



## Gender Discrimination as Human Rights Violations in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* and Ellen Banda-Aaku's *Patchwork*

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### Abstract:

This article investigates gender discrimination as a form of human rights violation within postcolonial female narratives. Centring on Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* and Ellen Banda-Aaku's *Patchwork*, the study examines how women in postcolonial societies experience marginalisation, curtailed agency, and systemic silencing. Drawing on feminist postcolonial theory, it demonstrates that these texts do not only portray oppression, but also articulate strategies of resistance that reclaim voice, identity, and dignity. Through close textual analysis, the paper highlights narrative techniques such as interior monologue, symbolism, and first-person perspectives, which female authors employ to challenge patriarchal and cultural hierarchies. Ultimately, the article argues that postcolonial women's writing bridges literature and human rights discourse, rendering women's personal struggles visible while inviting readers to engage in ethical reflection on gender justice. By positioning literature as both aesthetic creation and moral intervention, the study contributes to postcolonial and feminist scholarship, underscoring storytelling as a vital vehicle for human rights advocacy.

**Keywords:** Gender Discrimination, Human Rights, Postcolonialism, Female Narratives, Resistance, Agency, Identity.

### Review Article

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### INTRODUCTION

Chandra Talpade Mohanty in *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, argues that gender discrimination continues to undermine the fundamental principles of human rights, particularly in postcolonial societies where historical and cultural legacies converge to reinforce patriarchal hierarchies. Women's marginalization in these contexts is often rooted in colonial legal systems, religious injunctions, and traditional social norms that restrict access to education, economic participation, and civic agency. Literature, however, offers a distinctive lens through which these structural inequalities can be examined and critiqued. Postcolonial female writers employ narrative as a form of resistance, using storytelling to expose oppression, articulate lived experiences, and reconstruct notions of agency and identity; an

approach endorsed by Obioma Nnaemeka in *Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way*.

Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* and Ellen Banda-Aaku's *Patchwork* exemplify how postcolonial female narratives illuminate gendered inequalities, while engaging broader human rights concerns. In *The Translator*, Aboulela portrays the constrained social and religious spaces occupied by women in contemporary Sudan and the diaspora, underscoring how restrictions on mobility, education, and self-expression constitute subtle, yet pervasive forms of discrimination. Similarly, Banda-Aaku's *Patchwork* depicts the vulnerabilities of young girls in the Zambian society, whose lives are shaped by patriarchal expectations, familial neglect, and systemic silencing. These texts reveal that gender discrimination is not merely a private

or cultural issue; it constitutes a violation of fundamental human rights; rights to dignity, autonomy, and voice, as articulated in Judith Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself*.

Despite the growing body of postcolonial scholarship, few studies explicitly connect gender discrimination in literature to human rights violations. A lot of existing research has focused on postcolonial identity, hybridity, and resistance, often overlooking the moral and legal implications of women's subordination. This article seeks to address that gap by demonstrating how postcolonial female writers interpret gender discrimination as a fundamental infringement upon women's human rights. Specifically, it argues that the lived experiences of female characters navigating social constraints, cultural expectations, and religious norms provide a critical lens through which readers can apprehend the ethical dimensions of gendered oppression.

The article is structured in three parts. First, it situates the discussion within the framework of feminist postcolonial theory, highlighting key perspectives on gender, power, and agency. Second, it provides the historical and biographical contexts of the selected texts, showing how colonial legacies and local traditions shape the depiction of women's struggles. Third, it engages in a close reading of *The Translator* and *Patchwork*, examining narrative strategies, thematic elements, and character development to illustrate how female authors transform narratives of oppression into narratives of resistance. Through this integrated approach, the paper demonstrates that postcolonial female literature functions simultaneously as aesthetic expression and moral intervention, compelling readers to reconsider gendered social structures and human rights violations.

### Theoretical Framework

The study of gender discrimination within postcolonial contexts has been shaped by feminist postcolonial theorists who interrogate the intersections of gender, power, and cultural

hegemony. Chandra Talpade Mohanty critiques Western feminist universalism for its tendency to portray Third World women as a homogenous category of oppressed subjects. Instead, she emphasizes the importance of historical and cultural specificity in analyzing women's lived experiences, foregrounding the structural and systemic forces that sustain gender inequality.

Gayatri Spivak's seminal essay "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" advances this framework by illustrating how marginalized voices—particularly those of women in formerly colonized societies—are silenced by both colonial and patriarchal discourses. Spivak argues that the subaltern female subject is doubly oppressed: first by colonial structures and then by indigenous patriarchies, rendering her voice difficult to access or represent authentically. Within literary studies, this framework enables scholars to examine how female authors articulate agency and resistance despite the constraints of social, cultural, and historical silencing.

African feminist theorists such as Obioma Nnaemeka and Molara Ogundipe-Leslie complement Spivak's perspective by highlighting culturally specific modes of resistance. Nnaemeka's concept of Negofeminism underscores negotiation and reconciliation within communal values, portraying women's empowerment as relational and culturally embedded. Ogundipe-Leslie emphasizes the necessity of women reclaiming narrative authority in patriarchal societies, a concept particularly relevant for understanding Aboulela and Banda-Aaku's use of first-person narration and interior monologues to articulate female consciousness.

In addition to feminist postcolonial theory, human rights discourse provides a normative framework for assessing the ethical implications of gender discrimination. Scholars contend that violations of bodily autonomy, freedom of expression, and personal agency constitute fundamental infringements on human dignity. Within postcolonial literature, these violations are often embedded in the daily lives of female characters, demonstrating that the personal is political, where the private spheres of

family, culture, and religion reflect broader systemic injustices recognized under international human rights law, including the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)* and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*.

Integrating feminist postcolonial theory with human rights discourse enables a multifaceted analysis of literature. This approach enables researchers to explore not only how gender discrimination is represented in texts, but also the moral and legal dimensions of these portrayals. In *The Translator*, Aboulela's depiction of Sammar navigating the patriarchal confines of Sudanese society and the diaspora illustrates both the internalisation of restrictive norms and the subtle forms of resistance that challenge them. Similarly, in *Patchwork*, Banda-Aaku presents female protagonists negotiating familial neglect and societal expectations, demonstrating how agency can emerge even within severely constrained environments.

The theoretical framework adopted in this study situates postcolonial female narratives at the intersection of literature, feminism, and human rights. Feminist postcolonial theory offers the analytical tools to examine the cultural, historical, and social dimensions of gender discrimination, while human rights discourse provides a normative basis for evaluating the ethical implications of these representations. By combining these approaches, the article demonstrates that postcolonial female literature serves as both aesthetic expression and social critique, underscoring how gender discrimination constitutes a violation of fundamental human rights.

### Gender Discrimination

In *The Translator*, the institution of marriage is portrayed as vulnerable to violations of rights for both men and women, shaped by religion, culture, and societal expectations. Rae's first marriage to Amelia in Morocco is dissolved largely due to his inability to meet the financial demands of family life and the disapproval of Amelia's parents. After moving to Morocco in search of employment as a foreign journalist, Rae fails to secure the

position and instead works in a souvenir shop, performing menial tasks such as attending to casual buyers and changing display bulbs. Living with three Air Maroc pilots who are frequently absent, Rae eventually marries Amelia. Their union, however, proves short-lived: Amelia's parents reject him, financial instability undermines the marriage, and Amelia delivers a stillborn child. Following her painful recovery, Amelia's mother blames Rae for ruining her daughter's life and enlists Rae's employer to dissolve the marriage. Rae is advised to abandon the relationship and return to his studies, underscoring how cultural and familial pressures override marital autonomy.

Marriage is further problematized in the relationship between Sammar and Rae, where religious difference and societal opinion dictate the boundaries of intimacy. Yasmin, Rae's secretary and Sammar's friend, discourages Sammar from pursuing Rae, arguing that he will not convert to Islam and that mixed couples provoke social irritation. Sammar, however, disregards Rae's autonomy, pressuring him to convert so that they might marry immediately. On the eve of her departure to Cairo for a translation assignment, she confronts Rae about their relationship, insisting that his knowledge of Islam suffices for conversion and marriage: "I imagined we could get married today... I thought Fareed could marry us and it would not be difficult to get two witnesses" (125). This moment illustrates how cultural and religious expectations can override personal choice, reducing marriage to a negotiation of conformity rather than mutual consent.

In *The Translator*, the idea of women getting into marriage is central to the analysis of the novel. Set in Khartoum and Scotland. It narrates the life of the protagonist Sammar. Sammar's life revolves around her marriage to Tariq. Society places much emphasis on marriage, and it is considered an accomplishment for a woman to be married. Back in Khartoum, Sammar abandons her own family and clings to Tariq's family from childhood till her marriage to Tariq. This is all in a bid to give a good impression of herself and be close to her husband's family. "You were happy

with that, content, waiting for the day you would take her only son away from her" (7). When Tariq dies, the expectation of widowhood shapes her life. Mahasen, Tariq's mother, loves Sammar is only demonstrated towards her when she takes care of Tariq's home and when they marry and move to Scotland. But when he dies and Sammar comes back to Khartoum with his dead body, Mahasen develops a hatred for her, blaming and accusing her of her son's death. "This was the same Mahasen who now frowned when mentioning Sammar's name. That idiot girl" (10). This critiques the systematic inequalities that govern women's lives.

Because of gender-defined roles and responsibilities allocated to women, Sammar lives with Mahasen, her mother-in-law, when she moves from Aberdeen back to Khartoum. Her brother Waleed is not happy about this decision, but there isn't much he can do for Sammar as they cannot afford a house of their own, and Amir, Sammar's son with Tariq, has part of the family house as an inheritance. Due to Mahasen's hatred for Sammar, she becomes insulting towards her because Sammar no longer provides for them the way she did while she was abroad. Mahasen's interest in having Sammar now at home is to benefit from the services she provides at home by taking care of Amir and Hanan, cooking, washing, and cleaning. When Sammar arrives, the maid at the house is sacked, and there is no sign of bringing in a new one. We notice here that marriage places the woman at the disposal of the man's family. Her life and everything she does revolves around her husband's family, even after his death.

In many patriarchal societies like those reflected in Aboulela's novels, the status and image of the family is measured through the father's role and career, rather than the mother's contribution. In a typical traditional society, men, women, and even children occupy different roles, behaviors, communication modes, and physical appearances, and exhibit different attitudes. This type of environment gives clear distinctions on gender roles in society without

much influence from external factors. The family occupies an important position in society, which we see from our texts as all the characters and protagonists come from a family that is defined by certain rules and different family models. In most African and postcolonial societies, the family is regarded as the foundation of moral, social, and cultural stability. The family circle is meant to provide emotional security and define one's social position.

Cultural standards regarding gender roles further complicate the demands of feminism, which advocates for the equal treatment of men and women irrespective of sex. In patriarchal societies, failure to conform to prescribed norms often results in extreme consequences for women. Male authority is exercised through coercion, violence, and, in some cases, the denial of life itself. Aboulela's *Minaret* provides a striking example: "Do you remember the girls who went missing whose photos were shown on TV? They weren't lost, these girls, they weren't missing—they were killed by their brothers or fathers then thrown in the Nile" (175). Such acts directly contravene the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)*, particularly Articles 2, 3, and 5, which affirm the right to life, liberty, and security of a person without discrimination.

In Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*, Islamic cultural reservations are depicted as favouring men over women, particularly within conservative Khartoum society, where public displays of emotion between men and women are prohibited. A woman's reputation is treated as paramount, requiring upright behaviour, while men enjoy greater freedom of conduct. Although the Qur'an advocates equality between men and women, patriarchal interpretations prioritize male authority, thereby violating women's rights through cultural practices rather than religious teachings. During the Christmas break, when the university is closed and families gather for celebrations, Rae and Sammar spend much of

their time speaking on the phone. Their closeness highlights the societal anxieties surrounding female reputation in Khartoum:

*Once upon a time in another part of the world, were the fears someone will see us together, alone together... a woman's reputation is fragile as a matchstick... a woman's honour... reputation was the idol people set up, what determined the giving, the holding back. A girl's honour... your father will kill you... Your brother will beat you up... you will go to school the next morning as the bolder girls inevitably did, with puffy red eyes, unusually subdued. (57)*

This passage illustrates how women's opinions and identities are disregarded within patriarchal structures. Correction and punishment are directed solely at women, while men remain unaccountable. Such practices violate not only women's human rights, but also their dignity and autonomy, with extreme cases resulting in death at the hands of male relatives.

Human rights violations in *The Translator* extend beyond gender to encompass religious freedom. Rae's uncle, who travelled to Egypt with the army during the Second World War, became interested in Sufism, converted to Islam, and left the army. His conversion branded him as a traitor and defector, thereby violating his right to freedom of religion as outlined in Article 18 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)*:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in a community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. (1)*

Unable to return home for fear of arrest, Rae's uncle changes his name and

marries an Egyptian woman, underscoring how cultural and political pressures infringe upon fundamental rights.

In Ellen Banda-Aaku's *Patchwork*, gender discrimination manifests through Pumpkin's troubled marriage to Tembo. In Part Two, Pumpkin valorises her marriage, resorting to physical and verbal confrontations with Salome, a young girl she suspects of having an affair with her husband. The narrative opens with Pumpkin attacking Salome after seeing her emerge from Tembo's car. This conflict escalates when Pumpkin abducts Salome and takes her to her father's office to be warned against Tembo. Ironically, Salome later enters into a relationship with Pumpkin's father, and both die in a car accident following the presidential elections.

Desperate to secure her marriage, Pumpkin seeks spiritual intervention. Bee's mother, a spiritualist, provides her with beads to cut in front of her house, intended to ward off Salome and other women. Pumpkin's reliance on spiritual practices highlights the cultural weight placed on marriage as a marker of female identity and worth. Her desperation is further emphasized by her history of suitors before Tembo, none of whom she married. Through Pumpkin's struggles, Banda-Aaku critiques the societal expectation that women must preserve marriage at all costs, even at the expense of personal dignity and agency.

In Ellen Banda-Aaku's *Patchwork*, Sakavungo epitomizes the male chauvinistic, domineering figure who is accustomed to obtaining whatever he desires. Commanding respect within both family and political circles, he is portrayed as flirtatious and manipulative. Throughout his political career, Sakavungo leverages authority to protect his family and conceal his questionable dealings. His influence is evident when he intervenes to close the summons brought against Pumpkin by Salome after their fight, demonstrating how patriarchal

power shields men and perpetuates gendered inequality.

Evidence of a gendered society also emerges in Part Two during the election campaign. After a campaign walk, the manager invites the group to his home for lunch. When Pumpkin washes her hands before her father, she is reprimanded by the campaign manager's wife: "She says it's culturally improper to wash my hands before an elder" (188). This moment underscores how cultural norms reinforce male authority and dictate female behaviour, even in seemingly mundane acts.

Pumpkin's identity is further complicated by her dual birth certificates, one issued under her grandmother Ponga's name and another under her father's: "I'm two different people according to the Registrar of Birth, my birth was registered twice" (vii). This duality reflects the tension between patriarchal control and matrilineal influence, situating Pumpkin's identity within contested cultural frameworks. Sakavungo's domineering attitude extends from family life into his political ambitions, where he uses wealth and power to manipulate outcomes. His care for Pumpkin while she resides at Tudu Court is conditional, expressed through gifts and money sent at his discretion. On one occasion, upon finding Pumpkin's mother drunk, he orders Pumpkin to pack her belongings and leave with him, disregarding her mother's opinion. This episode reveals his possessiveness and highlights the patriarchal tendency to override women's agency.

Sakavungo later takes Pumpkin to his farm, where he lives with his wife and children, without informing his wife of the decision. His household remains

silent, restrained by fear of his authority. His prioritization of his five sons with Mama T further illustrates patriarchal bias. He esteems his sons, particularly Junior and Lazarus, introducing them to business associates as heirs to his legacy: "My boys will take over after I'm gone... He talks about how clever they are. He talks about what they will do when they graduate" (68). Pumpkin, by contrast, is excluded from succession plans, reflecting the systemic devaluation of daughters in patriarchal societies. We further read:

Mwanza is a bad man. Uncle Oscar must chase him! Bee says, looking at Sonia. Why? I ask as the two of them burst out laughing. Because he likes to do bad things, Bee says. 'He said to Sonia: 'If you squeeze my banana, I give you sweets.' 'Arhh.... Bee,' Sonia giggles, 'even to you he said: squeeze me! Squeeze me! 'But if you squeeze him, he will faint,' I say, hardly believing what I am hearing. Faint! Bee shrieks. He won't faint; he likes it. Even you, Pumpkin, one day he will call you. (22)

The narrative of *Patchwork* exposes how patriarchal structures perpetuate female vulnerability and normalize male excess. Mwanza, Uncle Oscar's houseboy, exemplifies this dynamic by exploiting young girls in Tudu Court, luring them with sweets brought back from Oscar's travels. His predatory behaviour highlights how masculinity and dominance enable abuse while silencing victims. When BaDodo becomes pregnant by Mwanza, she alone bears the burden of stigma and responsibility. Seeking to abort the pregnancy, she consumes a toxic leaf reputed to induce miscarriage and dies as a result. This tragedy underscores how societal prescriptions place the consequences of male misconduct squarely on women, reinforcing systemic injustice.

Mama T's marriage to Sakavungo further illustrates the silencing of women within

patriarchal systems. Living in wealth and comfort, she chooses to ignore Sakavungo's infidelities, prioritizing the preservation of her marriage over confronting his excesses. When Sakavungo brings Pumpkin to the farm, Mama T temporarily leaves but eventually returns, demonstrating her resignation to his authority. His relationship with Gloria, revealed when he takes Pumpkin to visit her, reinforces his dominance and disregard for emotional accountability. Gloria's letter to Pumpkin captures this reality: "Your Tata is incapable of making emotional sacrifices or taking responsibility for the pain he inflicts on others. Now I understand what he did to her; I understand your grandmother's bitterness" (172). This testimony reveals how Sakavungo's power and wealth shield him from accountability, while women absorb the emotional consequences of his actions.

Mama T's dependence on Sakavungo is further emphasized through Sissy's observation that her mood mirrors the November weather, dull and overcast, brightening only when Sakavungo is present. Her reliance on him for emotional fulfilment reflects the broader subordination of women in patriarchal societies. Moreover, Mama T discriminates against Pumpkin, viewing her as the embodiment of Sakavungo's sin. During a Rhodesian attack on the farm, Mama T hides with her sons, closing the door against Pumpkin and leaving her outside to plead for safety. This act demonstrates how patriarchal hierarchies fracture female solidarity, with women themselves perpetuating discrimination against other women. Pumpkin narrates that:

It was early one Saturday morning, three weeks and one day after we had moved to Tudu Court. A white Volkswagen sped into the complex and screeched to a halt outside Uncle Oscar's flat. The shrieking brakes had us all outside even before we heard a woman's scream and the shattering of glass. There we saw a man, Uncle Oscar, trying to wrestle two women apart. (28)

The incident with Uncle Oscar, where two women are dismissed after a quarrel while he remains unscathed, illustrates how women often rely on men who, in turn, remain indifferent to their struggles. From the cultural analysis of gender discrimination in the novels, it becomes evident that these practices are not merely moral issues but constitute human rights concerns. Gender discrimination leaves profound psychological effects on characters, operating both externally through social restrictions and internally through diminished self-worth.

Marriage, as depicted in both Aboulela's *The Translator* and Banda-Aaku's *Patchwork*, is not treated as a purely personal union but as a cultural instrument enforcing patriarchal norms. In these texts, marriage restricts women's economic and social mobility, violating multiple human rights. Aboulela emphasizes the social and emotional constraints imposed on women, while Banda-Aaku highlights how marriage compromises women's safety, freedom, and dignity. Such violations contravene Articles 3 and 5 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)*, which guarantee freedom and security of person, as well as Articles 23 and 25, which affirm rights to property, work, and adequate living standards.

From the discussions above, both authors reveal the multifaceted ways in which postcolonial African women suffer violations. They demonstrate how patriarchal control and economic denial deprive women of basic human rights. These violations are not merely personal but expose systemic failures of governance in protecting women across postcolonial contexts. Through their narratives, Aboulela and Banda-Aaku highlight the gaps in implementing the UDHR's principles for women, positioning literature as a critical site of human rights advocacy.

## Gender Resistance

Obioma Nnaemeka's concept of Nego-feminism, articulated in her article "Nego-Feminism: Theorising, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way", provides a vital framework for understanding female resistance. Nego-feminism, or negotiation feminism, reimagines how African women resist patriarchy within cultural contexts. Rather than engaging in open confrontation, women negotiate and compromise, rejecting individualistic approaches to gender struggle in favour of cooperation.

In the works of Aboulela and Banda-Aaku, female characters resist discrimination not through overt defiance, but by negotiating spaces within domestic and marital contexts. They manage households, shape their children's futures, and reclaim faith and education as tools of empowerment. Instead of rejecting cultural norms outright, they reinterpret them to affirm dignity and agency.

In *The Translator*, Sammar exemplifies resistance through education. As a university translator, she demonstrates intellectual independence: "Sammar was the translator in Rae's department. She worked on several projects at the same time, historical texts, newspaper articles in Arab newspapers, and now a political manifesto Rae had given her" (5). Her education shields her from being coerced into marriage with Ahmad Ali Yasseen after her husband's death. Mahasen reinforces this resistance by reminding her: "An educated girl like you, you know English, you can support yourself and your son, you don't need marriage" (13). Education thus becomes a strategy against patriarchal gender roles that demand female dependence. Similarly, Yasmin, Sammar's colleague, demonstrates resistance by pursuing knowledge during pregnancy, borrowing books on breastfeeding and childcare. These acts of intellectual engagement highlight how education empowers women to resist cultural prescriptions of subordination.

Mahasen, Sammar's aunt and the mother of her late husband Tarig, emerges as a prominent female figure in Aboulela's *The Translator*. She exercises firm control over her household, even determining whom her son marries. From childhood, Mahasen shapes Sammar's appearance and choices, reflecting her strong influence within the family. After Tarig's death, Mahasen assumes responsibility for raising her grandson Amir, thereby enabling Sammar to rebuild her life. It is Mahasen who names Sammar at birth, a name that distinguishes her as the only "Sammar" in her school: "My aunt is a strong woman, Sammar said, 'a leader rally'. She is looking after my son now. I haven't seen them for four years" (7).

Mahasen's traits reveal that even within a male-dominated society, certain women exercise authority and command respect. Unlike the stereotypical traditional Muslim woman in Khartoum, she is exposed, fashionable, and elegant. Sammar describes her as part of the "lights of the house," a woman whose validation does not stem from domestic chores: "Her aunt's bedroom had a large mirror, jars of lotions and creams. A transistor radio, a painting of gazelles, a huge bed with blue pillows" (48). Mahasen thus represents the minority of women who stand out in conservative societies, embodying female agency and resilience.

Similarly, Grandma Ponga in Banda-Aaku's *Patchwork* is a deconstructive female character who challenges patriarchal expectations. Strong-willed and industrious, she takes over her late husband's tavern and transforms it into a profitable business, using the proceeds to educate her daughter Totela: "When he died Grandma Ponga, who has never drunk alcohol in her life, took over the tavern and turned it for the first time into a profitable business" (32). Her entrepreneurial success demonstrates women's capacity to thrive independently within patriarchal structures.

Despite her disappointment with Totela for becoming pregnant out of wedlock, Grandma Ponga continues to support her daughter and granddaughter. She provides shelter for Pumpkin during Totela's difficult times, though she refuses to raise her permanently in the tavern's unsuitable environment. Her advice to Totela not to rely on Tata's inconsistent support reflects her pragmatic wisdom and awareness of male irresponsibility. Grandma Ponga embodies maternal strength, balancing disappointment with compassion, and offering guidance rooted in resilience.

Pumpkin, the protagonist of *Patchwork*, further illustrates female endurance in patriarchal contexts. In Part One, she grows up in Tudu Court with her mother Totela, while her father Tata visits sporadically. Totela, devastated by Tata's refusal to marry her after Pumpkin's birth, descends into alcoholism. Through these struggles, Pumpkin assumes adult responsibilities, caring for her mother by cleaning up after her drunken episodes and preparing baths to restore her dignity. One rainy night, Pumpkin's mother vomits all over the room, and Pumpkin diligently cleans the mess with toilet paper and washes the rug under running water. That same night, Tata arrives and witnesses the disorder, exposing the harsh realities of Totela's dependence and Pumpkin's resilience.

Pumpkin's silence about her mother's alcoholism illustrates the complex negotiation women undertake within patriarchal contexts. Although she contemplates revealing the truth to her father, she chooses silence to protect her mother: "I can tell him that sometimes, late at night, I hear her open the kitchen and I hear the bottles jingling... But I don't tell him this; instead, I say 'I'm okay, Tata'" (40). Her decision reflects the burden placed on women and girls to preserve family honour, even at personal cost. Pumpkin's presence in Tata's household evokes mixed emotions among

family members and workers, yet Sissy interprets her arrival as a blessing, likening it to the Peachtree in the courtyard finally bearing fruit after six years. This metaphor underscores Pumpkin's role as a source of renewal and hope within fractured family structures.

From this analysis, it is evident that Banda and Aboulela, as postcolonial female writers, contribute to the redefinition of the African woman. They challenge dominant narratives of patriarchal systems by portraying female protagonists who are neither fully liberated nor entirely oppressed. Instead, these women negotiate within familial and cultural structures, resisting patriarchal roles and Islamophobic stereotypes. Banda exposes fractures within African families and governance, while Aboulela humanizes the Muslim African woman in Western contexts. Together, they challenge Western assumptions about African identity and demonstrate the resilience of women navigating multiple layers of oppression.

## CONCLUSION

This study has emphasized that gender distinctions and hierarchies have long been fundamental features of social coexistence, shaping institutions and relationships, and informing conceptions of humanity itself. Examining these distinctions through the lens of human rights reveals both positive and negative outcomes. While sex is a biological categorization based on reproductive potential, gender is a social construct elaborated through cultural expectations. These expectations, often detrimental to women, manifest in institutions and individual relationships. As Simone de Beauvoir argues, "the term 'female' is derogatory, not because it emphasizes woman's animality but because it imprisons her in her sex" (39). This

assertion reinforces the view that gender distinctions are more social than natural.

Gender discrimination constitutes a serious human rights violation because it denies individuals equal dignity, opportunities, and freedoms solely based on their sex or gender. It affects access to education, employment, healthcare, property ownership, and participation in public life, reinforcing cycles of inequality and poverty. Such discrimination not only undermines the principles of justice and fairness but also contradicts international human rights standards that guarantee equality and non-discrimination for all. Addressing gender discrimination is therefore essential for building inclusive societies where every person can fully exercise their rights and contribute to national development.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates how female postcolonial writers confront multiple obstacles in expressing authentic viewpoints within multicultural contexts. Despite racial, cultural, and gender-based privileges, they devise new forms of identity and voice that resist cultural domination. Banda and Aboulela reveal their ability to construct a hybrid vocabulary of experience and meaning, simultaneously engaging with and resisting orientalist tropes. Through the combined lens of feminist postcolonial theory, this article has evaluated how their novels expose systemic violations while offering creative strategies of resistance. In doing so, they affirm literature's role as both aesthetic expression and moral intervention, challenging readers to reconsider the structures that perpetuate gender discrimination and human rights violations.

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