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*So Long A Letter and Zenzele, A Letter for
My Daughter: A Comparative Study*

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of the requirements for a **Master degree in English Language,
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Abstract

This work studies Mariama Bâ's *So Long A Letter* and J. Nozipo Maraire's *Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter* through the lens of African feminism. It also strives to show the feminine condition in post-colonial Africa, in general, and in the studied texts, in particular. The African feminist traits in the selected texts are highlighted and explained. I have also attempted to focus on the form of the works as both novels belong to epistolary tradition. The study revealed that both authors, who come from different cultures and traditions, used the epistolary form and not any other genre to give voice to the African woman.

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To all my teachers, thank you for enlightening my road.

To my dear brother: thanks for providing me with the two novels.

To my friends and classmates.

Dedication

This work is lovingly dedicated to the memory of my grandparents whose wisdom and blessings enlightened my way and kindled my spirit.

To my mother and father, whose love and care gave me courage to pursue my dreams.

To my brother Nabil and my sisters Nabila, Nassima, Myria and Kamilia.

To my dearest and sweetest nephews especially Adam, my soul.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgement.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
General introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Biographical and Historical Backgrounds	
Introduction	8
I. Biographies of the Authors	8
I.1. Mariama Bâ	8
I.1.1. Life and Education	8
I.1.2. Activism	9
I.1.3. Writing Career and Awards	9
I.2. Biography of J. Nozipo Maraire	11
I. 2. 1. Early and Personal Life	11
I. 2. 2. Education	12
I. 2. 3. Writing Career	13
II. Summaries of the Novels	14
II. 1. <i>So Long A Letter</i>	14
II. 2. <i>Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter</i>	17
III. Socio-historical Context of the Novels	21
III. 1. <i>So Long A Letter</i>	21
III. 2. <i>Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter</i>	24
Conclusion	27
Chapter Two: African Feminism:	A
Re-reading of <i>So Long A Letter</i> and <i>Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter</i>	

Introduction	28
1. Feminisms	28
1.1. Womanism versus Feminism	29
1.2. African Feminism	30
1.3. Feminism versus African Feminism	33
2. African Feminist Perspectives in	35
2.1. Mariama Bâ's <i>So Long A Letter</i>	35
2.2. Maraire's <i>Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter</i>	45
Conclusion	53

Chapter Three: Epistolarity in Bâ's *So Long A Letter* and Maraire's *Zenzele, A Letter for My*

<i>Daughter</i> Introduction	55
1. The Epistolary Novel	55
1.2. Historical Background	56
1.3. <i>So Long A Letter</i> and <i>Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter</i>	57
2. The Epistolary Characteristics in <i>So Long A Letter</i> and <i>Zenzele, A letter for My</i> <i>Daughter</i>	60
2.1. Epistolary Mediation	60
2.2. Confidentiality	61
2.3. The Reader	62
2.4. Epistolary Discourse.....	63
Conclusion	63

General Conclusion 65

Bibliography 69

General Introduction

With the liberation of African countries from colonial power came the emergence of renowned female writers who sought to correct the stereotyped image of women in African literature. Women were often portrayed as subordinate and passive in male-authored literature like in the poetry of Leopold Senghor or the fiction of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. This image given to women by male writers was merely another way to demonstrate male authority in African societies, a testimony of the little attention accorded to women and their rights which have always been taken for granted.

Therefore, it was the task of those exploited and subjugated women to raise their voice to break the silence and look for liberation where there was only deprivation. Such a brave emancipation led by African women was a continuation of the white feminist movement that appeared in Europe and America then spread all over the world. African women faced numerous obstacles besides gender oppression; they were locked up in the prison of tradition and considered inferior because of their sex and the color of their skin. Thus, they joined their white counterparts who, aware enough of their marginalization, took steps to balance out their oppression.

The same was for the privileged African female intellectual minority who found that it was their duty to reinvent a new picture of women in post-colonial literature. Writers like Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo and Nawal El Saadawi, to name only a few, were the first authors who took up the challenge to counterbalance male literature 'plagued' by heroism and patriarchy. Through the illustration of women in different experiences, they succeeded to remedy the one-sided presentation of women in African literature, encourage women to reconsider their positions and introduce them to the world of empowerment.

Through their literary production, women writers followed that path and were involved in taking the female cause as the main objective of their writing. Among the most glowing works of literature devoted to the issue of African women's situation we have Mariama Bâ's *So Long A Letter* and J. Nozipo Maraire Zenzele, *A Letter for My Daughter*. While Bâ presents the underprivileged position of women in the Senegalese society, Maraire pictures the various facets that construct the true African womanhood.

As a matter of fact, many reasons stimulated me to lead this comparative study between the two novels. First, they bear numerous issues in common as both draw a picture of post-colonial countries torn between tradition and modernity. Second, they both focus on portraying the contemporary African women and revealing the problems these women face in their societies. Finally, the resemblance in their form is striking; both texts belong to epistolary literature.

Therefore, my aim in this humble research is to demonstrate the various difficulties that African women defy and strive to overcome and suggest ways and solutions that both Bâ and Maraire propose as healing from the multitudes of oppression they receive. Moreover, I will put equal emphasis on the form of the two works and analyze the letter's formal properties used by the two authors.

For the sake of my study, I will rely on African feminism as a theory in my analysis. As I shall analyze the two novels from an African feminist point of view, a reference to white feminism is inevitable. A special emphasis will be put on African feminism as developed and explained by Filomina Steady. I will try to highlight the elements that separate it from white feminism and lay bare the African feminist perspectives in the two novels. African feminists embrace specific beliefs to distinguish themselves from white feminists. Various ideas, as it will be shown in the second chapter, shape their thought and differentiate them from other

feminists. African feminism celebrates women's self-reliance and ability, motherhood and childbearing and complementarity with men.

Throughout this research, I will try to answer the following questions:

1. What kind of feminism do we find in the two novels?
2. Why do Bâ and Maraire resort to this trivialized and neglected form of writing in world literature known as the epistolary?
3. Is this form related to women empowerment or just used as strategy to voice the African women?

Mariama Bâ and J. Nozipo Maraire have been studied by many critics and researchers. Many scholars attempted to explain the meaning and contribution of Bâ's *So Long a Letter* and Maraire's *Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter*. However, no exhaustive comparative study about their use of epistolary form of writing has been done as far as I know. Therefore, this study will explore the parallels between the two works and explain the secret behind this epistolarity that bring them closer.

Because I cannot mention all the works that have studied the two novels, I shall review the most important ones. Irene Assiba D'Almeida's "The Concept of Choice in Mariama Bâ's Fiction" analyzes the importance of the repetitively used word "choice" in Bâ's two major novels *So Long A Letter* and *Scarlet Song*. For D'Almeida, choice is of a crucial role in the development of events and changing situations as she regards it as a "powerful act which gives shape and direction to human existence" (161). Referring to Ramatoulaye and Aissatou in *So Long a Letter*, she shows how choice affects the lives of the two characters starting from their studies, marriage and their reactions in relation to their husbands' betrayals. The scholar

believes that making reasonable choices helped the characters to overcome their problems and achieve self-realization (165).

For D'Almeida, Bâ belongs to the generation of female writers "whose writing is characterized by a certain malaise" (167); this means according much consideration to values and traditions at the same time rejecting the ones that may oppress women. This is well presented through Ramatoulaye in *So Long A Letter* when faced with the issue of modernity. She bases her choices on tradition, at the same time, she welcomes the ideas brought by the new generation and in the way she educates her children through a combination of comprehension and tolerance (ibid).

Edris Makward's in "Marriage, Tradition and Women's Pursuit of Happiness" affirms that even if the two major treated themes in *So Long A Letter* and *Scarlet Song* are respectively polygamy and the failure of mixed marriages, the actual theme is women's pursuit of happiness(273). To support his view, he analyses Ramatoulaye's reaction to Aissatou's rejection of polygamy believing that Ramatoulaye is not against polygamy or traditions but celebrates her friend's courage and determination to be happy (ibid). Makward believes that Bâ insists on the idea of complementarity between men and women in assuring familial and social happiness (ibid) and this is clearly apparent in several passages in her works. With a more focus on *So Long A Letter* and Bâ's vision of tradition, he emphasizes: "Mariama Bâ did not attack tradition blatantly, but she expressed her disapproval of certain glaring abuses of tradition which impede progress" (274), this means she is only against practices that erase women and society's prosperity. According to Makward, even if this ideal is expressed by other African male writers like Albert Memmi and Ousmane Sembène, Bâ was the first African writer who accentuated the equality and peace between partners (279).

Ann McElaney-Johnson in “Epistolary Friendship: La prise de parole in Mariama Bâ’s *So Long a Letter*” studied the epistolary form of *So Long* as a distinguishing genre of writing in contemporary African literature. Through the characters of Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, he emphasized the vital role of exchanging letters in reinforcing their friendship though the distance between them. In this context, the scholar asserts that “their correspondence bridges distance and time. It protects intimacy and possesses a healing power that obscures physical separation” (117). The critic highlights the power that a letter represents in making distances short and getting correspondents closer. According to Johnson, the efficacy of the epistolary form in the novel lies not only in self-relieving as a diary but it serves as a means of empowerment to women as well. Through recounting her shared memories and experiences with Aissatou, Ramatoulaye explores the suffering of the Senegalese women and her letter is merely “a weapon against 30 years of silence” as Johnson puts it (118). Here Ramatoulaye does not seek comfort or help from her friend but rather she raises her voice and takes women cause as her major concern. The letter is an “affirmation of solidarity among women” (ibid). Accordingly, Bâ invites all women to help each other to overcome their miserable conditions and glorifies female friendship as the only trustful refuge that women can inhabit.

“Stuck on *So Long A Letter: Senegalese Women’s Writings and the Specter of Mariama Bâ*” by Maramé Gueye is another significant work that analyzed the content of Mariama Bâ’s *So Long A Letter* and focused on the influential aspects of western education and feminism on the author and her work. Through the process of the novel, Gueye stressed that Mariama Bâ’s influence by western culture is very clear as the fruit of her French education. In a “quest for a Western sympathy” (3) Bâ does the effort to explain Wolof words and traditions so as to be understood by a wider western audience. Another aspect of influence is shown through Ramatoulaye and Aissatou’s feminism, rejection of polygamy and traditions and belief in romantic love. Bâ feeds the western stereotypes about Islam and the

Senegalese culture as her major characters complain of a religion and rituals that ignore them. Both Bâ and Ramatoulaye consider French education as an “enlightenment” and “look at their culture through corrupted eyes” (6-7). They seek refuge in the western culture so as to escape the values and attitudes that deny them their proper place.

Equally significant is Rosemary Michele Harrington’s thesis entitled “Rejecting The Epistolary Woman: Modern Female Protagonists in Mariama Bâ’s *Une Si Longue Lettre* and Ying Chen’s *Les Lettres Chinoises*”. The paper shows how the two Francophone authors (Bâ and Chen) are influenced by Guilleragues’s 1669 *Lettres Portugaises* as a product of their French education. Having a sufficient background about French culture and literature, Bâ was able to imitate the 17th and 18th century epistolary form of writing. However, this influence, explains the author of this dissertation, is restricted only to the choice of epistolary novel dealing with betrayal as a major theme. According to Harrington, Bâ was creative in giving another face to “epistolary woman” unlike the one shown in *Lettres Portugaises*. In this respect, Harrington comments about *So Long A Letter* and *Les Lettres Chinoises* as being “modern representation of the classic epistolary narrative of suffering, amorous women and also as re-evaluations that eventually serve to advocate a more realistic and (at times) more feminist portrayal of a new Epistolary Woman” (4). Harrington draw attentions to the progress that the epistolary woman has made through time from disempowerment and devaluation to achieve self awareness and realization.

Another landmark in the literature about Mariama Bâ is Angelita Reyes’s “Crossing Bridges and Memory-Telling: *Une Si Longue Lettre*” where Reyes analyzes epistolarity in *So Long*. According to her, the epistolary form of writing helps the protagonist Ramatoulaye to refer not only to her personal suffering but includes other women’s situations as well. In this context, she asserts: “the epistolary voice and the voice of memory-telling in letters [*So Long A Letter* are representative multiple voices of the irreversible currents of global feminisms”

(147), thus Ramatoulaye does not exclusively recount her life as a victim of tradition but voices other women across boundaries and cultures. Reyes regards Bâ's novel as a diary possessing a healing power through the act of memory telling and confinement, she explains: "Taking advantage of the epistolary form, Mariama Bâ contextualizes immediacy, intimacy, and the wide movement of time encapsulated in a memoir. The letter (addressed to Aissatou) is also a *mémoire* because it provides textual healing for Ramatoulaye" (153).

A more recent PhD dissertation entitled *Writing About Writing: African Women's Epistolary Narratives* by Suzanne Marrie Ondrus (August 2014) exposes the literary techniques used by six female African writers including Mariama Bâ and J. Nozipo Maraire, and their usefulness in the emotional engagement and the creation of intimacy between the author and reader. Analyzing the epistolary form of *So Long A Letter* and *Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter*, Ondrus asserts that epistolaries "which are written in first person, replicate the heart, mind and creative spirit enabling one to actually experience the narrator's experience" (1). This means that the epistolary novel with a more focus on [Bâ and Maraire's works] is a technique allowing the reader to be emotionally engaged with the events of the story and share the author's inner thoughts and feelings.

The present research work is divided into three chapters. In the first one, I shall introduce the two authors' biographies and provide summaries to the two novels. Subsequently, I will provide with the socio-historical contexts of the two novels. In the second chapter, I will explore feminism and focus on African feminism. After analyzing the two novels through African feminism, I will expose the African feminist perspectives in the two novels. In the last chapter, I will define the epistolary novel and furnish a historical background of this literary genre. I shall analyze the epistolary devices used by the two authors and explain the aim behind its use.

Chapter One:

Biographical and Historical Backgrounds

Introduction:

This chapter is devoted to the biographies of the two authors and the summaries of their two novels. However, this part of my dissertation strives not only to introduce the writers and their works, but also aims to delve more into their lives to disclose the marks of resemblance and inspiration between them. Moreover, I found it inescapable to shed light on the history of the two authors' countries, Senegal and Zimbabwe, as both received and share a close colonial affinity. Thereby, I intend to study the historical contexts of these two novels to locate and situate their settings and highlight the elements and aspects that unite and differentiate them. The literary and historical commonalities and divergences will be examined and clarified throughout this chapter.

I. Biographies of the Authors:

I.1. Mariama Bâ:

I.1.1. Life and Education:

Mariama Bâ was born on April, 17th in 1929, in Dakar, into an educated and a well-to-do Senegalese family. Her father was a career civil servant who became a minister of health in 1956 while her grandfather was an interpreter in the French occupation regime. When her mother died, she was raised by her maternal grandparents in a traditional Muslim milieu. Though the disagreement of her grandparents who saw no necessity in educating her, Bâ had the privilege to attend Koranic school and be introduced to French education and culture. It was her father who insisted and encouraged her to carry on a higher education unlike other girls of her age who were supposed to stay home and help in different tasks. In expressing her

gratitude to her father, she declared in an interview with Ousmane Touré Dia in 1979: “thanks to my father, I have been to school [...], normally I should have grown up in the minds of this family without ever having gone to school, my only education being a traditional one including initiation to rites” (Dia 13, my translation).

At her primary school now called Berthe Maubert and at that time Ecole des Filles, she was soon noticed to be an exceptionally gifted student. Unaware of her abilities at the age of 14, Bâ chose to be a secretary just like her classmates. It was her headmistress, Mrs. Maubert, who removed her from this group and encouraged her to take the examination entrance to the Ecole Normale for girls in Rufisque in 1943. Once she triumphantly passed the exam, it was once again her beloved headmistress who persuaded Bâ’s family to give her an opportunity to explore her talent (Dia 13). Mrs. Legoff, the headmistress of the Ecole Normale of Rufisque was highly admired by Bâ for her vision of Africa’s future and her education principles which marked her throughout her life. She declared when praising her: “she is a woman of heart as well as of mind” (ibid).

After her graduation from the Ecole Normale of Rufisque in 1947, Bâ had to overcome the sad loss of her grandmother. She worked as a teacher for twelve years but was forced to resign for poor health to become a regional inspector. Bâ met the young Bassirou and then married Ablaye Ndiaye, a medical practitioner but none of these unions lasted for long time. She then married Obèye Diop, a parliament member, with whom she had nine children. Once divorced, she was left to care for her children alone. She died in 1981 after a long illness.

I.1.2. Activism:

Neither her personal disappointments nor her health decline could deter Mariama Bâ from being engaged with social issues of her day as she was a very active member in women’s

associations in Senegal. Her contribution was unapproachable and in addition to promoting education, Bâ defended women's rights, delivered speeches and wrote articles in local newspapers. Among those associations in which she participated were: Les Soeurs Optimistes Internationales, Amicale Germaine Legoff and Cercle Femina (Dia 13).

I.1.3. Writing Career and Awards:

Mariama Bâ fell in love with writing since her childhood as her father made her familiar with reading by bringing her books at each return from his voyages. However, this passion started to blossom when she encountered two leading inspirations that determined her profession: Mrs. Maubert who provided her with basic grammatical rules once a student and Mrs. Legoff who offered her guidance. Equally great were the encouragements from her friends and Annette Mbaye d'Erneville, an ancient journalist at Radio Senegal who contributed to the publication of her first work *So Long A Letter* (ibid).

In an interview with Ernest N. Emenyonu, Chinua Achebe revealed that Bâ told him in 1980 that “she started writing after reading *Things Fall Apart*” (qtd in Ondrus, 40). Just like the young Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Bâ was fascinated by the heroic story of Okonkwo. However, no matter how many authors may have influenced her, she perceived this mixture of inspirations as “a bee flitting from flower to flower, sucking out the liquid, but the honey [her work] is really the bee's own unique product” (qtd in Ondrus, 40).

Bâ's first work *So Long A Letter* was published in 1979. The novel is written in the form of a lengthy letter from Ramatoulaye to her best friend Aissatou to share some youth memories as both are victims of polygamy. Though polygamy is considered as the central theme of the novel, themes like education, tradition, religion and culture are highly presented. The novel gained wide acclaim and admiration and was the first African novel to win the

prestigious Noma Award in 1980. It was also recognized as one of Africa 100's best books of the 20th century.

Other works include: *La Fonction Politique des Littératures Africaines Ecrites* and *Scarlet Song* which gained international attention and was published shortly after Bâ's death (1981). The novel is about the complexities of mixed marriages and tells the story of an African man named Ousmane who takes a European wife, Mireille. The text illustrates how traditions and cultural differences feed the decline of their union.

I. 2. J. Nozipo Maraire:

I.2.1. Early and Personal Life:

J. Nozipo Maraire, whose name means "the mother of gifts" in Ndebele and last name "meat eaters" in Shona, was born in 1964 in Mangula, Zimbabwe (Ondrus, 182). Like Mariama Bâ, she was the daughter of a highly educated family as her father, Dr Nkosana Arthur Maraire, was a college professor, banker and tobacco farmer while her mother, Dr Angelina Mbuya, was a pediatrician. She grew up and spent her early years in Harare, Zimbabwe, but was forced to go abroad because of the war that broke out at that time leaving her grandparents, parents and family participating in the liberation struggle.

Maraire was only eight when her parents divorced. Moreover, she lived with her father and it took her over 22 years to reconnect with her mother again. However, the absence of the one who brought her to life did not stop her chasing after her childhood dreams. She had her body and mind full of energy and determination; and was able to study, live and work in different countries like Canada, Wales, USA and Columbia. This helped her much to learn and even be fluent in many languages including Shona, English, French, Spanish, and Norwegian.

In 1994 Maraire met Allen Chiura, a urologist from Zimbabwe and a childhood friend whom she married in 1998 and with whom she had four children. Their marriage was celebrated according to both Western and traditional African norms; a Shona ceremony with Lobola (bride price) and a large Roman Catholic wedding in Zimbabwe. She regarded her union with her husband as enlightening and empowering for her. She has a home in Zimbabwe and currently lives in New Haven, Connecticut.

I.2.2. Education:

Maraire was only five when she informed her father of her decision to become a neurosurgeon, an ambition greater than her age that she triumphantly fulfilled crossing many ordeals starting from her first experience at missionary schools (elite schools). Once back to Zimbabwe, at a period when racism and fear reached their height, she attended a white school. This experience she did not really appreciate when she revealed: “It was horrid, the air seethed with anger and hate” (qtd in Ondrus, 183).

Maraire attended Atlantic college in Wales from 1981 to 1983 where she obtained her international Baccalaureate (high school degree). Few years later, she received a B.A in biology from Harvard (Boston). She also got a medical degree from Columbia in 1992 and was specialized in neurosurgery at Yale from 1992 to 1999, and at the same time, obtained a master degree in public health. She is considered “the second woman to have completed neurosurgical training at Yale since its program began in 1925” and “the only black female neurosurgeon in the African continent” (qtd in Ondrus, 184).

When questioned about the choice of her profession, Maraire said that “it sounded like the most difficult thing I could do”(ibid) to highlight that her job was not a mere coincidence but a dream born in her heart, nurtured and pursued through challenges and sacrifices. This also, according to her, was what could distinguish an African from a western citizen. Being an

African to her was synonymous to extra duties. This is to illustrate that Africans are not only that savage and cruel people but can be, though the difficulties they encounter, great intellectuals.

As famous as she was, Maraire has always wished to become a doctor to contribute in the health care of her native country. Indeed, she invested much time and energy in establishing organizations, building hospitals and providing with free and basic medical equipments either in Zimbabwe or abroad. She worked with and for many development agencies including the World Health Organization, the Norwegian Aid Institute and Synergos Institute. She was awarded a Clinical Fellowship Award by the Congress of Neurological Surgeons in pediatric neurosurgery in New York City. She was also one of the winners of the British Airways Entrepreneur Face to Face Award in 2010.

I.2.3. Writing Career:

Though overwhelmed by her responsibilities, being a wife and a mother, a housewife and a doctor, she still managed to fetch some hours in her overcrowded days to write down words and shape a beautifully crafted novel. Maraire regarded writing as a second part of her, a part where she could find equilibrium and absorb the pressure she received during her residency at Yale. In this context, she stated that [writing] gave her peace of mind, it also helped her to express her feelings that she could not express in her job (187). She said: “Zenzele was my spring, each word writ with joyous surge of delirious freedom of expression. It completed me” (ibid).

Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter, the author’s first and only novel, was published in 1996. Like *So Long A Letter*, the book is written in the form of a long letter from a dying mother (Shiri) to her daughter (Zenzele) to challenge her beliefs. Many themes like: history,

racism, dreams, freedom, family and love are tackled in the novel. The work was the New York Times Notable Book of the year 1996 and Boston Globe Bestseller.

Just like *Mariama Bâ*, it was astonishing to learn that Maraire's greatest source of inspiration for *Zenzele* was her father. Through receiving letters from her father during her voyages, Maraire thought of writing a lasting work where to gather all the life lessons and experiences her father taught her. Other literary influences on Maraire's *Zenzele* include the African-American poet Maya Angelou and other male writers like Somerset Maugham and Chinua Achebe (Ondrus 186).

II. Summaries of the Novels:

II.1. *So Long A Letter*:

Mariama Bâ's *So Long A Letter* recounts the stories of two women, lifelong friends witnessing the passage of Senegal from late colonialism to a new modern nation. The novel's story is represented in one single and long letter written from Ramatoulaye, a recently widowed Senegalese school teacher, to her best friend Aissatou living in the USA and working as an interpreter in the Senegalese Embassy. During her seclusion period called in the customs Mirasse, Ramatoulaye resorts to writing as the only way to express her deep grief and mourn her dead husband Modou. However, her letter is a sequence of reminiscences; some wistful and some bitter memories shared with her beloved friend.

As the story opens, Ramatoulaye tells about Modou's abrupt death from a heart attack and goes further to narrate the whole ceremonies performed for her husband's burial. As a devout Muslim woman, she finds comfort in Koran verses, refreshing baths and prayers. Moreover, she goes on to criticize some disrespectful behaviors from her visitors and family members and some traditions she finds excessively exaggerating.

Through flashbacks, Ramatoulaye goes back to the past to recall the joyful memories of youth when both, she and Aissatou, were students in the French school. Moreover, she longs for the times when, as teachers, they met their husbands Modou and Mawdo, a lawyer and doctor respectively, whom they married without their families' approval. Aissatou, the goldsmith's daughter, was underestimated by her family-in-law because she was not considered a suitable wife to the son of a princess. Ramatoulaye's mother, in contrast, was never satisfied by the choice of her daughter and considered their love too good to be true. Both couples, however, lived happily for long years contrary to people's expectations.

Nevertheless, their fairy tales come to an end when their husbands decide to take co-wives. Mawdo, Aissatou's husband, is forced to marry Little Nabou to satisfy his mother (Aunt Nabou) who, according to tradition, should take her niece as a daughter-in-law. Mawdo was in a dilemma and didn't know whether to obey his sick mother or stay faithful to the woman he loved. In Modou's case there was neither obligation nor dilemma. Regardless of his wife's feelings and children's love, he makes his choice and takes Binetou, his oldest daughter's classmate, as his second wife.

Ramatoulaye and Aissatou take different paths in relation to these betrayals. Aissatou completely rejects polygamy; she writes a letter to Mawdo informing him of her will to divorce and intention to leave. Without hesitation, she moves abroad with her four children to start a new life keeping indifferent and calm while Ramatoulaye chooses to remain legally married to Modou. Ramatoulaye prepares herself for equal sharing with Binetou but Modou ignores her and cuts off both family ties and financial support. His desertion obliges her to get used to the new life she is imposed to live. She is overburdened by the numerous tasks and responsibilities and is left to care for her twelve children alone.

Ramatoulaye begins to find her own self and prospers when she bravely takes up the challenge and goes to the cinema alone. She starts her journey towards independence through learning to drive the car that Aissatou generously offered her. Both realize once again the strength and superiority of friendship over love. While the love they cherished and treasured for long vanished, their sisterhood and solidarity blossomed.

Ramatoulaye's path towards freedom is drawn when she refuses to yield to her brother-in-law's, Tamsir, marriage proposal. As a response to thirty years of silence, she raises her voice and decides herself of her fate. She even rejects Daouda Dieng, an honest friend who won her mother's confidence and with whom she had sturdy discussions about women and politics. She writes him a letter where she explains her sorrow for not being able to accept his offer even if she has a great esteem for him, an esteem which, according to her, is not sufficient for marriage. Though she was deceived and devastated by the love of her youth, she still believes in her ideal that there might be no union and no happiness outside love.

Ramatoulaye reveals her bewilderment by the task of motherhood. She is the father and mother, the one to take decisions. She guides and advises, punishes and yells too. She explains to her youngest children the importance of being educated, and warns Daba of the surprises life can reserve if ever her husband abandons her. However, she becomes paralyzed after Farmata's confirmation of young Aissatou's pregnancy and when she discovers that her other daughters were smoking. She often refers to some wisdom lessons and advice inherited from her mother and grandmother to support her in finding solutions. She successfully manages to resolve each problem and is an epitome of courage, patience and love.

Here in her mourning, she looks forward to meet Aissatou once again. She concludes her letter with a hopeful end for both she and her country. She insists on the necessity of

contribution and complementarity between men and women to build fruitful families and societies. Though disappointments and humiliation that ruined her life, she informs Aissatou that she remains optimistic and strong.

II.2. *Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter:*

J. Nozipo Maraire's *Zenzele, A Letter For My Daughter* tells the story of a Zimbabwean mother who tries to challenge her daughter's beliefs. The novel is represented in one long letter from Shiri, also called Amai Zenzele, to her beloved daughter Zenzele, a student at Harvard. Through this beautifully articulated letter, Amai Zenzele shares her own experiences and wisdom with her daughter who has rejected tradition for the opportunity of western culture. She tries to remind her daughter of her roots and emphasize the beauty and wonder of her country. Through reminiscences of her growing up experiences, from the innocence of childhood to the giddiness of adolescence love, maturity to undiagnosed strength-sapping, she tells of her own evolution and the one of her family which parallels with Zimbabwe's struggle for independence.

Sitting in the kitchen enjoying her sight and remembering the discussions she once had with her daughter, Shiri remembers the day Zenzele announced her plans to study abroad and described all the dispositions of her marvelous university. Amai Zenzele, a very learned and sensitive woman, finds that it is time for her to answer Zenzele's numerous questions and explain to her things she didn't dare to pronounce before.

Shiri recounts her life as being the eldest in her family helping her mother and making her tasks easier. Raised in Chakowa, where she and her younger sister Linda used to hide in their underground cave, bathe in the Umvumvumu River and spend their sweetest memories, she felt awkward that her daughter was ashamed by the village of her ancestors and preferred to join her friend Petranella's family to spend vacation in town instead of visiting her

grandmother. Amai Zenzele remains centered in that particular African world and still cherishes and treasures every single part of Chakowa; she wants her daughter to be a part of that side that fascinated her and shaped her strong personality.

The narrator goes on to reveal the other reason of her refusal to let Zenzele spend her holidays with Petranella and explains that she only intervened to protect her from this spoiled friend who has neither respect nor dignity. Through Petranella, Shiri illustrates the post independent generation of Zimbabwean and African children who are exposed to western culture and find themselves torn between tradition and modernity. She also blames their parents who, according to her, contribute in their children's decline through their lack of guidance.

As she finally succeeds to change Zenzele's mind about holidays, Shiri recalls the conversation about some African traditions like Lobola on which she took the pleasure to explain the meaning. However, she remembers how she remained speechless each time Zenzele criticized some customs like women's appellation after marriage and childbearing. She also gives an entire explanation of what is an African woman imagining what would have been her mother's definition, and even tells about the words her mother-in-law pronounced on the eve of her wedding about the beauty of the woman's body and its evolution through time, wisdom words that left her in total confusion and took her decades to understand.

Amai Zenzele tells later the story of a talented student, called Mukoma Byron, educated at Oxford. Once in England, he becomes disillusioned after years of nostalgia and gives up his dream of becoming a doctor. When his mother begs him on her deathbed to come back, he returns on a visit, married to an English woman, too arrogant to go to see his dying mother in their bush village. To the great astonishment and disappointment of his close relatives, he became a foreigner in his own land and easily erased his origins. Through

Mukoma Byron, Shiri pictures the issue of the brain drain, of all African intellectuals who go abroad and find the burden of returning to their lands with triumph too heavy, and instead of exploiting the white men's knowledge, they become swallowed in their new way of life and bury their identity.

Shiri recalls Zenzele's numerous questions about her parents' trips abroad as her departure to America became official. Her husband and she (Shiri) saw that it was their duty to nurture their daughter with African culture and inform her of the western world and the absurdity of racism there. Through their own experiences, Zenzele's father tells the story of the American lady who mockingly wanted drums, and her mother tells of her awful experiences in Warsaw and Geneva. They cleverly share these tales to prepare their daughter to this kind of humiliation, and advise her to be tolerant explaining that westerners' stereotypes are merely due to their ignorance of African history and culture.

A counterbalance to Mukoma Byron's story is the tale of an afro-American girl named Mary William Smith and nicknamed Sister Africa, the daughter of a legendary political organizer who disappears after her birth, leaving her forever obsessed with her mysterious origins. Shiri is so touched by this brave and tireless girl who did everything and finally succeeded to find her father and her true identity.

Though it is not usually discussed in African culture, Amai Zenzele wants her daughter to discover that beautiful and mysterious event called love. She remembers the tale her father told her when she was in love with a young man. The tale is about a young woman, happily married to a kindly but older husband; she murders him and her son to flee with a lover who abandoned her later. Her father chose this tale to serve as a warning about the perils of obsessive love and Shiri found it worthy to impart it to Zenzele. Amai Zenzele goes on to share two love experiences that marked her life and shaped her beliefs. The first is her

adventure with the sculptor, the unknown and less crossed love, as she describes it, that life could not satisfy as fate took another direction. She reveals her joy and hope, madness and restlessness soon replaced by loss and hopelessness as this innocent love prematurely died at its defeat against God's will. The second is, just as her wise mother has predicted, her meeting with the firebrand activist lawyer who became a good husband and father to Zenzele. Shiri considers her marriage enlightening and empowering to her and her mother's wisdom as a powerful reference to guide her in her journey of life. Equally moving is the story of her cousin Rudo, married to a wretched drunkard, who beats her for the most futile reasons. Each time she is beaten by her husband, she flees to the house of Shiri's parents where she is washed and soothed, but when he comes to fetch her, she goes with him without any hesitation or complaint believing that it is her fate and there is no means to change it.

In addition to talking about her personal life and relatives' experiences, Amai Zenzele's major concern lies in teaching her daughter to be sensitive to her heritage and aware of her responsibilities towards her country. She talks of her husband, her cousin Tinawu, a freedom fighter and spy, and her sister Linda, two eerily brave heroines who participated in the struggle for independence. She evokes different social conditions, the dark years of colonialism, and the transitional period of her youth, when the dream of an Africa for Africans came true.

Back to Chakowa, Amai Zenzele comes to her ancestors' home to seek peace and reflection. Sitting on her father's chair, she is reminded of the song he used to sing and wonders whether people will meet again after death. She talks of the power of love spirit and recalls how her mother used to visit daily her father's grave and reestablished their connection. She recounts a too fascinating story of child lovers, kept apart by their parents, who commit suicide and are separately buried by the mourning families. As her health

weakens, she goes to her parents' graveyard to inform them of her growth. She invites Zenzele to go there so as to carry on the path drawn by her ancestors. She talks about her life through a perspective of an old and wise woman who, looking back at her choices, is persuaded that her greatest contribution is her daughter, the one who reconciled her with her God.

III. Socio-historical Contexts:

III.1. *So Long A Letter*:

So Long A Letter is set during the passage of Senegal from late colonialism to its liberation from French colonial rule. Bâ refers to this period saying:

It was the privilege of our generation to be the link between two periods in our history, one of domination, the other of independence. We remained young and efficient, for we were the messengers of a new design. With independence achieved, we witnessed the birth of a republic, the birth of an anthem and the implantation of a flag. (25)

However, the novel is neither a revelation of the callousness of colonialism and the long struggle for freedom, nor a celebration of the greatness and majesty of independence. It is more about the transformations and consequences that French presence engendered in this modern nation after a settlement that lasted for centuries.

III.1.1. Senegal under the French Rule:

Under the pretended "civilizing mission" often referred to as "the white man's burden" in Rudyard Kipling's famous poem, France, just like the other countries which participated in the (1884-1885) Berlin conference shaping the scramble for Africa, saw specific strategies to

ensure its presence in its colonies. Through “direct rule” and “assimilation policy”, the French maintained a good position to acquire and keep more possessions in Africa.

Since the establishment of St Louis Fort by the 17th century, French interest in West Africa grew greater and clearer. However, over 1800s, at time French settlement remained autonomous, French population and culture have already expanded in urban centers like Gorée and St Louis (Fenwick 11). The French revolution of 1848, marked as the turning point in the French history gave birth to the principle of equality between Africans and Europeans.

Through this typically French policy known as “assimilation”, the Senegalese enjoyed some equality rights that tied them to the French even after independence. Moreover, this equality manifested itself in different arenas granting the Senegalese a representation in the Chambre des deutes in 1884 and creating a general council and municipal councils. In the same year, residents of urban areas were given French citizenship and accorded voting rights. Reforms were also meticulously made to tailor a culturally French-based educational system (mission schools) to the Senegalese to keep their minds bind together with the French principals (ibid)

The Senegalese did not endure humiliations of “Africans Only” and “Europeans Only” or “Africans and Dogs Not Allowed” signs for the French were not as racist as the British in their colonies. However, the Senegalese were deprived from their identities with customs ridiculed and suppressed and their language raised and banned. The assimilation policy aimed at shaping the Senegalese in the French image ensuring Senegal’s integration and safeguarding a peaceful relationship between the two nations with no claim for self-rule.

III.1.2. Leopold Senghor and the Rise of Negritude:

The coming of Leopold Senghor into political life as a president diverted the relationship between the two countries through his establishment of the Bloc Démocratique Sénégalais)

and his ideals of Negritude by which he and his fellow black intellectuals asserted the inherent worth of blackness. This movement which is both cultural and literary “called for a return to African values and culture and countered the claim of French cultural universalism” (qtd in Fenwick, 13).

The Bloc Démocratique Sénégalais dominated politics in Senegal in 1950s. Following the introduction of Charles De Gaulle into power in late 1958, Senegal became an autonomous republic within the French community. In January 1959, Senegal joined the Sudanese republic (French Sudan now Mali) to form Mali federation. Negotiations for independence were held and received many cooperation accords from neighboring countries. Senegal gained independence in August, 1960.

III.1.3. Senegal as an Independent Republic:

Colonialism had a powerful and lasting impact on Africa. The implication is that Africa can neither be explained nor understood without understanding the continent’s colonial experience. The character of the contemporary African states had been determined by its colonial origins. Actually, post-independence is an arena of great political disillusionment and social corruption and foreign dominated economy. The white colonial masters have simply metamorphosed into their own natives, the elite few who took control.

Despite the great political disillusionment that swept most African independent states, Senegal in contrast, remains the longest serving democracy in Africa. There has never been a coup d’état in Senegal which is exceptional considering that coups or civil wars have affected almost all other countries in the West African region. Despite all these facts, Leopold democracy was challenged several times by student and trade unions till the transition from one party democracy to multi-party democracy in 1976. Leopold was reelected respectively in

the elections of (1968, 1973 and 1978). The shining political atmosphere in post-independent Senegal was confirmed by the withdrawal of Leopold from presidency by his own will.

Independence of Senegal from French rule marked not the end of colonialism but the beginning of a new form of imperialism called neo-colonialism. It represented the introduction of new methods of influence in politics, education, defense and economy. France felt the same atmosphere that existed before independence. French companies conducted workshops that cleaned out Senegal. Beside economy, neo-colonialism manifested itself through the dominance of French language and culture. A wide range of writers and intellectuals grew charmed with the ideals set by colonialism. Through their subversive discourse, they called for a new Senegal, and the introduction of western values in education and society. Neo-colonialism is generally the high degree of economic, technological and cultural influence over colony's economic affairs and cultural contours.

III.2. *Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter:*

Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter is set in post-colonial Zimbabwe, which emerged out of the former British colony of southern Rhodesia. However, the novel evokes the British colonial climate from the early Cecil Rhodes conquest and the hard liberation struggle shaped by brave men and women till its independence in 1980.

III.2.1. Zimbabwe of Cecil Rhodes:

In late 19th century, the driving force behind British expansion in Africa was Cecil Rhodes. Rhodes arrived in Africa very young. Soon he made his way as a successful entrepreneur, and grew very rich owing two companies named "De Beers Consolidated Mines" and "Gold Fields of South Africa" that dominated the already immensely valuable South African export of diamonds and gold. Under the leadership of Cecil Rhodes, who planned strategies to obtain agreements from King Lobengula about the Rudd Concession aiming at extracting mining

rights from Zimbabwe, the British established their first settlement in Matabeleland in the 1880s. Being easy to convince, Lobengula approved the Rudd Concession and granted Rhodes's men the right to mine the land. In September 1880, the English settlers raised their first flag in a town named Salisbury (now Harare).

Between 1885 and 1895, Cecil Rhodes had already acquired Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Northern Rhodesia (Zambia now). He also gave protection to Malawi and almost took Mozambique and Shaba (Congo now) from the Portuguese. His ambition did not stop here. To extend the British colonial rule from Cape Town to Cairo, he set up a private company under the name of The British South Africa Company, and applied for a royal charter giving him the right to administer the area comprising Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi.

A rebellion followed in 1896-1897 involving the Ndebele, founded by the father of Lobengula, and Shona kingdoms embodying the great tribal uprising against the British. Soon, British South African Company knocked down all the challenging tribes and placed the whole region under its control. From 1890 to 1923, the British South Africa Company set up a colonial administration. The first European settlers in Rhodesia felt from the start that the government should be in their hands. They insisted on having a voice in the colony's legislative assembly. In 1914, when the company's charter was nearing its close, they persuaded the British government to extend the charter of the company for ten years. As that charter was drawing to its expiration, a referendum was held by only the European community. The referendum witnessed the triumph of those who voted for a self-rule over those who voted for the colony's attachment to South Africa.

In 1923, the colony of Rhodesia became a de facto self-governing colony allowing the local white residents to run it without interference from colonial office in London. Local

white settlers expected independence just like whites in South Africa. In 1950, a federation called the Central African Federation composed of Malawi (Nyasaland then), Zambia and Zimbabwe, and was inaugurated. It was a self-governing colony, with its own assembly and prime minister First Lord Malvern, and from 1956 Roy Welensky.

III.2.2.From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe:

Rhodesia remained a self-governing for almost three decades. Due to the growing pressure which came from the north, the Federation was officially dissolved on 31 December 1963. Throughout three decades of self-governing, Rhodesia knew a deeply rooted institutionalized racism. Since 1923, Rhodesia was seen as the home of violent racism. The white minority took power and brushed aside any possibility for sharing power with the blacks. The white minority lied crucially behind the warm support that was unreservedly provided by the racist South African government since 1948. As time progressed, the white minority grew uncomfortable in preserving its solid position because of many reasons.

First, the withdrawal of South Africa from the Commonwealth in 1961 increased the horrible international opinion toward the racist policies in Rhodesia, and this was closely associated with the gradual vanishing support of South African government to Rhodesian government. Second, the African nations who had recently received independence demanded that a serious decision ought to be taken in order to halt what was going on in Rhodesia. Consequently, Britain felt a duty to solve what became historically known as “Rhodesian Crisis”. Third, the relinquishment of Portugal from Mozambique in 1975 increased drastically the isolation of Rhodesia. By the late of 1970s, Ian Smith and his government, despite their previous attempts to maintain the status-quo, became quite convinced that they cannot indulge their racist policies any longer than the end of the decade. The British Government issued invitations to all parties to attend a peace conference at Lancaster House. Ian Smith was

present at the conference which took place in late 1979 to launch a process of negotiations that proved later to be quite long as it lasted three months. Ultimately, the conference resulted in the Lancaster house agreement. This meant that Rhodesia became again a British colony. A year later, Britain granted independence to a black majority government.

Conclusion:

Both Bâ and Maraire are great writers who, through these spectacular achievements, wanted to give something back to Africa. They both draw a picture of post-colonial African countries torn between tradition and modernity. Though the tone of their writing is distinctly African, their messages are universal. Both were inspired and paved the way to other writers to keep African literature alive and women's place influential. We cannot overlook the fervor and tenacity, through which Bâ and Maraire pictured the realities of their environments, portrayed the hard lives of women there and the way they urged them to find self-recognition. These same African women, battered by their spouses, excluded by their societies and incarcerated in the prison of tradition are invited by Bâ and Maraire, throughout these beautifully crafted novels, to join the world of empowerment relying on sisterhood and motherhood, two main beliefs of African feminism that will be explored in the following chapter.

Chapter Two:

African Feminism: A Re-reading of *So Long* and *Zenzele*

Introduction:

My aim in this chapter is to investigate feminism and compare it to African feminism. I will also show how it varies from 'womanism' born as a result of historical and cultural differences. As I shall analyze the two novels through the theory of African feminism, I will put more emphasis on its principles and illustrate the elements that distinguish it from (white) feminism, then highlight African feminist outlooks central in both texts.

1. Feminisms:

Feminism emerged as a movement against the long marginalization of women. Although attempts by those segregated women to gain equal rights with men in all spheres have a long history, the actual term 'feminism' in English came only in the 1980s (Carter 91). What is worth considering is that as wide as this movement may seem and as many branches it may include, all the different brands and colors of feminism share the same interest which is making women conscious of their role and situation. Carter asserts that "what unites the various kinds of feminism as a literary theory is not so much a specific technique of criticism but a common goal" (ibid). Increasing wakefulness of women's positions and illuminating male supremacy, Carter explains, are the main objectives the main objectives of all feminist approaches (ibid).

Bell Hooks, in her book *Feminism is for Everybody*, sees feminism as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression" (Hooks 1). From her definition, we understand that feminism was created to consider women's plight, defend their rights and

release them from all forms of exploitation. It seeks to cast out the ghost of inequity between genders and give women back their true status.

To emphasize the ideas previously drawn by the pioneering white feminist writers like Virginia Woolf in her famous work *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), Susan Arndt gives an exhaustive explanation where she gathers the feminist thought ideals. According to her "[f]eminism is a world view and way of life of women and men who, as individuals, groups and/or organization, actively oppose existing gender relationships based on discriminating hierarchies and ratings" (71). Feminists are aware of the system of coercion; furthermore, they aim at defeat them" (ibid). So, from the above statements, we conclude that feminism represents the total refusal of men's servitude, and supports women to free themselves from men's subordination.

However, as feminism grew more to break the yokes of men's patriarchy and liberate silenced women, it extended around countries and crossed generations in history. The task of defining the term became wearisome and confusing considering the multitudes of types it engendered. Because of geographical, social, cultural and historical dynamics and differences, a universal definition that would suit women around the world, taking their experiences into account, became markedly complex and quite unattainable. Consequently, other kinds of feminism including womanism and African feminism were born.

1.2. Womanism versus Feminism:

As feminism concentrated on the needs of white women and failed to take into consideration the peculiarities of black females and men of color in African American communities, a new variant of feminism called womanism came into use. The term was first coined by the Afro-American writer and critic Alice Walker in her collection of essays entitled *In Search of Our*

Mothers's Gardens: Womanist Prose (1983). In this book, Alice Walker gives an in-depth account of the womanist and explains where its difference lies to the feminist:

A black feminist or feminist of color...a woman who loves other women sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility, and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men sexually or/and nonsexually committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except for health. Traditionally Universalist...loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the spirits. Loves struggle. Loves herself. Regardless; womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender. (qtd in Stounsa, 229)

Walker's womanism stresses women's friendship and sisterhood; they are chief building blocks in the life of women and help them to triumph over their suppression. However, this deep and strong friendship may sometimes reach lesbianism to flee from men's violence. Unlike feminism that supports the total rejection of men, womanism does not consider men as the central enemy of women. It rather urges men and women of color to complement each other and fight together against racism, a key issue that threatens them, and slavery, a shadow that still devours them. Love and struggle are other qualities that shape the strength of the womanists. Despite the harsh ordeals they face, womanists are full of hope and determination to face three kinds of oppression defined by race, sex and class.

1.3. African feminism:

Considering the dehumanizing treatment they received and the marginal position they occupied in their societies, African women rose to Africanize feminism to serve as a reclaimed version specific to them. Indeed, African feminism was an outcome of the total

overlook of African women's experiences by the western feminists who devoted themselves restrictedly to fight sexism.

To identify multitudes of oppression that were faced by African women as offered by the Nigerian critic Molaria Ogundipe Leslie's *African Women, Culture and Another Development* consisting of the inherited burden of colonialism, the heavy weight of tradition, underdevelopment, humiliation by their men, sense of inadequacy because of their race and most importantly to the negative image they hold of themselves, African feminism emerged as the most suitable theory to cover the different aspects of their suppression (Davis 6-7). Filomina Chioma Steady was the first to formulate a true definition of the African feminist thought in her book *The Black Woman Cross Culturally*. She explains that this type of feminism "includes female autonomy and cooperation; an emphasis on nature over culture; the centrality of children, multiple mothering and kinship" (Davies 6). From this stance, we may decipher the salient pillars this movement encompasses.

First, African feminism condemns all forms of patriarchy that insist on treating African women as second-class citizens. However, the presence of their male partners is necessary in their lives, which means even if they struggle to be financially independent and become autonomous, they do not actually separate themselves from their men. The Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta declared once: "I don't subscribe to the feminist idea that all men are brutal and repressive and we must reject them. Some of these men are my brothers and fathers and sons. Am I to reject them too?"(qtd in Gordema, 38). African feminism; therefore, advances the view of complementarity between the sexes through women's cooperation, and calls for love and collaboration among them. Cooperation, as such, may also be interpreted as the close relationships built by unhappy women to flee their distress. Sisterhood is another advantageous opportunity to defeat men's egoism and belittlement of their women.

Second, African women are tied to their nature, color and origins. They are aware of the importance of education and welcome fervently the idea of culture through making efforts in improving their knowledge. They recognize the benefits of receptiveness, but they remain centered to their African identity and traditions.

Then, motherhood is the outstanding principle in African feminism. In quoting Steady's words, Carole Boyce Davies reveals that "the most important factor with regard to the woman in traditional society is her role as mother" (243). Steady affirms that motherhood is the criteria through which African women are evaluated and are given the status of womanhood. Even if the two institutions that follow marriage (childbearing and motherhood) generally put women under men's control, African women tend to find self-recognition and recover from bad treatment thanks to the many children they give life to.

Davies develops African feminist theory developed by Steady and goes beyond the acceptance of men, celebration of nature and glorification of motherhood. In her introduction to *Ngambika, Studies of Women in African Literature*, Davies summarizes a genuine African feminism as follows:

African feminism largely embraces a common struggle of black men and women against the constraints of foreign domination. It is not hostile to men; it invites them to unite with their women to cross out the inequalities related to slavery and colonialism. It also recognizes that western and African feminists do not fight against the same thing. In this context, Patricia Hill Collins argues: "black women intellectuals have expressed a unique feminist consciousness about the intersection of race and class in structuring gender, historically we have not been full participants in white feminist organizations" (qtd in Stounsa, 228). Collins puts forward the relegation of black women from the white feminist movement and confirms the opposition and divergence of their basics. Despite the fact that

African women were devalued during and after colonialism, history proved that they have been important participants and leaders in their ancient societies and that their indistinct image was the result of foreign intervention. In addition, African feminism attributed them a highly regarded status through the institution of motherhood. African feminism does not consider polygamy and extended family as depriving women from their rights but rather consider them positively. Finally, like other forms of feminism, African feminism rejects women overburdening and exploitation and welcomes their self-sufficiency and willpower.

1.4. Feminism versus African feminism:

The obvious connection between African and Western feminism cannot be overlooked as both highlight the disparaged place accorded to women as second class citizens and try to correct it. However, western feminism fails to cover the African women's experiences and the issues that directly affect them. In this context Buchi Emecheta criticizes the limitation of western feminism that attacks sexism as a major problem and ignores the economic, historical and cultural issues that poison the African women. In this context, she says: "I think we women of African background still have a very very long way to go before we can really rub shoulders with such women...so my sisters in America, I'm not shunning your advanced help, in fact I still think women of Africa need your contribution, and at the same time we need our men" (qtd in Mekgwe, 17). Emecheta's response to the white feminists represents the major point that separates the two ideologies. She believes, as other African feminist writers of her generation, that both feminisms cannot be joined under the same concept because men's presence is indisputable and the need of their help is obvious in African women's environment.

Another point that makes the difference between western and African feminism more apparent is the question of motherhood. The latter is regarded as a condemnation for the white

women, who see their personal and professional lives more important than childbearing, while it is valued by African women, who build upon it peaceful marriages and reassure harmonious unions. In this context, Davis quotes Steady's comments about the subject: "the importance of motherhood and the evaluation of the childbearing capacity by African women is probably the most fundamental difference between the African women and her Western counterpart in their common struggle to end discrimination against men" (Davies 243). Steady identifies clearly the distinction between the two categories of feminism regarding motherhood and confirms that it is considered as a crucial element that separates the two movements' interests.

Contemporary female African writers see that it is their task to underscore African women's realities. Mariama Bâ introduces this idea in her collection of essays titled *La Fonction politique des littératures africaines écrites*; she states that "it is up to us women to take our fate in our hands in order to overthrow the order established to our detriment instead of submitting to it. We must, like men, use this weapon, peaceful of course but effective which is writing" (qtd in Klaw 1). As an African writer, Bâ wants to raise consciousness and support female intellectuals of her time to participate through the production of literary works to correct their images distorted by their male counterparts.

Indeed, through embracing African feminism's ideals, African writers illustrated various faces of 'brave' women achieving self-recognition and empowerment. Anglophone writers like Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta from Nigeria, Ama Ata Aidoo from Ghana, Bessie Head from South Africa, Tsitsi Dangarembga and Yvonne Vera from Zimbabwe and francophone authors like Aminata Sow Fall and Mariama Bâ from Senegal successfully maintained the image of liberated women in their fiction. Their works were bright alerts and testimonies about the many examples of tyranny that African women day after day tolerate.

2. African Feminist Perspectives in Bâ's *So Long* and Maraire's *Zenzele*:

In this part of my work, I will try to unveil the African feminist perspectives in Mariama Bâ's *So Long A Letter* and J. Nozipo Maraire's *Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter* and underscore the characteristics of the African feminist thought in the two novels.

2.1. Mariama Bâ's *So Long A Letter*:

The first African feminist perspective in the novel is represented through the major characters Ramatoulaye and Aissatou who learn to be autonomous, and at the same time, believe in male and female cooperation just as it is explained above. As a reaction to Mawdo's betrayal, Aissatou moves with her children to America to escape an environment in which her feelings counted for very little and her value was denied. To express her anger and disappointment, she writes a letter to her husband where she criticizes the society's unfairness and men's ungratefulness. In her letter, she says: "that, briefly put, is the internal ordering of our society, with its absurd divisions. I will not yield to it...you want to draw a line between heartfelt love and physical love. I say there can be no union of bodies without the heart's acceptance" (33). Thus, her belief in true romantic love makes her realize the absurdity of men's infidelity and convinces her to totally reject a society which encourages such behaviors.

Aissatou, nevertheless, remains persuaded that her departure is the first step to free herself from the caste system imposed by her society and that divorce is the right way towards peace of mind. She cannot accept to be an additional object in the life of the person she loved, and instead of sharing the love of her youth with another rival (young Nabou), she prefers to give up this battle already lost. To make clear her decision, Aissatou addresses Mawdo: "I am striping myself of your love, your name. Clothed in my dignity, the only worthy garment, I go my way" (ibid). She leaves her husband determined to reach autonomy and self-fulfillment alone. However, this separation should not be understood as Aissatou's best choice. On the

contrary, leaving her husband is just a means to let him measure the size of his act. She would have liked to save her family, but Mawdou's infidelity was unbearable.

This same principle of self-sufficiency and support is better illustrated through the protagonist Ramatoulaye who takes a different reaction towards her husband's betrayal. Unlike Aissatou, she surrenders to the practice of polygamy and prepares herself for equal sharing with her co-wife, Binetou. However, her great suffering takes place when Modou totally abandons her and their children and she finds no other solution than learning to detach herself from him.

Ramatoulaye's way to autonomy begins when she relieves herself through citing other victims whose situations resemble hers; she desperately says: "I counted the abandoned or divorced women of my generation whom I knew" (41). Through evoking the sad story of Jacqueline who suffered from a mental breakdown because of her husband's desertion, and other women who managed to overcome their husbands' neglect, Ramatoulaye realizes that she is not alone and can fight to improve her life. Furthermore, this path is drawn when Ramatoulaye starts to question her lot and concludes that she has to be resolute when she says: "was I to deny myself because Modou had chosen another path? No, I would not give in to the pressure. My mind and my faith rejected supernatural power. They rejected this easy attraction, which kills any will to fight. I looked reality in the face" (51). Accepting her fate and fighting to take hold of her husband's abandonment shape her strength and hope to recover from her disappointment. She believes that she deserves to be happy and she has to go in pursuit of this happiness. Ramatoulaye's mind is set and is persuaded that self-reliance is the only means to be independent. She keeps herself occupied by home tasks and takes up the challenge to go to the cinema alone facing the rude looks of people and the humiliation of public transport. Once Aissatou offers her a car, she bravely succeeds to learn to drive and

scores another victory against Modou's deprivation; she takes one step forward to independence.

Nevertheless, even if Ramatoulaye wins against her husband's betrayal and finds herself other reasons to live, she confides to Aissatou the bitterness of dealing with a life imposed to her, letting go the love she cherished for years, when she reveals: "the truth is that, despite everything, I remain faithful to the love of my youth. Aissatou, I cry for Modou, and I can do nothing about it" (59). Her faithfulness to Modou doesn't mean that she remains passive under his will and unable to turn over a page, but she simply proves that she cannot perceive a complete happiness without her husband.

Separation, for Rama, is only an option to liberate herself from Modou's subjugation. She does not hesitate to unveil that the joy and peace she once had with her husband form the basis of true happiness. In this context, she confirms: "I am one of those who can realize themselves fully and bloom only when they form part of a couple. Even though I understand your stand, even though I respect the choice of liberated women, I have never conceived of happiness outside marriage" (58). Rama sees the presence of Modou as the secret of her plenitude; she respects the position of the women who break with their men but insists on the importance of contribution of both in a couple.

Daba, Rama's daughter, and her husband Abou form a happy couple based on mutual understanding and support. They believe that the basis of their happiness is cooperation. However, Daba perceives things differently from her mother and sees no obligation in remaining engaged in a fruitless union when she claims that "marriage is no chain. It's a mutual agreement over a life's programme. So if one of the partners is not satisfied with the union, why should he remain?" (77). Daba invests herself fully in her relationship, but she is

not afraid to lose her husband's presence; breaking is the best solution to end a useless liaison according to her.

Both Aissatou and Ramatoulaye serve as good examples of liberated women who struggle to achieve self-recognition as highlighted by Filomina Steady's African feminism. However, they take different reactions facing the same situations. They believe in the necessity of self-reliance to be independent and consider men's presence and cooperation as a better healing means of empowerment. Daba and her husband, on the other hand, shape the ideal of men and women cooperation as emphasized in the same theory.

The second perspective of African feminism in *So Long A Letter* appears through female cooperation. Sisterhood and friendship among women shape another element of Steady's theory and is illustrated through female characters mainly Ramatoulaye and Aissatou. Ramatoulaye and Aissatou are childhood friends who took the same path to Koranic school and received the same education. They grew up together and shared the joyful and bitter memories of youth. Their lives developed in parallel as both witnessed the passage of their country from colonialism to a modern nation. They are the product of the French education and among the pioneering intellectuals in post-independent Senegal.

Ramatoulaye and Aissatou experienced nearly the same hardships as Ramatoulaye confesses: "your disappointment was mine, as my rejection was yours" (57), and this taught them nothing but to be united. Even when Aissatou moves abroad, distance is not a barrier to exchange their daily news, to recount their smallest problems and confide their deepest secrets. Letters transmit details of their lives across years and countries; they continue to meet and support each other even in the worst moments of despair.

Taking different reactions in relation to their husbands' betrayals did not influence their close ties. Aissatou follows a monogamous relationship assuming the responsibility of

single parenting; she leaves her home country to flee the endurance of caste and live conveniently. However, despite her firm conviction of a feminist and her good status achieved abroad, she does not disapprove Ramatoulaye's decision of accepting a polygamous marriage, Ramatoulaye reminds Aissatou: "Forewarned, you my friend did not try to dissuade me, respectful of my new choice of life" (48). Equally respectful and understanding is Ramatoulaye when relating the story of Aissatou. Even if she is a traditional and conservative woman, Ramatoulaye respects her friend's position and, simultaneously, shares her sorrow.

When Aissatou offers her a car to save her from the humiliation of public transportation, Ramatoulaye realizes the strength of their friendship and confirms the purity of this feeling that neither time nor distance could destruct. In this context, she compares their close and sincere relationship with the dear love that cheated them and concludes that friendship "has splendours that love knows not. It grows stronger when crossed, whereas obstacles kill love. Friendship resists time, which wearies and severs couples. It has heights unknown to love" (56). Aissatou's extraordinary generosity and her ability to restore her friend's confidence are valuable. The boundaries that separate them are shortened by their deep will of mutual help and sincere commitment to defeat common pains. Their friendship, in consequence, extends to shape an eternal and true sisterhood.

Ramatoulaye draws a comparison between female friendship and romantic love, and shows that female bonding emerges from its attentiveness to morality. She confirms this idea when she addresses Aissatou: "when we meet, the signs on our bodies will not be important. The essential thing is the content of our hearts...you have often proved to me the superiority of friendship over love. Time, distance, as well as mutual memories have consolidated our ties" (75). Their meeting will draw another chapter of a book neatly colored and beautifully shaped; it will mark a continuation of a long story of reciprocated love. This friendship becomes their sanctuary, their shelter. Ramatoulaye and Aissatou portray the true sisterhood

in African societies mentioned in Steady's principals of African feminist thought. It is a means of empowerment and represents a healing power to the wounds caused by men and a refuge to flee society's constraints.

The praise of motherhood is another pillar of African feminism underlined by Filomina Steady. This idea is well shown in *So Long A Letter* through the protagonist Ramatoulaye and her children. When Ramatoulaye experiences the inequities of polygamy and the rejection of her husband, she becomes engaged in pursuit of happiness and bravely succeeds to surmount her distress. However, she would not have achieved this harmony without her children.

When she faces Modou's neglect and strives desperately to give herself other reasons to live, her children help her and keep attentive and ready to comfort her. In the worst moments of despair, when the tone of her crying becomes high, her eldest daughter Daba advises her to end this suffering telling her: "break with him, mother! Send this man away... Tell me you'll break with him. I can't see you fighting over a man with a girl my age" (41). Daba feels responsible and tries to save her mother by showing her a reasonable way to reach serenity. Daba dares even to confront her father accompanied with his new wife Binetou in the night clubs to show him that the family he abandoned can be prosperous without him.

In addition to extra responsibilities that her recently dead husband left her, Ramatoulaye faces various problems when dealing with her grown children who cause her a great deal of troubles. As their issues become numerous, she realizes the difficulty of this journey that she has to carry on alone. At this moment, she is reminded of her grandmother's words and understands the vague signification of her lamentation: "the mother of a family has no time to travel. But she has time to die" (79). She understands that the joys of motherhood are preceded by great sacrifices; she arms herself with wisdom and patience to win her battle.

Ramatoulaye is bewildered by the task of motherhood, and she reveals it when telling Aissatou: “ah, how children make one pay for the joy of bringing them into the world” (84). This confession shows the difficulty of being a mother. Her surprise was big when she discovered her children smoking and her daughter’s pregnancy. She questions in astonishment and anger: “how could I guess that my daughter, who had calmed my nerves during the cigarette affair, was now indulging in an even more dangerous game?” (85). Ramatoulaye felt upset because her daughter was supposed to be an example to her sisters. However, she manages to control her nerves and concludes that, exactly at this awful condition, her daughter needs to be saved. She tells in a voice full of compassion and tenderness that she realized how close she was to her child; she could not desert her because her daughter’s life and future were at issue (87). Contrary to Farmata’s expectations, Ramatoulaye pardons her daughter believing that it is a mother’s duty to be understanding and tolerant. She takes up the challenge to fully play her role of a mother: “one is a mother in order to understand the inexplicable. One is a mother to lighten the darkness. One is a mother to shield when lightning streaks the night, when thunder shakes the earth, when mud bogs one down. One is a mother in order to love without beginning or end” (87).

These difficulties kept Ramatoulaye’s mind busy and instead of thinking of things that life could not satisfy, she thought of things that would make her and her children happy. Instead of counting people from whom she was deprived, she cited ways to follow to complete her life and the one of her sons and daughters. These obstacles taught her to be a true fighting woman and were another means to recover from the ravages of disappointments and dreariness of solitude.

Being an African woman, according to Steady, is indivisible from motherhood. Mothering is, as illustrated in Bâ’s novel, experienced by African women with its joys and sorrows. It is also described as the greatest achievement a woman can fulfill. Ramatoulaye is

the quintessence of the African mother, as dictated in the African feminist thought, who paves the way to other women to find empowerment in childbearing and this sacred institution of motherhood.

The fourth and most prominent perspective of African feminism in the novel is shown through polygamy which is the central theme of the novel. The issue is represented through both male and female characters and may be analyzed differently from one case to another. Starting with Aissatou's marriage with Mawdo based on romantic love, the example of union defying obstacles and surviving hard times, their love gradually decays at its failure against social constraints. Aissatou is not from the same class as Mawdo; her mother-in-law cannot accept to see his son marrying a goldsmith's daughter. This incongruity in social classes gives aunt Nabou, Aissatou's mother-in-law, the right to destruct her son's marriage. To take her revenge, she even obliges him to take her niece as a second wife.

Mawdo yields to his mother's plans and marries young Nabou to satisfy her. However, he neither takes into consideration the pain he causes to Aissatou nor realizes that his act is a denial of the commitment they made to each other years ago. The only justification he provides is the one of his instincts unable to resist young Nabou's temptation. He tells Ramatoulaye: "how can you expect a man to remain a stone when he is constantly in contact with the woman who runs his house? You can't resist the imperious laws that demand food and clothing for a man... a wife must understand, once for all, and forgive; she must not worry herself about betrayals of the flesh" (35). Aissatou intends neither to forgive nor to forget as her mind is set. Leaving abroad seemed the best decision to be taken to express her total refusal of caste system and reject institutionalized polygamy. Indeed, distance is the only answer against the double oppression she receives in a society where polygamy is a rule and not an exception. Furthermore, western education plays a key role in her choice. Unlike other

women of her generation who, without complaint, accept to share their husbands, she prefers the challenge of single parenting in exchange to her independence.

Another example of polygamy is provided by Bâ through Ramatoulaye and Modou, also united by true romantic love. This love resists twenty five years of ups and downs and gives birth to twelve maternities. However, the strength and length of this union counted less beside Modou's egoism and his determination to take his daughter's friend as his second wife. Modou never shows his intention to remarry or asks his wife's view about it. He prepares everything on the sly of Ramatoulaye, and he doesn't even make the effort to explain his act. He prefers to send her the news via messengers. Thus, he respects neither his wife nor the precepts of how polygamy truly functions in religion. As a traditional Muslim woman, Ramatoulaye finds that it is her duty to accept a polygamous marriage; she prepares herself for equal sharing with her co-wife as it is prescribed in Islam. The burden of having twelve children to feed and to be looked after with a salary of a teacher seemed difficult, thus cannot allow herself to react like Aissatou. The choice of leaving her country and her husband was impossible as she said: "leave? Start again at zero, after living twenty five years with one man, after having borne twelve children? Did I have enough energy to bear alone the weight of this responsibility which was both moral and material?" (41).

What makes the reactions of Ramatoulaye and Aissatou dissimilar is the issue of caste. Aissatou gives up easily fighting for the love of her youth because she considers the battle already defeated ever since she endured the segregation of her family-in-law while Ramatoulaye remains tied to Modou and believes that she can find a way to save her marriage through her faithfulness. Ramatoulaye is completely abandoned by Modou as she confirms it: "I lived in a vacuum. And Modou avoided me. Attempts by friends and family to bring him back to the fold proved futile...He never came back again; his new-found happiness gradually swallowed up his memory of us. He forgot about us" (48). She is not disappointed by her

husband's decision to remarry as she feels deceived and humiliated when abandoned. Her pain does not emerge only from losing a love she fought long to possess but from the way she is left, empty-handed, with no explanation nor excuse.

After her recovery from Modou's betrayal came his unexpected death. During her mourning, Rama receives two polygamous marriage proposals. The first proposal comes from her brother-in-law, Tamsir, whom she refuses without hesitation as she considers marriage as something sacred and an act based on mutual love. Her disappointment by Modou does not influence her belief, and her solitude does not tempt her to accept the proposal; she answers him angrily: "you forget that I have a heart, a mind that I am not an object to be passed from hand to hand. You don't know what marriage means to me: it is an act of faith and of love, the total surrender of oneself to the person one has chosen and who has chosen you" (60). In addition, considering the financial situation of Tamsir, she understands that his intentions were not innocent and wants only to take profit from her money. Ramatoulaye decides to continue assuming her responsibilities alone rather than adding extra duties as she said later in the novel: "I shall never be the one to complete your collection. My house shall never be for you the coveted oasis: no extra burden; my turn everyday; cleanliness and luxury, abundance and calm! No, Tamsir!" (ibid).

The second offer is the one of Daouda Dieng, a close friend who loves her and has helped her financially at the death of her husband. Ramatoulaye is agitated by this proposal because she is embarrassed. She welcomes him in her house and is grateful for his kindness, but unable to accept to marry him. To answer him, she writes him a letter where she explains her deep regret for not offering what he hoped long ago. "I can offer you nothing else, even though you deserve everything" (71) Ramatoulaye says in her letter. She continues that admiration is insufficient for marriage "whose snares I know from experience. And then the existence of your wife and children further complicates the situation" (71). What makes

Ramatoulaye cautious about the proposal is the problem of polygamy. Because of her cruel experience with Modou, she fears to face another similar situation and experience again the same pain. Moreover, her consciousness does not allow her to cause another woman the same suffering, so her rejection will save her and Daouda's family from the injustice of polygamy. She adds: "you think the problem of polygamy is a simple one. Those involved in it know the constraints, the lies, the injustices that weigh down their consciences in return for the ephemeral joys of change" (72).

Bâ, through the characters of Aissatou and Ramatoulaye, does not necessarily condemn the institution of polygamy; she rather denounces the way it is manipulated by men to satisfy their needs. The writer exposes the constraints caused by these men who persecute women, and suggests different solutions for them to find self-recognition. Polygamy is not really celebrated in the novel as it is mentioned in African feminism; Bâ does not attack it as a primary issue condemning women.

2.2. J. Nozipo Maraire's *Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter*:

The first visible perspective of African feminism in the novel appears through female characters who are independent and others who believe in the importance of cooperation with their men in their lives. Zenzele is a young ambitious girl full of life and who questions everything around her. Her spirit is guided by the dream of pursuing her studies at Harvard University as she wants to give herself the opportunity to discover new cultures and create her own world. Her self-confidence and challenging nature made her imagination a reality. She never ceases asking about different things and her curiosity is quite impossible to satisfy. She defies her mother and analyzes each response to formulate another more complicated question.

Zenzele has the power to notice things that have never occurred to her mother to ask herself. She wonders about some traditions in her country and wishes to find convincing explanations to them. Each time, she challenges her mother's views and insists on the unfairness of embracing some customs that are too degrading to African women. When talking about Lobola, the amount of money a man offers his in-laws to obtain their daughter's hand for marriage and as a way to thank them for their efforts in bringing her out well, she says: "Mama, you are defending a custom that identifies women as property, transferred from father to husband. It is dreadful. I shall have none of it" (32).

Zenzele wants to be an independent woman and following such traditions represents a threat to her freedom. She wants to be given her deserved status as a woman and is afraid that such practices would deprive her from achieving her dreams. She finds other customs even more ghastly like women appellation after marriage or childbirth. She exclaims: "as if her only identifiable contribution to mankind was the act of childbirth" (34). Despite her young age, Zenzele takes women's concerns so seriously that she cannot get the true meaning of her African culture. Her autonomy and enthusiasm to experience the western way of life make her want to live in a utopian world where women are treated rightfully. Thus, she rejects tradition not to deny her origins but for fear to see her dreams die out.

Another example of an independent and strong woman is Shiri's little sister, Linda. Linda's will to be self-reliant dates back to her childhood when she used to flee to her underground cave with her sister to be peaceful. She reveals her enjoyment being there: "it's perfect, our own private place. This is our special kingdom. We make the rules. Nobody can come and tell us what to do or make us run away" (21). As a young girl, she appreciates her freedom to be far from people that may be a source of infuriation and trouble. Linda dislikes to be ordered by others as well. For instance, when she accompanies her father by car with her sister Shiri, she feels uncomfortable and prefers her own private corner where she can run

everything according to her own laws as she says in the text: “I would rather play alone by the river. There I can shout or sing or laugh or run, and I can take anything I want from the woods to play with and do anything I want in my secret place” (26).

As a teenager, she has the power to understand the world of adults and notice its injustices. When, for instance, she witnesses the coming of her cousin Rudo after being coldly beaten by her drunkard husband, she criticizes her for remaining in a domestically violent relationship and for easily accepting a destiny that oppresses her. For Linda, it is better to live alone rather than being with a person who has no respect. She angrily tells Shiri: “it is ridiculous. If she is so unhappy, why doesn’t she just pack her bags and leave him? They do not even have children. She is stupid...it is disgraceful, Sisi Shiri, to allow another person to make you their slave...she has made herself no better than a dog or a baboon” (172).

Like Daba, Ramatoulaye’s daughter in *So Long A Letter* who incites her mother to break with her father, Linda sees no necessity to remain tied to a relation that makes a woman unhappy. For Daba and Linda, women can be complete and feel fulfilled without the need of men who insist on abusing their weakness. They are not against men’s servitude but against these women’s battered spirits who let these men drain their happiness.

Amai Zenzele is the opposite of her daughter and her sister Linda. She is a very sensitive and cultured woman who has constructed and nurtured herself through the wisdom of her ancestors. She is proud of her African legacy and cherishes every aspect of her culture. She believes that everything is predestined and one has little power against nature and God’s will. Her beliefs emerge mainly from the unkind love experience she had when she was an adolescent and her marriage.

Unlike Zenzele and Linda, Shiri’s only hope was the love of her youth. Once she endures his loss, she no longer finds herself reasons to fight; she feels weakened and

vanquished and perceives everything around her silently. She realizes the world progressing around her; she measures Zenzele's infinite ambitions, her husband's success at work, her sister and cousin's contribution in the struggle for independence, but she remains centered to that love, helpless to heal from its wounds. The loss of her sculptor, whom she was ready to help and engage in a crusade to save, made her life hollow and pointless as she revealed it to Zenzele: "unlike your father, I had long ago ceased to dream. For a brief time in my youth, I had believed that I could fight for what was mine. But how can one face death? It is the ultimate humbler" (177).

For her supernatural powers can defeat any strong will that fights, so she is contented with what life offered her. Unlike Zenzele and Linda who enthusiastically draw plans of their lives from their childhood, Shiri's only motivation and true reason of existence lies within her past. She finds it hard to hide the remorse that consumes her, and she confesses that her true found happiness is dead and buried with her sculptor: "it is not that I do not love my life now and my home, for I do. It is just that for me, my sculptor was the road less traveled; he was the unknown and the beautiful" (129).

Shiri never talks of being independent or living a complete life without referring to a man's presence in her life. As a young girl, it was her sculptor that fascinated her, and after his death, it was her husband. Although her first love drew the path of her life, she manages to find strength when she meets Zenzele's father whom she admires much. She says that "the longer we were together, the more stable my steps became, the clearer my vision, the steadier my hands, and the more lucid my thoughts" (131); the love of her husband gives her back self-assurance and hopefulness and provides her with sufficient force to fight again. She cannot imagine to separate herself from him, as she puts it: "I was content to have such a friend and partner...he had such a strength and confidence about him that I felt his balancing

force wherever I was; like an anchor, he was that little extra weight that I needed to steady my course in the storms of life ” (132-133).

Through Zenzele and Linda, Maraire portrays the possibility for women to detach themselves from men to pursue their dreams, to prosper and to blossom. However, Shiri, like Ramatoulaye, represents the true nature of the African woman who believes in cooperation and mutual support between men and women fighting for a true and shared happiness.

The second African feminist perspective appears through the importance accorded to extended family and multiple kinship just as it is described by Steady. When Zenzele complains about the breadth of her family, Shiri finds it her duty to expose to her daughter the beneficial sides of their extended family and the importance it represents in forming the African culture. She tells her in an understanding tone that “there are many aspects of our culture that you find difficult to accept. I know that you have often bewailed the nefarious links of our clan. Even after years of great mental effort, I myself often fail to make the correct connections” (31). Shiri celebrates another feature of African kinship and takes pleasure in recounting the sweet memories spent in the house of her parents in Chakowa, where all family relatives with their guests used to gather on evenings. Because they are from different generations, Shiri knows that these family gatherings have less value to her daughter, but she tries to familiarize her with this part of the African way of life.

Furthermore, she admits the difficulty of memorizing these blood ties and explains to her their significance in African culture and in her life as an African woman when she says:

it will take time, but you will learn. As my daughter, it will be your responsibility to maintain those links for all of us. Do not be discouraged by its breadth. Therein lies its beauty, there is always someone to meet, a new friend, a business acquaintance, a confidante, and an infinite

source of advice and support. The extended family is your community, your own emotional, financial, and cultural safety net. It's Africa most powerful resource. (ibid)

Shiri glorifies family relationships and considers them inseparable from African culture. She shows Zenzele the advantages they have in the life of Africans and makes her aware of her responsibility to water and protect these ties.

Motherhood, an outstanding element in African feminist thought, is illustrated by different female characters mainly Zenzele and her mother. The most prominent image of motherhood in the novel is represented through Shiri and her daughter Zenzele. Unlike the usual relationships that unite mothers with their daughters, Shiri's challenging role lies in educating her western-oriented daughter according to African norms. She emphasizes: "how could I allow you to grow up reading the Greek classics, and watch you devour *The Merchant of Venice* and *Romeo and Juliet*, yet be ignorant of the lyrical, the romantic and the tragic that have shaped us as Africans?"(8). As she notices the big gap that separates them, Shiri decides to remind her daughter of her roots and emphasize the splendor of her country and culture. She finds a way to accomplish her mission through answering all her questions and imparting to her the wisdom she inherited from her ancestors and her own experience.

Shiri admits her vague irritation and awkwardness facing Zenzele's incessant questions when she says: "I had no answers to your questions, which dropped like little bombs to disturb my orderly, swept, waxed, and shiny world" (36). Each time Zenzele insists on questioning about various things, Shiri remains wordless and unable to provide persuasive answers. Though disturbed and tormented, Shiri feels responsible and explains to her daughter the significance of some traditions in African culture to correct the false ideas that Zenzele had drawn about them. She celebrates the charm of extended family and village life and tries

to bring her closer to admire her culture through highlighting the meaning of Lobola and woman naming. Furthermore, she glorifies her personal naming after marriage and unveils her enjoyment of being a wife then a mother to make her appreciate the African way of life as it is explained in the text: “I had accepted without question to be Mrs. Shungu, to leave my home and family and be a wife. Indeed, it had seemed an honor, a dream come true. How envious all of my friends had been at my bridal shower!” (ibid).

Shiri recounts to her daughter her growing-up experiences and the ones of her relatives to prepare Zenzele to the harshness of the western world and warn her of the difficulties she may encounter in her life. She talks about different issues like the brain drain, racism and Zimbabwe’s long struggle for independence to make her aware of the absurdity of living outside one’s country and make her proud of her belonging. To reinforce their relationship that extends to a close friendship, just like Ramatoulaye with her daughters in *So Long A Letter*, she shares with her deep secrets like her love liaison with the sculptor and marriage with her father.

Shiri endures a lifetime journey to gather the fruit of her work and watch her daughter succeed and shine when she confirms: “and now with my tight afro sprinkled with gray, I finally believed, seeing you grow, that I have achieved something” (ibid). The grayness of her hair is a statement of the efforts and sacrifices she made to raise her daughter and make her a true African woman. When her strength weakens, she looks back at her life and regards her journey through motherhood as her greatest achievement. She feels contented for having finally accomplished her duty of a mother as she puts it later: “and, there is you. Should anyone ask what my contribution is to this world, I can only say that my conscience rests joyously with the knowledge that I had a hand in bringing you into it” (193).

Another relevant pattern of motherhood is illustrated through Petranella and her mother who, simultaneously, portray the great inconsistencies between two different generations: one led by tradition and the other by modernity. When she invites Shiri to her house, Florence Makororo complains incessantly about her daughter Petranella's behavior. Unlike Zenzele, she is a spoiled girl who has respect neither to her mother nor the guests she receives. As the oldest in her family, she does not even make the effort to prepare tea as it is dictated in the African traditions. She never helps her mother in home tasks and worse still, she refuses to visit her dying grandfather and be present at his funeral. She smokes, drinks and is pregnant without even knowing who the father of her child is.

Florence feels lost and has no solution in her hands to save her daughter. She did her best to ensure her an easy life and a good future, but soon realizes bitterly that her efforts went all in vain. Just like Ramatoulaye's daughters, the trio and young Aissatou, Petranella is another victim of modernity. They are the product of western colonialism. Modernity which was supposed to help Africans to reach development incongruously made them ludicrous.

Motherhood has two different faces in Maraire's novel. It portrays the awarded virtues of a wise woman who grew up through the history of her country and the stories of her relatives, and at the same time, it is illustrated as a futile sacrifice when faced with the constraints of modernity. What is important to note is that, at any rate, motherhood is indissoluble from the life of the African woman.

The fourth perspective is drawn through the common struggle of men and women against foreign domination. Shiri is fascinated by the history of her country, and she wants to share it with Zenzele and make her understand the process through which Zimbabwe went through, from colonialism to independence. She goes on to show the instability of those days

under the British colonial rule and the hypocrisy of media that avoided any discussion of the destruction which was taking in Rhodesia. The narrator explains that:

no ink was wasted on the tanks and troops that overrun whole villages, killing our cattle, massacring our children. No one heard of the schoolgirls who were raped, the bushfires that the Rhodesian forces set alight to smoke out the “terrorist savages”, and the homes of Africans that were razed to a few sticks of charcoal. (134)

She also evokes the dark years of racism and cites brave women, like her sister and her cousin, who enthusiastically participated beside men in the liberation struggle (141). Indeed, these women passionately fought beside their men against their enemy to regain and rebuild together what is truly theirs. She talks of Zenzele’s father, as well, and his huge contribution in the freedom of their country saying that “our first few years together were years of sleeplessness and hard work as the struggle became more organized” (134). The narrator later moves to talk about her cousin Tinawo, head of the office of National Intelligence in Mutare and a great fighter during the liberation struggle, and her sister Linda who is fervently guided by the fight for freedom. Shiri notices the common points between her sister and husband and appreciates much their commitment. She tells Zenzele laughably that it was Linda who was meant to marry her father; “their spirits,” she says, are “the same parts of some greater whole” (138). Their commitment to the struggle, the narrator goes on, was unconditional and their truthfulness beyond criticism (ibid).

Conclusion:

Throughout this chapter, I have tried to explain and define both feminism and womanism to reveal the parallels and differences. Moreover, I attempted to offer an in depth account of the

African feminist thought developed by theorists and critics like Filomina Steady. A close reading of the novels' content through African feminism prism made clear the disclosure of African feminist perspectives used by the two authors. I have tried to show that both writers' consciousness is shaped by African feminist notions. Through their texts, as explained in this chapter, they narrated other stories of brave African women who succeeded to find empowerment and self-realization. However, an examination of the structure of these novels is required to expose the aim(s) behind the use of epistolary techniques by both authors.

Chapter Three:

Epistolarity in Bâ's *So Long A Letter* and Maraire's *Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter*

Introduction:

The first thing that attracted me when thinking of doing a comparative study between *So Long A Letter* and *Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter* was that both novels are written in the form of letters. Therefore, my aim in this chapter is to define epistolary novel and highlight its importance providing with a historical background of this literary genre. As I shall analyze both works' epistolary aspects, I will concurrently attempt to explain the writers' choice to employ this form of writing.

I. The Epistolary Novel:

All over ages, letters have served as the frequently used means of communication across distances and remained so despite everything. Historically, letters have been divided into two major types: the informative or business letter and the private one exchanged between family relatives, lovers or friends. In the 18th century, the private letter found its use in the fictional correspondence of characters within a novel. These novels composed of these private letters are known as epistolary.

Glenice Joy Witthing defines the genre as a novel "written in the form of letters, although novels, which are not composed exclusively of letters, can also be partly classified as epistolary" (2). According to her, even novels that are not built entirely of letters indulge themselves the definition of epistolary. Moreover, this type of narrative told through the medium of letters can be written by one or more characters; it can be either monologic focusing on the letters or diary entries of one single character, dialogic representing a

correspondence between two characters or polylogic where multiple characters are involved. One of the major characteristics that make this literary genre distinguished is the intimate view of the characters' thoughts and feelings and emotional engagement it creates on the reader.

I.1. Historical Background:

The emergence of the epistolary novel in western literature coincided with the rise of the novel in England. Likewise, this genre was also common in France. However, even if its existence dates back to antiquity with works such as *Ovid's Heroise* and continued to the 12th century love letters like *Héloïse et Abélard* which were followed by the 1669 *Lettres Portugaises*, this type of narrative reached its maturity and height only in the 18th century with the birth of authors inspired by these epistolary models (Pine 23).

The 18th century marked the flourishing of the epistolary novel thanks to the appearance of renowned works of such authors like Samuel Richardson with his highly successful novels *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1749). Simultaneously, this type of novel, in France, developed with the publication of *Lettres Persanes* by Montesquieu (1721), followed by *Julie, ou la nouvelle Heloise* (1761) by Jean-Jacque Rousseau and Laclos's *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782). Equally reputable and frequent was the epistolary novel in Germany with works such as Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe's *Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers* or *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) and Friedrich Holderlin's *Hyperion*.

One of the crucial specificities of the epistolary novel in western literature is its connection to women. Just as mentioned by Witting who says that "women's letters are the product of their lived experience and culture" (2), women characters are generally illustrated deprived from any means of confinement and rely on letters to write down their desperate situations and share their common experiences. Examples of characters representing the

“epistolary woman” writing restrictedly about abandonment and lamenting the absence of their lovers are intensely apparent in the Portuguese nun in *Lettres Portugaises* (Jorgenson 16).

As this genre was invented specifically by men, it remained controlled by them to the extent that epistolary novels produced by women were not respected or recognized as literary works (Pine 26). To analyze women’s novels of the 18th century, Katharine Jenson in her work *Writing Love* identifies two specific types of female epistolary narratives: love-letters and letter novels. While the former’s concern is women addressing desperately their lovers and emphasizing the “epistolary woman” Just as in *Lettres Portugaises*, the latter emerged to contrast and improve the image of women who may be successful and happy without men as illustrated in *Lettres d’une Péruvienne* (1747) of Mme Graffigny (27-28). However, according to Jenson, even if the “epistolary woman” was abandoned and rejected to be replaced by letter novels where women are given more value, both forms were “well received” (39).

1.2. So Long A Letter and Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter:

The epistolary form privileges the subjective experience in narration, and also establishes a dialogue between two (or more) subjectivities. The francophone epistolary novel was influenced by the French epistolary tradition. However, this genre remains unpopular in Africa for probably literary reasons. Clearly, African writers, male and female, prefer the conventional novel.

The first Senegalese epistolary text was written in 1935 by Ousmane Socé Diop. Possibly, Bâ read Diop’s *Karim, Roman Sénégalais*. The first “real” epistolary novel is Ibrahima M. Ouane’s *Lettres d’Afrique, recit épistolaire*, which appeared in 1955. Henry Lopez, an influential political man and writer from Congo, published many epistolary novels like *La Nouvelle Romance* (1976), *Sans Tam-Tam* (1977) *Le Pleurer-rire* (1982) to name only

a few. Notice that Lopez's first and second novels were published in the 70s before Mariama Bâ's first novel.

Bâ's *So Long A Letter* and Maraire's *Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter* are what we call letter novels or 'roman par lettres' because they use the letter as vehicle of narration. In both texts, there is one sender and one receiver. The two writers use one continuous letter, and there is no interruption. This continuity can be explained by the fact that the writers did not want to break up the emotional concentration of the two protagonists-narrators.

In Bâ's text, the letters sent by Ramatoulaye, and the letters sent by Aissatou written before the letter in the text are not reproduced. In fact, there is a real exchange between the two characters although Aissatou's letters are not inserted or seen by the reader. Ramatoulaye was not "monologuing"; in fact, she had already sent many letters to her friend. In addition, Ramatoulaye had the intention of sending the letter to her friend. Therefore, Bâ's text cannot be read as a journal or a diary; it is a true epistolary novel.

From the opening sentence of Bâ's text where we read "I have received your letter. By way of reply, I am beginning this diary, my prop in my distress. Our long association has taught me that confiding in others allays pain" (1), we understand that a kind of correspondence is established between the narrator and her friend before this letter is written, and this text is just a response to an already received letter to keep this correspondence alive. Moreover, the word diary transforms the letter to a more intimate conversation as the narrator confirms her intention from addressing her friend "confiding in others allays pain" (ibid), to confess her secrets. Here the letter extends to become a sort of a memoir but not a real one, where the narrator wills to heal from the weight of reminiscences. Therefore, the text's function can be interpreted as both a letter and diary.

What confirms once again this long exchange of letters between the narrator and her friend is when Rama talks about her son: "he has the privilege of bringing me all your letters.

How does he recognize them? By their stamp? By their envelope? By the careful writing, characteristic of you? By the scent of lavender emanating from them” (75). The text represents not the only letter between the two correspondents but one among others that are easily recognized by Rama’s six-old son. This fact also confirms that the exchange of letters is usual that even an infant identifies them and their sender.

In *Zenzele*, the text is the first letter since there is no reference to previously sent letters and there are no words introducing an already established correspondence as in Bâ’s text. The mother’s decision to write to her daughter stems from her strong will to impart her wisdom and teach her life lessons. However, the letter’s aim is to answer the questions that the narratee asked before moving abroad and tries to bring back past conversations. The text reinforces the ties between the narrator and her daughter and cannot be considered a journal or diary even if Shiri throughout her writing includes some personal secrets like love and marriage experiences.

Both texts are first person narratives; the narrator is definitely not the writer. Both narrators call to mind two periods: the colonial and the post-colonial, and both remember their childhood and marriage. Narration in both novels is exclusively guaranteed by the protagonists/narrators. The narrators organize the plot; insert their stories, and stories of their receivers and even other characters. In both novels, we have intradiegetic narrators; which means the narrators are also protagonists. Each protagonist tells her own story and her story/history. The more we read, the more we become close to the narrator. The story becomes believable and the narrator trustworthy and reliable; In fact, the reader and the narratee become one.

The narrators in the two novels also tell their stories retrospectively through the use of flashbacks using words like “do you remember”. In Bâ’s text, Rama tries to bring back past scenes and memories spent with her friend and her husband whom she addresses

simultaneously. When she uses expressions like “do you remember the morning train that took us for the first time to Ponty-Ville...?” (13), “let us recall our school” (15) or even “do you remember the picnics we organized?” (22), she invites her friend (Aissatou, the narratee) to remember these moments. We even feel a kind of nostalgia as the narrator misses these times and wants to rejoice them through writing. Similarly in *Zenzele* these expressions are frequent like in “do you remember when she came in to see” (28), “do you remember how disappointed you were”(31) or “do you remember Mukoma Byron” (46). Through the use of such words, the narrator affords to share at the same time her personal story and the ones of her relatives with the narratee and reader whom she invites to discover other characters and witness other events and experiences. These words also serve to help the narratee and reader to memorize and make connection between these characters and their stories.

2. The Epistolary Characteristics in *So Long A Letter* and *Zenzele*, *A Letter for My Daughter*

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Janet Gurkin Altman in *Epistolary: Approaches to a Form* defines epistolarity as “the use of the letter’s formal properties to create meaning” (4). The critic lists characteristics that are inherent to the epistolary novel. The characteristics that will be studied in this chapter are the following: epistolary mediation, confidence and confidant, the reader, and epistolary discourse.

2.1. Epistolary Mediation:

In both texts, it is the letter that connects the persons; it links Rama and Aissatou, and *Zenzele* and her mother. Therefore, in both novels, it serves as a bridge cutting the distance between the characters. The letter has an even more important role; it has a liberating and healing power. The epistle (the letter) delivers Ramatoulaye from the walls of seclusion imposed by Mirasse and releases her from the weight of disappointment and sorrow. Confession, in fact,

represents a healing power that helps her to overcome her frustration. By the same way, it represents a free space that ties a mother with her daughter in *Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter* where she is able to explain freely things she did not say before and confide secrets without embarrassment. Another function of the letter lies in the mediation with the idyllic, rustic past and the celebration of tradition and roots. In the midst of her solitude, Ramatoulaye rejoices the past and takes pleasure to remember her youth specifically her marriage. She recounts her marriage in details as she relates her friend's experiences. Similarly, in *Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter*, the narrator tells memorable events that marked her life and confides her secrets to her daughter.

2.2. Confidentiality:

It characterizes both novels. Both narrators make confidences to their confidants (Aissatou and Zenzele) through the epistolary medium which is the letter. Aissatou/ Zenzele, the two epistolary confidants, although absent from the texts, are active agents. In Bâ's novel, the epistolary confidant's role is crucial; her importance stems from her relation, stressed many times in the novel, to the epistolary heroine, Ramatoulaye. Aissatou is an information receiver not an information supplier. Even if there is no direct response from her, her presence is felt through her actions. She writes no word about her husband's betrayal or divorce but still we know the whole story from the letter that the narrator inserts. Moreover, when Ramatoulaye remembers her kind help "I shall never forget your response, you, my sister, nor my joy and my surprise when I was called to the Fiat agency and was told to choose a car which you had paid for, in full" (56), the reader is informed about her reaction and kind support. Similar cases are shown when Ramatoulaye remembers her words: "forewarned, you my friend, didn't try to dissuade me, respectful of my new choice of life" (48); she implicitly demonstrates Aissatou's understanding view about her situation even if there is no available comment from her in the novel. The narrator uses even her imagination to form her narratee's

thoughts; this appears several times in the letter like in “you may tell me” (56), “you very logically may reply” (59), “you tell me of the end” (75) and “more convenient you will say” (94). Through these kind of expressions, Ramatoulaye introduces the reader to her confidant’s inner thoughts and emphasizes the closeness of their ties. Similarly, Zenzele is an information receiver just like Aissatou and makes no response to her mother’s letter. Confidence is shaped here by both the mother and her daughter.

2.3. The Reader:

Altman says in her book that “it is the reader who distinguishes the letter from other first-person narratives” (87). The first person narrative, like the autobiography for instance, is about the writer’s spontaneous representation of the troubles and ambiguity surrounding the act of writing (ibid). The epistolary form, Altman continues, is distinctive in its capacity in exposing the experience of reading (88). The reader/narratee becomes an instrument in the narrative as the writer of the letter/narrator; s/he is a “determinant” of the letter’s meaning (ibid). The traditional autobiography is born of the need to express oneself, but it ignores the eventual reader; however, the letter is never the result of such a flawless idea, but rather the outcome of a unification of writer and reader (ibid). Therefore, without the reader, there is no epistolary deal. The absence of the epistolary pact or deal means that the text is not an epistolary one because there is no desire for exchange, something that we commonly see in journals and diaries where the narratee is missing. In the novels under study, the call for response from a specific reader is there.

In Bâ’s text, Ramatoulaye addresses her narratee directly and tries to open a conversation with her. She, for instance, says: “Aissatou, my friend, perhaps I’m boring you” (9) or “when I stopped yesterday, I probably left you astonished” (26). Through these expressions, Ramatoulaye pushes her receiver to answer her conjectures. Moreover, her desire to exchange grows when she faces many problems with her children and finds no one to share

her burden. She asks: “was I to blame for having given my daughters a bit of liberty?” (81), “who is behind this theft? Who has dared” (86). These questions which represent Ramatoulaye’s intense self examination seek at the same time a response from her friend to relieve her from her situation. She also invites her to exchange when she asks her: “end or new beginning?” (75), “why aren’t your sons coming with you...so, then, will I see you tomorrow in a tailored suit or long dress?” (94). The narrator’s desire for exchange is very prominent and even if she doesn’t expect answers in a short time, she wants to establish a discussion with her friend.

2.4. Epistolary Discourse:

Epistolary discourse is characterized by the particularity of the I / you (reciprocity), the use of the present-tense and temporal polyvalence (the actual time that an act described is performed, the moment when it is written down, the time the letter is received and read). In the two texts, epistolary discourse is ensured by Rama with her friend, and Shiri with her daughter. The present tense is the most frequent tense in both novels and used to address the narratees (Aissatou and Zenzele) to shorten the distance between them. However, it is not used when going back to the past to recount early events and experiences.

In both novels, many actions are performed by the narrators simultaneously when writing their letters. For instance, when Ramatoulaye says: “I take a deep breath” (57), “I feel an immense fatigue” (57) or when Shiri “oh, dear! It is late now...I shall have to continue this letter later” (185), these expressions allow the narratee/reader to deeply examine each of the narrators’ movements.

Solitude and distance serve as the starting point for both letters to take place. When Ramatoulaye faces four-month seclusion imposed by Islam to reflect on her husband, she starts writing her letter. Her husband’s abandonment as well as his desertion did not push her to write. Mirasse affords her sufficient time and creates a suitable atmosphere for reflection

and the production of her letter. In *Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter*, the narrator's motivation to address her daughter stems principally from her health decline. The narrator is probably afraid to die before Zenzele's return from America; thus, she writes to her to accomplish her duty of a mother.

Conclusion:

Both Bâ and Maraire experimented the epistolary form of writing in their novels and spectacularly played with this form. They used some conventions of letter writing that I analyzed throughout the chapter that made their works truly epistolary. However, what is original in their works is that they revised this form and manipulated it through the intrusion of unusual themes. The two novels are not about seduction, they are not about libertine or platonic love like in the western epistolary novel. While the first celebrates female friendship, the second glorifies mother-daughter relationship.

General Conclusion

Throughout this research paper, I have aimed to explore the common points that unite and bring the two authors and novels closer. I have tried to dig into the lives of the two writers and demonstrated that even if they are from different countries and generations, they share the same ambitions to write. Moreover, their concerns are the same as both attempt to portray the situation of African women in their societies.

In the first chapter of my work, I have attempted to introduce the two writers and disclose the commonalities that unite their lives, writings and ideologies. I have also referred to the historical contexts of the novels and highlighted the colonial experiences that both authors' countries received.

Mariama Bâ in her novel *So Long a Letter* exposes the story of two women, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou who are victims of polygamy. She highlights the suffering of Senegalese women under men's egoism and social constraints. Bâ also demonstrates the sort of women yielding to bad treatment and marginalization. She even refers to some problems inherited from French colonialism like modernity. However, she suggests ways to these women to liberate and empower themselves.

Likewise, Maraire in *Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter*, through a voice of a mother whispering to her daughter, highlights the importance of values and roots that shape the

African culture and identity. She urges Africans to be responsible towards their countries and build its future. Through the inclusion of many issues that affect post-colonial Africa like modernity, the brain drain and racism, Maraire conveys a message that calls Africans to be aware of the problems that threaten them and proposes ways to resolve these issues. Evoking the colonial climate that Zimbabwe endured for centuries and the effects it engendered on the Zimbabweans are also the major concerns in her novel. Additionally, her interest lies in illustrating the situation of African women and emphasizing the importance of mother-daughter relationship in the African culture.

Therefore, the two authors' interests are nearly the same, and the themes they put forward are very similar. The first deals with polygamy and caste system that victimize Senegalese women in particular and African women in general; she introduces the power that female friendship and sisterhood represent in helping these disempowered women to achieve self realization and recognition. She even insists on the importance of education in drawing the way of these subjugated women towards freedom and independence. The second cites more serious issues, in addition to modernity, caused by the influence of foreign presence in African countries and illustrates the disillusionment in which Africans find themselves in post-colonial periods. A counterbalance to these issues knitted by colonizers is shown through the evocation of the bravery of men and women that shaped the struggle for independence. Through these allusions, Maraire attempts to raise consciousness among African minds to let them face the realities in which they live at the same time wants them to carry on the struggle started by their ancestors to ensure a peaceful and prosperous Africa.

In the second chapter, I have explored feminism and went further to explain womanism as another feminist variant specific in African-American communities. I have also provided with elements that shape the African feminist thought and cited its major concerns and highlighted the ethics that differentiate it from white feminism. Moreover, I have tried to

shed light on the plight of African women, and have in the same way tried to explore the ways that this movement indicates to these women to overcome their situations.

As vast as it is and as many branches it includes since its appearance in the western world, feminism aimed at making the ideology of egalitarianism between genders true. However, this movement's failure to take into consideration the experiences of women in other countries with other cultures resulted in the emergence of other movements that fit the needs of these women. As a matter of fact, womanism is one of the other movements that appeared to satisfy the requirements of afro-American women.

Therefore, African feminism was created to put an end to the multiple facets of exploitation that African women had to endure in their societies. Unlike white feminism that attacks sexism as a major issue, African feminism attempts to reduce the devaluation that African women undergo through the prescription of some healing solutions to deliver themselves from the yokes of oppression. Among these solutions, succinctly, we can cite male and female cooperation, celebration of multiple mothering and kinship that I endeavored to examine in the two works. By relying on this theory and its principals, I have tried to provide evidence that the two authors are African feminists by excellence, and their works share the same perspectives.

As my interest went further, I devoted the third chapter to study the form of the two novels. I have provided with a brief background of the western epistolary novel to make clear its difference with the African epistolary novel. Moreover, I focused on the epistolary techniques used by these two authors in their works. In doing so, I have cited various characteristics, as explained by Altman, which are in common between the two novels like: epistolary mediation, confidentiality, the reader and the epistolary discourse. I have attempted

to show that the two writers wanted to experiment this neglected form of writing and give it a new dimension through the nature of the themes discussed throughout their works.

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