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# Betrayal, Coping in Marriage Crises: Issues in Mariama Ba's and Ifeoma Okoye's Texts

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*Abstract-* Marriages sometimes come under attack due to various internal and extraneous factors that may include betrayal. Betrayal identified as one of the most destabilizing factor, comes as abuse of trust. The consequences of betrayal in marriages leave such marriages on the verge of collapse, and more often to divorce, separation, or abandonment. Women are mostly found vulnerable to betrayals in marriage relationships, although culpability could be with either the females or males. The effects of betrayal are traumatic. It leaves the offended injured and seeking a coping strategy. African literary texts have portrayed incidents and narratives that present women as victims, found to cope and adapt to the situation in different ways. *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba and *Behind the Clouds* by Ifeoma Okoye relay instances of betrayal, different responses, and coping strategies by the female protagonists. This essay makes a literary analysis of the incidents of marriage crises in the two texts highlighting the bitter experiences and reactions of individual victims. Using coping as a tool under the framework of Cognitive Psychological Adaptation, the essay examines the psychological effect of betrayal on the victims. A coping strategy is explored as a conscious effort devised by individual victims to construct, interpret, and resolve emotional and mental stress as a result of betrayal.

*Keywords:* *adaptation, betrayal, coping, cognitive psychology, marriage crises.*

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# Betrayal, Coping in Marriage Crises: Issues in Mariama Ba's and Ifeoma Okoye's Texts

Ngozi Dora Ulogu

*Abstract-* Marriages sometimes come under attack due to various internal and extraneous factors that may include betrayal. Betrayal identified as one of the most destabilizing factor, comes as abuse of trust. The consequences of betrayal in marriages leave such marriages on the verge of collapse, and more often to divorce, separation, or abandonment. Women are mostly found vulnerable to betrayals in marriage relationships, although culpability could be with either the females or males. The effects of betrayal are traumatic. It leaves the offended injured and seeking a coping strategy. African literary texts have portrayed incidents and narratives that present women as victims, found to cope and adapt to the situation in different ways. *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba and *Behind the Clouds* by Ifeoma Okoye relay instances of betrayal, different responses, and coping strategies by the female protagonists. This essay makes a literary analysis of the incidents of marriage crises in the two texts highlighting the bitter experiences and reactions of individual victims. Using coping as a tool under the framework of Cognitive Psychological Adaptation, the essay examines the psychological effect of betrayal on the victims. A coping strategy is explored as a conscious effort devised by individual victims to construct, interpret, and resolve emotional and mental stress as a result of betrayal. The paper proffers a positive coping strategy for women in traumatic marriage situations as a buffer to mental disorientation in times of these crises.

*Keywords: adaptation, betrayal, coping, cognitive psychology, marriage crises.*

## I. Introduction

African literary tradition has records of narratives and incidents of failed marriages arising from betrayals, which have become recurrent motifs in literary texts. These textual narratives usually present women as victims and men as perpetrators. The effect of the violation of love and trust on the women who have shown to love their spouses is always traumatic. Trauma is described as a "response to a deeply distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, causes feelings of helplessness, diminishes their sense of self and their ability to feel the full range of emotions and experiences" (Karen Onderko Online). Women's responses to the effects of spousal betrayals vary. Rachman, S. in "Betrayal: A Psychological Analysis" observes that "effects of betrayal include; shock, loss and grief, morbid pre-occupation (sic), damaged self-esteem, self-doubting, anger" (304). Incidents in the texts under study indicate extreme shock, grief, anger, and hurt manifest by the protagonists who feel betrayed by their husbands. Mariama Ba in *So Long a Letter* presents the sorrows of two friends, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, who are cheated in marriage by the infidelity of their husbands. Likewise, Ifeoma Okoye in *Behind the Clouds* presents the trauma suffered by Ije Apia as her husband Dozie welcomes another woman into their home, thus breaching Ije's trust. These female protagonists, Ramatoulaye, Aissatou, and Ije, sacrificed a lot to build their marriages. They love their spouses and invest hugely in their marriages to sustain a harmonious family. Incidents indicate avoidable cases of betrayal by the men's acts of omission and commission that bring untold damages in the marriages. Deceit in marriage relationships have usually come heavy on the women with devastating effects leaving them stressed. Saul Mcleod in "Stress Management" quotes Sarafino, 2012, as saying that "stress arises when individuals perceive a discrepancy between the physical or psychological demands of a situation and the resources of his or her biological, psychological or social system" (Mcleod). Betrayal changes the tone of relationships in marriages. Hence, adopting strategies to cope with the attendant stress becomes very important.

Earlier literature on *So Long a Letter* and *Behind the Clouds* studied the works as feminist texts dwelling on patriarchy, childlessness, unfriendly cultural practices, and unpalatable experiences by the women. Scholars have also studied the structural, stylistic, and linguistic aspects of the texts. For example, Amal Mustapha, Al Balolo and Abdulmahoud Idrees in the essay, "Patriarchy Through the Eyes of Mariama Ba in *So Long a Letter*" advocated that women are given equal opportunities with their male counterparts, noting that "there is no doubting the fact that the increase in single parenting in Africa which has made women to combine the dual roles of fatherhood and motherhood require critical attention of both literary writers and critics" (334). The writers further allude to religion and culture as the oppressors of women and the supporters of patriarchy, stating that "women can never be free as long as some cultural and religious values are in place and those values not re-examined and reviewed considering women's plight. Religion has its ways of oppressing women, and so does culture" (338). Discussions on women issues have long gone beyond patriarchy and women's oppression. Julie Agbasiere in

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"Mariama Ba's *Une si Longue Letter*: The Classic and the Critique" observes that "the current major themes that sustain the critical discourse in *So Long a Letter* are polygamy, divorce, and feminism" (70). While blaming marriage break up on nonreciprocation by the partners, Chioma Okpara in "Female Experience and Narrative Form in Mariama Ba's Novels" believes that " It will seem that harrowing female experiences are aggravated (sic) by lack of reciprocation exhibited by their spouses represented by the husbands of the two protagonists of Ba's novels" (Agbasiere 34). It seems a common knowledge that men take for granted the love and trust reposed on them by their wives and so made their marriages porous and vulnerable through acts of omission or commission.

Scholars have also taken an ardent look at the feminist issues of childlessness, infertility, societal discrimination of women, in contrast, some have studied the structure, style, and language use in Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds*. For example, Ifeyinwa Ogbazi in "A Structural Reading of Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds"* writes that the text's "narrative is premised on a feminist framework and therefore marked by gender perspectives which are mediated by African culture" (Ogbazi Online). Writing on the style and language use, in "Linguo-Literary Reflections of Feminism in the Works of Ifeoma Okoye", Uzoamaka Madu Amuche embarked on a feminist stylist study on the use of language and style in bringing out feminist tendencies in the text "revealing the theme of non-confrontational and non-radical feminism through a stylistic and textual analysis of her works, especially with an emphasis on foregrounding, diction, authorial voice, sentence patterns, paragraph structure, punctuation and cohesion" (Online). Still writing on the feminist issues, using a sociological framework, the essay "Gender Ideology and Social Crises in Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds* and *Men without Ears* exposes social ills in the society and seeks to correct the social-economic and political imbalance… The issue of childlessness in matrimonial homes has also captured the attention of female writers" (IProject Online). Moving up further to highlight women's positive identity, Augustine Uka Nwanyanwu in the essay "The Quest for Gender Identity Self-consciousness and Recognition in Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds"* captures the writer's sentiment in appraising the level of female assessment of their identity and self-consciousness in a male-dominated culture asserts that "the essay is a narrative that is characterized by diverse and multiple consciousnesses that redefine the African woman's identity as she acquires a new voice that rejects the totalizing traditional stereotypes that defined her womanhood within an androcentric African socio-cultural reality" (Nwanyanwu 23). Gender issues highlight women experiences in the cultural milieu.

Despite these critical attentions on the texts, there are gaps yet explore, hence the present literary study of the incidents of betrayal. Specifically, the essay examines the coping and adaptation strategies by the women subjected to marriage disintegration aside, relying on the expected feminist ideal. This study, therefore, makes a cognitive psychological analysis of coping and adaptation mechanisms adopted by the protagonists. It explores the individual victim's focused approach to settling the traumatic experiences of betrayal. The essay highlights the possibility of women to traverse the expectations of feminist ideals and create a set of individual cognitive constructs in solving traumatic marriage problems.

## II. Conceptual Issues

Coping is a concept domiciled in the domain of Cognitive Adaptation Psychology functioning as a therapy to a problematic situation such as betrayal. Courtney E. Ackerman defines coping as "cognitive and behavioral strategies that people use to deal with stressful situations or difficult demands, whether they are internal or external" (Online). Coping follows a troubled or stressful situation encountered by individuals. It also means "to invest one's conscious effort to solving personal and interpersonal problems, to try to master, minimize, or tolerate stress and conflict" (Wikipedia). Coping becomes a purposive, conscious decision to getting around a traumatic situation. It, therefore, serves as an adaptive mechanism in scaling through traumatic and stressful experiences. In "Stress Management", Mcleod observes that "there are many ways of coping with stress. Their effectiveness depends on the type of stressor, the particular individuals, and the circumstances" (Online). Hence, coping propels an individual victim to readjust from the destabilized mental situation in its way. Describing this strategy from a Personal Construct Theory, George Kelly observes that:

> Each person creates a set of cognitive constructs about the environment. By that, he meant that we interpret and organize the events and social relationships of our lives in a system or pattern. On the basis (sic) of this pattern, we make predictions about ourselves and about other people and events, and we use these predictions to formulate our responses and guide our actions. (Duane .P. Schultz and Sydney Ellen Schultz 356).

Individuals' ability to understand themselves and interpret the traumatic incidents and situations is part of a coping strategy. Gordon Allport in "The Trait Approach: The Genetics of Personality" "identified coping behavior, which is oriented towards a specific purpose and is consciously planned (sic) and carried out. Coping behavior is determined by needs inspired by the situation and ordinarily is directed toward



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bringing about some change in our environment" (Duane. P. Schultz and Sydney Ellen Schultz 267). Different coping mechanism evolves consciously according to existing threats. Coping becomes the survival strategies employed in re-instating the order of things in a victim's life, "this involves changing one's perspective or reframing the situation to view it as an opportunity instead of a problem. Positive coping generally requires a level of maturity and an ability to accept one's faults without resorting to self-blame" (Courtney Ackerman Online). This mechanism becomes relevant in examining the strategies employed by the protagonists in textual analysis.

Cognitive psychology defines "the scientific study of mental activities in terms of information processing such as reasoning, concept formation, attention, recognition, imagination and problem solving" (D.O. Adebayo 129). Psychological cognition becomes imperative in the area of mental processing and problem-solving, whereby Cognition simply describes "act or process of knowing". The cognition approach focuses on the ways people come to know their environment and themselves, how they perceive, evaluate, learn, think, make decisions, and solve problems" (Duane .P. Schultz and Sydney Ellen Schultz 353). The theory of Cognitive Adaptation Psychology approach to human behavior posits that "humans cope with threats in their lives by creating a set of positive illusions, which serve to protect their psychological health. These positively slanted cognitions are not considered delusional or inaccurate but rather represent a sign of mental health as they create space for hope, personal growth, and flexibility" (Zeigler, Shackelford, and Czajkowska 71). The cognitive adaptation approach helps to understand and moderate an individual's thinking pattern, especially in times of psychological distress. Shelly Taylor S.E. explains that "cognitive adaptation to threatening events centers on a search for meaning in the experience, an attempt to regain mastery over the event in particular and life more generally and an effort to restore self–esteem through self-enhancing evaluations" (Shelly Taylor 1161). In further examination of the concept of cognitive psychology, Cherry Kendra says, "cognitive psychology involves the study of internal mental processes-all of the things that go on inside your brain including perception, thinking, memory, attention, language, problem-solving, and learning" (Online). Individual effort and knowledge is a thriving factor in coping against stress.

Whereas the issue at hand involves resilience by the victim to overcome the enormous stress and trauma, Kendra believes that with "adaptation, we can adopt new behaviors that allow us to cope with change" (Online). In effect, adopting new behaviors in the face of distress involves an individual's ability to withstand adversity and bounce back from difficult situations. Kendra, therefore, defines adaptation as "the ability to adjust to new information and experiences. He adds: through adaptation, we can adopt new behaviors that allow us to cope with change" (Online). Adaptation involves personal effort and resilience. Resilience is, therefore "assigned to factors that protect one from the negative sequel that accompany major stresses and promote successful adaptation to adversity" (Vicks. S. Helgeson, Kerry A. Reynolds, and Oscar Escobar M.D Online). Adaptation and resilience help victims to activate their constructs to maintain balance in the face of trauma.

Here, betrayal identifies a painful stressor in marriages that demands an active conscious coping strategy. According to Rachman in "Betrayal: A Psychological Analysis," "Betrayal is the sense of being harmed by the intentional actions or omissions of a trusted person. The most common forms of betrayal are harmful disclosures of confidential information, disloyalty, infidelity, dishonesty. They can be traumatic and cause considerable distress" (Rachman 304). The issue of intentionality indicates a common factor of betrayal, suggesting a deliberate action from one partner against the other. This idea supports the assertion that "Betrayal is a sense of being harmed by the intentional actions, or omission, of a person, who was assumed to be trusted and loyal" (Heba Essawy). However, these assertions do not foreclose the fact that betrayal can also occur by omission or unpremeditated action in relationships, as can be seen in textual analysis, especially in the relationship between Dozie and Virginia in Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds.* Issues and incidents in the textual narratives thus highlight betrayal as a causative factor in marital crises with concomitant disorientation of the mental and psychological well being of the female protagonists who are victims. Hence, the women need to come out of these naturally similar problematic situations differently by their various approaches geared toward finding mental or psychological stability.

## III. Betrayal in Selected Texts

*So Long a Letter* (1989) by Mariama Ba, and *Behind the Clouds* (1982) by Ifeoma Okoye record incidents of marital distrust and consequent break ups. The hurt associated with the betrayal of love and trust as are the cases under study are enormous and daunting. In these texts, *So Long a Letter* and *Behind the Clouds,* the writers relay the hurt and grief of the female characters who let out their disappointments through interaction with their friends. In *So Long a Letter,* Ramatoulaye recounts her predicament in a letter to her bosom friend Aissatou, who incidentally suffered a similar fate in her marriage with Mawdo Ba. "Each ends in disaster mainly because the man takes a second wife: Binetou in the case of Modou, Nabou in the case of Mawdo" (Oladele Taiwo 18). The depth of hurt the two women go through is very manifest in their



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correspondence. In her chronicle of the incidents to Aissatou, Ramatoulaye grieved her heart out over the crash of her twenty-five-year marriage to Modou Fall, who suddenly takes her daughter's friend, Binetou, as a second wife. She tells her, "With consternation (sic), I measure the extent of Modou's betrayal. His abandonment of his first family (myself and my children) was the outcome of the choice of a new life. He rejected us. He mapped out his future without taking our existence into account" (*So Long a Letter* 9). Ramatoulaye recounts the reception of the unexpected news of Modou's second marriage, "And the Imam, who had finally got hold of a leading thread, held tightly on to it. He went on quickly as if the words were glowing embers in his mouth: "Yes, Modou Fall, but happily, he is alive for you, for all of us, thanks to God. All he has done is to marry a second wife today. We have just come from the mosque in Grand Dakar where the marriage took place" (*So Long a Letter* 37). The marriage was contracted secretly behind Modou's immediate family, invariably revealing the insensitivity of religion and tradition against women. This development has its attendant psychological impact on the psyche of the members of the immediate family.

Ifeoma Okoye in *Behind the Clouds* presents Ije Apia, who, through her interaction with her friend, Ugo Ushie, relays the depth of bitterness and betrayal by Dozie, her assumed trusted husband. The narrative indicates sudden disclosure of the presence of a strange woman, Virginia in Dozie's life. This revelation comes to Ije as a rude shock as Virginia rudely informs her, "I am Mrs. Apia too. I'm carrying Mr. Apia's baby, and I've come to take my rightful place in his house" (*Behind the Clouds* 75). Ije felt shattered by this revelation. The shocking trend portends that news of betrayal comes not from the men themselves but other sources. The revelation becomes the high point of betrayal of trust, especially, in an assumed harmonious marriage relationship. It is remarkable that at no point in the narrative has there been any indication or suggestion of quarrels between the couples. Chioma Opara in "Female Experience and Narrative Form in Mariama Ba's Novels" observes that in all these situations, there is no reason or explanation for the men to adduce to their action, except ingratitude, saying, therefore, "it would seem that the crux of the marital crises lies in the fact that men never pay the debt they owe their ever-doting wives but hanker after less privileged women who on their part drain their resources" (Agbasiere 34). However, as rightly alluded to, Opara states that the narratives in texts point to the fact that "all women have almost the same fate which religion and unjust legislation have sealed…" (37). Some of these situations come off due to religious and cultural acceptance. Modou Fall succumbs to the practice of Islam, while Dozie's act of commission or omission gets exonerated due to the cultural acceptance of a second wife.

The men's indiscretion is contrary to the wives' show of undeniable love and commitment to their husbands. Ramatoulaye was reminiscing about her love for her husband, "We experienced the tiffs and reconciliations of marital life… I loved Moudou. I compromised with his people. I tolerated his sisters, who too often would desert their own homes to encumber my own" (*So Long a Letter* 19). These inconveniences she accommodates from Modou's relatives tell of her sacrifices and show of love. Ije, on her part, sacrificed a lot for Dozie right before their marriage as she recounts, "I had to keep two jobs to help him pay his university fees. That was in London. My jobs were different ones…" (*Behind the Clouds* 7). Ije has continued to be Dozie's backbone and strong support in his business. It is therefore unarguable why the enormity of the shock of the betrayal for the victims. Thus, when Virginia comes with the shattering news, "Ije was stunned. The room seemed to be spinning round (sic), or was it her head? She wanted to scream, to call the visitor an impostor, a liar. But she braced herself and said as calmly as she could, "There must be a mistake. Maybe you mean another Mr. Apia. She felt the tears welling to her eyes, but she didn't want to weep in front of the sneering woman. She blinked hard to stop the tears" (*Behind the Clouds* 75). Ramatoulaye expressed similar agitation when the sudden news of her husband's marriage reached her: "I forced myself to check my inner agitation. Above all, I must not give my visitors the pleasure of relating my distress" (*So Long a Letter* 38). This inner agitation and great distress mark the reception by the women of the unpalatable news of betrayal. But they showed brevity in their initial reaction and assimilation of the shocking news. This initial inner power exhibited by these women, is referred to in feminist terms as female masculinity. Mustapha describes it as "women who also have malerish (sic) qualities." In *So Long a Letter,* Ba spotlights a typical example of female masculinity in the character of Ramatoulaye. Likewise, Ije's initial absorption of the shock of Virginia's intrusion manifests a feminine quality.

## IV. Coping Strategy

As coping behavior orientates towards a specific purpose, the women in letting out their frustrations lean on their confidants to whom they tell their stories. Ramatoulaye writes her friend Aissatou and "reveals the innermost feelings and experiences of both herself and her friend's in this lengthy letter" (Opara in Agbasiere 28). Ramatoulaye captures in the letter the friendship between her and Aissatou, who has divorced her husband on account of betrayal. She writes, "We walked the same paths from adolescence to maturity, where the past begets the present. My friend, my friend,

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my friend, I call on you three times. Yesterday you were divorced. Today I am (abandoned)…" (*So Long a Letter* 1). The two women have come a long way of friendship and seem to have shared a similar fate of abandonment and betrayal in their marriages. Oladele gives an insight into the predicament of the women saying, "Ramatoulaye and Aissatou consider themselves unable to accept the indignity of living with a second wife. At the height of her crises, Aissatou writes Mawdo to terminate the relationship between them. Ramatoulaye, on the other hand, decides to remain with Modou for as long as possible" (Taiwo 18). However, Ramatoulaye finds succor in reliving her experience with Aissatou, her friend. Ije, at the point of confusion, hurries to her friend Ugo Ushie's flat to relay her plight to her as "It took her no longer than five minutes to get there, but in that little time a multitude of emotions churned up her mind…Ije poured out, more in tears than in words, what had happened in her house a few minutes before" (*Behind the Clouds* 75). Ije could at the instance, share her shock with her friend and confidant, Ugo Ushie.

While confiding in friends provides initial palliative on the victims' temporary insanity, the victims before long allude to their convictions by interpreting and organizing their experiences as coping strategies. Moreso, the individual is attuned "to alter or discard constructs periodically as situations change" (Kelly 360). The victim knows where it hurts more and is poised to make a choice. Agbasiere posits that "when a marriage breaks down, the woman is left (sic) with two choices; divorce or compromise. In *So Long a Letter,* Aissatou divorces Mawdo Ba and moves off with her four sons first to France where she improves on her educational standing and thereafter (sic) to New York where she takes up the job of an interpreter in the Senegalese Embassy" (75). Aissatou takes the option of divorce, and ordinarily expects her friend Ramatoulaye to toe the same line. Feminist critics hailed Aissatou's action as courageous. Agbasiere further records that "critics such as Chukwuma, Acholonu, and Adebayo hail her as a true feminist,… a woman of her action who is ruled by her head, who knows what she wants and goes for it" (75). Agbasiere views the incidents from the feminist point and hails Aissatou as the superwoman. In contrast, Ramatoulaye chooses to stay back in her marriage despite her abandonment. She makes this clear in her letter to Aissatou:

> You may tell me: the path of life is not smooth; one is bruised by its sharp edges. I also know that marriage is never smooth. It reflects differences in character and capacity for feeling. In one couple the man may be the victim of a fickle woman or of a woman shut up in her own preoccupations who rejects all dialogue and quashes all moves towards tenderness" (*So Long a Letter* 55).

In her conviction, she states "Yes, I was well aware of where the right solution lay, the dignified solution. And, to my family's great surprise, unanimously disapproved of by my children, who were under Daba's influence, I chose to remain" (*So Long a Letter* 45). The decision to remain with Modou is personal to Ramatoulaye. She consciously chooses to re-order her psyche from the reaction of walking away from an embattled marriage. Hence, "it is a great tribute to Ramatoulaye's sterling qualities that she can cope with the problems posed by the upbringing of her children in a society in a state of transition, where borrowed and inherited ideas battle for supremacy" (Taiwo 18). Ramatoulaye understands her thought process as she braces herself, saying, "a nervous breakdown walks around the corner for anyone who lets himself wallow in bitterness, little by little, it takes over your whole being" (*So Long a Letter* 41). It is to counter the nervous breakdown that psychological adaption becomes so imperative at salvaging the victim of betrayal, a marked difference between the decisions taken and what is supported by feminism. Aissatou, Ramatoulaye's friend, goes the way of the feminist as she divorces Mawdo Ba and, in her parting letter, concludes "… I am stripping myself of your love, your name. Clothed in my dignity, the only worthy (sic) garment, I go my way" (*So Long a Letter* 32). This option of divorce leaves her still feeling the pains of abandonment.

Ifeoma Okoye records that as Ije contemplates to quit her marriage with Dozie and be on her own, she has another choice, Ugo Ushie's advice not to leave her marriage for another woman. But "She got out of bed and began to pack her things. She must leave the house at once despite Ugo Ushie's advice against such an action" (*Behind the Clouds* 78). Her contemplation confirms the assertion that "it is revealing of African women's recognition that marriage is one option among many" (Augustine 27). As Ije leaves her house running away from the trauma, she does not find peace in her. She tells her friend, "I'm thinking of taking a job. I can't stand the atmosphere of this house anymore. If I get a job, I'll feel better. At least I'll be away from the house for some hours. I'll meet people, and I'll have some hours of peace. I must look elsewhere for solace" (*Behind the Clouds* 96). Here Ije seeks the solution for her problem outside herself. Though her leaving her marriage is a temporary action that does not give her the required peace, she eventually regains her inner stability when she finally decides to reunite with Dozie.

This determination to stay on in the face of daunting challenges becomes an efficient coping option that focuses on the thinking processes and human behavior. The process anchors on "deliberate changes in response to the environment" (Somer, Keinan, and Carmil). Ramatoulaye and Ije, therefore, apply a



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deliberate approach to solving their psychological problem. Although the decisions to stay find favor with some people, it does not go down well with the feminists who think that Ramatoulaye acted out of cowardice as Agbasiere records, saying that " Ramatoulaye does not possess the "gut and courage to assert herself in a society that subjugates her" (75). Here, the issue uppermost in her thought and that of her counterpart, Ije, is about surviving and healing the emotional torture of betrayal. Ramatoulaye chooses what she considers a personal and dignified part that enables her to achieve mental balance as she records her life's experiences. Her action and coping strategy prove that "women who chose to compromise can obtain virtually the same redress as the one who divorces spontaneously" (75). Divorce seems not to offer a settled psychological balance, as it leaves the victim ever reliving the painful state of her condition. The bitterness and hurt remain long after. The effect of separation is exemplified in Ije's endless nervous disorder as long as she stays away from Dozie. She reminds her friend Ugo Ushie of the proverb that "a wound may heal, but the scar remains… and this scar always serves as a reminder to you that you won't allow yourself to be wounded again" (*Behind the Clouds* 117). Thus, the effect of divorce resurrects intermittently and remains a constant reminder of the betrayal. Therefore, divorce or walking out of marriage does not give a soothing effect. Ije regains her composure the moment she accepts Dozie back such that "her cry was a cry without pain" (119). The calming effect of cognitive coping wipes away every tension and heals the soul. Such is the healing effect of deciding to bury the hatchet by a personal decision to cope with the challenges. In adopting the coping strategy, Oladele adduces that:

> Ramatoulaye is an embodiment of all that is noble and dignified in a woman. As an activist she is endowed with a lot of physical and mental energy which she puts to good use. That she remains so mentally alert and accomplishes so much in the unhappy situation in which she finds herself is no mean achievement. She is meant to be an attractive example of how brilliantly a woman can perform when the use of her talent and ability is not obstructed by restrictions and taboos. It is by such constructive achievement, rather than by empty sloganising, that women can prove their mettle and establish a place of honor for themselves in a male-dominated world. (19)

Ramatoulaye's and Ije's positive coping strategies prove to yield a total healing effect. They remain, models of women pushing for a paradigm shift from the stereotypical feminist ideal, to a constructive ideal which help to re-order their lives soon after betrayal.

## V. Conclusion

Marriages are replete with crises. Women make efforts towards changing the pattern of response to any such crises, especially the issues of betrayal. Devising appropriate self-conscious effort such as coping, becomes a paradigm shift from divorce, which has been the usual response to marriage crises. The cognitive adaptation strategy becomes a positive strategy for the victim's psychological revival. Adapting to the challenge involves the understanding of the problem at hand and building up conscious alternatives in handling the matter. Adopting appropriate coping behavior is, therefore "determined by needs inspired by the situation and ordinarily is directed toward bringing about some change in our environment" (Allport 267). What is of paramount concern here in this paper is the conscious coping effort to solving traumatic and psychological challenges.

The presentations of Ramatoulaye and Ije in the texts narratives who choose to remain in their marriages in the face of betrayal by their husbands are commendable as against the idea of divorce as would have ordinarily been the case. However, despite the feminist applause of women who have taken the option to bow out of marriage, it becomes evident that the problem of psychic trauma persists with divorce. Thus, relegating issues of managing marital crises such as betrayal to the domain of psychological coping, not only, heals but fortifies the individual as it creates mental harmony. This strategy becomes "a more radical example of women's liberation and independent action" (Oladele 12). Cognitive adaptation psychological strategy by its merits provides a different new orientation required to sustain women's effort to mental wellbeing as individuals. This paper, therefore, favors a coping approach to replace the constant expectation of the feminist struggles. It behooves on women to construct their personality to believe in their ability to deal with daunting marriage situations, including betrayal.

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