcissistic theory, on the other hand, exposes the self-centred, exploitative behaviours of male characters. Modou embodies narcissism by pursuing a younger wife, Binetou, at the expense of his wife and children. This betrayal reveals his lack of empathy and accountability, traits associated with narcissistic abuse. In *Beyond the Horizon*, Akobi's narcissism is even more destructive. He deceives Mara into believing they are building a life together, but exploits her body for financial gain. Mara's trauma is expressed through her fractured identity: "I am staring painfully at an image. My image? No! What is left is what once used to be my image" (Darko, p. 78). Akobi's emotional cruelty and lack of empathy reduce Mara to an object, confirming the psychological scars of narcissistic abuse.

Narcissistic theory complements radical feminism not just in systems of oppression but in the pathological entitlement and grandiosity of individual men like Modou and Akobi.

Together, radical feminism and narcissistic theory offer a fuller understanding of male chauvinism. In the novels, radical feminism theory exposes the cultural and institutional roots of oppression, marriage, polygamy, male authority, and economic dependency, while narcissistic theory highlights the individual male psychology that fuels betrayal and narcissistic abuse.

4. DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Psychological Impact on Women

Psychological wounds inflicted upon women by male chauvinism and patriarchal structures, specifically focusing on emotional trauma and depression, loss of self-esteem and identity crisis, and the fragmentation of women as beings, are depicted in Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* and Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*.

4.2. Emotional Trauma and Depression

In *So Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye experiences deep emotional trauma and a sense of profound sadness following Modou's betrayal, which religion allows it to be so. The sudden disruption of her long-established life, coupled with the societal expectation to accept her fate with stoicism, leads to a form of emotional paralysis that borders on depression. The letter itself is an outpouring of grief, anger, and a sense of loss that extends beyond her husband to encompass a loss of her past and her envisioned future. Ramatoulaye's repeated reflections on her shattered dreams and the emptiness she feels after Modou's departure illustrate her emotional trauma. Expressions like "I live in a vacuum" (Bâ, p. 46) convey the depth of her despair and the potential for depression. The weight of societal expectations to remain dignified while internally suffering adds to this burden.

Furthermore, in *Beyond the Horizon*, Mara endures horrific emotional trauma as a result of her forced marriage, deception, and subsequent sexual exploitation. The constant fear, violence, and dehumanization she experiences would undoubtedly lead to severe depression: her forced silence and inability to express her suffering compound this trauma. The descriptions of Mara's vacant eyes and her withdrawal from her surroundings suggest a deep emotional wounding. Her reduction to a mere object of exploitation strips her of her humanity and inflicts her with unimaginable psychological pain, likely leading to severe depression and lasting trauma. She states, "I am staring painfully at an image. My image? No! What is left of what once used to be my image" (Darko, p. 78). The trauma experienced by Ramatoulaye and Mara mirrors clinical descriptions of narcissistic abuse victims.

4.3. Loss of Self-Esteem and Identity Crisis

Male chauvinism leads to the loss of self-esteem and an identity crisis. In *So Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye grapples with a loss of self-esteem as she questions her worth and her identity in the wake of Modou's actions. Her years of devotion and her understanding of their shared life are invalidated, leading her to doubt her judgment and her value as a wife and woman. The societal norms that prioritize male desire over female feelings contribute to this erosion of her self-esteem. Ramatoulaye's internal questioning of what she did wrong and her reflections on the changing dynamics of her marriage reveal a crisis in her self-perception. She struggles to reconcile the image she had of herself as a loved and respected wife with the reality of her abandonment. As an illustration, her complaint in these terms, "I had lost my slim figure as well as ease and quickness of movement." (Bâ, p. 46)

In *Beyond the Horizon*, Mara's identity is systematically destroyed through her exploitation. She is stripped of her name, her agency, and her inherent worth, reduced to a commodity. The act of renaming Mara and the treatment she receives as a nameless body for sale signify the complete erasure of her identity. This stripping away of her individuality would lead to a catastrophic loss of self-esteem and a profound crisis of who she is as she mentions "And even when he puts me in pain and spits upon me and calls me a nigger fool I still offer him my crimson smile and pretend he's just called me a princess, for I've got a job to do, and I've got to put my all in it." (Darko, p. 3). This complete dehumanization leads to a profound loss of self-esteem and an identity crisis where she is no longer recognized as an individual with her own desires and aspirations.

4.4. Fragmentation of Women

Psychological and Sociological Impacts of Male Chauvinism on Women in *Beyond The Horizon* and *So Long A Letter*

Male chauvinism significantly contributes to women's fragmentation in African societies. In *So Long a Letter*, the patriarchal structures depicted in the novel contribute to a fragmentation of women's roles and experiences. Ramatoulaye is expected to be a wife, mother, and professional, often having to compartmentalize these aspects of her life. The arrival of a co-wife further fragments her identity and her place within her own family. The societal pressure to remain silent and dignified forces her to suppress parts of herself, resulting in internal fragmentation. Ramatoulaye's struggle to balance her professional life with her domestic responsibilities, and then to reconcile her role as the first wife with the presence of a second, illustrates this fragmentation. She is pulled in different directions by societal expectations and her own internal conflicts. She says, "I am beginning this diary, my prop and my distress." (Bâ, p. 1). This illustrates how Ramatoulaye copes with her internal grief following her husband's betrayal. Equally, Binetou, a young girl gifted with a dream of continuing her education, has her aspirations shattered due to cultural constraints. "The very gifted young girl wanted to continue her studies, to sit for her *baccalaureat*. So as to establish his rule, Modou, wickedly, determined to remove her from the critical and unsparing world of the young girl." (Bâ, p.10). Also, Jacqueline experiences betrayal from her husband which led to her death. Jacqueline's husband spent time chasing slender Senegalese women neglecting his wife. "Jacqueline thoughts turned to death." (Bâ, p.43). This shows how society and culture permit women to endure trauma in silence which leads to the fragmentation of their lives.

Furthermore, Mara's experience in *Beyond the Horizon* leads to a brutal fragmentation of her being. She is reduced to her physical body, objectified and commodified. Her emotional, intellectual, and spiritual selves are disregarded. The trauma she endures can also lead to psychological fragmentation as a coping mechanism, where she may dissociate from her experiences to survive. Mara's objectification and the focus solely on her physical form in the context of prostitution represent a severe fragmentation of her whole self. She is no longer seen or treated as a complete human being with thoughts, feelings, and a history. For instance, she states, "It's deep inside me that feels this chilliness, from the dejected soul my body harbours, a soul grown old from too much use of its shelter." (Darko, p. 1).

4.5. Deep Scars of Psychological Oppression

Male chauvinism and the societies it shapes often inflict deep psychological scars on women. They are not just physically or economically disadvantaged; their inner worlds are profoundly affected, leading to significant mental and emotional distress. Oppression happens when a group of people (in this case, women) is treated unfairly and has fewer opportunities and less power than another group (men) because of their gender. This can manifest in various ways, from laws and social norms to everyday interactions. Being oppressed can have a deep and damaging impact on a woman's mental well-being. When society constantly tells you that you are less capable or less important, you start to believe it. Depression, hopelessness, and internalized oppression, violence, and injustice can lead to significant psychological trauma. In *So Long a Letter*, the societal acceptance of polygamy, a patriarchal practice that often prioritizes male desire over female well-being, oppresses Ramatoulaye emotionally. She is expected to accept her husband taking a second wife with dignity and silence. This emotional oppression leads to feelings of betrayal, sadness, and a questioning of her worth after years of devotion. Her internal struggle, expressed through the letter, reveals the psychological toll of being forced to conform to a system that devalues her feelings. She puts that "I had made a

choice that my reason rejected but that accorded with the immense tenderness I felt towards Modou fall?" (Bâ, p.45). This shows her shattered trust and the emotional pain caused by a system that allows such betrayal.

In addition, women are very limited in their choices in patriarchal societies. Ramatoulaye's limited options after Modou's death highlight the economic and social oppression women face. She is largely dependent on her husband's legacy and societal expectations about widowhood. This lack of agency in her own life can lead to feelings of frustration and a sense of powerlessness. Her reflections on the financial uncertainties she faces and the societal expectations placed upon her as a widow demonstrate the limitations imposed on her autonomy as she mentions, "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." (Bâ, p.8).

Mara's experience in *Beyond the Horizon* is a brutal example of the psychological effects of extreme oppression. Forced into marriage and then trafficked into sexual slavery, she is stripped of all autonomy and subjected to horrific abuse. This complete lack of control and the constant violence led her to a profound trauma and a shattering of her sense of self. Her dehumanization and exploitation in Germany illustrate the devastating psychological impact of being treated as a mere object with no rights or feelings. Thus, Mara's silence and withdrawal express the deep trauma he undergoes.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that patriarchal structures often enforce silence upon women as a means of maintaining dominance and control. This enforced silence, whether overt or subtle, has profound psychological effects on women, impacting their sense of self, agency, and well-being. Amma Darko vividly illustrates these psychological impacts through the experiences of her female characters. Mara's experiences are even more devastating. Trafficked to Germany and forced into prostitution, Mara is stripped of her voice most brutally. She is treated as a commodity, her desires and opinions rendered irrelevant. This extreme form of enforced silence has catastrophic psychological consequences: feelings of powerlessness and despair.

Both *So Long a Letter* and *Beyond the Horizon* powerfully illustrate how patriarchal enforcement of silence can have profound and damaging psychological effects on women. This internalizes psychological oppression and trauma. By giving voice to these experiences through their narratives, Amma Darko and Mariama Bâ shed light on the psychological toll of patriarchal structures and male chauvinism, and in certain African societies, apart from their sociological effects.

4.6.Sociological Impacts on Women

This study reveals that male chauvinism in society has profound sociological impacts, particularly on women's status in society, economic empowerment, and their autonomy.

4.7.Male Superiority over Women

Male chauvinism, which paves the way for male superiority over women, perpetuates gender inequality in countless detrimental ways. Through the reinforcement of patriarchal structures, male chauvinism stands as a pillar on which societies hold women in lowest estimate and consider them inferior beings. This is how men hold primary power and predominate in roles of moral authority and control of property. The ideology makes it normal because it is dominated, and the subordination of women embeds it with social structures, laws and cultural norms. Both

novels under scrutiny highlight cultural and religious beliefs reinforce male dominance through patriarchal structure.

In *So Long a Letter*, polygamy and societal expectations limit women's autonomy. Modou marrying without informing his wife that the Islamic religion permits a man to marry more than one wife illustrates this fact. Ramatoulaye is only informed on the day of the marriage by the Imam. "And the Imam, who had finally gone to hold a leading the read, held tightly on to it. He went on quickly, as if words were glowing embers in his mouth. Yes, Modou tall, but happily, he is alive for you, for all of us, thanks be to God. All he has done, is marrying a second wife today. We have just come from the mosque in Grand Dakar where the marriage took place." (Bâ, p.37). Through perpetuation of gender inequality, the society normalized gender based violence harmful stereotypes. Male chauvinism often fosters a sense of control over women, which can manifest in various forms of violence, including domestic abuse and sexual harassment because men feel superior they madly feel justified in exerting power and control over women's bodies and lives. Women are often stereotypes as emotional, irrational and suited for domestic roles while men are expected to be strong, dominant, and the primary providers in patriarchal societies. In *Beyond the Horizon*, Mara is abused by the husband, but still has to obey her husband and endure in silence, since tradition demands so; she complains in these terms, "I laid there and could not sleep and suffered a splitting headache the next day because of lack of sleep I still regards my suffering as part of being a wife and endured it just like I would in menstrual pain. (Darko, p. 12-13). In *So Long a Letter*, the society normalizes gender-based violence. The laws of land demands women being submission to men in all manner (p.34). Through the perpetuation of gender, inequality paves way to the undermining women's autonomy and agency. By asserting male superiority, chauvinistic attitudes undermine women's freedom in taking independent decision about live, building future and even mobility. Binetou could not continue her education because of Modou wickedness. (Bâ, p.10). Then Mara, in *Beyond the horizon* is allowed to make decision about her life, husband she equally experiences marital rape severely, she is allowed to even talk who her husband talks. Mara's father takes the decision by giving her hand in marriage without consulting her as an illustration, "Your father has found a husband for you" (Darko, p. 4). And when she decided to prove further, her mother says the father will consider it rude. Mara experiences marital rape and even blackmails her into prostitution. (Darko, p.115). In the same novel, Vivian equally, experiences restrictions and lack of consideration.

The two novels vividly illustrate how the belief in male superiority permeates various aspects of women's lives, leading to emotional distress, social marginalization, and the undermining of their autonomy and well-being.

4.8.Economic Disempowerment

This is vividly portrayed in literary works where patriarchal structures and chauvinistic attitudes directly lead to the economic disempowerment of female characters.

Ramatoulaye, despite being educated, faces financial struggles as a single mother after Modou's abandonment. Bâ (p. 63) advocates:

Those women we call 'housewives' deserve praise. The domestic work they carry out, and which is not paid in hard cash, is essential to the home. Their compensation remains the pile of well-ironed, sweet-smelling washing, the shining tiled floor on which the foot glides, the gay kitchen filled with the smell of stews. Their silent

action is left in the least useful trail over there: a flower in bloom placed in a vase, elsewhere a painting with appropriate colors, hung up in the right place.

Furthermore, the economic vulnerabilities Ramatoulaye faces after Modou's death highlight how the lack of economic independence for women in one generation can impact the security and opportunities of the next. While Ramatoulaye is educated, the societal expectation that a woman's primary security lies in her marriage leaves her and her children in a precarious position. This can influence how future generations of girls are raised, potentially limiting their educational aspirations or reinforcing the idea that their ultimate security lies in male provision, thus perpetuating a cycle of economic dependence and limiting their potential.

In addition, the underlying economic vulnerabilities of women within a patriarchal Senegalese society are evident. This is because the societal norms depicted assume male economic dominance and female dependence within marriage. When Modou abandons Ramatoulaye and their children, he leaves her in a precarious financial situation, highlighting how women's economic security is often tied to their marital status and male provision in such contexts. The novel subtly critiques a system where women, even when educated, can be economically vulnerable due to patriarchal marital structures and the expectation of male financial support.

In *Beyond the horizon*, Mara is also economically vulnerable, making her susceptible to manipulation and human trafficking. From that humble home, whose father chose a husband for her, she is economically vulnerable. She states, "... left for the city on the same Saturday with me as his wife ... and property!" (Darko p. 7). When they get to the city, Akobi makes Mara throw rubbish away before she gets food to eat. He says, "Now listen to me," he resumes, "from now on you will throw Mama Kiosk's rubbish away for her, and she will pay you with foodstuffs and vegetables" (Darko p. 11). Darko offers a more direct and harrowing depiction of economic disempowerment stemming from male chauvinism. Her character, Mara, the protagonist, is a young woman whose arranged marriage to Akobi leads to her complete economic subjugation.

Both novels, in their unique ways, showcase how male chauvinism operates within broader patriarchal structures to limit women's economic opportunities and independence. In *So Long a Letter*, it's seen in the assumptions of male financial responsibility and the vulnerability women face when that support is withdrawn due to patriarchal norms like polygamy. In *Beyond the Horizon*, it manifests as a blatant disregard for a woman's autonomy, leading to her direct economic exploitation. These literary depictions reflect real-world sociological impacts where male chauvinistic attitudes contribute to wage gaps and precarious economic situations.

4.9.Loss of Autonomy

One of the major sociological impacts of male chauvinism in society is loss of women's autonomy. Mara is stripped of her fundamental right to make decisions about her own life and body. Her forced migration, arranged marriage, and subsequent exploitation highlight how male chauvinism can lead to the complete subjugation of women, denying them agency over their destinies. She puts that "Materials things are all I can offer them. As for myself, there's nothing dignified and decent left of me to give them" (Darko, p.138).

In the foreign land and within the exploitative environment, Mara experiences profound social isolation and the stigma associated with her forced profession. Male chauvinism, in this context, not only leads to her exploitation but also to her social marginalization and the erosion of her sense of self-worth. For instance, she states, "There is no turning back for me now. I am

so much a whore now that I can no longer remember or imagine what being a non-whore is.” (Darko, p.139).

In her novel, Mariama Bâ portrays the struggles of Senegalese women who lose their autonomy within a patriarchal society shaped by tradition and religion. Through Ramatoulaye’s personal reflections after her husband’s polygamous marriage and eventual death, the novel reveals how women’s choices are constrained by social expectations and male authority. Ramatoulaye and her friend Aissatou both suffer from betrayals that strip them of control over their own lives, yet their responses differ—Aissatou rebels by divorcing her husband, while Ramatoulaye endures, seeking dignity within confinement. Bâ exposes how customs like polygamy, inheritance laws, and gendered roles, all under male chauvinism, diminish women’s freedom, turning their lives into a constant negotiation between self-respect and societal duty.

Through their works, Bâ and Darko have vigorously denounced women’s loss of autonomy due to male chauvinism in their respective societies and beyond. They believe that women are constantly under the pressure and constraints of traditions, customs and certain chauvinistic ideologies.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has revealed the devastating psychological and sociological consequences of male chauvinism through Mariama Bâ’s *So Long a Letter* and Amma Darko’s *Beyond the Horizon*. The novels expose patriarchy as a deliberate system that institutionalizes female subordination and women’s trauma due to selfish and manipulative male behaviours. Modou’s betrayal and Akobi’s exploitation exemplify how structural oppression and individual pathology intersect to deny women dignity, voice, and autonomy.

Both novels implicitly critique the societal structures and norms that allow male chauvinism to thrive and be transmitted across generations. The lack of strong legal and social protections for women, the emphasis on male authority within families, and the limited economic opportunities for women all contribute to a cycle of inequality. Future generations growing up in such environments may internalize these imbalances as normal, making it more challenging to achieve true gender equality. The combined application of radical feminism and narcissistic Theory in this study has thus emphasized the urgent need for women’s empowerment, systemic reform, and resistance against patriarchal and narcissistic domination in African societies.

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