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# Translating Mariama Bâ: representation of African women and reception of Une Si Longue Lettre

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# Translating Mariama Bâ: Representation of African women and Reception of *Une Si Longue Lettre*

**By**

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**Research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree:**

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# Abstract

African literature by female African writers occupies a unique space in the literary sphere. Authors like Mariama Bâ produce work that succeeds in amplifying women's marginalised voices and contributing to real, positive narratives about women and about Africa. Works of this calibre educate, dispel false truths and foster scholarship about Africa by Africans.

The present research is a comparative analysis of the French Senegalese novel *Une Si Longue Lettre* written by Mariama Bâ and translated into English by Modupe Bodé-Thomas as *So Long a Letter*. This research is carried out as a case study that makes use of and takes the form of a product oriented study as a part of Descriptive Translation Studies, as theorised by Gideon Toury. It is concerned with the reception of such a text by English speaking audiences in the Global North. The questions about reception and the privileging of Western views are analysed and answered through a thorough paratextual and metatextual analysis. In the same way, the question surrounding the depiction of African women is answered through a close reading of the texts themselves and through the reading of other scholars and critics who have written extensively about the subject. In this way, the answers to all these questions feed into one another. Drawing from the analysis, the reception of this novel by English speakers in Europe and America is a largely positive one. The diversity and versatility of the subject matter in the novel, makes the novel suitable to be taught and discussed in a variety of settings and for different purposes. Its accolades contribute to this reception as well.

# Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own, unaided work, submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree M.A by coursework and research report in Translation Studies, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before any degree of examination in any other university.

_____

Sanelisiwe Sithole

Signed at _____this _____day of _____20_____

# Dedication

I would like to thank my mom for her constant support and understanding throughout this process. I would also like to thank my supervisor Christopher Fotheringham for his endless patience, for sharing his vast knowledge with me and his willingness to help. I could not have done this without him.

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**List of abbreviations**

The following abbreviations have been used:

**DTS** – Descriptive translation studies

**ST** – source text

**TT** – target text

**SL** – source language

**TL** – target language

**AWS** – African Writers Series

# Chapter 1

## 1.1 Background

Mariama Bâ is a celebrated Senegalese author whose novels have been widely read and have been studied in many different disciplines all over the world. She was born in Dakar, Senegal in 1929 into a fairly privileged and well-educated family. Her father was a civil servant who went on to become a minister in the period after independence. Although she was raised by her grandparents, she benefitted from her family's social status and received an education in the colonial French education system which remained after independence. This is made obvious when reading her work. Her language of choice when it comes to her writing is French and she rarely, if at all, breaks the conventions of the language. This is indicative of her advantaged upbringing.

Bâ's use of French can be attributed to the aims of the colonial powers at the time. The schooling system in French West Africa was primarily concerned with the dissemination of the French language and the advantages to be gained from the spread of French culture, specifically through the education system (Riesz, 1991: 33). In the early days of colonialism there was a great disparity between the number of girls attending school as compared to the number of boys enrolled. By the late 1930s the schooling of women had increased significantly. It can be argued that the French sought to improve the lives of Senegalese girls through education for their upliftment, but also and perhaps more importantly, the French authorities believed that the education of women would more quickly spread their message and achieve the goal of assimilation. The French authorities recognized that educating a woman would equate to the community benefitting from that education. Georges Hardy, the first Inspector General of French West Africa said in this regard:

> When we enrol a boy in the French school, we gain a single unit; when we enrol a girl, we gain one unit multiplied by the number of children she will have.
>
> (Riesz, 1991: 32- 33)

Thus the success of the French colonial project in West Africa, according to the colonial powers, relied on the education of women. The project to educate women was met with much resistance from those who rejected formal education and all that came with it. In Senegalese society there existed two recognized forms of education; education at home (the more traditional of the two) and formal schooling. Education that took place in the home was carried out with the intention of preparing young women for adulthood (namely marriage)

and all the responsibilities that come with it. Arguably both of these have the ability to succeed and produce women who are in control of their destinies. Regardless of the aims of the French, there were benefits to their formal education system and its ability to co-exist with the traditional African system of education.

Education was of particular importance to Bâ because of her own work as an educator. This love for education and the ability it had to powerfully improve the lives of women can be seen throughout her work as well. As a champion of women's rights and in the light of her involvement with various women's organisations, it comes as no surprise that her writing deals with issues of race, gender, feminism and religion. Of particular interest to me is how these different themes are represented in her novel and the transferal of these themes in the translation. As varied as her themes are, they all contribute towards painting a vivid picture of the trials and tribulations of Muslim Senegalese women.

*Une Si Longue Lettre* is one such story of two Senegalese women who have been friends most of their lives. Many years later they are brought together again by a tragic event and by making use of flashbacks, the story unfolds in epistolary form. In other words, we come to know our main characters and their lives through a series of letters written by Ramatoulaye to Aïssatou. In terms of contemporary African fiction, the epistolary mode is rather unique, it offers a more personal account and it affords the reader a certain intimacy. The French was published in 1980 by Nouvelles Éditions Africaines (publishing house established by poet, theorist and Senegal's first president, Léopold Sédar Senghor), and the English translation followed and was published in 1981. Bâ's second and final novel *Un Chart Écarlate* was published just after her death in 1981. The English translation, *Scarlet Song*, translated by Dorothy Blair was published in 1986.

### 1.2 Aim

Mariama Bâ's first novel, *Une Si Longue Lettre,* and its 1981 translation into English under the title *So Long a Letter* by Modupe Bodé-Thomas, are under examination in this study. The aim of this study is threefold. Firstly, to examine the type of reception Mariama Bâ's work has experienced in the English speaking world, particularly in the Global North. This is done by examining the marketing of the novel by its publishers and the contexts in which the novel is read and studied in the Anglophone world. Secondly, I seek to discover how her translation has represented African women and the extent to which it has privileged a Western audience and Western views. Lastly, the extent to which, if at all, feminist translation theory and its strategies are employed in the translation are also examined.

### 1.3 Rationale

Mariama Bâ's first published novel, *Une Si Longue Lettre*, catapulted her into the African literary scene. Its themes cover a vast area of knowledge and have influenced a generation of African women and women writers. This study delves into the relationship that exists between the novel and its audience in the English speaking Global North, namely North America and Europe. The choice to focus on this part of the world is not designed to dismiss the novel's acclaim in Anglophone Africa nor is it meant to dismiss or discredit enlightened and educated elites on the continent who have read and provided critical commentary on the English translation of the book. The aim is to examine the relationship (between the audience and the novel) and subsequent reception of the novel from outside the continent and from a 'western' perspective and gaze. This relationship between the chosen audience and the novel is able to exist because of translation. One of the many indicators of the novel's success and the importance bestowed upon it, is the fact that it has been translated from French into eighteen languages, which is examined later in the research report. Translation has granted entirely new audiences access to Bâ's work and that is why analysing the novel's reception with new audiences is of value to this study.

The eighteen other translations of *Une Si Longue Lettre* are part of the reason why the novel's impact is so far reaching. Another reason is that the novel touches on and explores many facets of human nature and behaviour that are understood and relatable to all people. It broaches the subjects of polygamy, education (women's education in particular), colonialism, the fight for liberation on the continent, friendship and many other things. The scholarship and critical analysis of this work has to do with postcolonial literature, African literature and feminism.

The themes of exoticisation and the aestheticisation of otherness also play a crucial role when examining an audience's reception to a text that is foreign to their society and culture. This takes on newer and greater importance when that text originates from a place that is historically viewed in a one dimensional light, in the way that the African continent has been in the past and continues to be viewed today. The prism through which Africa and subsequently anything that comes from there is viewed can result in two things. The first of those is the creation of a biased and incorrect picture of Africa and the second is a determination by African scholars to dispel those false depictions through writing and producing literature that depicts Africa in its true, diverse form. More importantly, a view of

Africa that is told through the eyes of those who live as Africans and who reflect their reality through their writing, as Mariama Bâ has done with *Une Si Longue Lettre*.

The work of Mariama Bâ is greatly celebrated, due in part to the fact that her French novels have been translated into many languages, enabling them to be read by a wider audience. Her acclaim in French led her novels to be translated into other languages and in turn, their wide dissemination increased their acclaim. The many translations have, in a way, given the text prestige. This phenomenon is what literary critic and novelist George Steiner refers to as compensation, one of the stages of what is known as the hermeneutic motion. The hermeneutic motion as theorised by Steiner is the act of elicitation and appropriative transfer of meaning and it has four stages (Steiner, 1998: 296). There is initiative trust, aggression, incorporation and compensation. Initiative trust is the belief that there is something worth discovering in the source text, aggression is the act of taking apart the source text and capturing its meaning and incorporation is where the meaning extracted from the source text is assimilated into the target text. This act of invading and extracting from one, in order to input into another, causes the system to be off-tilt resulting in an imbalance. This imbalance is redressed by the fourth stage; compensation. The hermeneutic motion is incomplete if it lacks this fourth stage (Steiner, 1998: 300). The restoration of this balance is the crux of the morals of translation. When the third stage is complete the original text is left with a residue and while this can be detrimental, it can also be quite positive. This residue enhances the translated work and this is the case with Bâ's *Une Si Longue Lettre*.

This enhancement is achieved in a few ways. Firstly, according to Steiner, the selection of any source text for translation is noteworthy. The mere fact that a text is selected dignifies that source text and enlarges its stature (Steiner, 1998: 300). Furthermore, the process of translation is a process that asserts that there is something contained within a source text worth exploring further. Translation essentially magnifies and illuminates a text. It can be compared to a mirror; an object that reflects but can also generate light. There is a very reciprocal relationship between an original and its translation (Steiner, 1998: 300).

This reciprocal relationship can however be tarnished by a bad translation. This occurs when the imbalance Steiner speaks of has not been addressed. The hermeneutic motion places great emphasis on the role of the translator and how that role can affect the outcome of a translation and its reception. In the case of a bad or an inadequate translation, the translator has perhaps taken too much, or too little from the source material, has either embellished or

skimped and omitted (Steiner, 1998: 301). When a translation falls short of the original, it makes abundantly clear the autonomous virtues of the original. Where the translation surpasses the original it implies that the original text (and author) did not fully realise the potential of the literary work. The latter refers to Schleiermacher's notion of a hermeneutic that knows better than the author did (Steiner, 1998: 302).

Translation can achieve many things but at this point in time I shall focus on two principle things. Firstly, translation grants an entirely new audience access to knowledge and material that would otherwise be inaccessible to them. The original, *Une Si Longue Lettre*, was written in French and while French is a language spoken by many people all over the world, this meant that the novel was limited to the Francophone world. Secondly, translation enables a literary work to gain acclaim and prestige from a new audience. An audience that was previously distant and removed from the literary work because of the language barrier. One of the great advantages of translation is the passage of time. New forms of significance can be gained by an original through translation into another language over the course of time. The publication dates of the various translations of *Une Si Longue Lettre* range from 1981, just two years after the original novels publication, to 2008 and beyond. The object of this study received great acclaim when it was published in 1979, but I would argue that the bulk of its critical acclaim and accolades came with the publication of its various translations over the years. Each time a translation in a new language appeared, an opportunity for fresh examination, analysis and acclaim also presented itself. It can be argued that this is why Bâ's work has had such longevity, especially considering that she only published two novels, both over thirty years ago. Her unfortunate passing just before the publication of her second novel meant that the world was deprived of more of her work. Perhaps the key to her relevance and continued acclaim, long after her death, is translation.

It is the translation of her novel into English as *So Long a Letter* in 1981 that is of particular importance to this study. It goes without saying that had this English translation not been commissioned, this novel and Bâ herself might have remained relatively unknown and unstudied in the Anglophone world. The prestige she enjoys posthumously is in part due to the many translations of her novels that exist. The might and influence of the Anglophone publishing world is also not to be overlooked. This study thoroughly examines the power of one particular Anglophone publishing house and how their relationship with *So Long a Letter* began. Heinemann was the first to publish her translated English work under their African Writers Series, and the collaboration was a great success. The series aimed and I believe

succeeded in creating an African canon for academic study that included all the various literary forms found on the African continent. The release and rerelease of the novel as part of this series established Mariama Bâ as an African writer of note, appropriately placed alongside the likes of Chinua Achebe, Nuruddin Farah, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Nadine Gordimer, Steve Biko and many others.

Given that Bâ's work and *Une Si Longue Lettre* in particular, is centred around two women and their contrasting experiences of the same society it is worth exploring the relationship between translation and gender. Gender equality was very important to Bâ and as a pioneer of women's rights, she was involved in various women's rights organisations. So strong was her passion and belief in this issue that she wrote the novel that is now the subject of my study. When *Une Si Longue Lettre* was published in 1979, it was one of the first French novels written by a Senegalese woman which is further evidence of the true pioneer that she was. *The Companion to African Literature* points out that "It is a pioneering work, as Bâ was among the very first female novelists from sub-Saharan Africa to explore the experience of Muslim African women" (Currey, 2008: 70). In 1980, she was recognised for her work when it became the very first novel to win the prestigious Noma Award for Publishing in Africa. The awarding of this literary prize is a noteworthy event in the life of this novel and the importance of this event is examined at length later in this study.

There are a few important choices made by the author and echoed by the translator that create a certain amount of intimacy for the reader. The first is the choice to write in the epistolary form and the second is the use of first person narrative. While the latter is rather common in the African corpus, the former is quite rare (McElaney-Johnson, 1999: 111). Up until 1979, only five African novels had been classified as having been written in the epistolary form and all of them had been written by men. Collectively Dutch author and scholar Mineke Schipper and author Christopher Miller list a total of five texts that can be categorized as letter novels by the following authors: Bernard Dadié (*Une nègre à Paris*), Nsimba Mumbamuna (*Lettres kinoises*), Henri Lopès (*Sans tam-tam*), René Philombe (*Lettres de ma cambuse*) and Etoundi-M'Balla Patrice (*Lettre ouverte à Soeur Marie-Pierre*) (Miller, 1990 & Schipper, 1989). *Une Si Longue Lettre*, as the title suggests, is a novel written as one long letter. In other words, it is written in the epistolary form. During a very difficult time in her life, our protagonist Ramatoulaye writes a long letter to her friend since childhood, Aïssatou, as a way to overcome her grief over the sudden death of her husband. The epistolary form is a central part of the telling of this story. It offers the reader an insight into the mind of the characters or

indeed the author themselves. It is also a unique and intimate representation of voice. Crucial to any letter writing process is the identification of a sender (addresser) and a receiver (addressee) and acknowledging the letter that acts as a bridge between them. In an epistolary novel, the sender is obvious and in this instance that is Ramatoulaye. At first glance, the receiver is Aïssatou, but one of the interesting elements of this genre and style of writing is that as the reader, you feel as though you are the receiver. That reinforces the strong and intimate nature of the relationship between the writer and the audience.

This genre or form places great emphasis on confidence. In fact, the theme of "confiance" and "confidence" are a prominent feature in French epistolary fiction. One of the fundamental vehicles of this narrative is the fact that a letter is often written to a person the sender views as a confidant, someone they trust implicitly (Altman, 1982: 48). Ramatoulaye herself makes mention of the notion of confidence in the very first paragraph of the novel: "Notre longue pratique m'a enseigné que la confidence noie la douleur", "Our long association has taught me that confiding in others allays pain". Ramatoulaye firmly believes that confiding in her oldest and closest friend will ease her pain during this difficult time. This demonstrates the strength of their relationship and in a way justifies the writing of this long letter. This belief is also the sole motivation and justification for the writing of this long letter.

In the object of this study, the trust that exists between our sender and receiver is based on a lifetime of friendship, on shared life experiences and a shared history. This shared history is generational and is mapped out by Ramatoulaye. At many points Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou's lives have mirrored each other. She recounts how it began with their grandmothers whose homes were separated by a fence, how their mothers maintained this relationship that was eventually passed down to Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou (Larrier, 1991: 748). They went to the same schools, both became teachers, the men they married were great friends and Ramatoulaye even named one of her daughters and sons after Aïssatou and her husband Mawdo respectively (Larrier, 1991: 748). Their relationship is long established and this is made clearer through the reading of this long letter.

Epistolary literature has only recently become a subject of serious critical study and this places even more importance on Bâ's work. *Une Si Longue Lettre* prominently features a writing style and genre that has not been studied exhaustively and has in fact been viewed as archaic and historically limited (Altman, 1982: 3). Scholars like Janet Altman and Renée Larrier argue that the epistolary form is more than just a formal structure or medium for the

narrative, it can and does in fact, inform the narrative. That is how integral the epistolary genre is. I believe that there is definitely room for this genre to be studied more, especially within the context of translation. There is a sensitivity and intimacy the epistolary genre requires and the translator would have to adjust and meet the needs of such a genre in order to carry out a successful translation.

There are those who would and do argue that this novel is more of a journal or diary than a letter. They even point to Bâ's use of the word "cahier" again in the first paragraph of the novel which means notebook but a word which the translator, Modupe Bodé-Thomas, translates as diary, as proof of their belief. While there are similarities between journal writing and letter writing, for instance the required self-reflection and introspection, there is a fundamental difference. Writing in the epistolary form is defined by the anticipation of another person's words (McElaney-Johnson, 1999: 113). All letters are addressed to someone and with someone in mind. Through writing that letter, the sender tells their story, for another and in front of another. They go beyond just self-examination. This is what Mariama Bâ offers her readers in her novel *Une Si Longue Lettre*; an opportunity to be witnesses to an intimate moment of self-evaluation and reflection.

This point emphasises the importance of the role that the reader plays. There is a reciprocity required and expected in the letter writing process that just does not exist when writing in a diary or a journal. A journal is created for the writer alone. The expectation with a journal is that it will only ever be read by the author themselves. Its contents are deemed too private to share. I believe that the choice by Mariama Bâ to use the epistolary genre is central to the audience's connection to the characters and the overall reaction and reception to the novel. The epistolary form has the potential to make the reader feel a part of the story and not just an outside observer.

This emphasis on the role of the reader is essential to the answering of the question that I have posed. After all, it is the reader (whether it is critics, university students and lecturers or the layman) who determines and sets the standard for the kind of reception that the novel will receive. The success of any published literary work rests in the hands of the readership and their response to the work. The focus of this study is the reception of the English translation of the novel by a readership from the Anglophone world, particularly from Europe and North America.

*Une Si Longue Lettre* is different from other postcolonial literature and its author is different from other postcolonial African writers for reasons that I have already stated and other reasons that are articulated throughout the study. Both the author and the novel are credited with many firsts namely the honour of being the first novel to win the Noma Award, in 1979 being the first female writer out of Africa (on record) to write a novel in the epistolary genre and at the time of its publication, it was also one of the first novels written in French by a Senegalese woman.

Although Bâ's work is well known and her novels widely read and analysed, this study approaches her work from a different angle and with a different focus. The study of this literary work and its translation is important because it highlights the uniqueness of Mariama Bâ's work while also bringing attention to the very important subject of the translation of African literature. African literature is a vast area of study and it includes many unique features that enhance and nuance the story, but they also complicate the translation process. The novel makes use of the epistolary genre, the story is very female centric, the setting and the events are undoubtedly and unapologetically African, almost as proof of that the original author has interwoven the French with Wolof words and phrases and quite importantly, it was written at a time when women did not have much of a voice. These are some of the challenges and intricacies that present themselves when translating African literature. The fact that it is an area that is relatively understudied, presents challenges of its own as well and only adds to the pressure. The role of the translator becomes clearer when approaching a translation of this kind. A certain sensitivity, delicacy and awareness is required for the translator of such a literary work.

Although her career as an author was short lived, her writing has been influential and has greatly contributed to and enriched African literature and has encouraged extensive critical study and analysis of her work. I believe her writing successfully addresses and brings attention to the tensions of being African, Muslim and female and negotiating the quest for modernity in these circumstances without forsaking culture and traditions. The literature review examines in more depth the points that I have raised in this section.

### 1.4 Outline of chapters

The first chapter provides an overview of the entire study. It includes the background concerning the author, Mariama Ba and her work; the aims of this study and the rationale which elaborates on the value of this study, provides a plot synopsis and discusses why Mariama Bâ's work is so important and worthy of study.

The second chapter contains the most extensive parts of the study. The literature review, the theory and the method. The literature review covers the topics of feminism in an African context, feminist translation theory, the role of the translator, Descriptive Translation Studies, foreignization and domestication, reception and the paratext. The entire review of the literature highlights and discusses the literature that inspired and formed the foundation upon which my study is built. The theory and the method discuss how the research is going to be carried out practically, but more importantly the theoretical framework that underpins my entire research report and helps me answer the question that I have posed.

The third and fourth chapter comprise the analysis and conclusion. The analysis is done in three parts. It is through the first two analyses that we come to appreciate the role and power of the publisher. The paratextual analysis and the marketing of the novel give an insight into the extent of this publishers power, how it is wielded, to what effect and to what purpose. First the paratextual analysis is undertaken whereby I examine all the extratextual material that exists outside the text, but still contributes to the main body; what Gerard Genette calls the paratext. The second part of the analysis is the analysis of the reception and marketing of So Long a Letter. In this section, I look at the various marketing tools and strategies utilised by Heinemann to promote and sell the novel to their audience. From the clever use of the African Writers Series as a selling point to the politics of literary prizes, these are some of the tools used to manipulate the audience's reception to the novel. The last part of the analysis is the close reading whereby the main body of the text is analysed. Segments (or coupled pairs) are selected in both languages and then compared. It is a micro-textual analysis. Lastly, in chapter four we find the conclusion. It is here where all the findings are consolidated and observations are summarised.

# Chapter 2

**Literature review**

Given that this literary work is such a significant and necessary addition to African literature and is adding to the number of female voices in this sphere there are many theoretical discussions to be had, in order to back up this study. The theoretical literature to be discussed in this study can be divided into seven main fields; feminism in an African context, feminist translation theory, the role of the translator and the strategies at their disposal, Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), foreignization and domestication, reception and the paratext. All of these fields are in some way relevant to this study. Feminism is without doubt one of the prominent themes in the novel and this study requires an in depth discussion of feminism specifically in an African context, to better understand the writing and the author herself. When a translated work features feminism quite prominently it is worth considering feminist translation theory and its merits or value to a novel of this nature. In any translation , the role of the translator is probably the most scrutinized because it is the most important job. The skills required to deliver a translation of an African literary gem are discussed in this literature review. DTS and foreignization and domestication are useful translation strategies that help explain the decision making process and strategies employed by the translator and the effect they have on the novel's reception. The reception of the novel in an Anglophone context is at the heart of this study. The paratext is one of the key elements that influences the reception of a literary work in a given audience and So Long a Letter is no different.

## 2.1 Feminism in an African context

At the centre of this epistolary novel we find two characters, Aïssatou and Ramatoulaye two African Muslim women who in some way feel a sense of betrayal at the hands of their spouses. The "letter" is written by Ramatoulaye to Aïssatou during her four month mourning period (known as iddat) which is required of all Muslim widows, after the death of her husband Modou Fall. The novel tells the story of the two women struggling to overcome the institutionalised injustices of the male dominated and inherently patriarchal society in which they live (Latha, 2001: 25). There are varying perceptions and opinions that have been perpetuated about the plight of the African woman in western discourse on Africa and writings on Africa. Until recently, the image of the woman in literature was an image cultivated by male writers. Female characters created by men are typically unlike women in real life. As a result, the woman, in this case the African woman is displaced. A speech that is not her own has been imposed upon her and she has been placed in what author Florence

Stratton (1988) calls a “shallow grave”. It is in this grave that female characters are forced to accept the limiting stereotypes that are created and promoted by sexist, masculine, societies (McElaney-Johnson, 1993: 19). This problem is compounded when it comes to the depiction of the African woman; her gender, her race, her religion and her geographical location all contribute to negative, biased and many times incorrect depictions of her. In *Une Si Longue Lettre*, however the story is told through the female prism and the men play secondary roles. This novel more realistically depicts female characters and their struggle to find their place in a society and social order that has for a long time defined their role for them. And by telling the story in this way, Bâ challenges the status quo.

Like other African female writers like Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta, Mariama Bâ publicly rejected the title of feminist (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1987: 11). Some scholars have argued that her rejection of the term stems from her feeling that the generic, widely disseminated brand of feminism does not accurately speak to the lived experiences of African, Muslim women (Latha, 2001: 24). In the same way that many women feel it is closely associated with whiteness and Western society (Collins, 1996: 12-13). Another term that is perhaps more aligned with the thinking of Mariama Bâ is the term womanism. American novelist and activist Alice Walker (1983) offers multiple understandings. She first defines a womanist as a black feminist or a feminist of colour. Consequently, she speaks of the term “womanism” as something that is rooted in black women’s history in racial and gender oppression. Others have categorised it as a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womanhood (Collins, 1996: 10). The terms womanism and black feminism are used interchangeably by some because they both speak to the same ideals. Both concern themselves with the struggle against sexism and racism that black women face and the importance of self-definition and self-determination (Collins, 1996: 10). This is valuable to the study primarily because So Long a Letter has feminism as one of its underlying themes, despite the author rejecting the feminist title. The kind of feminism present in the novel reflects the thoughts of proponents and theorists of black feminism and womanism. It speaks to the reality and injustice at the hands of others, faced by Black African Muslim women because of their race, gender, religion, social class and geographical location. Readers of this novel in Anglophone Europe and North America will be confronted with a kind of feminism that is unlike the widely promulgated feminism. It will raise the question of whether this particular audience’s expectations will be met.

This study interrogates whether the translation of this novel has pandered to the expectations of a white Anglophone audience. Does the interpretation of the novel align with the dominant ideas about the plight of African women that exist in Europe and North America? Or more precisely, does it meet the expectations of the Western feminists? The very feminists who Mariama Bâ saw herself as distinctly different from because of their brand of selective feminism; a feminism that was not all encompassing of all women and their experiences.

The form in which the novel is written is a very important feature as it helps the reader understand and appreciate Mariama Bâ's writing and feminist endeavour. The author has manipulated the epistolary genre and used it as a vehicle through which African women can tell their own stories. Bâ herself spoke at length about the need for a new female discourse and the mission of the African woman writer. She argues that the African woman writer has the responsibility to present the position of women in Africa in all its aspects (McElaney-Johnson, 1999: 119). Through the epistolary form; Ramatoulaye writing to her friend Aïssatou, the character is removed from the position of the archetypal "suffering epistolary victim" or even the oppressed African woman and contradicts male and western representations in African literature (McElaney-Johnson, 1999: 119).

Interestingly, there are sections of radical feminist thought (especially from Europe and North America) who argue that male African novelists also contribute to this state of affairs by marginalising African women in their writing. This is one, perhaps essentialist point of view, that seeks to paint the African man as the enemy of the African woman. It is more valuable to acknowledge that certain male and female African writers and scholars share the same agenda; that of the "liberation" of African women through their writing (Kamara, 2001: 212). Senegalese author Irène Assiba D'Almeida even goes as far as to describe the writing of African women in Africa as "destroying the emptiness of silence" (D'Almeida, 1994: 1). The silence to which she is referring is the historical muting of women which is enabled and often encouraged by patriarchy. Women having the ability to articulate their experiences at all, but specifically through the medium of literature, can have a positive effect that goes beyond the written word and D'Almeida articulates this best by saying:

> Women's social possibilities are linked with their ability to articulate their experience, understanding and desire, an articulation that cannot be realised unless the silence imposed upon these women is destroyed (D'Almeida, 1994: 2).

Women capitalising on the opportunity and their ability to tell their own stories feeds into other aspects of their lives. The destruction of silence has a direct effect on how a woman's life unfolds and what can be achieved in that lifetime, one cannot happen without the other. This concept of silence emphasises even more the importance of multiple African female voices in literature. A powerful way to destroy the silence that D'Almeida describes, is to write. From this perspective, Bâ's work in the late 1970s and the early 1980s was the work of a pioneer. Bit by bit, she was dismantling the silence that had been constructed by patriarchy, by racism and by the colonial project. With the same pioneering spirit that Bâ embodied, other women authors have done and continue to do the same and are making valuable and varied contributions.

*Une Si Longue Lettre* differs from other depictions of African women in a variety of ways. The first and perhaps most distinct way, is the way in which the two main characters react to the same event occurring in each of their lives. Upon finding out about her husband's decision to take a second wife, Aïssatou asks for a divorce, leaves for France where she furthers her education and eventually gets a job as an interpreter at the Senegalese embassy in the US (Williams, 1997: 140). In contrast, when Ramatoulaye gets the same news about her husband Modou, she remains in the marriage and raises their twelve children on her own. There can be no doubt that Bâ's novel is centred on the issue of polygamy. Polygamy is practiced in various parts of the world including Africa. Nigel Barber conducted a study of the practice of polygyny and his study compared countries of similar social development and that had at least 5% of women in polygamous unions. Of the 32 countries selected for comparison, 29 were on the African continent (Barber, 2008: 108). In societies where polygamy is practiced far less, if at all (typically societies dominated and infiltrated by western beliefs and ideology), polygamy is viewed quite negatively. By giving polygamy a central role in her novel, Bâ simultaneously introduces to the reader the patriarchal aspects of both religion and culture in Senegal. Other writers might see Aïssatou's actions as feminist, liberating and forward thinking and Ramatoulaye's as the opposite. The underlying message here is that both women achieve self-empowerment in different ways; one by ending her marriage and setting out to achieve personal and individual goals and the other by staying and finding self-fulfilment within the confines of her traditional society (Latha, 2001: 25). While Ramatoulaye does not follow in the western footsteps of Aïssatou, arguably her relationship with feminism still exists and is as complex as that of Mariama Bâ herself (Ibnlfassi & Hitchcott, 1996: 147). The response to the destruction that polygamy has brought upon their

lives differs slightly, but ultimately the author conveys the triumph of the two central characters; Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou.

Mariama Bâ's work, *Une Si Longue Lettre* in particular, has been widely read and relatively well received by Western audiences and has been rather popular with academic institutions in the West and in Africa, being taught in disciplines like gender studies, African literature, French and Francophone studies and anthropology among many others. Some scholars insist that the principal reason for this popularity and appeal is due to the focus on the negative aspects of the lives of Senegalese women (Gueye, 2012). In this instance it is polygamy and Islamic culture that are "to blame" for Aïssatou and Ramatoulaye's oppression.

It fits into the narrative that Western feminists have conjured up about the sorry state of affairs of the African woman. And this narrative has contributed to the perpetuation of an image of an African women that is subject to the oppression found in her religion and her culture (Gueye, 2012). To some extent Bâ feeds the prevalent stereotypes about Africa and Islam. It quite easily meets the expectations that those in the West have about Africa and how African women are victims of their circumstances. I think it will be useful to explore the life of the author Mariama Bâ herself. The novel includes elements that mirror her own life and I firmly believe that her life experiences played a role in creation of this novel. Her upbringing, the period of history in which she was born and raised, her education and her social status in Senegalese society are all important in examining her literary work because these personal facts inevitably influenced her decision making (consciously and subconsciously) when writing *Une Si Longue Lettre*.

Bâ was born in 1929 at the height of French colonial rule in Senegal and her first novel appeared in 1979, by which time Senegal had gained independence from France, 19 years earlier. These two historical events shaped the country and its inhabitants and it definitely shaped Mariama Bâ as well. As mentioned in the background of the author, she was of privileged upbringing and was from a family with heavy political involvement in the period after independence. Her upbringing and education heavily influenced her opinions and outlook on life and subsequently her writing. As an educator herself, she sought to highlight and champion the writer and the role of the writer in every society. That role being to challenge the status quo and to strike out at archaic practices that misrepresent true culture and tradition. She was a politicised figure who championed women's rights and upon reading *Une Si Longue Lettre*, this comes out through some of her characters, the female ones in

particular. Such is the extent of the influence of her life in this novel that it has been categorised as a semi-autobiographical account.

The translation process while largely positive and useful in many ways, it also has some pitfalls. It is a form of intervention that has the potential to misrepresent, alter and undermine an original text and author. It is after all designed specifically for a new and different audience, perhaps even an audience that the author had no intention of reaching. When translating another's words and thoughts it is quite possible to misunderstand or to misinterpret the authentic voice of the writer. This can be done subconsciously and without any intended malice, but there are also instances where the translator is influenced by their own agenda and motives and this results in them delivering a very specific rendition of the original text. An English translation of *Une Si Longue Lettre* would obviously be geared towards an English speaking audience and this study argues that this particular translation is targeted at a Euro-American audience. Or rather an Anglophone audience in the Global North, that is to say North America, English speaking Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

The practice of polygamy is central to the plotline in *Une Si Longue Lettre* and the reader is confronted with the way the practice affects the lives of all the female characters, more so than the male characters. Perceptions of this practice outside of Islam and the African continent are generally very negative and this will have some impact on how the work is received in the rest of the world as well as how the characters who are affected by the practice are perceived and classified in the mind of a reader in the West. For the most part, it is a practice that is viewed as backward, sexist and misogynistic by proponents of feminism and by cultures in the Global North.

The novel does very little to dispel the negative connotations of polygamy. Regarding the outcomes of the female characters stories; Aïssatou's marriage ends in divorce, Ramatoulaye and her children are abandoned and Binetou marries a man much older than herself, her friend's father in fact, resulting in the end of any dreams she might have had for her life and the end of her friendship with Daba. Virtually every female character who is in some way affected by polygamy, is affected by it in a very negative way. The only female character who greatly benefits is Binetou's mother, Lady Mother-in-Law who orchestrates her young daughter's marriage to a wealthy older man. This union proves to be financially beneficial to her to the extent that her status in society is elevated. She further capitalised on her son-in-

law's abandonment of his first and senior wife, leaving her and her daughter free to enjoy all his wealth as the passage below explains.

> The senior wife hitherto neglected, Lady Mother-in-Law emerged from the shadows and took her unfaithful husband back in tow. Having known poverty, she rejoiced in her new-found happiness. Modou fulfilled her expectations. He would thoughtfully send her wads of notes to spend and would offer her, after his trips abroad jewellery and rich *boubous*.
>
> (Bâ, 1981: 52)

The practice is seen to be the cause for the breakdown of marriages, for the destruction and estrangement of families, for the destruction of hope and youth and for the destruction of friendship. In some circles, there is seen to be a correlation between polygamy and the lack of education among women in the region. In French West Africa (as it was called during colonialism) there had been concerted efforts to educate women but they were unsuccessful and this failure was attributed to Islam (particularly the subordinate role of women in the religion), the prevalence of polygamy, the fact that the bulk of agricultural work was done by women and the reliance on young girls to perform household chores in the home (Riesz, 1991: 33). A large majority of the Senegalese population identifies as Muslim. Their religion is not necessarily enacted through speaking Arabic or through practicing Arabic culture but through following the teachings found in the Koran. It is common knowledge that the practice of polygamy is allowed in the Islamic faith. This propensity to pinpoint religion and culture as the sources of women's oppression, particularly in the developing world, originated from colonial times and has to some extent remained entrenched in people's minds and has fed into various narratives about parts of the world that suffered through colonialism.

There is a power dynamic that exists between the author, the publisher, the translator and the reader. It is reasonable to say that at different points in the life of a published work, the power lies in different hands. Initially the author has sole control of the story, once the writing process is complete and handed over to the publishers, the power rests in their hands and their powers are vast. The paratextual analysis that comes later in this research report, showcases the extent of the power that the publisher possesses. The selection of the translator, the cover design and artwork, how the novel is marketed and the overall packaging of the novel are decisions that need to be made and all of these decisions are made by the publisher, with the potential reader in mind. Once a translator has been commissioned they then assume their

role as intermediary and the importance of this job cannot be understated. The translator is tasked and entrusted with delivering the story to a new audience in a way that honours the original work, that will fulfil its purpose in the target culture and society and will be understood and well received by the intended audience. After publication, the reader's power comes into effect. Once the novel has been published and is available for public consumption, the reader holds all the power. Their reaction to the literary work will to a large extent determine, the success or failure of the novel. Very often, an author's acclaim as well as the longevity of their work stems from the praise heaped on them by an audience.

**2.2 Feminist Translation**

In order to delve into feminist translation and the relationship between gender and translation we must first understand the roots of feminist theory and when and how the idea of gender began to change. The notion of gender began to evolve in the 1960s as post-war feminism began to grow in strength. People began to think of gender as more than biological sexual difference (Von Flotow, 1997: 5). Feminist scholars like Simone de Beauvoir put forward the notion that just because a child is born with female reproductive organs, does not mean that child will become a woman. That child becoming a woman arises out of society's expectations of how women should perform their womanhood and the consequent treatment of the child (gendering). Gender is a result of conditioning and education. It is the process that instils in both genders the sociocultural, physical and psychological attributes that are specific and perceived as suitable for each gender and it is worth noting that these attributes are often completely different for men and women (Von Flotow, 1997: 5).

Given that the vast majority of societies are patriarchal, prescriptive gender roles limit women to society's expectations and strictures and deny them the room to determine their own path. As a result, gender continues to be the basis for women's subordination. Ultimately gender is a basic substructure of society that must be understood, examined and analysed in all its forms in order to prevent the silencing of women and to prevent the loss of their stories. Luise Von Flotow asserts that gender is a cultural construct and that translation is a process of cultural transfer which in essence means that gender and language intersect (Von Flotow, 1997: 8). Language needs to be seen as more than just a communicative tool, but as a tool for manipulation as well. One can even go as far as to say that language is an incredibly powerful political instrument.

The development of feminist translation has been, to a large extent, a result of the surge of feminist thought and the conversations about feminism that are now taking place. This

resulted in translators seeking out the writing of contemporary women authors to translate and has resulted in a kind of gender awareness. The practice of translation, whether feminist in nature or otherwise, is about granting access to the target audience, about visibility and amplifying lost or quiet voices, particularly the voices of any and all previously marginalised people. In this way, translation as a discipline and practice and its aims are in line with the aims of feminism and feminist translation. Luise Von Flotow articulates this belief and argues that making the feminine visible in language equates to women being seen and heard in the real world, thus achieving the same goal as feminism (Von Flotow 1997).

Given that Mariama Bâ's writing is so deeply rooted in issues surrounding women and feminism, feminist translation theory is a suitable theory upon which to base my research and inform the discussion. As discussed, feminist translation arose out of a need to focus on the process of translation and not just the product. It seeks to highlight the visibility of the translator and was pioneered by translation scholars (and authors) like Luise Von Flotow, Sherry Simon, Barbara Goddard and Susan De Lotbinière-Harwood. These scholars form part of the feminist translation school that originated in Quebec in the late 1970s and 1980s. Feminist translation recognized the "genderedness" of the literary world including readers, writers, translators, powerful entities and all other actors involved in the production of a literary project (Wallace, 2002: 66). In acknowledging this state of "genderedness", the natural progression was to examine the relationship between gender and translation and in so doing develop four strategies in feminist translation.

The four strategies identified in feminist translation studies are hijacking, footnoting, supplementing and prefacing (Von Flotow, 1991: 74). Prefacing refers to when the translator includes a preface to the target text, where there was none in the source text. This is done to assert and announce the translator to the reader. Supplementing is the practice of manipulating the text and engaging in syntactic subversion. This describes tactics used by a translator to clearly highlight the visibility of the translator but more importantly to draw attention to the gender of the subject in the text. Footnoting is a strategy that allows the translator to remain visible throughout the text through the use of footnotes. The footnotes are a means for the translator to voice her opinion. Lastly, hijacking is the practice of appropriating a text that has no particular feminist leaning or rather a text where the translator has not adopted a feminist stance. What all of these strategies have in common is the fact that they display a level of intervention on the part of the translator and consequently render her visible. Some of the thought processes of the translator are also brought to the fore and thus

feminist translation strategies tie in with the process oriented study found in Descriptive Translation Studies. These strategies and their presence in the text, or lack thereof, will contribute to the analysis of *Une Si Longue Lettre* and its English translation.

There is an argument to be made about the wisdom of using such strategies when translating. These feminist translation strategies seem to highlight the translator. I would argue that while the translation is crucial to the process, it is the work they produce that is of greater relevance to the reader. They are perhaps too interventionist and can run the risk of diverting attention away from what is important; the text itself and the author. Ultimately, the work you produce as a translator is not entirely yours. You are merely a conduit or the vehicle that delivers the work of another to an audience. This is elaborated on in the following section. A proper analysis of these strategies in relation to the English translation would be aided by knowledge of the translator herself. Unfortunately, there is virtually no footprint of Modupe Bodé-Thomas. There is very little available online about her, there is no biography, no record or mention of the other work she might have done or indeed anything else about her. I contacted Heinemann as well as Pearson (who relaunched the AWS in 2011) regarding this issue and they were unfortunately unable to provide any information on the translator. What we do know about her is that she is female and that she was of African descent, probably Francophone Africa. As a result, it is difficult to ascertain to the fullest extent her reasons for making some of the decisions she made, given that we know nothing about her. Regardless of her identity, her role in translating a work of this magnitude is still important.

### 2.3 Role of the Translator

Translation is not merely a transcoding process, nor is it a search for sameness. It is far more complex than that. Each language classifies and organises the world differently and the job of the translator is to creatively intervene (Godard, 1990: 91). The role of the translator is never an easy one, being an intermediary poses many challenges and will draw the eye of many critics. To successfully carry out their mission, the translator must understand the culture-bound, structure-bound and tradition-bound elements of the source text and be able to render them in the target text (Ojo, 1986: 292). This process can assign many identities to the translator from political agent to rewriter to cultural agent, to cannibal[1] , all of which require more than just linguistic ability from the translator. Translation signifies encounters with

[1] Concept in translation studies that borrows the image of the cannibal in Brazilian culture and uses it as a metaphor to describe a particular approach to translation whereby the translator devours or consumes the text being translated and makes it their own. This led to the development of a cannibalistic theory of translation, theorized by Brazilian poet, critic and translator Haroldo de Campos and fellow Brazilian writer Augusto de Campos (Cisneros, 2012).

otherness; it is an attempt to bring the "foreign" closer (Maher & Nelson, 2013: 5). This perspective further reinforces the importance of culture in translation because translation is a cultural activity. It brings together two worlds, cultures that otherwise would never have met. And through bringing together two cultures, it also brings into conflict the norms of those cultures. Norms that are constantly evolving and are relatively unstable, but can also be stagnant. This contradiction is due to the fact that at times norms change quite quickly and at other times they are more enduring, meaning the process will take longer. As a result, in the translation process, the translator is not a passive observer. They can in fact be instrumental in shaping the changing of norms through the process of translation (Toury, 1995: 62).

Feminist translation theory seeks to highlight the visibility of the translator and to make obvious the personality and the stance of the translator in the text. It seeks to make them an active participant. It is a concerted move away from invisibility. Scholars like Von Flotow contend that the literary canon has for a long time been dominated by and privileged the work of male writers, to the detriment of female writers (Wallace, 2002: 67). In this way, it is then the responsibility of the translator to rectify this "wrongdoing" and to bring to the surface work that has been "lost in the patriarchy"(Wallace, 2002: 66). In addition, the translator can take up the role of political agent because there are many who view translation as an emancipatory action. Much like Mariama Bâ's summation of the important job of a writer, that of challenging the status quo and striking out at archaic practices that misrepresent culture and tradition, the translator has the means to start conversations through their work and to effect change.

Ultimately, the job of a translator is one that can be compared to walking a tight rope. Literary translation as an activity is one that requires precision, vast knowledge of both the source and target cultures and norms. This understanding enables the translator to bridge the gap between the two cultures while still retaining the fundamental quality of the writing. Literature is such an intimate and specific kind of writing that any translation that takes place must be sensitive to this and make an effort to retain the intrinsic nature of what the author intended the audience to gain from the literary work. For the purposes of this study, the translator's role is relevant because of one of the questions I have posed which is whether the translation has privileged a Western audience and Western views. In order to answer the question, I will have to examine the decision making process of the translator and draw from that certain conclusions. A theory of translation that can aid in this task is the theory of Descriptive Translation Studies.

## 2.4 Descriptive Translation Studies

Descriptive translation studies is a general theory of translation developed by translation scholar Gideon Toury in collaboration with fellow translation scholar Itamar Even-Zohar. He sought to develop a way to test, modify and amend translation theory and saw that descriptive studies was the best way to achieve this (Toury, 1982: 24). According to Toury, one of the weaknesses of Translation Studies as an empirical discipline or science was that it lacked a descriptive branch. Translation scholars theorised that the principal reason for this was the tendency within Translation Studies to focus on practical applications. In other words, the orientation towards applicability is what caused the chasm between theory and practice in translation (Toury, 1995: 2). On translation scholar and author James S Holmes' basic map of Translation Studies, the discipline has two branches; pure and applied. In brief, applied translation studies deals with translator training, translation aids and translation criticism. What is of importance to this study is what is found in pure translation studies. Under the umbrella of pure translation studies there is a theoretical and a descriptive branch. The descriptive branch, alongside the theoretical branch, has now been established as Descriptive Translation Studies and is comprised of three approaches.

The three approaches theorised by Toury are product-oriented, function-oriented and process-oriented. Product-oriented DTS focuses on the product, in other words existing translations. It primarily involves comparative analyses or descriptions. This will typically be a comparative analysis of a source text and its target text or an analysis of several target texts of one particular source text (Munday, 2012: 17). Function-oriented DTS is a study of the context rather than the text itself. It is concerned with the socio-cultural context in which the translation is situated. The function of the translation in the target culture namely its influence or its reception. Lastly, process-oriented DTS is concerned with the psychology of translation, primarily the thought processes of translation (Munday, 2012: 17).

One way to approach translation is to view the translation itself as a fact of the target culture and to approach it within a target oriented framework. This is one of the central tenets of DTS. When this notion was first posed as a possibility, it was met with a lot of criticism and scepticism. The reason for this is that prior to this approach, translation studies was very much source-oriented (Toury, 1995: 24). It can even be argued that the source text was held in higher esteem than the target text and culture and there was a strong need to preserve, protect and remain loyal to it. That paradigm has shifted quite significantly since the 1970s. The notion of acceptability is one that features prominently in DTS and is in line with the

frame of reference that is more considerate of the target text. This notion is largely based on the extent to which the target text aligns with the norms of the target culture. It is judged from a target text oriented point of view (Munday, 2012: 173). In order for the text to meet the expectations of the target audience, certain shifts very often take place that bring the source text closer to the target text and culture. This makes the translation acceptable. If the opposite happens and the norms of the source text and culture are adhered to then the translation is considered adequate. This study, focuses on product-oriented DTS. The translation product is the main concern and point of analysis and comparison along with the source text.

Ultimately, what this reinforces is that translation is a norm-governed activity. Regardless of which way the translator goes in their decision making process, norms govern that process. Over and above the usage and involvement of two languages, translation is also a coming together of two cultural traditions which also means two sets of norm systems (Toury, 1995: 56). As has been mentioned briefly in the paragraph above, the pursuit of adequacy is for the translator to subject themselves to the source text, whereas the pursuit of acceptability is for the translator to subject themselves to the target culture and its norms. When it comes to norms, one can rely on both their basic instability and socio-cultural specificity.

Norms can further be delineated as preliminary and operational norms. Preliminary norms deal with the directness of translation and translation policy. Translation policy being the factors that govern the choice of texts for translation into a particular language, culture or point in time. The directness of translation refers to the threshold of tolerance for translating from languages other than the ultimate source language (Toury, 1995: 58). Essentially, it asks the question whether a particular translation has occurred through an intermediate language or not and the extent to which that is permissible or preferred. Should the intermediate language be a point of discussion at all? Is there an effort to conceal the fact that there is a third additional language involved as well as its identity? These are just some questions relating to directness of translation. Because this study is largely focused on the reception of the novel in a certain context (specifically the reception it received in the English speaking West), it will fall under preliminary norms. The writing of African women has been highlighted in this study and how this literature is marketed and presented to audiences outside of Africa has played a huge role in the acceptance and desire for more of this kind of literature. My discussion of the shifts, however, falls under operational norms. Operational norms refer to the decision making during the act of translation. They describe the presentation and linguistic matter of the target text. These are matricial and textual-linguistic

norms (Munday, 2012: 174). Matricial norms govern the existence of the target language material which includes changes of location, the omission and relocation of passages, textual segmentation and general manipulation of the text. The textual-linguistic norms govern the selection of target text linguistic material namely lexical items, phrases and stylistic features (Toury, 1995: 58- 59).

Operational norms can also be described as a kind of model that generates translations that can involve the norms realised by the source text, the target culture and norms or a combination of the two. With most translated texts a compromise is reached out of necessity and failure to do so can result in a failed translation process. If a translator solely adopts the position of privileging the source text and culture, the subsequent translation cannot be said to be a part of the target culture. Rather than be introduced and integrated, it is in fact imposed upon the target culture (Toury, 1995: 60). Alternatively when the translator opts to introduce an original work into a target culture, what the translator produces is a version of the original work, made to meet the specifications and understanding of the target audience. The translation of African literature must simultaneously meet and challenge the expectations of its target audience. This requires a combination of honouring the original work and the source culture within which it is placed and making allowances for target culture influences.

DTS is of particular importance and usefulness to this study because it achieves three things. Firstly, it provides an adequate method of analysis for studies that seek to compare two or more texts. Theoretically, it provides a guide on how to embark on a comparative analysis and what that analysis can highlight and reveal about the material being studied. Secondly, DTS requires a situating and contextualizing of the textual material at hand. This is vitally important not just as a step in the DTS process but as a necessary aspect of a study of this nature. One of the aims of this study is to determine how the English translation of the novel has been perceived and received in a wider context, specifically an Anglophone Western context. This cannot be achieved without placing the work in and relating it to its appropriate context. Lastly, the notion of acceptability in DTS can help determine where a literary work is located within the literary system of the target culture and determining this will also help ascertain the reception of the translation.

## 2.5 Foreignization and Domestication

American translation theorist Lawrence Venuti (1995) coined two terms in translation; foreignization and domestication. Domestication is a tendency to reduce or limit , the foreignness of a text when it is translated and migrates into in the target culture and language. This is done to make the text "acceptable" for the target audience and culture. German philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher puts forward the idea that domestication "leaves the reader in peace and moves the author towards him" (Schleiermacher, 2004: 49). In contrast, Schleiermacher described a translation strategy where "the translator leaves the writer in peace, as much as possible and moves the reader toward the writer" (Munday, 2012: 219). This is of course similar to Venuti's concept of foreignization. This translation strategy seeks to make the reader of the translated text aware that it is a translation but also aware of the cultural and linguistic difference contained in the foreign text. Where domestication seeks to assimilate the text into the target culture, foreignization seeks to do the opposite.

It is important to note that these concepts do not exist as a strict dichotomy but on a continuum and reflect the translators approach to the translation but also ethical attitudes towards the foreign text and culture. With regard to Bâ's *Une Si Longue Lettre*, the concepts of foreignization and domestication are worth exploring because the novel, was firstly written in a language understood and spoken in the Anglophone West, but it has also been made available in many other languages. In order to determine how the novel was received by foreign audiences in the Anglophone world, its English translation must be examined and conclusions on where it falls on the domestication-foreignization continuum must be established. Furthermore, this study is concerned with the novels reception by Western audiences and whether western views have been privileged by the author and the translator.

At this point it is necessary to discuss domestication and foreignization in relation to exoticisation or exoticism. Exoticism describes both a political and aesthetic practice. It is the global commodification of cultural difference or the aestheticisation of otherness. This is what postcolonial critic Graham Huggan refers to as the postcolonial exotic (Huggan, 2001: 14). At different points and perhaps for different purposes, the act of exoticism seeks to make use of domesticating practices as well as foreignizing practices. On the one hand, it was used to "educate" and introduce to the West the "undiscovered" world and its inhabitants. It acts as a kind of anthropology which is rather troublesome territory to find yourself in, given what we now know about early anthropological studies and some of the questions that are still raised about the study of anthropology today. In some circles, some early anthropological

studies are deemed responsible for nurturing a racial world view that made racism in its worst forms possible namely slavery, colonialism, segregation and eugenics (Mullings, 2005: 669). There is a strong link between ethnocentrism in ethnography (which has its roots in cultural anthropology), colonial power and western hegemony (Uddin & Ahamed, 2007: 20). Anthropology took foreign cultures and depicted them to a Western audience in a way that made them assimilate to Western culture, so as not to frighten. In other words an act of domestication.

Early anthropologists sought to act as interpreters of the undiscovered world, interpreting this foreign world to the rest of the "civilised" world. On the other hand, it proved to be a very effective political tool. Imperialists were able to mask and distract from the violent oppression they were inflicting upon the indigenous people by speaking at length about the sheer splendour and wonder of newly "discovered" lands (Huggan, 2001: 14). Descriptions of the beautiful, wild and untouched landscapes superseded the destruction, genocide and enslavement of the people native to that land. Imperialists were able to justify their actions by depicting indigenous people as savages or as backward, essentially depicting them as beings so far removed from a Western understanding of humanity and human behaviour that they could be considered subhuman. Foreignizing them to the extent that the Western audience eagerly consuming this anthropological literature, were unable to recognize them as human beings like themselves.

African literature, and indeed all literatures from parts of the world that were subject to some form of colonial conquest, have at some point or another, fallen victim to exoticism. Before we delve into that, African literature as a term and its connotations should be discussed. The term African literature is quite frankly vague and can be considered a weak attempt to classify such a varied and diverse literature from a varied and diverse continent (Huggan, 2001: 34). It reinforces an ignorant refusal to acknowledge that numerous kinds of literature can emerge from this part of the world in spite of attempts to treat it as homogenous. Furthermore, when articulating terms like African literature, Euro American publishing houses and in fact the potential audience (located in Europe and North America) usually expect that literature to be written in European languages.

What this refers to is the idea and practice of African literature being viewed as an export product, primarily to be exported to the West, usually Europe and America (Huggan, 2001: 34). Those literary works that do not already appear in languages spoken and understood in

the West and are considered of value, are translated into those languages. Very few texts produced in the Global South that are written in indigenous languages, in other words, languages other than those of the former colonisers, reach a stage where they are translated into languages spoken in the Global North. This usually means that they remain unknown and unnoticed by publishers and subsequently audiences in the Global North. So there exists a certain pressure for writers in the Global South to write in European languages in an effort to gain that attention. Essentially writers who fall into this category are economically obliged to write in European languages like French or English, for their livelihoods and in order to escape obscurity. Added to this, is the pressure on African writers to tailor their writing to meet the exotic tastes of audiences in the West that are hungry for exocitism. Unfortunately, this continues to reinforce the hegemony of European languages and the undervaluation of indigenous languages as a mode of literary expression.

Our novel, *Une Si Longue Lettre* is slightly unique in the sense that it was originally written in French, a widely spoken language that originated from the former colonial power that is France. Where it was previously only accessible to the Francophone world, thanks to its numerous translations, it is now available in many other languages of the world, many of them spoken in the Global North. The novel has been translated from French into the following eighteen languages: English, German, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Finnish, Serbo-Croatian, Bulgarian, Czech, Russian, Romanian, Arabic, Japanese (the Noma Award is founded and funded by Japanese publishing house Kodansha), Wolof and Swahili.

Of the languages on this list, European languages make up the majority reinforcing the belief that most of the translations of *Une Si Longue Lettre* are directed at Western audiences; primarily in Europe and North America. This highlights the demand for Bâ's work in this region and pinpoints the audience that is being targeted as the novels potential readership. From this perspective, the novel's status as an export product, to the Global North in particular must be acknowledged. It is also important to draw attention to the fact that some of these languages are spoken in the developing world. Educated elites in Anglophone Africa have access to the translation of this novel and are in fact very likely to read a novel of this nature. In South Africa for example, efforts to introduce Francophone African writing to South African audiences began in the 1950s when an anthology of African Writing was published in 1958 (Adensanmi, 2000: 244). There were other publications that followed but the most concerted effort to integrate Francophone Africa literature in South Africa, came

from the universities. At Stellenbosch University, students are introduced to West African writers like Sembene Ousmane and Mariama Bâ at undergraduate level. In the Department of African literature at Wits University, Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* is one of a few canonical African texts that are taught in a second year course entitled "Gender and Writing in Africa" (Adensanmi, 2000: 244). These are just two universities on the continent and I have of course focused on the literature of one West African author in particular, but what this indicates is that African literature is being read on the continent.

What is also interesting is that the novel has also been translated into Wolof and Swahili; two languages spoken widely in Africa. Wolof is an ethnic language spoken by the Wolof people found in Senegal (where our author originates and our novel is set), Mauritania and The Gambia. The Wolof are in fact the dominant ethnic group in Senegal, making up around 40% of the population and in Dakar, Senegal's capital and largest city, Wolof is the lingua franca. The implications of the existence of this translation means that this novel is available to many more Senegalese people. Those Wolof people in Senegal who are not products of the French influenced education system and as a result cannot speak or understand French, can read the novel in their own language.

Swahili is a Bantu language spoken by the Swahili people and the lingua franca in the African Great Lakes region (Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda). It is also recognised as a national language in the DRC, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda and is spoken in many other African countries in East Africa. Regarding the number of people who speak it, the number is estimated to be as high as 100 million people. This information helps to paint a picture of just how widely spoken and understood it is on the continent, but also the potential readership the novel can gain in Africa because of the existence of the Swahili translation. We often hear about works of literature written in indigenous languages being translated into widely spoken European languages but in this case, the opposite has taken place. A French novel by an African author has been translated into two indigenous African languages. I dwell on the translation of the novel into these two languages because I believe that it has the potential to be of great interest and an area of future study.

Huggan asserts that exoticism in its first incarnation was inflicted by imperial powers as discussed in an earlier paragraph. It can however also be self-inflicted and used strategically by some writers of postcolonial literature. This often occurs as a result of the very market

driven society and industry which they exist in; the world of publishing, translation and the business of selling books. Commodifying a kind of literature that is very popular in the West can be financially beneficial and can bring about a certain amount of renown and success for writers. A great example of this commodification at an institutional level is the work that the Heinemann publishing company has done. Heinemann has published and continues to publish the African Writers Series (AWS) which exclusively publishes (in English) the works of African authors and writers (Huggan, 2001: 50). One of the criticisms of the AWS was that its creation was motivated by profit. This claim is rather unfair and easily dismissed seeing as the success of any commercial enterprise is reliant on profits. This series and the work it has done is discussed at length as part of the analysis but I will provide a brief overview here. The low level of book production in Africa is owed to a number of factors including low literacy rates, the sheer size of the continent and how that limits transportation of books, the costs involved in printing and the aforementioned transportation as well as a fragile intellectual infrastructure.

This lack of literature by African writers and scholars being published in Africa led to the creation of the Heinemann series as an attempt to address and possibly profit from the problem. Up until this point, publishing and marketing school books was the extent of Heinemann's involvement on the continent (Owomoyela, 2008:61). They capitalised on the mistrust of local publishers on the part of African writers and recognized that because of this, African writers were turning to foreign publishers to be assured of a product of high calibre and a wider readership (Lizzaríbar, 1998: 58). Outside of the mistrust factor, the advent of independence on the African continent came with unique challenges. In the 1970s and 1980s, African governments were preoccupied with economic development and trying to counter the effects of colonial rule that local publishing houses received little or no funding at all (Bgoya & Jay, 2013: 19).It can be argued that as a result of this unfortunate predicament, publishers like Heinemann virtually have a monopoly on the distribution of African literature today. This state of affairs has given a great amount of power to Anglophone publishing houses in Europe and America thus enabling them to make the crucial decisions regarding the selection of works to be published as well as the overall look of novels and how they are marketed to the Western, Euro-American market. This power often manifests itself in the form of both domesticating and/or exoticising practices to suit their target audience. Furthermore, it is this power exerted by these publishing houses that can play an important role in the reception of the novel.

## 2.6 Reception

The reception of a book is a complex concept to analyse and one must first unpack what a book is. A book or a novel is a commodity, it is created for a purpose and is distributed to serve that purpose. Where a book differs from other commodities, is that it is complex and diverse, the concept of a book is not a uniform one (Brouillette, 2007: 49). Books are unique because of their content and the potential consumer. The consumer is able and expected to construct meaning from the contents of the book and often that interpretation or meaning is different from what the author intended to convey. There is a lot of room between articulation and reception (Brouillette, 2007: 49). Another interesting feature of books as commodities, and one that is particularly relevant to translation, is that books cannot easily assimilate into a variety of cultures. If the language used in the book is not spoken or understood in the context within which it is placed, then the entire exercise has been a failure. The task of the translator is to make the book suitable for the target audience or consumers.

The emergence of postcolonial literature has played an important role in the expansion of the global literary market and consequently the publishing world. Historically white, European and American publishing houses came to be aware of certain, possibly profitable markets that they were not reaching and they set out to correct this. An effective strategy was to incorporate postcolonial writers for distribution and open branches where the postcolonial writers originated, thus solidifying the publishers global dominance (Brouillette, 2007: 57). In the 1980s the centres of knowledge about the third world shifted from the periphery to the centre. What had historically been considered third world literature, because of a theoretical shift from third world nationalism to postmodernism, came to be known as postcolonial literature.

Postcolonial literature as a type of literature, must have certain characteristics for it to stand a good chance of being picked up for global distribution. Novels are typically chosen and work that is written in European languages, especially English is privileged. The English language has established itself as a dominant language at an alarming rate and this dominance is reflected in the world of translation as well (Brouillette, 2007: 59). However, postcolonial literature still does not garner the readers or command the kind of market share that other kinds of literature do. It can still be considered a niche market. There are literary theorists and scholars of literature that argue that African literature has become a kind of export product. The commodity function of the postcolonial text is a topic that has not been adequately addressed. After all, postcoloniality is a culture industry that exists in the age of globalisation.

There are those who argue that this commodification, which I discussed above when referencing Graham Huggan and the notion of the postcolonial exotic, serves the interests of certain privileged audiences. That this machine that is globalisation turns out translated products for metropolitan customers in the West (Brouillette, 2007: 15). Regarding Mariama Bâ's *Une Si Longue Lettre*, it is a story set in an African context, written by an African author in French and largely consumed by a foreign audience. An audience that has certain perceptions of Africa and as a result expect their belief to be reaffirmed. Beliefs that paint them as saviours and Africa and its people as needing to be saved or to assuage their guilt for their "complicity" in the colonial project or all of the above. So perhaps the assertion that African literature is an export product has some truth to it.

A crucial element to the reception of a work in a specific context is circulation. The move towards interconnectedness and the advent of globalisation has changed the landscape of society and to some extent has changed the value previously attached to translation and other language processes like it. Globalisation has brought about a greater consciousness of cultural difference and of the world in general (Maher & Nelson, 2013: 5). Furthermore, it has reinforced the necessity of translation and its ability to aid in communication. As a result, translation studies as a discipline has grown exponentially.

An interesting term that I feel is particularly relevant to *Une Si Longue Lettre* is that of "world literature". World literature being literature that extends beyond its setting or country of origin. It is able to engage with people and worlds beyond its time and place (Maher & Nelson, 2013: 174). It can even be argued that translation has created a space for world literature to exist. Transnational and cross cultural communication is one of the aims of translation. The publishing world and the global literary market are of vital importance and the mechanisms and trends that govern those two spheres will help examine the reception of this literary work. Those two elements will go some way in helping determine how the novel was received by a Western audience.

One of the ways in which reception can be analysed is by attempting to see if, where and how Bâ's work is being studied or being used in an academic setting. Novelist and Professor of English John Champagne talks about teaching *So Long a Letter* and the reaction to it by his students. His first use of the novel in an academic setting was in 1994, when he taught it as part of a course entitled "The Theme of Identity, in World Literature: Race, Gender, and other issues of Diversity". He mentions that one of the first reactions his students had to the

novel was one of overwhelming horror. Horror at the protagonist Ramatoulaye's situation and the role assigned to women in Islam. Many of their comments and remarks related to the religion being the cause of all the negative events in the novel and many questioned why the protagonist remained faithful to her religion when it was the cause of her misery (Champagne, 1996: 26).

One of the consequences of teaching postcolonial literature, particularly in the West, is that often literary works of that nature are almost seen as real life accounts of life in that society. Novels from Africa or any other country with a colonial past are treated as textbooks or guides to that society and its people. This is due to the fact that Africa is largely treated as one, homogenous land mass where the people are impoverished and ravaged by disease, where the women are oppressed by their culture and religion and a place that, along with its culture are stuck in a time warp (Champagne, 1996: 26). This idea is similar to anthropology scholar and writer Arjun Appadurai's concept of metonymic freezing. He argues that whenever a culture or group is assigned a specific trait or characteristic and that trait ends up being the only thing that the group is identified by, that is a case of metonymic freezing (Clingman, 2012: 12). When that singular trait becomes the distinguishing trait, it is an example of metonymy as a form of synecdoche; when the part stands for the whole. These ideas create what Appadurai calls metonymic prisons. This occurs when ideas and perceptions confine and restrict people (Appadurai, 1988: 36). Champagne argues that another one of the dangers of teaching postcolonial literatures is the very thing I discuss in the section titled foreignization and domestication; the commodification of African culture by a Western audience. If not handled carefully, a novel like *So Long a Letter* being taught in a Western context can become like "an ethnic food fair" where aspects of foreign culture end up being treated like commodities for consumption by a Western audience (Champagne, 1996: 22).

Scholars of Bâ point to the universalism of her work, particularly *Une Si Longue Lettre*. Universalism can be described as an ideology in which indigenous cultural practices and beliefs are being discredited and devalued by those who wield economic and political power in a capitalist state of affairs (Champagne, 1996: 27). It is an ideology that encourages the rejection of so called "primitive" cultures in favour of scientific progress and the advancement of man and society, i.e. modernisation. According to American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, it serves to expand the capitalist world market through the creation of what Spivak(1989) in her article "Who Claims Alterity?" and Frantz Fanon (1967) call the

"national bourgeoisie", those that act as a buffer between the foreign, colonial rulers and the ruled. After the end of colonial rule, it is this class of people who take on the duty of defining national identities. With regard to our novel, our two female protagonists and their respective spouses fit the role of definers of national identity in the period of decolonization, with the four of them working as a doctor, teacher, interpreter and bureaucrat respectively (Champagne, 1996: 28). In fact our protagonist Ramatoulaye articulates this very role that they took on:

> 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
>
> (Bâ, 1980: 25)

The educated bourgeoisie who remained or returned to Senegal after independence became the elites, the pioneers of a new world. The responsibilities that came with this were numerous but from the perspective of African writers in that context, the chief responsibilities were historical self-awareness, self-representation and education. Pan Africanist, theorist of the African revolution and first Prime Minister and President of Ghana Kwame Nkrumah talks about the regeneration of learning in the period after independence where Africans are treated as subjects, not objects (Osei-Nyame, 2001: 101). This would have been part of the mandate of the African novelist and writer, to take possession of and rewrite the distorted narration of a continent and a people's history that was tainted by colonialism and the mistruths and discourses that underpinned it.

Professor of Women's and Gender Studies Chandra Mohanty is one scholar who critiques literature with a feminist leaning on this basis. On the part of western feminists, there exists a kind of ethnocentric universality that, as discussed in this research report, seeks to construct a reductive and homogenous depiction of the Third World. She coins the term "Third World Woman" and analyses the conception of such a woman, which she argues takes place within the framework set up by writing that makes use of and takes as their primary point of reference, feminist interests articulated in the US and western Europe (Mohanty, 1988: 61). When Mohanty speaks of such writing, she is principally referring to scholars from the West writing about Africa, in this case, through the prism of Western feminism, but more generally writing about the so called Third World. Where the common thread that runs through these

kinds of writing is that "something" which Mohanty calls the third world difference, that thing that somehow oppresses and determines the outcome of the lives of almost all the women on the continent.

She does however, make a concession that this phenomenon is not limited only to the West casting their colonial gaze on the developing world. It can also extend to middle class, urban African scholars writing about their working class counterparts and through perceiving their own middle class circumstances as the norm or standard, they give their fellow countrymen and subsequently their histories the title of Other (Mohanty, 1988: 62). It can be argued and some of her critics do argue that Bâ is an example of a "third world" scholar who borrows or adopts the prism of western feminism and uses it to gaze upon her own culture and religion. The proof of this is found in her work in the articulations of her characters but the proof also lies in some of the reactions to her work and the events that unfold in *So Long a Letter*.

Alternatively, when taught as part of a women in literature course at a college in New Jersey, the overall reception towards the novel is rather positive. This could be due to the fact that most of the students in that class were women and indeed of women of colour. Professor of English at Ramapo College in New Jersey, Lisa Williams makes the point that many of her students found multiple ways to relate to the protagonist Ramatoulaye, from her essentially being forced into single parenthood, to her struggles in her marriage, how her friendship with Aïssatou is instrumental in her healing and how her writing has also helped her healing (Williams, 1997: 141). When the students studying a novel such as *So Long a Letter* exist in a framework that historically has not and does not privilege them, their perceptions and reactions tend to differ. Demographically, the students in Lisa Williams' class differed from the students in John Champagne's world literature course and this difference is reflected in their responses. As I said, the students in the women in literature course were older, predominantly women and women of colour. Their circumstances coloured the way they saw Ramatoulaye and her actions. Instead of chastising the character for remaining when her husband had forsaken her, they admired her decision to stay in her marriage (Williams, 1997: 142).

Interestingly both cases are examples of tactics used when trying to bring foreign literature out of the so called third world into a Western context. On the one hand, Williams' students related to the characters in a number of ways. Their sympathy was the kind that stemmed from an intimate knowledge of some of the circumstances faced by our female protagonists.

One of the ways to interest a Western reader in a foreign text is to find a way to make the Western reader see that they are not unlike the character who lives in a world far removed from them. It is crucial to get the foreign reader to see the character as "just like them". On the other hand, there is perhaps the more dominant narrative that posits anything out of the developing world as something to be pitied or chastised. Champagne's students immediately identified the victim (African, Muslim, women) and pinpointed the cause of all the misery and oppression (Islam) and their solution was to eliminate it (Champagne, 1996: 26). This approach highlights the paternal and colonial tendency by the West to diagnose problems in Africa or elsewhere and presume to have all the answers to solve them. Both contrasting receptions to the novel play into stereotypical depictions that typify Africans as so completely foreign and incomprehensible that one is shocked to discover similarities or identifies them as perpetual victims who need saving.

As has been stated in this study, the African Writers Series, commissioned by Heinemann's educational branch was created for the purposes of education. This section covers two examples of *So Long a Letter*, being used in an academic, educational setting in academic institutions in the United States of America. The novel's inclusion in academic syllabi and how the students in each setting reacted to it, helps to determine how the novel was received in its intended context. It is by no means an exhaustive study of the contexts in which this novel has been studied but it is valuable nonetheless, especially because the two classes who studied the novel were from different demographics. Here is proof of the novel's reception in the context it was intended.

## 2.7 Paratexts

Every published literary work is accompanied by external material because there is an understanding that there are certain things required to aid in the books reception and consumption by an audience (Genette, 1997: 1). This material is always supplied by publishers, authors, illustrators, editors and printers and is used to frame and situate the main text. This material is known as the paratext. The concept of the paratext was coined by literary theorist Gérard Genette and he articulates it as a *threshold*; a zone between the text itself and the supplementary material supplied by other actors (Genette, 1997: 2). In the foreword (one of many examples of a paratextual element) of Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Richard Macksey makes the assertion that the paratext is the literary and printerly conventions that mediate between the world of publishing and the world

of the text (Macksey, 1997: xvii). These conventions can include forewords, afterwords, titles and subtitles, dedications, prefaces, notes and epilogues among others, all of which frame and situate the text for the reader.

With regard to this research report, both *Une Si Longue Lettre* and its English translation *So Long a Letter* make use of paratextual elements in slightly differing ways. This difference can be attributed to many things, but perhaps specifically to the fact that the paratext is continually changing. Like with most things in society, the paratext is subject to certain constraints like culture, period, genre and authors and the degree of pressure applied on the paratext by such constraints will determine the final result (Genette, 1997: 3). Our two novels were written, translated and published at different times and arguably for different societies and cultures. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for a translated work to have more paratextual features than an original work, as has been the case with the subject of this study.

Every paratextual message or element has six characteristics; spatial, temporal, substantial, pragmatic and functional (Genette, 1997: 4). In order to analyse the paratextual elements of a text, Genette suggests using these six characteristics in determining; the location (where?), the date of its appearance and if applicable, the disappearance (when?), its mode of existence (how?), its sender and addressee (from whom? to whom?) and the functions that its message aims to fulfil (to do what?) (Genette, 1997: 4). Under the first characteristic we find two spatial categories; the peritext and the epitext. The elements that are located outside the book like interviews and reviews make up the epitext while the elements that are contained within the main body like the title, chapter titles, the preface and notes will fall under the category of the peritext (Genette, 1997: 4).

One of the features of a paratextual element is that it is not always subject to the time of the main text. In certain instances, the paratext might predate the main text, appear after the death of the author (posthumous paratext) or while the author is still alive (anthumous paratext). By virtue of the fact that it is not constrained by the time period of the main text, the paratext can appear and disappear at any given time through external interventions on the part of actors like publishers or the author themselves (Genette, 1997: 6). The mode of existence (substantial) of a paratextual element is at its most common and basic level, textual or verbal. What I mean by this is that the most common paratextual elements (interviews, prefaces, titles etc.) are all verbal and textual in nature. There are however, other manifestations of paratextual elements; illustrations are a prime example. Information that is considered purely

factual like the age or sex of the author also fall into this category. Divulging the age or the sex of the author is not done to impart some explicit message but what it does achieve is colouring the audiences perception, one way or another. That knowledge can lead to commentary on the main text and can influence the reading experience (Genette, 1997: 7).

The pragmatic status of a paratextual element is defined by the situation of communication and the two actors involved in that situation; the sender and the addressee. The sender of the paratextual message is not always the producer of said message nor is their identity the most important. The sender could be the author, the publisher or even a third party selected by either of the first two, but most important is the senders degree of authority and their acceptance of responsibility. Alternatively, the addressee can be broadly defined as the public but of course that is too broad a definition due to the fact that that could apply to all of humankind. Anyone with the potential to read or be read to, is a potential reader and thus a part of this "public" (Genette, 1997: 9). Some paratextual elements are geared specifically towards the readers of the work. A preface is addressing or intends to specifically address the reader. This falls under the umbrella of public paratext, the private paratext is more understated and the addressees are usually ordinary individuals, whereas the intimate paratext describes a more intimate process whereby the author is both the sender and the addressee. In a diary for instance (Genette, 1997: 9).

Lastly, the functional aspect of the paratext comes down to one crucial fact. It is dedicated to the service of something other than itself. The purpose and chief responsibility of the paratext is to cater to and enhance the main text. The paratext is always subordinate to the main text, that is its constant position (Genette, 1997: 12). The function of any given paratext is hard to define other than to say that paratextual elements can have numerous functions and be able to perform those functions at the same time.

Paratexts in all their forms are of particular importance to this study primarily because they reveal and give insight into the various stakeholders involved in the process of creating a literary work. Those stakeholders can include the authors themselves, translators, editors, publishers, illustrators as well as other scholars who review the work or provide literary material like prefaces, forewords and introductions. In addition, an analysis of these specific paratextual elements can go a long way in determining the kind of reception the work has received and the influence or impact it has had or will have. With all this in mind, in chapter three, I undertake a paratextual analysis of the subject of this study; both the French and the

English translation. When examining a translation in its context and how it has been received, the paratext is absolutely crucial. Although it exists outside of the text, it has an enormous role to play in setting the scene and preparing the reader for the text, attracting the reader through marketing tools to the text and reinforcing the ideas found in the text. With a regard to a translated text, the job carried out by the paratext is even more important. Essentially, the paratext is designed to enhance the main body of the text and create a more pleasant experience for the reader overall.

## 2.8 Theory and Method

### 2.8.1 Theoretical Framework

This study makes use of a qualitative research method, in particular a case study. American social scientist Robert Yin defines a case study as an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life context (eds. Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013: 207). The emphasis when undertaking this method of study is on contextualisation and real life setting. As important as the textual and paratextual analysis is in this study, the object of the study (the French novel and its English translation) and the analysis cannot be fully understood without contextualising the entire study and its contents. Before embarking on this method of study one must first identify the "case". A case is defined by Bill Gillham as a unit of human activity that is embedded in the real world, which can only be studied or understood in context. This can be an individual person, an event, a process, an entire organization, a literary system or a text, as is the case in this study (eds. Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013: 207).

Case studies tend to be used to achieve one or more of three things; to explore questions of why and how, to generate hypotheses in translation theory or to test the viability of a theoretical framework (eds. Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013: 211). What I hope to achieve in this study is the third scenario. If this is achieved, the outcome of this study would have something to contribute to general knowledge and perhaps even point out the lack of scholarship in a particular area. The sources upon which the research is based are entirely written sources. The primary sources being the source and target texts as well as the paratextual and metatextual (reviews, academic articles etc.) written material. It is the source and target texts which are subjected to a comparative analysis, through the use of strategies found in DTS.

The broad theoretical framework for this study is Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) as theorised and conceptualised by translation scholar Gideon Toury. This research will take the form of a product-oriented study that will in part, focus on the various strategies used by the translator in producing the text in English and the extent to which these strategies influenced the target text.

### 2.8.2 Method

Gideon Toury proposes a three stage method for DTS. Firstly, the text needs to be situated within the target culture system and focus specifically on its acceptability and significance. Acceptability is judged in terms of the extent to which the translated text is target oriented. This is best done through a case study method. The second step is to embark on a textual analysis of the source text as well as the target text in order to identify the relationships between like segments (the replacing and replaced segments) in the two texts, or as Toury calls them coupled pairs. Coupled pairs as units of comparative analysis are necessary because it is too labour intensive, too broad and essentially, virtually impossible to compare the two texts as a whole. The selection of pairs allows for a focused analysis on specific aspects of the two texts. Once the pairs have been identified and their choice justified, it is at this point where the translational shifts are identified. Lastly, once the patterns and shifts in the coupled pair have been identified, generalisations must be made based on the analysis (Munday, 2012: 170). Ultimately what these three steps achieve is recognising that these texts exist in a wider social, cultural and political context.

Regarding the discussion of the translation into English of *Une Si Longue Lettre,* situating the text within the target culture system (English speaking audience) is fairly simple. Firstly, the source text cultural system was that of Senegalese society seen through the eyes of a Muslim Senegalese woman. This would be a society whose norms are governed by predominantly by tradition, religion (Islam) and the social conventions that come along with that. The market that consumed and continues to consume the translation of this novel is generally from a different societal context. Both the textual and the paratextual analysis are the most comprehensive and detailed step in this three step methodology. This analysis is undertaken in Chapter 4. The features that are identified in both texts have to do with the use of language. With regard to Bâ's novel, the relationship between the use of language and how it portrays women is the topic of discussion. Specifically, I discuss how the language that is used, in some instances brings women to the fore, how the language has the ability to mask their presence and render them silent and how the language gives great insight as to how women in

this specific context are viewed by other women but also by men. Furthermore, how the language fits into narratives from certain schools of feminism about the “plight” of African women is also discussed. The final step comprises generalisations made on the basis of the observations and discoveries made in the textual analysis. From there, conclusions are drawn on the translation process undertaken by Modupe Bodé-Thomas.

# Chapter 3

**Analysis**

This analysis is done in three parts. Firstly, a detailed paratextual analysis is undertaken where the extra textual material is analysed and conclusions are drawn. The second part of the analysis focuses on the novels reception by looking at metatextual elements like reviews of both the original and the translation and how the book has been marketed. Lastly, an analysis of the text itself is undertaken in the form of a close reading of selected segments in both languages and comparisons and differences are highlighted and discussed.

## 3.1 Paratextual analysis

The structure of the paratextual analysis will be to start the analysis on the outside and work inwards. In other words, this analysis commences with an examination of the novel's outermost elements; the front cover and the back cover and proceed chronologically inwards to the inside flaps, to the title page etc, and work till the end of the novel, comparing the paratextual elements in both the French and the English translation.

I shall begin this paratextual analysis with a section that Gerard Genette refers to as the "publisher's peritext". In essence, the publisher's peritext is comprised of all the elements that are the responsibility of the publisher and by extension, the publishing house. In other words, the outermost paratextual elements or peritext; the cover, the title page and their appendages. Additionally, the material construction of the book also falls under this category because although this work is carried out by the printers and typesetters, it is ultimately the publisher (sometimes in conjunction with the author) who makes those decisions that will determine how the book will be presented visually (Genette, 1997: 16).

The printed cover is a rather recent phenomenon and can be dated back to the early nineteenth century. Prior to that, most literary works were bound by plain leather, that would include, at the very most, the author's name and the title of the book either on the front cover (cover 1) or on the spine (Genette, 1997: 23). At present, the standard cover of a book or novel can have numerous elements on them. The AWS Classics edition of *So Long a Letter*'s front cover features:

- The name of the author
- The title of the work
- The name of the publisher
- The name of the series and

- A specific illustration

As this study focuses on the English translation of the novel, it is worth noting that there is no mention made of the fact that this is a translation or indeed who is responsible for the translation. The visibility of the translator can be questioned here. Having said that, it is not unusual for the translator's name to be absent on the front cover. The fact that it is a translation is only made known to the reader on the first page and the identity of the translator is only revealed on the title page. When compared with its French counterpart and the information presented in each, they are very similar. The Collection Motifs edition cover of *Une Si Longue Lettre* features:

- The name of the author
- The title of the work
- The name of the publisher and
- A specific illustration

Most of these elements are factual in nature and they provide information that is necessary for the reader to know. It is the two illustrations that offer more points of comparison, primarily because they are very different from one another, but also because they offer the reader much more than just facts. It is these illustrations that I wish to discuss. The English cover is predominantly black with a horizontal orange strip below the illustration, in line with the colour scheme and layout of most of the novels from the AWS Classics. The illustration features three figures. An African woman is seated in the foreground on her own with a seemingly sombre expression on her face. Her solitude is made more obvious by the two figures (a man and woman, arm in arm) in the background. A variety of elements can be drawn from this image. Having read the novel, I am able to ascertain what the image on the cover is depicting. The woman in the foreground is alone, she is abandoned. One of the protagonists, Ramatoulaye is abandoned by her husband when he takes a much younger second wife and one could argue that this what the illustration is depicting. The other protagonist, Aïssatou suffers a similar fate when her husband also wishes to take a second wife. She instead chooses to divorce him. In a sense, the illustration could also be hinting at this. However, seeing as though the paratextual analysis is carried before the reading of the novel, the reader will have no insight as to what the image on the front cover is depicting. Someone examining it with no prior knowledge of the contents of the novel, will see something different. The image depicted on the front cover of *So Long a Letter* resembles a

scene that cannot be mistaken for anything other than Africa, from the desert and the sun in the background, to the three dark skinned people featured in the image and their choice of attire. All of this points to an African story about African people.

From a feminist perspective, there is an argument to be made about how the illustrator (and perhaps the publisher who often makes the final decisions concerning the external elements) is making the feminine visible. The female form is being highlighted and the feminine voice is being brought to the fore. So that could be viewed positively. Regarding the French cover, very little information is given in illustrated form and there is no insight into what the story could be about. There is far less to analyse when compared with the cover of the translation. The extent of the French cover's illustration is an African print or pattern that covers the entire book. It is quite obviously a traditional textile so perhaps that gives the potential reader the idea that it has ties to Africa, whether it is written by an African author or set in Africa.

Also on the front cover of *So Long a Letter*, the concept of series is brought to the reader's attention. The reader is made aware that this particular edition of the translation is part of Heinemann's (AWS) Classics which is a brand new series that offers a selection of some of the best works of African literature that were originally published in the African Writers Series. This explanation of the AWS Classics is provided on cover 4, more commonly known as the back cover. Genette argues that the growth in popularity of the series is an attempt by publishing houses to demonstrate the diversification of their activities (Genette, 1997: 22). What this inclusion can achieve, is to show the reader what they can expect from the literary work they are about to read. In this instance, the potential reader is made aware of a few things. Firstly, that this work has the status of a classic work of African literature, secondly, that it has been included in a previous series by the same publishing company and that perhaps due to the popularity and the positive reception of the novel the first time around, it has been included in a series by Heinemann once again. The mere fact that this novel is part of the AWS is a major selling point for the novel. This series is synonymous with the greatest names in African literature and the body of literature it has produced, some of the most important and influential, on the continent but the rest of the world as well.

There has been some discussion about the overall packaging and particularly the covers of books from the series and whether they play into notions about exoticisation of all things Africa and African. The colour scheme, emblems and design depict what a Euro-American audience expect from Africa and literature out of Africa (Huggan, 2001: 52-53). Some

scholars would argue that the publishers of the series (one can and should hold them responsible for the commission of things like the cover art) have played into stereotypical depictions of Africa in order to appeal to a Western audience who perhaps has a simplistic, totalising, essentialised and one dimensional view of Africa. The object of this study, *Une Si Longue Lettre* and its translation showcase this point quite clearly. The original novel, features very little cover art while the English translation does. Presumably the belief was that the translation would be consumed in a Western context (Europe and North America) and needed to cater to those expectations. From this point of view, there is a relatively strong argument that through this practice, of using stereotypical and predictable imagery, Anglophone audiences in the Global North are indeed being privileged.

As cover 1 has been discussed in detail, I will now move on to covers 2 and 3 which are the inside front and back covers and in both the English and the French versions they are blank or mute as Genette says, as is the case with most books. Cover 4, more commonly known as the back cover is an important and strategic spot. Both novels shared the following characteristics on the back cover:

- A reminder of the title of the work and the name of the author
- A please-insert
- An ISBN and
- A magnetic bar code

A please-insert is a short text that describes, through the use of a summary, the literary work in question. They are perhaps more sophisticated, well worded and eloquent summaries that are designed to entice the potential reader. These are often attached to copies of the work that are addressed to critics. In other words, it helps inform the critic of what to expect as they are about to read and critique the work (Genette, 1997: 105). The other common characteristics need no further analysis as they are factual in nature. The one mildly interesting piece of information provided in the French is the price of the novel. That is essentially all of the information contained on the back cover of the French. The back cover of the English translation goes a bit further. It includes the:

- name of the designer of the cover art and the
- identification of the cover illustration

The next natural and chronological step to take would be to analyse the title page and its appendages (if applicable). However, upon opening *So Long a Letter*, on the very first page you come across something akin to the preface or something one might call an introduction to the introduction. It is only a page long and it offers a brief biographical account of Mariama Bâ's life and her work; how she was raised and educated, her first forays into writing, her passion for the rights of women, her fight for gender equality, the success of her work and the effect that it has had and finally her untimely death. In the same way, the French features an *à propos de l'auteur* or an "about the author" section where a brief description of the author and her life is provided. In the French this author information is given after the title page which makes for an interesting contrast to the translation. It could be argued that the publishing house felt it necessary to provide the reader with this information before the reader read the introduction. The information provided on that first page aids in the understanding of the introduction and in a way, achieves what the introduction does for the main text which is to situate it for the reader. The publishers are taking every opportunity to educate the reader and to encourage them to keep reading because from a translation studies background or perspective, alienating one's audience is not advisable as it can be very detrimental to the success and positive reception of a translation. If the reader is armed with additional information, they are less at risk of being alienated.

Within the same "preface", there is a brief biography of the author of the introduction, Kenneth W Harrow. From this "preface" we learn that he is a professor of English at Michigan State University and his areas of expertise include African literature and cinema, African diaspora studies, postcolonialism and feminism. All of which are disciplines and areas of study that have great significance to the themes of *Une Si Longue Lettre* and Mariama Bâ's writing in general. I would argue that this information about Harrow is partly given to convince or show the potential reader that Harrow is worthy of or is qualified to write an introduction for this novel, given his vast knowledge of the themes that the novel is rooted in. Seeing as he is tasked with situating the crucial main text for the reader, the audience expects him to be knowledgeable and this is "proven" by listing his credentials so to speak. Importantly, prefaces and introductions like the one in *So Long a Letter* only appear in works of scholarly value. This novel has become something of a poster child for the Black African woman's experience and the fact that an African novel, written by an African woman has been deemed a work of scholarly value is hugely significant. It means that there is a desire for stories with black women at the centre, it means that the novel has had the desired

impact in the Anglophone world. It has successfully made the transition from being a success in Francophone circles to the Anglophone world.

It is relatively easy to determine who the addressee of the "preface" would be. The intended audience is the reader of the main text. It is geared towards them. Determining the sender however, is not as simple. It could be the author, an actor involved in the process or a completely separate third party (Genette, 1997: 179). We can say with some confidence that the preface in our translation is not authorial in nature because the sender of the preface is not the author of the novel, which then leaves it to be either actorial or allographic. A preface written by a third party and accepted by the author is allographic, so the preface in *So Long a Letter* is actorial.

The English translation of *Une Si Longue Lettre* features various paratextual elements and one of them is the introduction by Kenneth W Harrow. I believe it is an interesting choice to have a white, American man, a scholar from the West introduce a novel and an author like Mariama Bâ. An author who represents  Perhaps that alone is an indication of the manner in which the novel has been received in the Anglophone world. In the first paragraph of the introduction, Harrow mentions the fact that this novel won the prestigious Noma Award in 1980 and not only did it win, but it was the first African novel to achieve this feat. This fact is also mentioned on the back cover. Genette (1997) argues that making mention of membership to some esteemed body or the receipt of a literary prize is a more trivial fact but it definitely adds something to the overall reception of the literary work. From divulging that singular fact, assumptions are made by the potential audience about the quality of the work and the status of the author and the work itself. In essence, the potential reader is given the impression that it is an important work and that it is worth reading.

> When Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* appeared in 1979, it was one of the **first** novels by a Senegalese **woman** in French, and in a sense became one of the **foundational texts** for Francophone **women** writers. It was the **first** African novel to win the prestigious Noma award in 1980.
>
> (Harrow, first paragraph of the six page introduction)

I have highlighted three key elements in the introductory paragraph. The word first is used more than once. I believe this, as well as the use of the word foundational is to highlight the ground breaking nature of this literary work and of its author. The frequent mention of woman is also an echo of the ground breaking and pioneering nature of this work and

furthermore, it is an introduction to a central element of the novel. This novel is without doubt about women and their lives, written by a woman and written for everyone but it must be said that she is speaking to women. Alternatively, this emphasis can be seen as an indication of the ghettoization of women's literature or how women's literature is essentialised. The chief function of most prefaces is to make known an intention or interpretation by the author or publisher or both (Genette, 1997: 196). I would argue that this is also applicable to the introduction found in *So Long a Letter* and that Harrow attempts and indeed achieves this goal.

Using the example of *Une Si Longue Lettre*, specifically its English translation, the paratextual elements that point towards the novels success are quite enlightening. The particular edition of the English translation that I have chosen was published in 2008, twenty-eight years after the French was first published and twenty-seven years after the publication of the English translation. I refer to this length of time to highlight how much time has passed, but also to frame the paratextual elements within a specific context and from a specific perspective. Although there is no specified length of time set aside to determine the success of an artistic endeavour and many literary greats achieve success long after their deaths, I would argue that today, two decades is arguably enough time to determine whether a literary work has had its intended impact. This is evidenced by parts of the introduction and the back cover. The success of the novel in terms of the accolades it has received and the recognition it has received from various literary bodies and organisations is splashed all over the English translation. For example, in addition to the mention of the Noma Award success, which is made known to the potential reader numerous times, *So Long a Letter* was also recognised as one of Africa's 100 best books of the 20$^{th}$ century in an initiative organised by the Zimbabwe International Book Fair.

In some way, these acknowledgements of the novels success over the years is a kind of proof that Bâ's work has been influential and a critical success. Although we have no way of knowing what Bâ hoped to achieve or impart with this literary work, it has nonetheless achieved a great deal and has contributed to conversations about feminism, post colonialism, African literature, gender and many more fields of study. Importantly, it has become a part of academic spaces.

Now we come to the title page and its appendages. Pages 1 and 2, known as the flyleaf, usually remain blank which is the case with the French novel. As has been discussed, the

English translation does not adhere to this convention and has included a “preface” of sorts on the very first page. Page 3 of the novel is reserved for the “half title” which means that the title and nothing else will appear on this page (Genette, 1997: 33). In the French this is again the case, but the English translation has chosen page 3 as the title page (which is normally found on page 5). This title page features the name of the author, the title of the work, the name of the publisher, the series in which this novel features, the introduction and its author and the name of the translator. For a reader who is completely new to *So Long a Letter* and is unaware of its origin, so to speak, this will be the very first time that they are made aware of the fact that it is a translation. Interestingly, this is the extent of the information given to the reader about the translator; that they translated the novel from French. There is definitely a lack of visibility concerning the translator. Pages 4 and 6 are used to house other factual information, anything from the ISBN, various published editions and their publishers, dates of publication and copyright notice and other law related things (Genette, 1997: 33) and both the French and the English have included these features.

In the French, the title page consists of four pieces of information. The standard name of the author and title of the work. There is also the publishers logo as well as the word *roman*. Translated into English, *roman* means novel so the reader is being told that what they are about to read is a novel. An expectation is created with the addition of that singular word: that the literary work will comply with the conventions of novel writing.

A particularly interesting paratextual element is included in the English translation. Just before the dedication, is a four page section titled “for further reference”. It includes, journal articles, films, books and interviews, all pertaining to Mariama Bâ and her work. Any reader of the novel who is interested in reading further around the subject is provided with an extensive, comprehensive list of the critical studies of Bâ. There is more than one way to view the inclusion of a further reading list, the first that comes to mind is that this novel is likely to be read in an academic context and the inclusion of this list is to aid in the analysis of Bâ’s work, particularly *Une Si Longue Lettre*. After all, Heinemann is an educational publisher and one of the central aims of the series was for it to be used for educational purposes, initially on the African continent and later all over the Anglophone world (seeing as though Heinemann is an English publisher). The themes of the novel are multidisciplinary and there seems to be an understanding that there is a possibility and proof of this novel being read in an academic setting for analysis and examination purposes. The publishers or whoever else was involved in the decision making process obviously felt the need to respond

to this circumstance and this is perhaps why later editions of *So Long a Letter* have such a feature, while earlier editions do not. It can be argued that the inclusion of this paratextual element had some influence on the reception of the novel, specifically in an academic setting. A novel or indeed any piece of literature is more likely to be well received when it attempts to meets the needs of the potential reader. Students studying the novel would benefit greatly from a reading list or the inclusion of a glossary and footnotes, as those features would enhance their understanding of the source material and help them perform better.

Lastly, just before the start of the novel, we find the dedication. Traditionally, the dedication is at the beginning of a book and is usually placed on the first right hand page after the title page. In both instances this convention has not been followed. The convention of the dedication is that the work was written for its dedicatee (Genette, 1997: 128). One can strongly assume that the author of the dedication is Mariama Bâ herself and the message contained within the dedication seems to affirm that fact. I raise this point because it is not always the author of the literary work who authors the dedication. In certain translations, it is the translator who takes responsibility for the dedication (Genette, 1997: 130). This concludes the paratextual analysis and I now move onto the analysis of the main text.

À Abibatou Niang, femme de vertu et de rigueur qui partage mes émotions, à Annette d'Erneville, femme de tête et de cœur, à toutes les femmes et aux hommes de bonne volonté.

To Abibatou Niang, pure and constant, lucid and thorough, who shares my feelings. To Annette d'Erneville of the warm heart and level head. To all women and to men of good will.

In her dedication, Mariama Bâ specifically thanks two women and mentions them by name; Abibatou Niang and Annette d'Erneville. I was unable to identify who Abibatou Niang is, but Annette d'Erneville is a Senegalese writer and poet. While we know nothing about Abibatou Niang, what is clear from this dedication is that she holds both these women in high esteem. She then goes on to dedicate her work "to all women and men of good will". She is dedicating it to the reader at large; anyone male or female who share her ideals are included in this dedication.

### 3.2 Analysis of Reception and Marketing

There are various strategies used to market and sell a literary work. The bulk of the marketing is the responsibility of the publishers. I have chosen to focus on two specific elements that have been used to market *Une Si Longue Lettre* and its English translation, *So Long a Letter*. The first marketing tool used by Heinemann Publishers was to make known to the reader that the novel was the recipient of the first Noma Award for Publishing in Africa in 1980. The second marketing tool is highlighting the series that the novel was published under (the Heinemann African Writers Series).

The Noma Award for Publishing in Africa, established in 1979, is an annual book prize that originated in Japan and was sponsored by the late Shoichi Noma (the prize is named in his honour), former President of well-known Japanese publishing firm Kodansha Ltd. The award is bestowed upon African writers and scholars whose work is published in Africa. The works chosen must fall within one of three categories; academic or scholarly, books for children and literature and creative writing (Zell, 1996: 163). Additionally the works submitted can be in any African language whether indigenous or European in origin. Mariama Bâ's *Une Si Longue Lettre* has the distinction of being the very first novel to win this award in 1979. Mr Shoichi Noma had a vested interest in growing international cooperation and the promotion of literature in the developing world (Zell, 1979: 277). The establishment of this award would fill a gap that existed in the African market, promote African literature and establish Kodansha Ltd as a force in the global publishing market. When it was first established in 1979, the book prize was worth $3000. Under the stewardship of the founder's daughter and current president of Kodansha, Sawako Noma (who took up the reins after her father's death in 1984), the prize is now worth $10 000 (Zell, 1996: 163). One of the consequences of prizes like this is to highlight the dominance of international industry as legitimising agents for literature. In essence companies like Kodansha form the basis for literary evaluation and its effects (Huggan, 2001: 105).

The selection process is rigorous. The Noma Award calls on a secretariat and a managing committee to act as its jury. This jury is comprised of African scholars, literature experts and representatives of the international book community. Additionally, a decision was taken to include almost 300 assessors and subject authorities because it was felt that the jury alone would not be enough to assess the merits and worthiness of the entrants. These assessors have knowledge and experience in highly specialist subject areas and languages, thus enabling them to aid in the selection process (Zell, 1996: 164). There is an initial review process done

by the secretariat, thereafter books that emerge as serious contenders are read by a minimum of two specialists. Books that are considered frontline contenders are then read by at least four assessors. At this point, the jury, after having deliberated and thoroughly read the reports of the assessors, pick the winner. Such is the magnitude of talent submitted that in addition to the single winner, there are also Special Commendations and Honourable Mentions to recognize the merits of other deserving titles (Zell, 1996: 164). Based on this rigorous process and the extensive list of highly regarded nominees or applicants, there can be no doubt that the ultimate winner of the prize must be deserving and it is quite easy to see how and why this recognition is used as a key factor in the marketing strategy of *Une Si Longue Lettre*.

The relevance of this award in particular and any other book prize of a similar nature has been questioned. Literary prizes have been in existence in one form or another for many centuries. The form we are familiar with today is a phenomenon of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Arguably the main difference or shift in the process of awarding of prizes is the donors. Previously, literary prizes were bestowed by monarchs and rulers as a way to showcase their benevolence to the people and to appease their subjects and ensure their loyalty (Huggan, 2001: 105). Today, public sponsorship taken over that responsibility and the Noma Award is no different. The existence of this award is due to Shoichi Noma and his publishing house Kodansha. While we can praise him for his generosity, it must also be noted that founding and funding this award, is part of a marketing scheme that can be and has been of great benefit to his company, financially and otherwise. Corporate sponsors now dominate the arts in the face of dwindling state subsidies and funding. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu suggests that literary prizes reflect upon the donors as much as the recipients. So while the underlying motivation for recipients is literary recognition and what that can result in, for donors it is slightly more complex and lies in the struggle for the authority to consecrate particular literary works as a way to prove dominance and power (Huggan, 2001: 118). In other words the relationship between award donors and award recipients, while on the surface seems to benefit the recipient, is in fact a mutually beneficial one.

For many African writers in the West, their fate and potential for success is linked to the awarding of prestigious prizes. One such example is the fate of Nuruddin Farah in the Italian book market. Influential Somali writer Nuruddin Farah is one such example. His literary works (written in English) are important for a number of reasons but an interesting point regarding the publication and translation of his works lies in the literary prizes he has won. Much of Farah's writing deals with the effects Italian colonialism has had and continues to

have on Somalia, the country of his birth. His bibliography is vast and he and his work are lauded by many, yet much of his work had not been translated into Italian. The catalyst proved to be Farah being awarded the Neustadt Prize for Literature in 1998. Almost immediately after that, his reception and the reception of his work in Italy took an upward turn and in fact also resulted in him winning other literary awards in Italy (Fotheringham, 2017: 16). This example serves to firstly highlight the relationship between the Anglophone publishing world and the Italian publishing world and secondly emphasise the influence that Euro-American publishers truly have. While it took some time for Farah's work to garner this attention in Italy, his work was already a critical success in the Anglophone world. Anglophone publishers like Heinemann had seen his value and acted accordingly and included his work in the African Writers Series, along with other great names like Chinua Achebe and Bessie Head to name a few (Fotheringham, 2017: 14).

As far as the African continent is concerned, there is no other comparable book prize. Perhaps what sets it apart from other literary prizes is the promotion and recognition of indigenous African publishing, scholarship and authorship (Zell, 1996: 166). It has provided tremendous exposure for African authors and publishers. The Noma Award remains the only African book prize in Africa and as a result it continues to enjoy an incredibly high status and any literary work that wins this award, enjoys the same status. A further indication of the calibre of this award are the many recipients of the award over the years and the diversity of the countries from which they originate; South African poet Lebogang Mashile, António Jacinto (Angola), Charles Mungoshi (Zimbabwe) and Werewere Liking (Côte d'Ivoire) to name but a few.

It is then no surprise that on various published editions of the English translation, *So Long a Letter*, a prominent inclusion on the front cover and the back cover is the acknowledgement that this novel has won the Noma Award and is in fact the very first novel to have this honour bestowed upon it. It is a deliberate action on the part of the publisher to make known to the potential reader that this is an award winning book and that it was the first to win such an award. It sets it apart from other novels in its genre, it gives it a certain amount of distinction. Where other novels might rely solely on positive, complementary reviews by other recognized scholars (which can be very effective), the strategy employed here is one of showcasing the merits of the novel as judged by an official, impartial body and the experts within that body. It is to a certain extent, proof that the novel has stood up to critique and rigorous examination by numerous experienced professionals in the relevant fields and not

only has it stood up to critique, it has emerged victorious and "beaten" the rest of the highly talented competition. It is however important to note and to compare the marketing decisions made by the French Publisher, Nouvelles Éditions Africaines. The French publishing house omitted the fact that the novel had won the Noma Award for publishing in Africa. It is worth noting because this was a major marketing tool used by Heinemann to promote the novel.

It is important to acknowledge that a literary work can enjoy success without being awarded a literary prize but it must also be highlighted in this instance that this prize has made a significant difference in the life of *So Long a Letter*. The awarding of this prize has been used as a tool to impress but also to attract readers. As a result of the Noma Award, the author and the novel have been profiled in a way that might not have been done otherwise. Therein lies the power and importance of a prize of this nature. It has less to do with the monetary reward and all to do with the recognition and the platform that African writers are given.

Another crucial element in terms of the reception of this novel is the series it was published under. As previously mentioned, the English translation, *So Long a Letter* was published as part of Heinemann's African Writers Series Classics. The Heinemann African Writers Series was borne out of a need to bring to the fore, the "undiscovered" literature from the African continent. There are two differing stories concerning how the series came about. According to Alan Hill, author of *In Pursuit of Publishing* and former director of Heinemann's lucrative educational branch, the catalyst was acclaimed Nigerian author Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* which was published in hardback by William Heinemann in 1958 (Maja-Pearce, 1992: 125). The Heinemann edition of this novel sold more than three million copies (that figure now stands at eight million) and it was then they realised that this was not an isolated incident and that there was in fact a market and a demand for African literature written by African writers and authors. The idea was then to launch a paperback series, exclusive to African authors. The books were to be well designed and available at a cheaper price, whereas outside Africa, they would be sold at normal trade paperback prices. Achebe remained influential and important to Heinemann through the sale of his work (it has been estimated that his work accounts for about a third of the AWS total sales) and as one of the founding advisory editors of the series, a position which he left in 1972 (Huggan, 2001: 51).

Another story claims that the crucial decision was made by Van Milne (who moved from Thomas Nelson Educational Publishing to Heinemann) to launch a low cost trade paperback series that would essentially ride the coattails of the existing African educational market

(Huggan, 2001: 51). This version also involves Alan Hill as he was the director of Heinemann Educational Books (HEB), which was formed in 1960 after it split from William Heinemann Publishing (Currey, 2008: 39). The idea purportedly came from Hill's time in India immediately after independence. It was there that he saw that the change in political climate and attainment of independence had created a space for British educators and publishers like Longman and Oxford University Press. In the same way, the AWS was launched during a period where many African countries were gaining independence and Heinemann was able to benefit from the so called "winds of political change" (Huggan, 2001: 52). This version of events does however readily admit to intentionally trying to benefit from societies that still possess lingering colonial residue. Whatever the story is, Heinemann saw a gap in the market and capitalised on it, to great and continued success and reinforced an already existing economic and cultural dependency in Africa, on outside sources, primarily from the West.

The series was then launched in 1962 with four titles including Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. That same year Achebe agreed to become an editorial adviser to the AWS (Currey, 2008: 27). The success of the series was evident from the very beginning and by 1970, eighty books had appeared under the series' name. The success of the series manifested itself in two ways; a financial profit was being made in a new market and the voices of African writers were being amplified and introduced to a new international audience (Stec, 1997: 142). Today the prestige and success of the AWS by Heinemann is evidenced by the vast list of lauded African writers whose works have appeared as part of the series; Wole Soyinka, Nadine Gordimer, Nuruddin Farah, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Sembéne Ousmane to name but a few (Maja-Pearce, 1992: 126). *Une Si Longue Lettre*'s and thus *So Long a Letter*'s inclusion in this series among the many other illustrious names of African literature is an important one. It is important regarding the content of the novel and its relevance but for the purposes of this conversation, it is also vitally important for the marketing of the novel.

American literary critic Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1988) makes the assertion that, as human beings, we evaluate literary works for each other through various kinds of acts of evaluation and institutional practices. These acts and practices include teaching, book reviewing, awarding literary prizes and writing critical articles (Stec, 1997: 140). It is through these acts that literary value is given to or withheld from a literary work. Those responsible for the evaluation range from the publishers, to purchasers of the work, to translators and even to those who quote or cite the work. Consequently, these elements are all crucial in the

construction of a literary canon, which as we know is responsible for centralising the works with the highest literary value in a given society or culture. The publishing world and its extensive powers play an important role in the production and maintenance of the literary value which is the basis for canonicity (Stec, 1997: 140).

Regarding the two translations that form the basis of this study, it is clear that it has been subjected to various acts of evaluation and institutional practices including critical review, the fact that it has been taught in various disciplines at universities around the world and it has been the recipient of a rigorously judged book prize. Another interesting point (and bone of contention among many) is that the Heinemann series only publishes writers in English which means that Anglophone African writers and their work are privileged to some extent. There are however, a few novels written in other African languages that have been translated and now appear as part of the series like novels by Ferdinand Oyono, Sembene Ousmane, Leopold S. Senghor and others. A Heinemann editor explained that the reason for this decision (to publish in English) was that Heinemann was unable to cope with the cost and difficulty of soliciting people to evaluate and translate African literature. The only exception to this policy are those authors who were already "famous" (Stec, 1997: 144). Mariama Bâ and *So Long a Letter* is another such example[2]. Those responsible for selecting novels for the AWS deemed Mariama Bâ famous enough and her work influential and relevant enough to have her debut novel translated from French into English and have the English translation become a part of the series.

Heinemann's stance on the matter of language and which titles to translate raises a rather important point about language, Western languages in particular, and their relationship with the publishing world. Some scholars argue that when African literature is written in so called Western languages it does, to a certain extent, comply with the standard and structure of that particular language. In other words, how the story unfolds mirrors Western literary devices like characterization, plot development, word usage and style (Stec, 1997: 144). Whereas, when writers write in their own local language, they write to their own cultural framework. It can be argued that Mariama Bâ, by choosing to write in a Western language (French) has also made the conscious decision to adhere to a particular style of writing that is in accordance with the language. Many scholars who have read Bâ, make the assertion that she writes in a

[2] This decision, whether to translate or not and which titles to translate is in line with what Gideon Toury classifies as an initial norm; the choice that is made between two sources of constraint (Toury, 1995: 56).

specific French, a French that is not heavily influenced by her African context. Her use of language is indicative of her socio-economic status, her privileged formal education and life as part of a family who was part of the political elite in a newly independent Senegal. From a publishing perspective, this approach adopted by Heinemann aims to bring to publication literary works from Africa that resemble literary works that are valued in the West (Stec, 1997: 145).

Another important point worth discussing is that of intentional or strategic exoticism which was detailed earlier in the literature review, particularly with the case of the AWS by Heinemann. There is no doubt as to the success of the series or the good work that it has achieved, but it can be argued that part of that success is due to the exoticisation of Africa (Huggan, 2001: 50). The difference being that the exoticisation being enacted now is derived from a neo-colonial mind set and while the subjects essentially remain the same, the perpetrators are now those from former colonial empires. The colonial or anthropological gaze still remains to some extent. Upon reading some of the thoughts and justifications of central figures like Alan Hill, one begins to understand that one of the central aims of the series (from Hill's perspective anyway) was to offer a foreign audience a view of Africa unknown to them, an Africa after the end of colonial rule as the quote below suggests.

> In place of the misconceptions of colonialist times [the African Writers Series] has given us a true picture of African traditional societies as they move into the modern world, depicting their humanity, their artistic achievements, as well as their cruelty and superstition – a mixture very familiar in the history of Western European civilisation. (Hill 1988: 145)

Hill's articulation in the above quote reveals a number of things and makes a few assumptions as well. Firstly, I believe that there is an arrogant assertion that Africa is only beginning to move into the modern world and although he does not say this, it is not hard to assume that he is implying that the move to modernisation is possible because of the colonial presence and influence. Secondly, he says that it gives a true picture of Africa and its societies. By saying this, he fails to acknowledge the many faces of Africa that cannot possibly be depicted in one singular literary series about Africa. He has made the mistake that so many other non-African literary scholars have made; the mistake of reducing Africa to a single story or depiction. The single story creates stereotypes which can be quite damaging, but what is most harmful about them is not that they are incorrect but rather that they are

incomplete. They only tell one side of the story and that story ends up being the only story (Adichie, 2009). This is an echo of the discussion surrounding the broad, homogenous term that is African literature. For literature coming out of a place that is so large, diverse, multilingual and multicultural is it appropriate for there to be one term to encompass it all? In the same vein, can Hill truly claim that the African Writers Series gives a true picture of African society? I would argue that it is naïve of him to do so. Hill's quote is reminiscent of the colonial binary that is at the centre of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and other colonial works of that nature. Essentially it is the kind of rhetoric that exists in colonial literature and relies on two depictions or narratives of Africa to tell the story; Africa the innocent and Africa the savage.

Once again there is an attempt to take the foreign and make it personable and relatable. Hill takes an event that occurs in a foreign context and finds a way to relate it and assimilate it to a Western culture; the cruelty and superstition that also existed in European civilisation. During colonialism the dominant rhetoric spoke of uncivilised and barbaric peoples and now that colonialism is over, Europeans have suddenly become aware of their humanity. If I understand Hill's sentiments correctly, he is attempting to replace one kind of literature with another namely replacing colonial, racist literature written by colonialists with literature written by Africans about the "new" Africa, with the aim being to educate a Euro-American audience about postcolonial Africa. After all, the AWS was a series commissioned by Heinemann's educational branch. It was intended and initially used in Africa for educational purposes, but it then occurred to the various stakeholders in the Heinemann Educational Branch, that the educational function of the novels in the AWS need not be restricted to the African continent only, but could also be geared to the education systems of Europe and America (Huggan, 2001:53).

This education did however, give the Euro-American audience a singular depiction of Africa. Where previously it was through a colonial, missionary and anthropological gaze, it is now through a neo-colonial gaze. Graham Huggan calls Hill's argument a pseudo-anthropological view which reinforces an exoticist stereotype disguised as an attempt to understand a previously misunderstood culture (Huggan, 2001: 53). Furthermore, little effort was made to disprove and do away with those stereotypical views of a tribal and primitive Africa that existed in the colonial days. A way of thinking that defined and essentialised the "Dark Continent" and its inhabitants in a way that the Western world was able to comprehend and accept.

Another point to consider is that an author like Chinua Achebe, who is revered the world over and is seen as the poster child for African literature, was involved in the selection process (the selection of texts to be published as part of the African Writers Series), powers granted to him by his role as a founding advisory editor of the series. This is worth mentioning because his elite position as an African literary powerhouse and an authoritative voice in the African literary space, has afforded him a certain amount of privilege and sway with publishers. His opinion is held in very high esteem. One cannot talk about Heinemann's footprint in Africa and African literature, let alone the African Writers Series without mentioning Achebe's name. Achebe's writing has been hugely successful globally and one of his most well known works, *Things Fall Apart*, has been translated into over 50 languages. James Currey argues that this success is due to the African Writers Series (Currey, 2008:28).

This has the potential to create a situation where the texts selected are of a particular leaning (a leaning that is in line with Achebe's own interests, values, beliefs and political ideology), a particular form or style and slightly homogenous in nature. For instance, after his appointment as Editorial Adviser in 1962, the first titles in the AWS were predominantly from Nigeria, the country of his birth (Currey, 2008: 39). This of course was not a bad thing seeing as Nigeria has produced writers like Buchi Emecheta, Wole Soyinka and many others who also feature in the AWS. However, one simply cannot overlook the potential for bias on the part of Achebe or indeed any of the people involved in the selection process. This was one of the criticisms thrown at the AWS, the fact that it propagated a particular kind of literature, that is to say a literature that carries the imprint of a writer like Achebe (Owomoyela, 2008: 63). It is important to keep at the front of one's mind that Africa is incredibly diverse and as such, the writing coming out of Africa must reflect that. To place Achebe as the standard or to rely heavily on his judgement in the selection process, runs the risk of homogenizing the African literature presented in a series like the AWS.

While all of the above might be true and it might also be true that many African writers were, to some extent, forced by their circumstances to publish their work with Western publishers who took on the role of agents of legitimation, it is important to remember that this does not render their work completely compromised or useless. With particular focus on the AWS, and it being exported widely in the English speaking parts of the Global North, it was also widely disseminated in Africa. *So Long a Letter* for example was not only readily available, it was also used as an object of study in many disciplines at various tertiary institutions across the continent. The series did and continues to provide a platform for African writers to have

their work published, read by a wider audience and open to peer review (Huggan, 2001: 54). As frustrating and counterproductive as some of the mechanisms have proven to be, published series like the AWS have done some good and are still held in high esteem for that reason. To disregard this good work would be doing the series, its publishers and its published authors a huge disservice. The point I am simply trying to make is that the African Writers Series and in particular, the object of this study *So Long a Letter*, must be critically examined for its merits, as well as the problematic mechanisms that have greatly contributed to its success.

Another vital point is that postcolonial writers like Bâ and many others that are part of the series are not oblivious to the role that they have taken on or indeed the system and mechanisms they are a part of. Brouillette argues that as a result of the decision to publish with publishing houses like Heinemann, the postcolonial writer has essentially become a profoundly complicit and compromised figure whose authority is dependent on the connection they have to a political location (Brouillette, 2007: 5). This is not to say that they enter into this unknowingly, or that they remain compromised. An agreement of this nature situates the postcolonial writer and their work at the centre of Western interest and as it has been explained, that can be beneficial in a myriad of ways. This interest is often the result of publishing houses in the Global North capitalizing on "historical moments". For instance, Heinemann in the case of Mariama Bâ taking advantage of Senegal's transition from colonialism to independence or Italian publishing houses taking advantage of the outbreak of the Somali civil war and subsequently publishing and translating Nuruddin Farah's work. When the third world is in the news for what is usually tragic reasons, it becomes of sudden interest to a white liberal audience and that interest can and often does translate to book sales (Fotheringham, 2017: 6).

All of the elements and themes of the novel that have been discussed up until this point have laid the foundation for the analysis and close reading of the text. In order to draw conclusions about the reception of the novel by an Anglophone audience, the English text itself must be examined as well. A secondary question that has been posed deals with the extent to which, if at all, a Western, Anglophone audience has been privileged or considered in any way. The only way to try and answer that question is to do a close reading of segments selected from the text and to identify where, how and for what purpose the translator has used specific translation strategies to carry out the translation.

### 3.3 Analysis and close reading of the text

As we already know, in all of her published work, Mariama Bâ made the choice to write in French. I argue that that this choice results from the fact that she did speak other languages and could have written her work in those languages. She is however not alone in this decision as many African writers have chosen to articulate themselves in the language of the colonizer. African literature expressed in European languages occupies a very unique position. French author Jacques Chevrier (1979) articulates this quite well by arguing that a writer who writes in a language that is not their mother tongue rests on a certain ambivalence. This ambivalence is a mixture of hatred and love, of acceptance and rejection and an overall feeling of struggle that exists in the mind and heart of the African writer. African writers who do use European languages to express themselves often do so by re-appropriating the language for themselves and give expression to their imaginations through the foreign language (Gyasi, 1999: 76). Some African scholars purposefully choose to write in a European language because they wish to address an audience that sought to erase and deny African history and culture.

So perhaps there is an argument for Bâ writing in French. Perhaps she writes in French not because she is trying to accommodate a Western audience, but because she chooses to write in the language of the colonizer as an act of defiance and as a way to address that particular audience and to send a message to them; to awaken or to remind their collective conscience of their colonial past and their complicity in it. From a linguistic perspective her defiance is expressed in two ways, firstly she is taking their language, claiming it as her own and using the language in a specific way and for her own purposes. Secondly by interspersing her native Wolof into the main body of the text and leaving some of those terms unexplained (as you shall see in the analysis) she is contextualising the text and in so doing also reminding the reader of a context that is foreign and different from their reality.

That being said, there are certain linguistic and grammatical matters to consider when writing in French. Before undertaking this analysis, I believe it is pertinent to highlight the fact that French is a gendered language. Every object has a gender and that gender is made visible by the addition or omission of letters. So to avoid running the risk of overanalysing gender and its presence in an already gendered language, I will focus less on specificities and more on the representation of women through the use of language.

**Example 1**

**ST:** Car, premières pionnières de la promotion de la femme africaine, nous étions peu nombreuses. Des hommes nous taxaient d'écervelées. D'autres nous désignaient comme des **diablesses**. Mais beaucoup voulaient **nous posséder** (p 36).

**TT:** Because, being the first pioneers of the promotion of African women, there were very few of us. Men would call us scatter-brained. Others labelled us **devils**. But many wanted to **possess us** (p 15).

In French, every noun has a grammatical gender. The gender of the adjective is determined by the subject. If the subject is feminine then the adjective used to describe or refer to the subject will be feminine as well. In the above example I have highlighted the word *devils* and the French equivalent *diablesses*. The common or conventional translation for the word devil in French is *diable* (the masculine form). However, the word used in the original, *diablesse* offers a wider range of meaning and connotation which the translator chose not to make use of. The word *diablesse* was most likely preferred over the more common *diable* because the subjects are women and because the adjective has to agree with the subject. It could also potentially be a strategy on the part of Bâ to avoid the generic masculine, thereby making the language speak for women. Barbara Godard describes this as "womanhandling", a process that helps create meaning (Godard, 1988: 50).

The word *diablesse* at its most basic means a female devil, so in other words a she-devil, but the dictionary offers other definitions of the word like shrew or vixen. In English multiple meanings and connotations can be found and the various explanations offer an insight as to how the two female protagonists were viewed by men. A she-devil is considered a malicious or spiteful woman. A shrew is a woman who is viewed as aggressively assertive and finally a vixen is defined as a spiteful woman. All of these explanations are incredibly negative descriptions of women that the word devil, which the translator chose to use, simply does not encompass. I would argue that the translator missed an opportunity to emphasise the female presence in this segment and to articulate in full, the point of view of the men mentioned in the segment. There is significantly more meaning and connotation in this segment that the translator chose not to highlight.

The name calling that Ramatoulaye and her like-minded friends endure, at the hands of men, was a direct result of their beliefs. Women who believed in the promotion of women and articulated these beliefs freely and openly, were considered dangerous and to be avoided. In

the last sentence of the segment, the notion of possession is introduced, giving rise to the idea that women are "things" to be possessed. The contradiction is the myriad of emotions that was present in these men. The inherent resentment and disdain coupled with the desperate need to possess. Almost as if those are the only means by which to view women, as objects of desire or hatred. In both instances, they are treated as objects and as things to be acted upon. Women do not belong to themselves, but are to be the possessions of men. The second example further illustrates this point. The conversation that takes place in the first segment is also indicative of the way in which the education of women in traditional Senegalese society was a contested and politicised subject. Ramatoulaye talks about how herself and Aïssatou were part of a group of pioneers, the first women to be vocal about the advancement of women in society. It is no coincidence that they were well educated and that their education is tied to their belief systems. The narrative of African feminists, African women at the forefront of championing the women's cause was an unusual one, especially in 1979.

**Example 2**

**ST:** La première question qui vient à l'esprit a la découverte d'un pareil état est: qui? Qui est l'auteur de ce **vol**, car **vol** il y a ; qui est l'auteur de ce **préjudice**, car **préjudice** il y a ! (p. 151)

**TT:** The first question that comes to mind on discovering such a condition is: who? Who is behind this **theft**, for there has been a **theft**. Who is behind this **injury**, for **injury** it is. (p. 86)

This segment comes immediately after the protagonist, Ramatoulaye learns that her unmarried daughter Aïssatou is pregnant. The word usage in this text, particularly the highlighted words, situates the woman in a passive position. Falling pregnant through the act of intercourse is being portrayed as something that happens to the woman and not necessarily something in which she actively participates. She is being acted upon. A "theft" has taken place, meaning she has had something forcefully taken from her. An "injury" has taken place, meaning that there has been wrongdoing. The woman is the harmed subject (patient) and the perpetrator is the man who has done the harming (agent). This again reinforces the idea that women do not belong to themselves and that they are beings that are passive and unwilling participants. What it also reinforces are notions and perceptions that the West has about the lived experience of the African woman. As mentioned previously, often in literature and in the general portrayal of Africa, the African woman is depicted as a victim of her culture and religion. In no way can I claim that this is the sole reason that the novel is popular in the

Anglophone world because to do so would be naïve and would require me to disregard everything else that this literary work achieves and represents. It is however, worth noting that there are a number of times in the novel where the female characters are portrayed in a way that draws pity from the reader on the character's behalf. Students in John Champagne's "The Theme of Identity, in World Literature: Race, Gender, and other issues of Diversity" class responded accordingly at the plight of the protagonist Ramatoulaye. This segment enforces the notion of women being acted upon, rather than being in control of their lives.

It could be worth noting that this conversation is rooted in certain expectations of behaviour that are prescribed by society. In the context of *Une Si Longue Lettre*, Islam, the time period and African traditions and customs are the main contributors to Senegalese society. Premarital sex is frowned upon and as a result having a child out of wedlock is viewed much the same way if not worse. In both instances, these "rules" are for the most part enforced upon women. When a woman has a child out of wedlock, it is her who carries the burden and most of the shame. When it comes to premarital sex, the "rule" applies to both men and women but often women are the only gender expected to adhere to it. Furthermore, a certain amount of blame is often apportioned to the mother of the pregnant girl who is believed to have failed in her duty; raising a virtuous woman. Less, if any blame is laid at the feet of the father of the unwed mother to be, the father of the unborn child or indeed his family. Ultimately, it is the woman and sometimes women in the scenario who must assume responsibility for the "wrongdoing".

The language used by Mariama Bâ also points to the religion that she has subscribed to her entire life. There is a certain conservatism that is present in her writing. The protagonist's refusal to utter the word pregnancy and instead refer to it as a condition, an injury and a theft is quite telling. The delicacy with which she speaks of pregnancy, in particular a pregnancy that is considered shameful, points to the conservatism found in Islam, a religion that the protagonist also subscribes to.

**Example 3**

**ST:** Quoi, un Toucouleur qui convole avec une **bijoutière**? Jamais, il « n'amassera argent ». (p. 40).

**TT:** What, a Toucouleur marrying a **goldsmith's daughter**? He will never "make money" (p.17).

One of the goals of feminist translation is making the feminine visible. This segment is of a past memory of the reactions Aïssatou (Ramatoulaye's best friend) received when she chose to marry her now ex-husband Mawdo Bâ. In the above example we have a ST that does make mention of the female form but a TT that does it in a slightly different way. A *bijoutière* is a jeweller which is closely related to the concept of a goldsmith, so there is no real difference there. However, in one text the female presence is implied and in the other it is made explicit. As has been mentioned previously, the French language is a gendered language and an example of this is the word *bijoutière*. The 'e' on the end of the word denotes that the subject is female. English does not possess the same function, in order to denote a female presence, an additional word usually has to be included.

It is a deliberate and necessary addition made by the translator, I think, for the purpose of clarity and to explicitly mark the presence of the woman in the text, a presence that is not as visible in the ST. The presence of the word daughter achieves this. Alternatively, an argument can be made about the problematic manner in which the feminine is made visible in the TT. Aïssatou is described in terms of her relationship to a male. She is described as the daughter of someone, specifically as her father's daughter. Her status in society is to a large extent, determined by her father's profession, almost as if that is where her value or worth (or lack thereof) lies.

I believe it is worth noting that both the original author and the translator chose to leave the term Toucouleur unexplained. This is an interesting choice on both their parts because that word or term is crucial to the understanding of the entire phrase and segment. Upon reading these two sentences, the reader gets the sense that the person is speaking with shock or disbelief in their voice. There is a sense of the utter absurdity of contemplating such an event taking place. This shock, dismay or disbelief cannot easily be felt by the reader without a full understanding of what the word Toucouleur means or is referring to. In this instance the translator chose to stick closely to the source text and make the same decision that Bâ made by leaving the word unexplained. This could be a foreignizing strategy to remind the reader that the text they are reading is a foreign text: a text that was written about and created for a specific context; a context that is unfamiliar to their own. This English translation was after all, commissioned with an English audience in mind and Senegalese society, culture and history could not be further from the reality of an Anglophone reader in Europe or America. It could also be an attempt to encourage some initiative on the part of the reader. The reader is required to make an effort and do some research of their own, to aid in their own

understanding of that section of the novel. Some scholars argue that if as a writer, you wish to express the African imagination and you wish for your readership to benefit from African culture then one cannot completely disregard African language (Gyasi, 1999: 78). These insertions of an African language throughout the main body of the text are an attempt to adapt and modify a European language to suit the needs of the African author and her inherently African context.

According to Encyclopaedia Britannica (1998), the Toucouleur or Tukulor people inhabit present day Mali and Senegal. Up until the eighteenth century, the Tukulor lived in the kingdom of Tekrur until the birth of the Toucouleur empire in the 1700s. Islam was introduced into sub-Saharan West Africa by Trans-Saharan traders from Northern Africa (Clark, 1999: 152). The Tukulor people embraced Islam in the 11$^{th}$ century. Senegalese society today is still firmly rooted in those Islamic beliefs. Tukulor society is highly stratified and is based on male lineage (patrilineage). In other words, the lineage is traced through the paternal line meaning that the male descendant and the male line is emphasised. Added to that, the Tukulor are a polygynous people, although it is estimated that only 20 percent of men engage in this practice of having more than one wife. A great deal of importance is attached to social status and one's status in society is most commonly determined by birth, wealth and occupation. Those who are born to a noble or prosperous family have higher social status. Alternatively, lower status is given to those who occupy lower castes, are artisans and those who have slave ancestry. The time honoured tradition of the bride price is also affected by this. The price is determined by the social status of the chosen bride. This information gives the above segment a degree of clarity and situates it quite nicely. A Tukulor of noble birth, like Mawdo (his mother is a *Guelewar* or princess), would receive the highest esteem and reverence in society. Aïssatou by comparison was not noble at all and had a goldsmith for a father (a simple artisan). For this reason, a marriage between them would have been met with great criticism because the son of a princess is befitting of a woman much better and higher in rank than a goldsmith's daughter.

A recurring theme in this novel is the class or caste system in Senegal and how that governs the way of life and thinking of members of Senegalese society. Historically, Senegalese society was highly and rigidly stratified according to castes ranging from those of royal blood to artisan castes and slaves. Years later and the effects of that system are still deeply entrenched. The sheer contempt and disapproval for those who occupied a lowly status in society is evident throughout the novel and in the above segment that brings up the value

attached to one's occupation and social status. One of the major contributing factors that led to the break down in Aïssatou's marriage was of course her husband taking a second wife (at his mother's insistence). His mother's insistence and careful selection of the second wife stemmed from Aïssatou's so called inferior birth. As the above segment clearly indicates, Aïssatou's mother-in-law was never satisfied with the fact that her son, a man of royal lineage married a girl from a lower caste, a girl from an artisan caste. Such was her dissatisfaction that she found her son Mawdo a second wife, her own niece, one who would be more suitable (according to her standards) and of his social class.

A woman's worth in this context is being determined by things that are out of her control. She had no say in where, how or to whom she was born yet that is being used as against her and she is in fact being punished for it. Aïssatou is being relegated to a woman whose worth is determined by her association with a man. Those who have read the novel know that Aïssatou goes on to become very successful and works as an interpreter at the Senegalese embassy in the US, but one gets the feeling that had she remained in the marriage and achieved the same success her mother-in-law still would not have been satisfied. Essentially, who or what she becomes and the success she creates for herself is almost irrelevant as she cannot erase who her father is and the circumstances of her birth. In the eyes of her former mother-in-law she will never be more than just the daughter of a goldsmith.

Even Nabou, Mawdo's carefully selected second wife is herself a symbol of the value placed upon marriage and social class. Being his cousin she is of course of noble blood so that alone would make her suitable in the eyes of Mawdo's mother. Again, there is a distinct lack of self-determination. She is held in high esteem not because of what she has said or done but what she was born into. She is plucked out of her life, robbed of choosing and determining her own future and selected as Mawdo's second wife. Her feelings on this matter are never fully articulated in the novel which itself is quite telling. Her feelings or wishes are not a point of great consideration. Earlier in this research report, the history of the education system in Senegal is explained. Women were essentially given two forms of education, within the colonial French school system and the education at home, a western and a traditional education. The latter education is the kind that is designed to prepare women for wifely duties. The "reward" for such an education is attaining a husband.

What this segment highlights, is the oppression and discrimination inflicted on the women in the novel, by other women. James Currey argues that "In the novel, she [Bâ] shows how

women collaborate in the oppression of women for their own material security" (Currey, 2008: 70). When he says this he is referring to the arranged marriage I discuss above, but also to the arranged marriage between Modou (Ramatoulaye's husband) and young Binetou. Similarly, that marriage is also orchestrated by an older woman, Binetou's mother for her own financial gain and material security. Lady Mother-in-Law, as she is known, is granted elite status for the first time in her life, all at her daughter's expense. This has the potential to be an unusual and unexpected state of affairs to the Anglophone reader, but this is good news because this is a true depiction of African life. This is not an Africa, that they will have encountered in real life or on paper.

**Example 4**

**ST:** Elle n'était plus sous ma protection. Elle **appartenait davantage** à son ami. Une nouvelle famille naissait à mes yeux. J'acceptais mon rôle **subalterne**. Il faut bien que **le fruit mûr** tombe de l'arbre (p. 158).

**TT:** She was no longer under my protection. She **belonged** more to her boyfriend. A new family was being born before my very eyes. I accepted my **subordinate** role. The **ripe fruit** must drop away from the tree (p. 90- 91).

I have once again highlighted the points I wish to analyse and discuss. The notion of belonging, particularly the possession of women is brought up again. After learning of her daughter Aïssatou's pregnancy and now impending nuptials, Ramatoulaye is reluctantly relinquishing the ownership of her daughter to her daughter's boyfriend and father of her unborn child, Ibrahima Sall. The ownership of any person, especially a female is nonsensical because human beings are not possessions. Human beings belong to themselves. Women belong to themselves, despite the efforts and opinions of those who believe the contrary. In this passage, the female subject is once again portrayed as passive.

The subordinate role spoken about in this passage is multidimensional. Within the context of her daughter starting a family, she (Ramatoulaye) is being relegated to the role of spectator. She recognises that she must step back in order for future son-in-law to assume responsibility. A possible secondary meaning comes from a different translation of the French word *subalterne.* One translation of the word is subordinate but another is subaltern. From a postcolonial perspective, subaltern is a description of those who exist on the margins of society; the marginalised, the lower classes or those of lower status. Ramatoulaye is black, Muslim, widowed, African, female and a former colonial subject. These are only a few

labels that can be used to describe her, but the conclusion to be drawn from these labels is that she can be considered to be a part of the subaltern. Or at the very least a person at the very epicentre of oppression.

The use of the metaphor in the last sentence fulfils more than one function. The primary function is of course comparison. She, as the mother of a grown daughter who is also an expectant mother, has fulfilled or completed her job. Like a ripened fruit on the tree, her daughter has gained and extracted all she can from the tree and is now ready for a different path and a new journey. From the mother's perspective, as the tree, she has served her purpose and is no longer needed by the fruit and must now relinquish the fruit. There is an element of acceptance and sadness as well. Added to that is the depiction of the woman as a vessel. She is a conduit and once she has completed her task she becomes, in a way, useless. This metaphor calls into question the purpose of a fruit bearing tree when it no longer bears any fruit. When a tree or indeed any living thing, is unable to perform its sole function, it is no longer useful. Ramatoulaye birthed twelve children for her husband Modou and he quite easily took another wife and had more children with her. When the tree that is Ramatoulaye ceased to bear fruit, it became useless to Modou. This singular metaphor speaks to and echoes other events and scenes in the novel. It is interesting to note that fruit and trees are used quite a few times throughout the novel in metaphorical ways and often to describe women.

**Example 5**
**ST:** À Abibatou Niang, **femme de vertu** et de rigueur qui partage mes émotions, à Annette d'Erneville, **femme de tête et de cœur**, à **toutes les femmes** et aux hommes de bonne volonté.

**TT:** To Abibatou Niang, pure and constant, lucid and thorough, who shares my feelings. To Annette d'Erneville of the warm heart and level head. **To all women** and to men of good will.

This segment is the dedication and technically exists outside of the main text and is therefore a part of the paratext but I chose it as a segment because it is the first sign of evidence of the translator's footprint. This is where the translators work commenced. Up to this point any and all the parts of the novel that the reader has encountered, from the cover illustration, to the font, the reviews, the blurb on the back cover, the overall packaging of the novel etc. have been decided by someone else. The translator is not a part of those decision making

processes. You will notice that there is only one highlighted part in the English translation. This is the only place in the English dedication where the word woman or women is used. This is in comparison to its use three times in the French. That is because the translator has omitted two similar phrases that appear in the French. In Mariama Bâ's dedication, she thanks two women and goes as far as to mention them by name; Abibatou Niang and Annette d'Erneville. Unfortunately, I was unable to ascertain who Abibatou Niang is or what her relationship to the original author is, but based on the dedication itself, the reader is able to categorize her as someone Bâ values for her like-mindedness; as a woman who shares her feelings. Annette d'Erneville is a fellow Senegalese writer and poet who was from the same era as Bâ (d'Erneville was born in 1926, three years before Bâ). A woman not only from her era, but one who also shared her passion for women's rights, even launching a magazine, *Awa* that became the first Francophone publication for women (Ellerson, 2010). Both the women she has mentioned by name are champions of women's rights and women's empowerment.

She goes further than mentioning them by name, she remarks on specific attributes that they have. She calls Abibatou "femme de vertu", a woman of virtue and Annette "femme de tête et de coeur", a strong minded woman with heart. That the choice of words in my translation is different to Modupe Bodé-Thomas' is not as important as the omission both times of the word woman. I would argue that this was a deliberate choice by Bâ to again praise the female form and bring attention to it. I think the translator has missed an opportunity to do the same in the English. I cannot see a justifiable reason why the translator would make those changes in the dedication. Even more so because throughout the reading of both texts, it becomes clear that Modupe Bodé-Thomas has produced a close, more literal rendition of the French. She has remained loyal to Bâ's writing and in doing so has to some extent produced an adequate translation. Bâ is dedicating her work to two specific women, to all women and to men of good will. The dominant presence in that dedication is that of the female. She also phrases the final sentence of the dedication in a particular way. She mentions women before she does men. That could be a deliberate action on her part to privilege and honour the woman and that is carried over into the English by the translator. In English, the convention when grouping the two sexes together is to talk about "men and women", in that specific order. That is the convention, that is what sounds correct and is the norm in the English language, in the same way that the phrase "black and white" is not often articulated as "white and black". Both phrases mean the same thing, but one sounds more pleasing to the ear. One

articulation is accepted as right and correct. The translator could have easily swapped it around for her English speaking audience precisely because of the target culture norms that exists and the responsibility of the translator to be sensitive and aware of those norms, but she retained it the way it was originally written by Mariama Bâ.

**Example 6**

**ST:** Daba, les travaux ménagers ne l'accablent pas. Son mari cuit le riz aussi bien qu'elle, son mari qui proclame, quand je lui dis qu'il « pourrit » sa femme : « **Daba est ma femme. Elle n'est pas mon esclave, ni ma servante** ». Je sens mûrir la tendresse de ce jeune couple qui est l'image du couple telle que je la rêvais. Ils s'identifient l'un à l'autre, discutent de tout pour trouver un compromis. Je tremble tout de même pour Daba. La vie a de ces surprises. Quand je lui en parle, elle hausse les épaules : « **Le mariage n'est pas une chaîne**. C'est une adhésion réciproque à un programme de vie. Et puis, si l'un des conjoints ne trouve plus son compte dans cette union, pourquoi devrait-il rester ? Ce peut être Abou (son mari), ce peut être moi. Pourquoi pas ? **La femme peut prendre l'initiative de la rupture** ». (p. 137)

**TT:** Daba does not find household work a burden. Her husband cooks rice as well as she does; her husband who claims, when I tell him he 'spoils' his wife: '**Daba is my wife. She is not my slave, nor my servant**. I sense the tenderness growing between this young couple, an ideal couple, just as I have always imagined. They identify with each other, discuss everything so as to find a compromise. All the same, I fear for Daba. Life holds many surprises. When I discuss it with her, she shrugs her shoulders: '**Marriage is no chain**. It is mutual agreement over a life's programme. So if one of the partners is no longer satisfied with the union, why should he remain? It may be Abou (her husband); it may be me. Why not? **The wife can take the initiative to make the break**. (p. 77)

This segment offers a different view of what some audiences in Europe and America have perceived Africa to be. The novel to some extent has also played into narratives that do not flatter African society, narratives that audiences expect and that feed into Appadurai's concept of metonymic freezing. Women in the novel have at times been at the mercy of men, but this segment dispels that notion. Here we find an example of a young couple in traditional Senegalese society who have embraced modern values while still respecting their traditions and culture. There is a strong sense of equality in Daba and Abou's relationship and it is reflected in both their speech. This is the first time in the novel that one of the male characters is seen to be articulating and demonstrating feminist ideals. Abou believes that

marriage is a partnership and as such, he shares all the responsibilities with his wife even responsibilities, that his environment has told him are reserved for women. He is unlike the other male characters, he possesses a strength of character that Modou and Mawdo in particular seemed to lack.

He represents the ideals of feminism. A feminist that comes in the form of a black, African, Muslim man is not an image that is often seen in any literature, including African literature and especially in 1979 when the novel was published. It offers a snapshot into modern Africa and the independent thinking of people on the continent. Culture, religion and tradition are celebrated but they do not have to dictate an entire person's existence. Nor should they be used to justify the subjugation of others within that culture.

In Daba we find a young woman who is supremely confident and whose destiny is entirely hers. She is seen to be in control of her life and has chosen a husband who shares her values, unlike say Binetou or Nabou who had marriage thrust upon them. In fact, the contrast between the two former friends, Daba and Binetou is striking. Daba has the benefit of the education Binetou gave up and the benefit of choosing her husband, not for money or status, but for love. Her freedom to choose extends even to the choice to end her marriage. If a woman no longer finds satisfaction with her marital situation, she is well within her rights to end it. Her mother, who has experienced life as a wife in traditional Islamic Senegal, is cautious and fearful for her daughter. Her fear stems from her own experience, what she learned from her husband's betrayal. So sure and confident is Daba, that she does not dwell on her mother's warnings, she has a plan if that were to come to pass. The voice of Daba is the voice of a woman with agency, the voice of a woman who will determine her own path as is her right. She is a voice and a female figure that readers will be drawn in by because they can identify with her.

# Conclusion

As stated at the beginning of this research report, the aims of this study included examining the type of reception Mariama Bâ's work has received in the English speaking world, particularly in the Global North. This was done by examining the marketing of the novel by its publishers and the contexts in which the novel was read and studied in the Anglophone world. The second aim was to discover how her translation has represented African women and the extent to which it has privileged a Western audience and Western views. Lastly, the extent to which, if at all, feminist translation theory and its strategies were employed in the translation were also examined.

Unfortunately, attempts and requests to gain information about, or access to the translator were either unsuccessful or went unanswered. Therefore, the only way to gauge her intentions or motivations is to analyse her written work in the form of her English translation. The cognate nature of French and English are showcased by Modupe Bodé-Thomas in her translation of *Une Si Longue Lettre*. Her rendition of this novel is more of a literal rendition and closely mirrors Mariama Bâ's work. She sticks closely to the syntactic structure and sequence that the original author introduced. Her quest for faithfulness and an adequate translation is made clearer in her selection of which Wolof words to explain and which to leave obscure. It is the same as the phrases that are completely unique to the Senegalese context. Every obscure, unfamiliar phrase that is left unexplained in the French, remains unexplained in the English. Alternatively, the phrases that Bâ explains to the reader in footnotes, Bodé-Thomas also explains with a glossary at the back of the novel. According to Toury, she has delivered a translation that subscribes to the norms of the source text and thereby the norms of the source language and culture (Toury, 1995: 56).

One of the points of discussion in this study is that of feminist translation and whether there is substantial evidence that the translator of this novel was that interventionist. I would argue that, as far as her translation strategy is concerned, the translator does not make use of any feminist translation interventionist strategies to that extent. Although, the original novel has feminist undertones, the translation itself was not feminist in nature. I believe if she had undertaken a feminist translation it would have been too interventionist and would have distracted the reader from appreciating the work of Mariama Bâ. That is one of the

responsibilities the translator has after all; to act as an intermediary between a text in one language and an audience that speaks another language. I would argue that the translator did not privilege western views or western audiences in the rendering of this translation. If there is any person or thing that has been privileged by the translator, it is Mariama Bâ and her work.

As much as there are negative depictions of women and their subjugation in the novel, what it does succeed in doing is offering a new audience a nuanced image of the continent that they might not have seen before. One of the aims of the AWS was to educate foreign English audiences about an Africa free from the bondage that was colonialism, an Africa whose narrative was something other than oppression at the hands of the white man. This novel highlights sisterhood, the bonds of friendship, how education can empower women and how all of these things amount to more than what one man can do or enact upon a woman. *So Long a Letter* is a story of triumph and one that places the female at the centre of that triumph. The dominant depiction of women in this novel is that of women hampered by their circumstances, but in their individual ways find a way to overcome.

Much has been said in this study about the role of the publisher in the success of such a novel in an entirely new market (the Anglophone market). Their inclusion of this novel in the AWS proved to be pivotal for the literary work itself but for the publishers as well. The AWS is known and respected the world over and so are its contributing authors. It has catapulted the greatest names in African literature into superstardom. More importantly, it has made those canonical writers accessible to the masses. The literary works in the AWS were intended to be read by everyone who had an interest. The paratextual analysis synthesised the power wielded by publishers and how their marketing of their series in general greatly contributed to the marketing and success of this novel. The reaction to this series and subsequently its contributing authors is overwhelmingly positive because of the platform it has given African literature on the global stage.

Ultimately, the AWS succeeded in its mission to educate. Their publication of *So Long a Letter* in the African Writers Series granted audiences in the Anglophone world access to a literary work that has helped change the face of African literature and the role of women within that space. Mariama Bâ believed that the sacred mission of the writer, especially in Africa, was to strike out at the archaic practices, traditions and customs that she believed are

not a real part of African culture and heritage. She certainly succeeds in this mission and I believe the translator has transmitted that sentiment to her English speaking audience.

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