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**THE EPISTLE AS A MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION:
AN ANALYSIS OF ABUBAKAR GIMBA'S LETTERS TO MY
CHILDREN AND MARIAMA BA'S SO LONG A LETTER.**

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CERTIFICATION

This research work has been duely supervised and approved as having met the requirement for the award of a Bachelor of Arts (B.A. Hons) degree in the Department of Modern European Languages and Linguistics, Faculty of Arts and Islamic Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto.

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DEDICATION

With gratitude to Allah (SWT) I dedicate this work to my late father, Hon. M.K. Ahmed (May his soul rest in eternal peace andjannatulfirdaus be his final abode, amin) and the entire members of the M.K's family.

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ABSTRACT

Communication is an act of exchanging information from one point to another; it is a very important activity of life. Humans and animals communicate in different ways and for different purposes. Communication could be either oral or written. However, the major concern of this work is the written form of communication. Written communication is the exchange of information through letters, e-mails, blog etc. There are different forms of written communication one of which is 'the epistle'. Epistles are a means of delivering communication through the use of letters. An epistolary novel on the other hand is a novel written as a series of documents in the form of a letter. Abubakar Gimba's *Letters to My Children* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* are the selected texts for this research work. Therefore, this work sets out to explore the works of these two great feminist writers who in their artistic efforts employed a unique style of writing 'the epistolary' in order to convey their message(s) to their readers.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Communication is a very important activity of life. Humans and animals communicate in different ways and for different reasons. Language is the primary but complex form of communication by which human beings are distinguished from other living things. Humans use language to achieve premediated goals to defend themselves, to initiate and sustain interaction with one another. Language is not only used to communicate but also to do things and this is supported by Chomsky's standard theory 1965 where he says "There's little reason to believe that the primary use of language is to modify behavior or thought."

Literature is the most effective tool for social criticism as well as a pool of strategies for moral uprightness that promotes literacy and cultures necessary for human and national development. Writers from time immemorial have accepted not just the creative license but responsibility

and chosen various forms to play an active role in redirecting communities where they have gone wrong.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This research work sets out to explore the works of two great feminist writers who in their artistic efforts employed a unique style of writing ‘the epistolary’ in order to convey their messages to their readers.

Abubakar Gimba’s *Letters To My Children* and Mariama Ba’s *So Long a Letter* are epistles whose major preoccupation has to do with the effective use of the language of correspondence. These writers employ this device in order to explore and correct social, political and economic ills in their individual countries and Africa at large. Both writers are Africans but hail from different countries. Abubakar Gimba is a Nigerian or rather “a jewel of Northern Nigerian fiction and have contributed immensely in the popularisation of Northern Nigerian Literature In English.” Babatunde (1991). Gimba chooses a very apt form the epistle to explore in his *Letters To My Children*, an important yardstick of measurement of the moral

principle which is expected to guide people towards growth and development. His wits are of special quality; this shows his nationalistic and patriotic concerns where he projects questions of national integration. He addresses problems of social fragmentation. He tackles issues of empowerment and gender rights and particularly the quest to entrench transparent and purposeful leadership values in our youths. He represents the Muslim point of view in a deft but calm and responsible way and argues in a balanced and mature manner.

Using similar unique style (the epistle), popular on the African scene is Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* and its critique of gender discrimination in marriage. Mariama Ba was an iconic Senegalese female author and feminist who wrote in French. Ba is considered as Africa's best feminist writer. She achieved an instant international fame when her novel *Une Si Longue lettre (So Long a Letter)* published in 1981 won the prestigious Noma Prize and gained wide acclaim. What makes *So Long a Letter* a classic is not only its brave and honest account of the challenge of polygamy for women but its subtly elucidated message calling for

women's self reliance. Ba reveals through Ramatou Laye the inner strength demanded of a woman but also, poignantly, the challenges and fears that she faces. The much broader message that any reader will take away is the sense of hope and disappointment, clarity and confusion of those caught in the bewildering social change of the twentieth-century Africa.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Abubakar Gimba's *Letters To My Children* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* are the selected texts for this research work. The researcher chooses these texts because of the uniqueness of the style adopted by the writers. The irresistible appeal the texts have to the reader and the realism of the themes on contemporary African society is not to be left out either.

However, it is also to make a research analysis into the epistolary style of writing employed by both writers to create vivid pictures on the minds of the readers for the purpose of achieving the set out goals and objectives of this research.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Education is today's child (Boy and Girl) insurance against an uncertain future. It is his/ her ticket to a better life. And it is thus the only enduring legacy that parents and guardians can bequeath to their wards. This is Abubakar Gimba's argument in *Letters To My Children*. The author warns against complacency on the part of students as he challenges them to strive for greatness and excellence through hard work and right living. This, among other epistles set Gimba out as one of the moral voices of our time.

Ba's *So Long a Letter* effectively portrays the challenges women face in this steadily modernizing post colonial social context including a perceptive testimony to the plight of those articulate women who live in social milieudominated by attitudes and values that deny them their proper place.

"It is not only the fact that this is the most deeply felt presentation of the female condition in African fiction which gives distinction to this novel, but also its undoubted literary qualities, which seem to place it among the best novels that have come out of our continent" West Africa.

Furthermore, the epistle serves as an effective medium used to convey to an individual or group, the supposed failed moral responsibility and are instructed to change. That is the crux of this paper.

1.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This research work is within the frame work of Abubakar Gimba's *Letters To My Children* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*. Also inclusive are; Critical analysis of the epistle, communication and its components respectively. Encapsulating the sociocultural, economic and political as well as other issues that weigh down human and by extension, national development such as we encounter in Gimba and Ba's works.

1.5 CONCLUSION

The central idea of this chapter focuses on a General Introduction of the research topic. Through effective and efficient use of the epistolary style of writing, Gimba and Ba fulfil their responsibilities as writers to inform, teach and instruct with true and not the hypocritical religion and culture as a basic foundation upon which the child and nation are built.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 THE EPISTLE; A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The English word “epistle” originated from a Latin word, epistola, that itself originated from a Greek word, pronounced epistole, which meant to send on. While the English word “pistol” originated from the same Latin version of the word, epistola, as “epistle,” epistles were a means delivering of communication, not of delivering bullets.

The English word “apostle” originated from a Greek word, pronounced apostolos, which although related to the Greek word for “epistle,” refers to a person sent, rather communication sent. In the Holy Bible, apostles used epistles to communicate when they were unable to make the journey in person. Epistles were letters sent by apostles, to individuals, or to congregations of Christians in general with Biblical teaching and prophecy. All have since been read by a vast number of people.

The Epistle is a Greek word for a formal didactic letter; a written communication. From the catholic Encyclopedia, and Spiritual view, the Epistle came out first under the general concept of a book as in the letters of the apostles in the New Testament. Later, 'certain translational expressions signifying 'writing' and finally derivations were adopted by different writers.' The Biblical epistle comprise those of the old testament beginning with David's Letter to Joab in 2 Samuel (11:14-15), Jezebel's Letter in I kings (21:8-9) Prophet Elias to king Joram, Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon (Jeremiah 29: 1-59) among others. These were authoritative letters, advising and ordering certain actions to avoid pending dangers.

The New Testament epistles were even more developed with critics making distinctions between letter and epistle. These distinctions credited to Professor Diessmann defined the letter as a private and confidential conversation with the addressee, his anticipated answers shaping the course of the writing while the epistle addresses all whom it may concern, and tends to publication. The letter is a spontaneous product of the writer; the

epistle follows the rules of art. The critics concluded that if publication be regarded as an essential condition of literature, the letter may be described as a 'preliterary form of self-expression'. The Apostle James Epistles were Letters to groups of people he had visited in his ministry. The 13 Pauline epistles of Paul are common references. The Epistle is usually addressed to an absent person on a particular occasion. It is a long, formal composition and is instructive. Abubakar Gimba's Letters fall into this category. They are written to some person (s), Mariama Ba's Letter falls into this category. And like the *Muslim Fundamentalist*, to a group but they all have the expected literary qualities. Gimba's Letters are printed communication directed to 'My Children' the 'Unborn Child' and 'Muslim Fundamentalist' and they inculcate literary culture, impart knowledge and encompass writing as a profession. These letters follow literal interpretations attending to every detail

Gimba's letters are complaint or protest addressed to one person or group but intended for the general public, often Nigerian but also global using conventional symbols associated with the youth, religionists,

government or the international community. His Symbols are often associated with phonetic values of Nigerian English.

2.2 THE EPISTLE AS A STYLE OF WRITING

Style is defined by Lucas (1955:9) as “the effective use of language, especially in prose, whether to make statements or to arouse emotions. It involves first of all the power to put fact with clarity and brevity.” Style could also be said to be the description and analysis of the variability forms of linguistic items in actual language use. Style is applicable to virtually everything we do. However, there are different styles of writing, one of which is the epistolary. When a story is composed entirely of letters, diary entries or these days even e-mails or blog posts, it is known as an epistolary style. Nobody really sends letters anymore, but back in the day, written correspondence was rich with personality sentiment, and engaging story telling. Authors know this, which is why letters have been incorporated into novels since around the 15th century. An epistolary novel is a novel written as a series of documents. The usual form is letters, although diary

entries, newspaper clippings and other documents are used. Recently, electronic “documents” such as recordings and radio, blogs, and e-mails have also come into use. It’s a genre of fiction which first gained popularity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the epistolary novel is a form in which most or all of the plot is advanced by the letters or journal entries of one or more of its characters, and which marked the beginning of the novel as a literary form.

The epistolary form can add greater realism to a story, because it mimics the workings of real life. It is thus able to demonstrate differing points of view without recourse to the device of an omniscient narrator.

Epistolary novels can be monologic, which means they focus exclusively on the letters or diary entries of one character. *The Perks of being a wallflower*, penned by American novelist Stephen Chbosky, is a good example of a modern monologic epistolary novel, because it consists entirely of the main character’s letters to an anonymous recipient. They could also be dialogic, consisting of correspondence between two

characters, or polylogic, where multiple characters are represented. *Les Liasons dangereuses* written by French author Choderlos de Laclos, is a strong example of polylogic epistolary writing, because the alternating letters work well with the mood of the novel. They let the reader wonder who to trust, and they create an air of gossip and mystery.

The letter has become a popular literary medium since Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* (1983) which presents Celie, a main character who has been abused by a man she calls father. In her loneliness and despair she writes to God. It was an immediate hit. Rodger Morrison's *My Dearest Letters* (2003) is a set of love Letters from William to Annie whom he meets in the street. Their relationship develops and the story is told with embedded poetry, romance and religious overtones. Richardson's *Pamela* sometimes regarded as the 'First English Novel', wrote to a 'handsome' girl to instruct young girls on 'how to avoid the snares that may be laid against their virtue'. He hoped the style of the epistolary would turn young people away from the romance of the time and 'promote the cause of religion and virtue'. Popular on the

African scene is Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* and its critique of gender discrimination in marriage. She writes her problems in a letter to her friend who has opted out of a difficult marriage and gone abroad. Another is Abubakar Gimba. Gimba's Letters are directed to 'My Children', the 'Unborn Child' and the 'Muslim Fundamentalist'. The Nigerian socio-political situation and its effects on its citizenry is the focus of Gimba's epistles. The people's reactions to their condition denigrate and fail to ensure human development and by extension national development. His letters are a critique of the poor education available to the citizens of Nigeria represented by the Children/Unborn Child/Fundamentalist. It is thus significant when sociological psychological and political keeps cropping up in Gimba's letters and showing in what ways the reader must decide to put him/herself for as Foster says, 'now is always a product of then'(290)

2.3 THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNICATION

Communication is sharing our feelings, ideas and opinions with others. This can be intellectual, personal, spoken or written in nature. We live in groups and man is invariably a social animal. As the social needs insist that we share our thoughts with others. This can be called communication. It is a two-way process. In spoken communication, we have speakers and listeners who send and receive verbal messages from each other. In written communication, we have readers and writers, whereas in visualization and observation, the symbols and signs are included.

Communication motivates, informs, suggests, warns, orders, changes behavior and establishes better relationships, to make oneself understood. Communication is effective when a communicator is effective enough to communicate competently, simply, clearly, sincerely and dynamically. Ones' communication can be termed as successful, if the receiver acknowledges it, i.e, when a listener or reader understands, reacts, responds

to this communication and shapes his/her learning behavior. The word communication is derived from the Latin word 'communis', which means 'common' ,i.e., to share, exchange, send, transmit, write, relate and communicate. The other etymological source mentions that 'communication' is derived from the Latin term 'communicare' which means to impart or participate. This word often denotes and means different things to different people. In short, we can define communication as sharing and feelings mutually. As it involves interaction, it encourages exchange of ideas until all the experiences become a common profession.

Communication is essential for close, sympathetic relationships in the society and for transformation of men, material and thoughts from one place to another. In a classroom, the meaning of communication is related to the message and counter-messages, which constitute the teaching, learning process. This involves initiation, reception and response that serve as feedback.

Communication process

Communication is interactive by nature. The importance and meaning of communication pertain to the fact that receivers and senders of messages are connected through space and time. Communication as a process has two participants- the sender of the message and the receiver of the message. When these messages are transmitted, they activate the person and this response is the purpose of communication. Thus, we can say that communication requires a source, a sender, a message and a person at the receiving end. Human beings are primarily related to the study of communication. Nevertheless, this process is present in all living things and is a fundamental and universal process. Communication influences the activities of the human community at large. Social development is a prominent feature of effective techniques of communication, which is necessary for sustaining the growth and development.

2.4 COMMUNICATION CYCLE

Communication is purposeful and comprises six components. They are:

1. Sender of the message
2. Receiver of the message
3. Message
4. Medium
5. Setting
6. Feedback

The cycle of communication works effectively when a sender formulates the message, encodes it and transmits the sound waves properly. This message is channelized via a medium to reach the receiver. The message can be termed as communicated when the receiver successfully interpretes it, decodes the message, formulates the counter message (feedback) and transmits it back to the person at the other end via the

medium. This has been the way messages are communicated through ages. In both spoken and written forms, technological process of communication remains the same. In a basic system of communication, sender, message, medium and receiver are the primary elements. Several linguists and communication specialists might have proposed various theories of communication. Even then, the basic model is repetitive, as only the dysfunctional factor or noise comes in as an extra element.

2.5 TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

There are different types of communication. They include:

1. Person to person
2. One person to many persons
3. Many persons to many persons

There are three major modes of communication. They are:

1. Speaking – Listening

In this mode of communication, the possible interaction is face-to-face and person-to-person. It includes body language, sharing of ideas and immediate feedback as well as reinforcement. In a classroom situation, pupils can ask questions, clarify doubts and derive satisfaction. This mode of communication is generally used in seminars, classrooms, debates and etc. This kind of communication is very lively and effective.

2. Writing- Reading

In this mode of communication, the receiver or decoder is not physically present in front of the sender or encoder. Still, there is a chance for the sender and receiver of messages to enjoy and appreciate the feelings of each other. Language is always the vehicle for communication and also changeable into other forms. For example, English language can be changed into visual symbols, graphic signs and even Braille system of language for the blind. Reading is possible in all forms and equally effective as it is in the face-to-face communication. Though instant

feedback is not possible immediately, this is perhaps the most used mode of communication.

3. Visualising- Observing

In this mode of communication, sender encodes the messages in the form of symbols and signs. Receiver decodes these signals and feels the impact of the ideas conveyed. Dramatization and audio-visual experiences come into this category. Communication carried out is many to many and one person to many. In spite of the separation between the producer of the signs and the receiver of the signals, the clear expression of language leaves a greater impact.

If we analyse the types of communication they can be classified as oral and written communication. In the case of oral communication, direct interaction saves time, creates greater impact, gives personal touch and provides space for immediate feedback and reinforcement, which leads to proper evaluation and flexible action. Still, oral communication is not completely rid of gap, which can be physical, social and economic in

nature. Written communication which is a permanent record conveys more information, involves more time and investment. The Epistolary Novel is a good example.

Purposes of Communication

Communication is used to achieve different purposes. The basic ones identified by Dimbley and Burton (1998:11-15) are examined below.

- i. Survival: This refers to the use of communication for physical needs, such as renting an apartment and calling for help when in danger.
- ii. Cooperation: We use communication to work with and get along with others. This is crucial for peace in the society. Breakdown of communication in this regard could lead to war and even extermination of a whole race.
- iii. Personal need: Act of communication like dressing in the right way for an occasion and giving people.
- iv. Relationship: We communicate to persuade others to think or

act in our own way.

- v. Power: We communicate to exert power over others. This may be in the form of control over what they know or how they know it. Propaganda is a good example. Access to and control of the channel of communication play important role in this regard particularly in organisational communication.
- vi. Persuasion: We communicate to persuade others to think or act in our own way.
- vii. Social needs: We communicate to keep our society, group and organizations together.
- viii. Information: This involves giving and receiving information.
- ix. Making sense of the world: We communicate to make sense of the world and our experience of it. According to Dimbly and Burton (1998:14), making sense of the world involves four important things; what we believe in what we think of ourselves

- What we think our relationships are with people
 - What we think is real
- x. Self-expression: We communicate to express our imagination and ourselves to others through words, pictures, sounds others.

There is connection between the types of communication and the use to which communication is put. The end of communication determines the type of communication one is involved in. People adapt communication to suit their needs and purposes. It is clear from this unit that communication is multifarious and the purpose cannot be left out when discussing communication types. Having analyzed 'the epistle' and examined it 'as a style of writing'. This chapter has also explored the concept of communication and its process, Communication Cycle, types of communication and its purposes respectively.

CHAPTER THREE

DATA ANALYSIS: *LETTERS TO MY CHILDREN*

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Abubakar Gimba's pessimism in most of his works, *Letters to My Children* inclusive about Nigeria and the State is unquestionable. He would want the people and the state to change for the better especially for the sake of the Nigerian child whom he believes has no optional country to Nigeria and must necessarily move away from the conduct that bedevils the nation. He thus adopts the epistle in which he is a passionate narrator capturing the devastating truth, reality, perception and delusion of the compromised situation of Nigeria. He adopts an ethical stand point evaluating the conduct of Nigerians and the country's short-comings since independence. This Chapter looks at the objective view of a passing generation and the country's fate in absence of the moral principle. The Nigerian socio-political situation and its effects on its citizenry is the focus of this epistle. The people's reaction to their condition denigrate and fail to ensure human

development and by extension national development. These letters are a critique of the poor education available to citizens of Nigeria represented by the Children. Their failures are as a result of this education which has worsened since independence. His references to what was and what it is now agrees with Ojaide (2011) That, ‘African Literature has to promote literacy to ensure human development as a literate people do not forget and so learn from past mistakes and failures and resort to strategies that succeeded in the past.’

3.2 *LETTERS TO MY CHILDREN*:THE PLOT SUMMARY

Abubakar Gimba’s *Letters to My Children* comprises two letters. The first was addressed to ‘My dearest daughter’ which was first presented at the Fifth Speech and Prize-Giving Graduation Ceremony of the Federal Government Girls’ College, Bida on 14 June, 1986. The second letter was addressed to ‘My dear son’ and was first delivered at the Speech and Prize-giving Day Ceremony of New Horizons College, Minna, on 1 August 2000. In his *Letter to My Daughter*, he laid emphasis on not just education

but a good one. After congratulating her on being successfully admitted into Form Five(now SSS III), he encouraged her to work hard so as to live a respectable, peaceful and independent life. The importance of education was stressed by citing examples with the plight of the women in the village who got little or no education and also some of the girls in the neighbourhood who didn't take their secondary school education seriously thereby terminating their chances of getting into tertiary institutions. He mentioned to his daughter just how selfishly unreasonable and irresponsible men can be. This and a host of others portrayed the economy and scarcity of good husbands. It's unfortunate that most Muslim families are guilty of the misuse and abuse of religion to maltreat their wives. Quoting from the Qur'an and hadith, Gimba stated the importance of the girl-child education. The true meaning of gender equality was stated as non-superiority between the sexes and not sameness of identity, giving a clear cut distinction between the sexes as each has its roles, rights and responsibilities which must be given mutual respect. He encouraged her involvement in extracurricular activities like the Women's Rights Club that

fights the inferiority complex imposed on the womenfolk and end the mental oppression.

The second part of Gimba's letter titled, '*If your tomorrow comes*', was addressed to his son. He started by thanking the son for the letter he wrote informing him of their school's upcoming Parents Teachers Association (PTA) meeting and the importance of his (Gimba) presence. Unfortunately, he won't be able to attend the meeting as a result of a contract he is pursuing at Abuja in order to sustain the family. The author went further to tell his son about a poetry competition among secondary schools which he attended at Abuja. The title was '*The future is ours*'. The presentations were described as interesting and touching and made him think of his own son's future. Gimba encouraged his son to strive hard for a bright and successful future, this is achieved by seeking knowledge, both western and Islamic no matter how far he has to go to obtain it. This extends to having good manners as enjoined by Allah(SWT). A successful future depends on the hard work of both the parent and the child. He frowns at greediness, selfishness and being proud. The building blocks for

a successful future include honesty, patience and tolerance, the dangers of hard drugs, bad company and secret societies were not left out either. Worshiping and consciousness of the creator were termed as most important. Obedience and kindness to parents and teachers also counts among others. In conclusion, Gimba advised his son to stay away from religious arguments and should respect other people's beliefs.

3.3 EPISTOLARY DISCOURSE IN *LETTERS TO MY CHILDREN*

Gimba is familiar with his subject, and chooses words with caution and purpose deploying them in ways that add beauty and depth to meaning. Typical of epistles, the writer dominates the world of his characters, their physical terrain, and ennobles them, sensitizing his readers to the beauty of their religion and cultural heritage. He emphasizes the problems in relation to their practices. Education is a value Gimba uplifts simultaneously with the challenges the community faces as a result of its absence or its promotion in little measure. *Letters to My Children* comprises two letters,

the first one was addressed to '*My Daughter*' while the second letter was to '*My Son*' titled '*If your tomorrow comes*'.

The key words in his *Letter to My Daughter*, he notes in the introduction are 'Girls Education' and 'Liberation' adding that 'for in the word, 'girl', a woman is born and liberation is a condition that seeks for change'(sic). Liberation presupposes a condition of oppression, suppression, repression and bondage (5). Gimba castigates the women for the widespread ignorance and living on in men's concept of keeping women in their proper place and promoted by a male-dominated society. In his letter, he congratulates his daughter for passing her promotional examination to her final class in secondary school but goes on to remind her it is not enough to finish and come home to get married. He informs her that good men are scarce and the majority abuse and misuse religion to abuse their wives.(11), noting that most men ignore the Holy Qur'an which says men and women are equal and treat their women as if God has decreed men superior. He blames this on men's ignorance of Islamic teachings. He advises her to work hard, get a good result that will get her a professional

university education that will not only enable her to be self sufficient but be a good mother, raise good children who will in turn be good parents that will evolve a good nation. Gimba in the epistles' didactic form explains to his 'little girl' the serious business of education and religious instructions, encourages her to be involved in extracurricular activities such as the 'Women's Rights Club' to fight inferiority complex imposed on women and know her rights but not the wrong type of feminism being practiced by her mother's contemporaries, confusing equality and sameness. The letter concludes with a sincere hope that the girl will see her role in the social development of the country as 'behind every successful nation is an educated woman folk' (15) .

The second letter, '*If your tomorrow comes*' (16) is to his son, also in secondary school. Here the father writes to his son explaining to him (son) why he would not attend the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) meeting as much as he wanted to. This is because he had to be in Abuja to get a contract in order to take care of the family, his school fees and that of his brothers and sisters which have recently increased. In the letter to his son,

Gimba informs him of the need for a contract, the difficulties of getting a contract and the need to know a senator who knows a minister, a director or a permanent secretary. He tells his son he has met someone who knows a minister and has an appointment fixed for Saturday which is why he cannot attend the PTA meeting. This is an important factor in the survival game in Nigeria where the government is the ‘business centre’ where one could get a contract with the right connections.

In his letter to the son, Gimba encourages the boy to not just read but emphasizes the importance of writing. He tells his son of a poetry competition he attended and a poem titled ‘The future is ours.’ He educates his son on the benefits of this competition but concludes with a question, ‘if the future is theirs, what sort of future is theirs?’(19). As to his daughter he tells his son to work hard and uphold the culture of good manners enjoined by God. Here he uses the allegory of the mango tree which if not properly tendered will not only fail to bear fruit but die. Hard work, tolerance, speaking the truth and keeping promises, he notes, are important integrity builders. He warned against not being proud or greedy and keeping away

from drugs and friends who indulge in such habits and most importantly worshipping God, obeying teachers, being kind to parents and having consideration for others will ensure a bright future. He goes further to inform his son of the dangers of appointing a thief or a greedy man to run the ministry of education or health. These areas will end up in poor conditions. He chronicles the disadvantages of cheats and lies in spite of the initial financial benefits and typical of the folk stories, such people end up miserably. He concludes by advising his son to keep away from religious arguments and only seek religious knowledge and understanding and never to behave as if he holds the key to anybody's house in paradise.(23) He enjoins him to respect other people's beliefs and be tolerant. With the social conditions of the day, Gimba is indeed writing this letter to all Nigerian children in secondary and tertiary schools.

3.4 CONCLUSION

The Nigerian socio-political situation and its effects on its citizenry are the focus of Gimba's epistles. The people's reaction to their condition

denigrates and fails to ensure human development and by extension national development. His letters are a critique of the poor education available to the citizens of Nigeria represented by the Children. Their failures are a result of this education which has worsened since independence. His references to what was and what it now is agrees with Ojaide (2011) that 'African Literature has to promote literacy to ensure human development as a literate people do not forget and so learn from past mistakes and failures and resort to strategies that succeeded in the past.'(11)

In his epistles, Gimba addresses all the problems that keep the nation from development in the past and the present suggesting to his children what they can achieve with moral rejuvenation and would address corruption as the root of the problems facing the nation. He thus plays his role as Ojaide aptly notes 'of a guide and prophet and constructing an imaginary nation or society of an ideal polity to which readers and the entire society are constantly riveted' (11). Gimba is a writer who knows his place in a globalised world and who does not hesitate to

inform, caution and direct his child to open his eyes to events in the world around him and his place in it which is best determined by him/her and not the dictates of a hypocritical international community that has ignored the importance of peace.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS: *SO LONG A LETTER*

4.1 INTRODUCTION

So long a letter (translated from *Une si longue lettre*) is a semi-autobiographical epistolary novel originally written in French by the Senegalese writer Mariama Ba. Its theme is the condition of women in West African society. The novel is written in first person point of view and It won the first Noma prize for publishing in Africa in 1980. Mariama Ba's *So long a letter* recounts the stories of two women and their husbands, lifelong friends living in Senegal during the post-colonial period of national reformation. The novella is written in the form of a lengthy epistle from one woman, Ramatoulaye to her beloved friend Aissatou. Ramatoulaye, the book's speaker has just experienced the death of her husband, Modou, and as a devout Muslim woman, she is central to the ceremonies performed for her husband's burial .Through the device of a letter, Ramatoulaye narrates her story to her friend, Aissatou.

4.2 *SO LONG A LETTER*:THE PLOT SUMMARY

With this work of fiction, Senegalese writer Mariama Ba explores the inequalities between men and women in Senegal, Islam, and African society. Ba creates a premise of a fictional letter from Ramatoulaye, a schoolteacher in Senegal, to her good friend Aissatou, now in America. Ramatoulaye, a recent widow, is sequestered in mourning for four months and ten days, as is the custom when a woman's husband dies. During this time, she reminisces about hers and Aissatou's lives as students, then later adapting to their roles as wives. She pensively examines the disintegration of both their marriages using introspection and striving to look backward with equanimity.

Ramatoulaye and Aishatou grew into adulthood at a time when women's liberation was gaining momentum across the globe. It was also a time of newly-acquired independence in Senegal and the struggle to find a fresh societal model in a modern world. Ramatoulaye observed: "It was the

privilege of our generation to be the link between two periods in our history, one of domination, the other of independence.”

The two friends became teachers, contributing to the new landscape of education for girls and boys, rich and poor alike. They were cutting edge feminists and the men they married were modern in their views. Mawdo Ba, suitor to Aissatou and a caring doctor, married Aissatou, a goldsmith’s daughter, despite mawdo’s noble heritage. Ramatoulaye did not renounce her religion or customs and she still practiced many cultural traditions, yet she moved forward as a working mother and wife. Her husband Modou Fall wanted to help shape the country’s future, and his work as a lawyer representing trade unions had an impact on governmental decisions.

Trouble befell the marriages that were consummated over twenty years earlier. First, Aissatou’s husband weds a second wife but hoped to continue to live primarily with his first wife. Aissatou would not settle for this and divorced him. Three years later after Modou Fall took a second wife, he Abandoned Ramatoulaye and her twelve children. Ramatoulaye

decided to stay legally married, though Modou never set foot in their house again.

Five years after Modou's betrayal, he had a heart attack and his friend Mawdo was unable to revive him. The mourning and burial of Modou was carried out according to tradition, and Ramatoulaye and her co-wife mourned together in one house as people visited to pay their respects. Ramatoulaye was then house-bound for the rest of her mourning period. It was during this time she found a way to make peace with the past and embrace the future.

4.3 EPISTOLARY DISCOURSE IN *SO LONG A LETTER*

Reflecting on the past, Ramatoulaye weaves together their life histories. They grew up in a French school as two of 'the first pioneers of the promotion of African women' choosing their husbands against the disapproval of their parents (For Ramatoulaye, her marriage was against her mother's wish while that of Aissatou was against her mother-in-law's), they represented the huge social change sweeping across Africa. At

first, the author expresses the hope of a new generation, only to see it soured by practices of the old.

First it's Aissatou's husband, Mawdo. Born of noble descent, his scheming mother who was against his (Mawdo) marriage to the plain daughter of a goldsmith orchestrates a second marriage. Aissatou leaves, 'clothed in my dignity, the only worthy garment, I go my way' and survives and 'succeeds' on her own. For Ramatoulaye, her own misfortunes follow shortly after her husband, Modou, becomes the 'sugar-daddy' to her daughter's best friend and they got married.

Ba pauses on Ramatoulaye's quandary: she can leave with the hope of a new beginning, but, she reflects, 'can I bear alone the weight of this responsibility?'. She acquiesces to the second marriage but does not submit. While her husband increasingly ignores her, she learns to become stronger and more independent, going to cinemas alone and learning to drive. This self-respect and independence puts her in good stead to deal with the suitors after the death of Modou. She publicly humiliates her

father-in-law's proposal to marry, and despite much encouragement, refuses her admirer, Daouda Dieng, for she cannot love him. With wisdom and power she settles for the love of her friends and children.

Ramatoulaye addresses her long letter to Aissatou. The letter she writes appears to be a kind of refuge and relief to her as it is pointed out in the first paragraph of the novel:

“Dear Aissatou

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”

These words which mark the opening of the novel are indicative of the purpose of the letter addressed to the narrative. As it explicitly appears in this passage, the main aim of the letter is to relieve herself from the grief which her life seemed to be destined of and to find a confident so as to get rid of the burden which hardships had brought in her life (by sharing her problems). These first words let us know that this is a kind of continuity

insofar as the narrator-character, Ramatoulaye, makes it explicit that she received a letter from Aissatou.

However, in *So long a letter*, we have different narratives. Ramatoulaye's letters found their narratives in both Aissatou and Daouda Dieng. The letter addressed to Daouda Dieng has a different aim compared to the one she wrote to Aissatou. Both narratives found a common denominator in the purpose of communication. To Aissatou, Ramatoulaye narrates the vicissitudes of life, reminding her of her childhood and subsequently their marriage and abandonment by irresponsible and egoistic husband. To Daouda Dieng, she tells him the difficulties of getting into another relationship which surely will bereft either the latter's wife, or she herself of the privilege of sharing the good moments with the one destined to be the lifetime friend.

In the novel, Aissatou uses the same technique to tell her husband Mawdo that she can no longer bear the situation of sharing her husband. Unlike Ramatoulaye who prefers to stand by the side of her husband in

spite of her suffering, Aissatou in an eloquent way tells Mawdo, her narrative, that:

“Mawdo

Princes master their feelings to fulfill their duties. Others bend their heads and, in silence, accept a destiny that oppresses them.

That, briefly put, is the internal ordering of our society, with its absurd divisions. I will not yield to it. I cannot accept what you are offering me today in place of the happiness we had. You want to draw a line between heartfelt love and physical love. I say that there can be no union of bodies without the heart’s acceptance, however little that may be.

If you can procreate without loving, merely to satisfy the pride of your declining mother then I find you despicable...

I am stripping myself of your love, your name. Clothed in my dignity, the only worthy garment, I go my way.

Goodbye,

Aissatou ”.

That was Aissatou’s letter to her husband, she left afterwards.

So long a letter depicts a society uneasily torn between tradition and modernity. Ramatoulaye, describing herself as: “a bit of a rebel” is the dependable figure that allows the society to move forward: wife, mother, and teacher. Yet she and Aissatou, and their best intentions, are undermined even by those who should be closest to them, specifically: weak men, but also in-laws pursuing their own agenda. It does not bode well.

Ba concludes on a hopeful note: despite everything, Ramatoulaye avers: “hope still lives on within me”. It’s an encouraging ending to a rather bleak story of a strong but battered woman, but it’s hard to believe that all the hurdles facing the life she envisions for herself, her children and her country can be conquered.

4.4 CONCLUSION

Throughout the novel, Ba effectively illustrates the challenges women face in this steadily modernizing, post-colonial context. Both Ramatoulaye and Aissatou represent women of the “New Africa”, and having been educated, their life experiences break with the isolated experiences of their female predecessors. The women’s social roles are multifarious: while their teaching careers offer an avenue for personal meaning outside of the home, as well as contributing to their families’ economic well-being, they also retain their domestic roles as mothers and wives. While in many ways thriving under this added pressure, the women face the added obstacle of negotiating their devout Muslim faith in a modern world. Both women censure the polygamous relationship that their husbands justify with Islamic axioms and biology; whereas Modou invokes Allah’s intention of putting himself and his new wife “side by side”, Mawdo, a doctor falls back on his uncontrollable “instincts that dominate him” (42, 35). To Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, the existence of a co-wife renders the emotional connection and devotion the partners have with one

another, meaningless. On one level, such a belief reveals an individualistic idea of love likely engendered through their Westernized schooling, and importantly, one unable to align with the Muslim practice of polygamy, an institution the women believe fractures strong marital bonds that hold the family together. Ba takes this further and ultimately churns out a deeply felt message of the necessity of unity and solidarity between the sexes, and of the sexes, and of the inseparability of women's issues from those of national politics. Such a message holds great value in the modern context, especially in post-colonial countries still struggling with nationhood and national identity.

Although *So long a letter* emanates from a specific sociocultural milieu at a particular time in its history, it reflects many of the present day concerns of Muslim women worldwide, as the strong forces of trationalism often overpower both Islamic principles and state legislation designed to promote women's rights in many Muslim socio-cultural contexts. Thus, in spite of differences arising from particular traditions and various interpretations of religious percepts that impact on Islamic practices, Ba

believes writers have a role in shaping the society. And this novel is her contribution to those forces of change.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 SUMMARY

The entire body of this research is divided into five chapters. Chapter one contains the background and a general introduction of the study. Here, the research is centered on the works of two African writers who in their artistic efforts employed the epistolary style of writing in order to convey their message(s) to their readers. This complementarily(Gimba and Ba's works) has helped scholarly growth which brings together people with different professional backgrounds and diversifying views for human and national development, which includes education, health, income, the rate of inequality, poverty, gender gap, human security, a sense of corporate existence, selflessness, honesty, generosity and integrity which Ojaide (2011) describes as aspects of an individual's character that indicate the level of human development and can be attained through education.

Chapter two of this study contains a review of related literature. By this, a critical analysis of 'the epistle' was reviewed, as a concept and as a style of

writing. That leads to the concept of communication, communication cycle and types of communication respectively.

Subsequently, chapters three and four entail data analysis of the works of both writers. Each chapter contains an introduction, the plot summary, epistolary discourse and a conclusion of each of the texts.

5.2 CONCLUSION

The letter has become a popular literary medium since Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* (1983) which presents Celie, a main character who has been abused by a man she calls father. In her loneliness and despair she writes to God. It was an immediate hit. Rodger Morrison's *My Dearest Letters* (2003) is a set of Letters from William to Annie whom he meets in the street. Their relationship develops and the story is told with embeded poetry, romance and religious overtones. Richardson's *Pamela* sometimes regarded as the 'First English Novel' wrote to a 'handsome' girl to instruct young girls on how to avoid the snares that may be laid against their virtue'. He hoped the

style of the epistolary would turn young people away from the romance of the time and ‘promote the cause of religion and virtue’.

Finally, according to Ojaide (2011), a country or a region that is very corrupt and with a lot of undisciplined, self-centered and ignorant folks and rife with injustice is very low in human development and without human development there can be no industrial or other forms of development. Literature thus, serves as a catalyst for human development by inspiring people to stretch their imaginative potentials for physical development and the well being of people. It further encapsulates the socio-cultural, economic and political as well as other issues that confront and weigh down human and by extension, national development such as we encounter in Gimba’s *Letters to my Children*. The country groans under the denigration of moral and ethical responsibility where culture is sidelined, where religion and its values are enveloped in hipocracy and justice, fairness and communality has given way to disharmony and violence. His works question views of ‘detrivalised’ writers and citizens and is in agreement with Ojaide (2011:10). It is in this light we appreciate even the

new writers like Chimamanda Adichie and Helon Habila who tap from their roots to affirm faith in our indigenous virtues and values, an issue that is of utmost importance in Gimba's works as was seen in his epistles, a literature for the youth which focus on virtue and ethical theory in the promotion of education and good behaviour.

Discussion of *So long a Letter* by the West African woman writer Mariama Ba, is used as a basis for highlighting the empowering and disempowering effects of particular types of education for women in the traditional African-Muslim context of Senegal. Ba further presents polygamy as destructive, oppressive and responsible for women's misfortune and presents marriage as problematic. An examination of this issue in the novella would seem to indicate that the marginalisation of Muslim women in this and other countries could be alleviated by a religious education which would investigate the differences between Islamic principles and cultural practices as one of its key focus areas. Combined with a secular education taking cognisance of present-day hybrid identities in post colonial and other states, this approach has the potential to empower

Muslim women to become socially and politically active thereby, reconstructing their status in societies in which the forces of traditionalism often overpower both basic Islamic principles and state legislation designed to promote women's rights.

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