



# THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIETAL NORMS AND PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURES ON FEMALE SOLIDARITY IN *BLOSSOMS OF THE SAVANNAH* BY HENRY OLE KULET AND *THE RIVER AND THE SOURCE* BY MARGARET OGOLLA

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## ABSTRACT

Patriarchal systems, prevalent in both global and African societies, establish male dominance over social, economic, and political spheres. As societies developed, these gender roles became more fixed. Men were seen as the leaders in the community, making important decisions and participating in public life, while women were confined to domestic chores, taking care of the family and the home. Harmful practices like child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) persist within patriarchal contexts, further deepening the plight of women. However, amidst these challenges, women have come together in solidarity, supporting one another emotionally, socially, and politically. Societal and patriarchal influence remains to be a key factor towards achieving this goal. This study looks into how the societal norms and patriarchal structure promote or deter women solidarity in the society. The research was guided by feminist theory, the third wave. Being a qualitative study, descriptive research design was employed so as to describe the phenomenon of patriarchy in the wake of women solidarity. Purposive sampling was used to select two literary texts; *Blossoms of the Savannah* by Henry Ole Kulet and *The River and the Source* by Margaret Ogolla. The researcher conducted an intensive reading to identify excerpts which relate to the study's objectives, and which later underwent thematic analyses. The findings indicate that despite their resilience and mutual support, societal expectations perpetuate divisions among women, highlighting the ongoing struggle against patriarchal structures that undermine female solidarity and individual agency. Their resilience not only supports individual empowerment but also fosters a community ethos that values women's agency and leadership, and forges a path towards greater autonomy and gender equality within their community.

**Keywords:** Patriarchal, Women, Solidarity, Societal, Norms, Empowerment

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Patriarchal systems, prevalent in both global and African societies, establish male dominance over social, economic, and political spheres. In ancient times, when people started farming and owning land, the idea of private property became important (Engels & Untermann, 2021). This shift in society also brought along the idea of patriarchy, where men held more power and control. Men typically worked on the farms and became the primary breadwinners, while women were expected to focus on household tasks.

As societies developed, these gender roles became more fixed. Men were seen as the leaders in the community, making important decisions and participating in public life, while women were confined to domestic chores, taking care of the family and the home

(Hayden, 1982). This division of labor reinforced the idea that men were superior, and women's roles were limited to the private sphere of home and family.

Societal norms and patriarchal structures have a profound impact on female solidarity, shaping the way women interact, support, and empower one another (Kabeer, 2011). These norms often dictate traditional gender roles and expectations, placing women in specific domestic or subordinate positions. In such societies, women may find it challenging to break free from these predefined roles, making it difficult to form alliances and work together effectively. For instance, if a society values women primarily as homemakers, women might struggle to find common ground or opportunities for solidarity outside their homes.

Sultana (2022) claims that patriarchal structures often create competition among women for limited resources and opportunities. In a male-dominated environment, women might feel compelled to compete rather than collaborate, fearing that supporting one another could threaten their own chances of success. This competition can hinder the formation of strong bonds and unity among women, preventing them from collectively challenging the patriarchal status quo.

Matter (2023) discusses the concept of Internalized sexism, where he says its a phenomenon where women, due to societal conditioning and entrenched gender norms, start to believe and internalize negative stereotypes and biases about their own gender. In patriarchal societies, women are often bombarded with messages that reinforce their supposed inferiority, promoting ideas that they are less capable, intelligent, or deserving than men. Over time, these messages can seep into women's self-perception, leading them to accept these harmful beliefs about themselves. When women internalize these sexist attitudes, it creates a division among them. Instead of viewing each other as allies in the fight against discrimination, they might start seeing other women as rivals or threats (Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010). This internalized oppression can lead to a lack of trust and solidarity among women. They may compete with one another for limited opportunities or resources, believing that they must outdo their fellow women to succeed.

When societal norms depict women as rivals or adversaries, it becomes challenging for them to unite against common issues (Rucht, 2004). The belief that other women are competitors rather than allies prevents the formation of strong bonds. Overcoming internalized sexism and fostering female solidarity requires dismantling these harmful beliefs and promoting a sense of unity among women. It involves acknowledging that the real adversaries are the oppressive systems and norms, not fellow women. Encouraging mutual support, celebrating each other's successes, and challenging stereotypes together are essential steps toward breaking down these barriers.

The solidarity force that women put up is not just a source of emotional strength; it is a driving force behind movements that have reshaped societies and pushed for gender equality. Chant (2016) argues that solidarity empowers women to challenge societal stereotypes and limitations. By standing together, women amplify their voices, challenging the status quo that often restricts their opportunities and ambitions. Solidarity helps break down traditional gender roles and encourages women to pursue education, careers, and leadership positions, thereby altering the perception of women's roles in society. The efforts put up by women in terms of joining hands has remained under emphasized. Despite this, scholarly inquiry has predominantly focused on delineating the oppressive dynamics of patriarchy, largely overlooking the pivotal role of women's coalitions in confronting systemic injustices and effecting societal change.

## 2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The current study employed feminist literary theory. At its core, this theory critically examines the portrayal of women in literary works, addressing the inherent biases and imbalances present in traditional texts. By digging into into the power dynamics between genders, Feminist Literary theory challenges the historical subordination of women, revealing how they have been relegated to secondary roles or dismissed altogether within the literary canon. This critical approach highlights the importance of empowering women's narratives, recognizing the agency, complexity, and diversity of their experiences.

Although the theory does not have a specific proponent, some prominent figures associated with the early feminist movements include Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, and bell hooks, among others. These thinkers have significantly influenced feminist thought and laid the groundwork for the diverse branches of feminist theory that exist today. The Third Wave of feminism, which emerged in the 1990s and continues to shape contemporary feminist discourse, represents a significant evolution in feminist thought. Building on the achievements and critiques of the earlier waves, Third Wave Feminism emphasizes inclusivity, intersectionality, and a celebration of diverse identities. This wave challenges traditional notions of feminism, advocating for a more complex and nuanced understanding of gender issues and social justice.

This theory allows for a detailed analysis of the female characters' experiences, acknowledging the intersectionality of their identities and the challenges they face within patriarchal contexts. The wave of feminism aligns with the study's focus on exploring the diverse forms of female solidarity and understanding how women from different backgrounds navigate and resist patriarchal systems collectively.

By employing this perspective, the study focused on the characters' relationships, considering their intersecting identities and the unique challenges faced by women from different backgrounds. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the portrayals of female solidarity, capturing the complexities and strengths of women's alliances in the face of patriarchal pressures. The theory provides a lens through which the study can explore how societal expectations and patriarchal systems impact female

solidarity. The theory further helps the study assess the characters' acts of solidarity as catalysts for challenging social norms and driving change within their communities. By examining how female solidarity becomes a powerful force for transformation, the study can evaluate the characters' collective efforts as significant drivers of social change. This assessment highlights the agency and impact of female solidarity in reshaping societal attitudes and structures, reinforcing the theory's emphasis on empowerment and activism.

### 3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The current study employed descriptive research approach, utilizing qualitative methods to attain qualitative results. Descriptive research aims to provide a detailed account of a phenomenon or group, focusing on exploring and understanding the subject in depth. According to Williams (2007), descriptive research design is a scientific method that involves observing, describing, and documenting the characteristics of a particular phenomenon or group without manipulating variables. The study targeted all literary works done by Henry Ole Kulet and Margaret Ogolla. The sampling procedure for this study involved the use of purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique where specific texts were deliberately chosen based on the researchers' criteria and objectives. In this case, the texts selected for analysis are "Blossoms of the Savannah" by Henry Ole Kulet and "The River and the Source" by Margaret Ogolla. By selecting these texts purposefully, the study ensured a focused and in-depth analysis of the theme of female solidarity within the context of African literature. In this library-based study, the researcher employed a comprehensive research methodology. Primary data was extracted from the chosen novels through close literary analysis, focusing on themes, character interactions, and narrative techniques related to female solidarity. This was achieved by conducting an intensive reading, highlighting and extracting excerpts which relate to the objectives of the study. Secondary sources, including academic articles and critical reviews, reviewed to provide a broader theoretical context for the analysis. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. This is a qualitative method used to identify, analyze, and report themes within the data. The analysis process began with familiarization, where researchers immerse themselves in the texts, gaining an in-depth understanding of the characters, their interactions, and the contexts in which female solidarity is portrayed. Following familiarization, a process of generating initial codes followed, where specific textual elements related to female solidarity, patriarchal challenges, and social change was identified and labeled. These initial codes were then grouped into broader themes, allowing researchers to explore patterns, connections, and variations within the data.

### 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In many societies, patriarchal structures and cultural traditions impose rigid roles and behaviors on women, making it difficult for them to unite and support each other freely. These societal pressures can lead to internal conflicts, as women may struggle to balance their solidarity with the expectations placed upon them by their communities and families.

In "The River and the Source" by Margaret Ogolla and "Blossoms of the Savannah" by Henry Ole Kulet, such clashes between societal norms and female solidarity are prominently depicted. These texts explore how women navigate the tensions between conforming to societal expectations and maintaining their collective strength and support for one another.

#### 4.2.1 Crash Between Societal Norms and Expectations and Women Solidarity in Blossoms of the Savannah

The community views circumcision as a vital rite of passage and a prerequisite for marriage, placing immense pressure on the two sisters. Despite their strong reluctance and their mutual support for each other in resisting this tradition, the force of societal norms proves overwhelming. Taiyo, in particular, becomes a victim of this pressure when she is forcefully circumcised, despite her and Resian's efforts to resist.

*"...In the dim light of dawn, she saw the face of Enkamuratani who she had once seen in their house ...She screamed and screamed, but nobody came to her rescue. Then she fainted...When she came to, two days later, she was sore, bitter and angry, but she was no longer one among intoiye nemengalana..She had been circumcised..."*

The moment Taiyo is forcefully circumcised highlights the devastating impact of societal norms on individual autonomy and female solidarity. The vivid description of her traumatic experience underscores the brutality of the practice and the lack of agency afforded to women in the face of entrenched traditions. Taiyo's experience, where she is rendered powerless and subjected to a procedure against her will, illustrates how deeply rooted cultural expectations can override personal choices and the support women offer each other. This incident also demonstrates how societal norms can fracture the unity among women, as the overwhelming influence of tradition can lead to situations where support and solidarity are insufficient to protect against societal coercion.

When societal expectations, such as those dictating harmful practices like female circumcision, impose themselves upon women, it becomes a clear example of the broader feminist critique of patriarchal systems. Feminists argue that these cultural pressures undermine female solidarity by forcing women into roles and practices that violate their bodily autonomy and personal freedoms (Papanek, 2019). The collective resistance against such norms is seen as crucial in the feminist movement, which seeks to empower women to reclaim their agency and support one another in the face of these deeply ingrained societal pressures.



Despite their desire for education and independence, they face relentless pressure to conform to traditional gender roles. Ole Kaelo's insistence that they abandon their education to fulfill traditional roles highlights the tension between their personal ambitions and societal expectations.

*"...Because I think for now, you have had enough of formal education," Ole Kaelo answered eyeing her sharply....I am delighted to tell you that my good friend and business associate Oloisudori Loonkiyaa has approached me asking that he marries you..."*

This scenario underscores the struggle between the young women's dreams and the rigid cultural norms enforced by their father. The expectation for Taiyo and Resian to conform to traditional roles not only stifles their personal growth but also threatens their solidarity as sisters. Their father's decision, driven by societal norms, forces them into situations where their unity is tested. As they navigate these pressures, their bond is strained, yet it also becomes a source of strength. The societal expectation to adhere to traditional roles creates a conflict that the sisters must overcome together, highlighting the resilience of their solidarity in the face of oppressive norms. This dynamic illustrates how external pressures can both challenge and reinforce female solidarity, as Taiyo and Resian rely on each other for support and strength.

Societal pressures for women to enter into arranged marriages are deeply rooted in patriarchal ideologies that prioritize traditional gender roles and the control of women's bodies and choices. These pressures often stem from cultural norms that view women primarily as bearers of familial honor and economic assets, rather than as individuals with their own aspirations and autonomy. Feminist ideology critiques these norms by advocating for women's right to choose their own paths and partners, emphasizing personal freedom and gender equality. Anitha and Gill (2017) argue that arranged marriages often undermine women's agency, forcing them into roles that serve patriarchal interests rather than their own. By highlighting the systemic nature of these pressures, feminist thought seeks to dismantle the structures that perpetuate gender inequality and to empower women to make independent choices about their lives and relationships.

Their mother, torn between love for her daughters and societal expectations, often found herself in a difficult position.

*"...She was torn between her love for her daughters and her dutiful role of a faithful and obedient wife of Ole Kaelo. But in her culture there was no room for dissent, especially if the subject was in conformity with the culture. Who would side with her if she were to oppose the cultural rituals?..."*

The author as illustrated above highlights how societal expectations can create significant conflicts within female solidarity through the character of Mama Milanoi. As a mother, she deeply loves her daughters and wishes to protect them, but she is also bound by the cultural expectations that dictate her role as a faithful and obedient wife to Ole Kaelo. This duality places her in a difficult position, torn between her maternal instincts and her duty to conform to societal norms. Her internal struggle exemplifies the tension between personal desires and cultural obligations, highlighting how societal pressures can complicate the expression of female solidarity.

Mama Milanoi's predicament is further intensified by the rigid cultural rituals that leave little room for dissent. In her society, challenging these norms would not only isolate her but also undermine her position within the family and community. This lack of support from her society if she were to oppose the cultural rituals underscores the powerful influence of societal expectations in shaping individual behavior. Her inability to openly support her daughters reflects the broader theme of how societal norms can stifle female solidarity, forcing women to navigate their loyalties and roles carefully. When women do not support each other, it weakens the collective power necessary to challenge patriarchal structures and advocate for change (Bourque, & Warren, 2010). This lack of solidarity can stem from internalized misogyny, competition, or societal pressures that pit women against each other. As a result, women facing challenges may find themselves isolated, lacking the emotional, social, and sometimes even professional support needed to overcome obstacles.

Minik, an activist dedicated to rescuing girls from the oppressive patriarchal system, faces severe societal backlash for her efforts to end Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Her activism, which aims to protect and empower girls, is met with hostility and condemnation from the community that clings to traditional practices. Minik's courageous stand against FGM places her in direct conflict with entrenched cultural norms, leading to her being cursed and castigated by society. This harsh treatment reflects the deep resistance to change within the community and the significant challenges faced by those who advocate for progressive reforms.

The societal rejection of Minik's efforts is poignantly illustrated during a homecoming ceremony where she is publicly denounced as a bad example. The community elders, representing the guardians of tradition, explicitly advise Resian and Taiyo to disregard Minik's guidance, labeling her as someone who has embraced foreign, undesirable values. This public shaming serves not only to discredit Minik but also to reinforce the cultural norms that she is fighting against. By portraying her as an outsider and a threat to their way of life, the elders aim to undermine her influence and discourage others from following her example.

Minik's ordeal resonates deeply within feminist discourse, highlighting the broader implications of societal resistance to progressive gender reforms. Her passion for challenging entrenched patriarchal practices such as FGM underscores the broader struggle faced by feminists worldwide. In this context, Minik represents the brave individuals who confront cultural norms that perpetuate gender-based violence and inequality. The community's harsh condemnation not only tries to silence her advocacy but also sends a chilling message to other women who might dare to defy traditional roles and expectations. This highlights the critical role of solidarity among women in feminist movements, emphasizing the need for collective support to challenge and transform

oppressive social structures. Arguably, societies continue with the battle for gender equality, where resilience and unity among women are essential in confronting deeply ingrained patriarchal systems and advocating for meaningful change.

#### 4.2.1 Crash Between Societal Norms and Expectations and Women Solidarity in *The River and the Source*

In many societies, the norms and expectations placed upon individuals often conflict with the principles of unity and support among women. *The River and the Source* by Margaret Ogolla and *Blossoms of the Savannah* by Henry Ole Kulet. These texts explore how traditional gender roles and patriarchal structures create obstacles for female solidarity, challenging women's efforts to support one another in their personal and collective goals. By depicting the struggles women face in reconciling societal expectations with their desire for mutual empowerment, these works highlight the resilience and determination of women as they navigate and resist the constraints imposed upon them.

Awiti's struggle to obtain education highlights the conflict between societal norms and female solidarity.

*"...If it was hard for a boy to get an education—it was well nigh impossible for a girl. The purpose of female existence was marriage and child bearing... However, for Awiti several factors came together in her favour. The most important was the pioneering and daring spirit of her grandmother and mother..."*

In her community, education for girls is seen as unnecessary, with the primary expectation for women being marriage and childbearing. This societal belief is deeply ingrained, making it exceptionally difficult for girls to pursue educational opportunities. Despite these obstacles, Awiti's determination and the support from the women in her family play a crucial role in her quest for education. Her grandmother and mother, both embodying a pioneering and daring spirit, stand by her and challenge the prevailing norms, illustrating a powerful example of female solidarity in action.

The support Awiti receives from her family is a testament to the strength of female solidarity in overcoming societal barriers. Her grandmother and mother, recognizing the value of education, provide both moral and practical support, enabling Awiti to pursue her aspirations. This solidarity is not just an act of defiance against societal expectations but also a collective effort to secure a better future for Awiti and, by extension, for all women in the community. Their united front against the oppressive norms underscores the transformative potential of female solidarity, highlighting how collective efforts can challenge and change entrenched societal views.

From a feminist perspective, Awiti's struggle and eventual success in obtaining an education reflect the broader fight for gender equality. Feminism advocates for the dismantling of societal structures that limit women's opportunities and reinforce gender disparities. Awiti's journey is emblematic of this struggle, demonstrating how the perseverance and solidarity of women can slowly but surely break down these barriers. Despite the societal norms that prioritize boys' education and view girls' education as superfluous, the determination and support of Awiti and her family pave the way for future generations of women to access education and opportunities previously denied to them.

Margaret Ogolla illustrates the clash between societal expectations for girls to marry and bear children and the academic achievements of Awiti. The community's skepticism towards Awiti's brilliance reflects a deeply ingrained cultural belief that a woman's primary role is in the home, not in academic or professional pursuits.

*"...A girl! To be so clever, to show it openly, to receive commendation after commendation! It was too much! She should be ashamed or at least try to hide her brilliance, otherwise, they prophesied darkly, no man would marry her. That of course was supposed to be a catastrophe..."*

This expectation creates a conflict for Awiti, as her outstanding academic performance is seen not as a source of pride, but as a potential barrier to fulfilling her socially prescribed role. The community's reaction, suggesting that her intelligence might prevent her from finding a husband, underscores the tension between personal ambition and societal norms.

Awiti's situation highlights how societal norms can undermine female solidarity by isolating women who deviate from traditional roles. Instead of celebrating Awiti's achievements, the community's reaction pressures her to conform, thereby stifling her potential and discouraging other girls from pursuing similar paths. This clash not only affects Awiti's confidence but also perpetuates a cycle where women's intellectual capabilities are undervalued, reinforcing the belief that their primary worth lies in their ability to marry and bear children. Such societal pressures can create divisions among women, as those who conform to traditional roles may distance themselves from those who challenge these norms. From a feminist perspective, Awiti's struggle exemplifies the broader fight for women's autonomy and recognition beyond traditional roles.

Feminists argue that education is a critical tool that enables women to gain knowledge, develop critical thinking, and pursue personal and professional goals independent of traditional gender roles (Dhiman, 2023). Autonomy in this context means having the freedom to make informed choices about one's life, including the right to pursue education, career aspirations, and personal interests without societal constraints. Feminism emphasizes that when women are educated and autonomous, they are better equipped to challenge patriarchal structures, advocate for their rights, and contribute meaningfully to society. By promoting women's education and autonomy, feminism seeks to dismantle the systemic barriers that limit women's potential and to create a more equitable world where women have equal opportunities to thrive.

the tradition of naming children after ancestors to keep their spirits alive is a significant cultural practice that showcases the deep respect for lineage and heritage within the community. However, this tradition often clashes with modern skepticism about such practices, creating a tension between upholding cultural norms and adapting to contemporary beliefs.

“... Now why would such a little baby, the only daughter of so great a chief cry so bitterly? Had some evil enemy cast a spell? Had she not been properly named? ...”

The community's fear that the baby's distress could be linked to improper naming reflects the strong hold that these customs have on people's minds, even in the face of modernity. This clash between traditional and modern viewpoints can affect female solidarity, as women are often the primary bearers and enforcers of cultural practices related to childbirth and child-rearing. When modern skepticism challenges these traditions, it can create divisions among women who hold differing beliefs. Some women may feel pressured to conform to modern ideas to gain social acceptance, while others may staunchly defend their cultural heritage. This conflict can strain relationships and hinder the collective support system that female solidarity relies on, as women may find themselves at odds over the best way to honor their ancestors and protect their children's well-being.

Margaret Ogolla vividly illustrates the challenges women face in raising money for education within a male-dominated society where their roles are primarily domestic.

“...In any case it was considered better to try to lift the yoke of poverty by tilling the land rather than lying about in some classroom...”

The societal expectation that women should focus on household duties rather than pursue education creates a significant barrier to their educational advancement. This cultural norm, which values agricultural labor over academic achievement for women, is encapsulated in the belief that working the land is a more viable solution to poverty than spending time in the classroom. This perspective not only limits women's opportunities but also undermines their potential contributions to society beyond traditional domestic roles.

This societal expectation not only restricts their personal growth but also affects their ability to support one another in achieving educational and professional goals. The struggle to raise money for education thus becomes a collective challenge, as women must navigate and push against deeply ingrained cultural norms that prioritize their domestic responsibilities over their intellectual development. Feminism advocates for breaking down these societal barriers and promoting equal opportunities for women in all spheres of life, including education. The clash between societal expectations and the pursuit of education reflects the broader feminist struggle to redefine women's roles and ensure their access to resources and opportunities. Despite the delays and obstacles imposed by societal structures, the fight for women's education remains a crucial aspect of the broader movement toward gender equality and the recognition of women's rights and capabilities.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

The findings from *Blossoms of the Savannah* by Henry Ole Kulet and *The River and the Source* by Margaret Ogolla highlight the significant impact of societal norms and patriarchal structures on female solidarity. These cultural expectations often place immense pressure on women to conform to traditional roles, such as prioritizing marriage and childbearing over personal ambitions like education and independence. This can create internal conflicts for women, as they navigate the tension between fulfilling societal expectations and supporting each other's aspirations. In *Blossoms of the Savannah*, the forced circumcision of Taiyo and the societal pressure on the sisters to abandon their education illustrate how patriarchal norms can disrupt female solidarity and limit women's autonomy. Similarly, in *The River and the Source*, Awiti's struggle for education and the community's skepticism towards her achievements demonstrate the challenges women face when trying to break free from traditional roles. These examples show that while female solidarity can be a source of strength and resilience, it is often challenged by deeply ingrained cultural norms that seek to maintain the status quo. The narratives emphasize the importance of collective resistance and support among women to overcome these societal barriers and advocate for gender equality.

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