

The summary of so long a letter by mariama ba

[Sociology](#), [Social Issues](#)



In the novel *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba, Ramatoulaye, a woman in Dakar, Senegal, begins a diary with the intention to send it to her friend Aissatou, who lives in America. What recently brought on her behavior was the death of her late husband Modou, who had just recently made the abrupt decision to take a second wife and marry Benito. Through Ramatoulaye's ordeal, Mariama Ba shows the ways in which culture and traditions are practiced in West Africa and their effects on Senegalese women.

In the first entry, Ramatoulaye addresses her friend Aissatou, who lives in America, saying she has received her letter and has decided to write back to her in a form of a diary. In it, she will write about her life and eventually send it to her as a form of response. This, by itself, seems strange to Western American culture because usually diaries are a way to keep our personal thoughts, feelings, and opinions certain to ourself and are never shared. In Ramatoulaye's case, she shares it with others. But on the other hand, this may also show the level of trust in their friendship. Ramatoulaye shares details to the reader about recalling her childhood memories of her and her friend Aissatou, who practiced in childhood a tradition where the two of them buried their baby teeth in the same hole and begged their fairy godmothers to rerun them more splendid than before. Besides that, she later explains her cause of trouble by saying, "yesterday you were divorced and today I am a widow" (Mariama Ba, *So Long a Letter* 1). With this, she informs Aissatou of her husband Modou, who died of a heart attack, and how Aissatou's ex-husband, despite his best efforts, could not save Ramatoulaye's husband.

In the second chapter, Ramatoulaye describes the day after where, much like Western American culture, groups of mourners appear at the house of the

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recently passed to pay their respects. She also describe the traditions and steps in which the recently passed body goes through before its final resting place such as the women who are at this funereal have to help with preparations. They help by bringing incense white muslin holy water and dark wrappers. They use the dark wrappers to dress the body in accordance with western African custom. When the guests arrive at the home of the recently passed it is the wife duty to receive them. Ramatoulaye dose this with Benetou and it is at this time Madou's sisters give their consolation to both Ramatoulaye and Benetou. This bothers Ramatoulaye due to Ramatoulaye was with Madou fore thirty years of her life when Benetou was only married to him for five despite this they give an equal level of consolation to both of them make them seem like equals.

In the following chapter the ceremony continues to the third day. Now more people have show up to take advantage of Ramatoulaye's hospitality with them they bring forth the destruction of the house and gifts of banknotes not what was customary. What would be consider customary would be gift of live stock and miller. But in realty the gift are solely to compete with one anther to see who would be able to give the most money to Madou family and really have no meaning behind that. The proceeds are spit up with Ramatoulaye Binetou and Madou's family Ramatoulaye explains how Bintou's mother and Madou's sisters get the majority of the share leaving her with little to nothing in comparison. After a while the last of the relatives leave and in there stead leave a mess. Ramatoulaye describes hoe the walls are now stained with oil, the floors are blackened and the house is now filled with trash. She ends the chapter with explaining the mirasse which is a tradition where she spends a

period of four months and ten days time in solitude and mourning. She accepts this as her duty despite being undermined by Benito and her mother through out the funeral ceremony.

In chapter four Ramatoulaye describes the second part of the mirasse where her husband Modou is “ striped of his most intimate secretes thus is expose crudely explain a man’s life with consternation I measure the extent of Madou’s betrayal” (Mariama Ba 9). In short this part of the novel was mainly to show Madou financial debts he had acquired while only thinking of his new family. It was at this time reveled to Ramatoulaye that the chic villa the house where they lived was completely in Madou’s name even though she help pay for it with her own saving. Madou’s betrayal to Ramatoulaye is further show when Ramatoulaye finds out that Madou has bought Binetou and her mother passage to Mecca got them cars and provided Binetou an allowance when she was pulled out of school. This leads Binetou and her mother to believe that they are guaranteed the house and being to remove the furniture before the property is settled. In the following chapter Ramatoulaye give the reader more inside on her thought and explains how she has become distressed with thought of why Madou has chosen to abandon her with her twelve children in order to marry Binetou.

In a later chapter in the novel Ramatoulaye remembers how she met Modou for the first time on a trip to a teacher training college with her friend Aissatou. She remembers how Modou ask her to dance and how even after Modou left to France she remembers felling home sick and lonely the time he was not there with this she notice how much she really love him. Once he

got back from France to Senegal both Modou and Ramatoulaye both arranged to get married. It is here where the reader also learns about the origins of Mawdo and Aissatou. When Ramatoulaye mother hears about her daughter getting married she expresses her skepticism. Her mother being a first generation of women that fought for equality in Senegal that being said Ramatoulaye's mother wants nothing more than for the daughter and her husband to be an equal both in ambition and as intellect.

Later on in chapter eight Ramatoulaye changes topic from that of woo to that of social statics. She uses her friend Aissatou and her husband as example of what is a total mismatch in the eyes of tradition. This in a way also is displayed in western American custom where it is more likely to marry one of equal social standing on the contrary to marrying below ones social class. Ramatoulaye explains how this affected her and her friend Aissatou. Aissatou is of modest birth meaning his father is still of the working class as a gold smith all the while Mawdo is consider nobility his mother being a princess of the sine. Ramatoulaye also applies this to her own marriage and determines this is a conflict of tradition and progression of people and labels it an " eternal debate" (Mariama ba 18). She later reverts back to her original state of mind where she reminisce about the earl year of her marriage and tell the reader about how her and her friend Aissatou both married around the same time. Ramatoulaye also recalls how her mothers in law costainly bother her by constantly showing up unannounced and abusing her hospitality. Towards the end of the novel the reader learns that Aissatou will soon come to visit Ramatoulaye it is at this time Ramatoulaye looks back and truly understands the fate of Senegalese women in society she looks

back and see's all the right they have gain over time but at thee same time realizes that what they have gain is at best unstable.

In conclusion in the book so long a letter by Mariama ba the author dose show a enormous amount of West African culture and traction as well as a great deal of respect for their practice today but give a very clear stamen that most tradition and cultures still stop the progression of equally between men and women in Senegalese. All in all Through Ramatoulaye ordeal Mariama ba shows the ways on which culture and traditions are practice in West Africa and there affects on Senegalese women and leave the reader retaining hope for the future.