

REVIEW ARTICLE

AN EPISTOLARY MODEL FOR DELIVERING COUNSELLING TO STUDENTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN AFRICA: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

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Abstract: Objective(s): In 1988, Mariama Ba, the Senegalese woman novelist, of extraordinary distinction, won the Noma award for publishing in Africa on the basis of her impressive and now classic epistolary novel, titled: *So Long a Letter*. Design: Drawing inspiration from Mariama Ba's novel, this paper argues that the same epistolary method could be used with good effect in promoting student counselling at tertiary institutions in Africa and the wider world. Result and Conclusion: An example of how this can be done is offered and discussed in this article. The paper is considered significant in that it opens fresh vistas in the context of how to present counselling to university students using the epistolary model to complement the better known conventional oral counselling delivery systems.

Keywords: Students counselling, Epistolary method, Letter to undergraduates, Freshman orientation, Tertiary Education in Africa.

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INTRODUCTION

A number of alternatives for delivering counselling to people are available in the literature. Among them the most frequently documented include: (1) *the Bibliotherapy approach*, (2) *The epistolary method* or the use of letter writing in counselling, (3) *The telephone counseling technique*, and (4) *the use of the Electronic Mail (E-mail)* or *The Online counseling model* (Nwoye & Khumalo, 2025). While each of these four models deserves more elaboration in a paper such as this, only the first two will bear further treatment in this article. In this regard, the concept of Bibliotherapy will be used in this article to refer to the practice of use of literature in counselling and psychotherapy.

Fundamentally, such a model involves the process of exposing a client to a guided reading that is intended to positively transform their attitudes, vision and values. The key objective of the model is the application of literature or healing fictions (novels) or other therapeutic documents to correct peoples' narrow views about life and to enable them to gain a broader way of looking at themselves and their problems. Hence, according to Adderholdt-Elliott, and Eller (1989) and Miller (2009, p. 260),

bibliotherapy can be described as "the process of using books to help youth and adolescents think about, understand, and work through social and emotional issues."

As practiced presently among counselling psychologists in Africa, bibliotherapy no longer involves the mere giving of a book or a novel or a pamphlet to a client to read. It refers more generally to the scientific application of literature toward a therapeutic goal. This means that the book or poem or novel or pamphlet that is recommended is intended to make the client to get better, psychologically; or to become broader in his or her orientation to living. Hence some of such writings are targeted at the *demoralized* and the *dispossessed* in society, who are in need of something to uplift their spirits other than the use of tranquilizers.

Therapeutically speaking, according to Hebert & Kent, (2000), Jalongo, (1983); Lenkowsky (1987), and more recently (Nwoye & Khumalo, 2025), the major rationale of bibliotherapy draws from the classic psychotherapy principles of *identification* (with the character or situation in the story), *catharsis* (wherein the client gains

inspiration), and *insight* (which leads to motivation for positive change on the part of the client). Adding further clarification to this perspective, Halstead (1991), many years ago, referred to these stages as “recognising”, “feeling” and “thinking” (p. 80).

A fourth stage, *universalization* (the recognition that we are not the only one having these problems), has also been described (Slavson, 1950, cited in He'bert & Furner, 1997). This is based on the view credited to C.S. Lewis in his work (*Shadowlands*) that we read novels and other writings in order to discover that we are not alone in the challenges we face (Nwoye & Khumalo, 2025).

Of course, to achieve the above stated impact, it is not every kind of writing that is relevant for every kind of client. The nature of the problem must dictate the tune or the mood of the guided reading to be prescribed. So too, is the extent of the client's literacy. In general, however, the text to be recommended must be short, guidance oriented, emotionally inspiring or uplifting and happy, and interesting and easy to read, as well as having a good ending.

To be able to come by such reading resources, according to Pardeck & Pardeck (1993), a standard bibliotherapy process proceeds along the following four distinct phases:

First: Identification of the reader's (or client's) issue(s); which can be determined in the course of face-to-face therapy.

Second: Pre-reading (by the therapist) to facilitate effective selection of book(s) to match the client/reader's interest and needs;

Third: Presentation (in the course of face-to-face counseling contact), of the guided reading based on a carefully planned approach;

Fourth: Follow-up on what the reader learned or gained from reading the book(s), in subsequent meetings with the client.

Where bibliotherapy technique is used alongside the experience of individual psychotherapy, the phenomenon of *interval therapy* is what is aimed at. In that case, a counsellor or the clinician combines one-to-one therapy model with bibliotherapy in the design of his/her intervention for a particular client.

The healing that takes place in the time that stands in-between the one-to-one meetings through the avenue of the guided reading is what is referred to, in the professional literature, as interval therapy (Nwoye & Khumalo, 2025). Hence, in general, according to Cornett & Cornett (1980), bibliotherapy has the potential for effecting a number of changes in the target reader/client.

However, in practical terms, the kinds of writings that can promote the types of changes noted above, which therefore deserve mention as appropriate texts for bibliotherapy are those that among other concerns, focus on the theme of love, jealousy and envy, adultery, neglect, infertility, the cultural preference for male children, mother-in-law/daughter-in-law problems, and the tensions and ruptures arising from the problem of the extended family system and its constraints in contemporary Africa.

In working on these themes, novelists and other writers try to use the medium of fiction to make their case, trusting in ‘the power of the word as a miraculous weapon for transforming the world’ (Kesteloot, 1996, p. 8).

Now, one important reason for drawing attention to the importance of the use of literature in counselling practice is to emphasize the fact that psychotherapeutic services can be delivered not only in clinics but also in books and novels.

Importance of Use of Epistolary Method in Influencing Therapeutic Change

As the main focus of the present article is on the importance of the use of epistolary method in promoting therapeutic change in clients, the rest of the present discussion will now be directed to a more in-depth exposition of the value of the use of epistolary method in counselling practice. As a medium for delivering counseling to people, the epistolary model is that ancient practice that has recently gained popularity in the counselling and psychotherapy field (Epston, 1994; Kindswater, Desmond, Yanikoski, & Stahl, 2013).

It involves the use of letter writing to give a professional attention to a client or a group of clients; often, in the absence of a face-to-face

contact between the counsellor and the client/s being served. The primary aim of such letters is to use the epistolary medium to promote *food for thought*, *share information and advice*, and some *cautions and wise guidance*, in relation either to a new state of life which the addressee(s) or the target recipient(s) have embarked on. Hence it is most expedient when used as *letters of orientation* to new university students.

In some instances, of course, the epistolary method is used as a means of restoring morale in the bereaved, the unemployed, the prematurely retired, the disturbed spinster or young man feeling hopeless and mistreated by a person s/he has for many years loved, as well as the traumatized client brutalized and dispossessed by life. In some other instances, the letter writing technique may be used as a means of persuading a reluctant client to attend one-to-one meeting with the counsellor/clinician (Kindswater, et al, 2013). In addition, in still other cases the counsellor or clinician is writing like St Paul to a friend in need of psychological and spiritual support.

In some cases, the major initiative for the use of this option is the client's solicitations. This is the approach that has been exploited by Amani counselors (Atieno Okech & Kimemia, 2012) in Nairobi, Kenya, in sometime past. With the Amani counsellors' model, the counselor's letter is initiated by an earlier request by an anonymous client posted in either the Daily Newspaper or the Women's magazine, seeking for an Amani counselor's professional opinion on how to confront a given problem disturbing them.

In some other instances, on the other hand, the epistolary model, in the manner of *therapeutic letters*, is initiated by the counsellor or clinician as an effective approach for conducting a follow-up counseling with a previous client. Thus as indicated in their recent article, titled: *The Use of Therapeutic Letters in Addressing Parent-Child Attachment Problems*, Kindswater, et al (2013) showed that such letters have enormous value, since they are crucial for facilitating therapeutic engagement, therapeutic exploration, and therapeutic change. Kindswater, et al (2013) provided some sample models of how such letters could be drafted, clustering around the following three categories: *Letters of*

Engagement, Letters of Exploration and Letters of Change.

Objectives

The above observations demonstrate that although the epistolary model for delivering counseling to people is an age-old practice, the attention of many clinicians appear to focus more on the value and use of therapeutic letters in clinical settings. Little or no attention is directed towards how such a counselling delivery practice could be employed in promoting counselling at the university orientation service targeted at new students.

The central aim of this article is to close this gap. To achieve this aim a real (not fictional) sample of an orientation speech delivered in an epistolary format by the author, many years ago at a Kenyan University, in Kenya will be highlighted, following the model of Mariam Ba's (1988) *Son Long Letter*. In taking this approach the aim of this article is to show that the Epistolary technique could be used as a model for delivering an orientation speech to new university students.

The Application of the Psychology of 'As if'

In this regard the present author's orientation speech to fresh university students of the 2000/2001 academic year was titled: *A Letter to the Undergraduate* with its content presented from the point of the *psychology of 'as if'*. That is to say, as if the letter is delivered to each and every member of the new students as a personal letter directly from the author. For this reason the model of such a letter shortly to be presented is started and concluded with a greeting in the manner that was followed when it was first delivered, and in the same style as those used by Kindswater et al (2013) earlier cited.

Presented below is the sample content of such a letter/speech. It goes as follows:

"Dear First year Students,

I wish, by means of this letter, to join the entire members of Faculty, Staff and Students, and in particular, my Department of Psychology in welcoming you to the University, an exemplary City of Intellect and the multicultural and multiracial community of students and scholars under God.

I welcome and congratulate you at this particular moment because of the great honour you have done to yourselves and to your parents and well-wishers in being among the select few of the members of your generation to gain admission into the University this season.

In keeping with its own tradition of recognizing and celebrating your new membership and presence in the University, the University has committed a whole week to promote your effective orientation and direction, and eventual successful incorporation and insertion into the mainstream of the university community. I write you this letter as a way of joining in this process of working toward helping you to secure a firm footing in implementing your precious and well earned admission and membership of the University.

One aspect of psychological practice at this University is to participate in a Week like this aimed at helping to define a frame of orientation and understanding for new students. The specific objective of such an orientation Week is to help fresh students like you to avoid the tendency to rely merely on the gains of being in the University, but also to count and reach after what it takes to make a success of your stay here.

In line with this, my main aim in this letter is to assist you to keep in mind what university enrolment calls for, from you; that is, the responsibility that go with it. This is because a period like this in your life must be reserved not only for the exercise of rejoicing and congratulating you for the great stride you have achieved in gaining admission into this citadel of learning, where destinies are made and remade. A time like this must also be seen and reserved as a period of engaging you in dialogue and reflection designed to enable you to understand precisely, what it means to be a university student.

Indeed, we, in the field of professional psychological practice tend to look forward to a Week such as this, in the life of new students; a period understood in the counselling psychology field as a crucial time of acting as interpreters who can help to interpret the nature of university life to incoming students. This task of interpreting the University to fresh students is considered

crucial because it is through that process that students coming to the University for the first time are given those categories of information and education that will help them to become much wiser even at the very beginning of their university career. It is in that way that they can be enabled to escape the ordeal of getting into the costly and regrettable mistakes that will prove too expensive and damaging, in the end, to their overall success in the university.

It is in the light of the above understanding that I have decided to use the letter writing medium to reflect with you on the theme of *Hopes and Impediments in University Studentship*.

To give you an idea of what I intend to cover under this theme, I would like to raise the following questions which are meant to serve as a framework of reflections to the rest of what I am going to share with you in this letter.

The questions are as follows:

What understanding do you have of what it means to be a university student? And to work for a university degree?

What is your view of how life in the university differs significantly from life in high school?

What kind of life do you plan to live here to ensure that you achieve your life dream of self-realization? For example, are you here for a life of vision and dedication toward refashioning yourself and your chances in life? Or for a life of 'haloing,' gambling and easy living at the expense of squandering the opportunity of a new and great beginning for your life?

Which aspects of your life do you want to see abandoned or transformed in the course of your being here?

What would be the source of your major motivation for action while here? For example, would you be interested in living according to the opinions and dictates of your directionless peers, a life of 'anyone', a life of competing to impress in the world of passive consumerism, or else to live a life grounded on the core values of the University, supported by the psychological qualities of inner direction and self-maturity?

Who indeed is to think for you here? Your fellow students or your personal intuition, judgment and convictions?

Finally, are you sure you know who you really are and in which direction your destiny is moving? In particular, are you happy with yourself and the way you are? Or would you wish to be somebody else? For example, are you sure you are presently not being disturbed by the feelings of inferiority and shame about your family background and the way you look, including your colour, height, size, etc? If so, what is the basis of all these?

Of course, it will not be possible within the context of a single letter like the present one, to address all of these questions in depth with you. I have, however, raised them based on my conviction that they would be able to open up for you, important opportunities for constructive self-reflections, and a kind of sensitive points of reference for enabling you to sort out certain aspects of yourself as you struggle to settle down and to make the best of your experience here at your university of choice.

Now, what I intend to do in the remaining part of this letter is to take some of the themes raised in the searching questions highlighted above, one by one; and say one or two things about them, as follows:

Theme One: *University education as a means, not an end in itself*

Under this theme, what I have in mind is to draw your attention to four important considerations. The first is that gaining admission into the University is not an end in itself but a means to an end; namely that of serving as a new beginning in your quest for redefining your future and to contribute towards influencing the trajectories of your own life and destiny. The second issue of consideration is related to the first and that is that University education is intended to enable you to gain access to the life of *campus civilization*. And by the term *campus civilization* here I mean the idea of the University as a place where people live by *the guide of responsible freedom*, including the capacity for taming or regulating their emotions, accompanied by the ritual of engagement in the systematic cultivation of the mind. The resources the University has, to help you to accomplish this, are the professors and the lecturers you will meet in

the lecture halls; the chaplaincy services intended for your spiritual nourishment and restoration; the University Library, containing works of wisdom by hidden authors, and the social environment of the University generally, composed of opportunities for enlightened interaction and dialogue between you and your fellow students and the general staff of the University plus opportunity for various sports and games that the University has put at your disposal.

The third point of consideration under this first theme is the crucial idea that the way you work for a University degree differs greatly from the design of work you have followed in your High School Education. For instance, here in the University there is nothing like a comprehensive university certificate examination to be organized for you at the end of your entire three or four years here, where you will be expected to defend your degree, like you did in your secondary school where you were working for the Certificate of Secondary Education. No.

The quality of the degree you will earn at the end of your entire stay starts right from the quality of your performance at the first semester exam of your first year of study. What this means is that if you desire to make a *Cum Laude* or First Class degree or else an Upper Second, rather than just a mere Third Class degree or an ordinary Pass result, at the end of your stay, you then must begin from day one of your lecture/seminar/tutorial attendance to work for it, taking every lecture/seminar and every assignment given to you seriously.

And it is good for you to keep in mind that if you specifically desire to make a *Cum Laude* or First Class degree at the end of your stay here, you then cannot just strive to get a score of 75% average at the end of the first semester work of your first year of study. This is because, if you aim at only 75% average at the end of the first semester of your first year of study when you are just at the introductory stages of your academic programme, you will see that you may not be able to meet up with the 75% average in subsequent semesters, encompassing the ascending and advancing years in the programme when things are bound to become more complicated and much tougher for you.

The lesson in all this is that for you to crown your undergraduate life with an excellent degree success, you must start from the beginning of the first semester of your first year to work hard unrelentingly for such a reward.

Indeed, the fourth point I wish to share with you under this first theme is a fact that you are soon going to discover: namely, that gaining admission into the University is one thing, but sustaining or maintaining that admission is quite another. By this I mean that gaining admission to the University is not a guarantee that you would continue to stay here till the end.

Not at all. This is because the general *law of discontinuation* from staying in the University is usually applied in a situation where you fail to meet up with the departmental academic requirements and regulations of the University to which all students are bound to fulfill year by year and semester by semester.

This means that you might come here to stay only for a while before you would be forced to withdraw from the university because you are found unable to pass the required examinations and the modules you have registered for within a given semester. To be certain on this, you have to check with the university regulations on that and other related matters so that you are not caught up or taken by surprise in this regard.

Theme Two: *The university community as an adult community*

Now, a major difference between life at the University, and life at High School is that in the university everybody is presumed to have reached the age of majority; or as we often say in the field of psychology, the age of psychological independence, or that period in one's life when one is able to act from the power of inner direction and self-government.

This means a time when people are able to obey the rules and regulations of the university based on inner convictions, rather than as a reaction to the force of external coercion and policing. The vital implication of this observation is that in the university each person is left to manage his or her own affairs. Following this approach, nobody will be positioned to tell you, for example, when to go to bed, when to take your bath or to clean

your teeth and tongue, how to dress or what to wear or when to eat or to study.

But it may not even be accurate to say that in the university; particularly in this university, you are free to do as you please. For in the actual sense of it, what is meant is that you can do whatever you like, so long as you are able to observe the university regulations and avoid encroaching on the interests and the confines of others. For other members of the university, such as your roommates are entitled, like you, to the same peace and dignity of the university people.

It is important, similarly, to mention in a letter such as this, that in the last analysis it is only those who behave themselves that survive in the university as students. For there are things you might do here and you would be forced to face a university disciplinary action which in some cases may lead to your eventual expulsion from the university. The reason for this is because the university is a special community of students and scholars which encourages informed resoluteness of purpose and self-discipline on the part of the inmates.

It will however be a complete tragedy and a big embarrassment, both to yourself and your parents and relatives interested in your welfare and growth, if it happens that you were only able to succeed in high school when you were considered a minor and put under the charge of some people; and now that you are considered an adult and put in-charge of yourself, you are not able to hold on your own. So the university is a place of great hope and opportunity for young people. But whether that hope will be realized in your life here will usually depend on if you are able to confirm the trust of moral maturity and wisdom the university has reposed on you by virtue of the privilege of admission given to you.

Theme Three: *the University as a place for promotion of self-discovery and investment in creative experimentation*

The period of undergraduate education is a period of self-searching and pilgrimage in one's life. It is a period that allows each student the time and the chance to learn to discover some of the potentials and strengths they harbour in themselves, which they can capitalize on; and the limitations they have and what they can do to change them.

The university is thus a place where, besides your degree programme, you are expected to try your hands in a broad variety of things to find out the talents and the gifts you have. We believe, for instance, that even among you here are great writers that can emerge given sufficient effort and inspiration and dedicated reading and long practice on the part of those concerned.

The fact that you are still young cannot be accepted as enough excuse for you to believe that we cannot find, among you, people who might end up if they try their hands in it, as great world novelists. In this regard, one mistake which many young people tend to make is to think that to end up as an influential novelist one must have graduated in the fields of English or Literature; which, of course, is not true. For there are many well known novelists in the world such as Cyprain Ekwensi of Nigeria (a graduate of pharmacy) who had not studied English or Literature for a degree?

The same is true of Elechi Amadi, again from Nigeria, the famous author of the influential novel, the *Concubine*, who is a B.Sc. holder in Mathematics and Physics of the University of Ibadan. And it may be important to remind you that many great discoveries and advances in science and human knowledge have come from men and women under forty. Hence the undergraduate experience is usually conceived of as a time when wise and forward looking youngsters take advantage of their being left on their own to try their hands in creative pursuits and experimentation.

Some of the well-known novelists in Africa, for example, started their creative pursuits during their undergraduate days. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the illustrious and distinguished Kenyan novelist now of blessed memory, for example, completed his first novel, *Weep Not, Child* (1964), the first English-language novel to be published by an East African; while working as an undergraduate student at Makerere University, in Uganda.

The same is true of the Nobel Prize winner, Professor Wole Soyinka of Nigeria. And those of you female students must in no way assume that this kind of feat is reserved only for male students. This is because it is on record that some established women novelists in Africa started their creative

works not after graduation but while still reading for their first degree in the university. In this context, one name that readily comes to mind is the Kenyan born artist and writer, Rebecca Njau, who wrote her first play, *The Scar* published in 1965 when still a student at Makerere University in Uganda. Those of you under 20 should similarly not assume that you have to wait until you are older before you could start to try your hands in coming by such achievements. I mention this because Ben Okri of Nigeria completed his first Novel called *Flowers and Shadows* (1980) at the age of nineteen.

What the above review and account shows is that the period of youth is not a period of waste or indolence and reckless consumption of what other people have produced. It is rather a period that is crucial for vital charting of one's creative direction in one's life. The aim of sharing these biographical narratives with you, in this letter, is to help you to see need to re-engage in re-visioning your mission while here as a student. I outline them to show you that the university is a place of opportunity you can seize upon for charting and carving out an illustrious and enviable future for yourself and for the nation at large.

Theme Four: The University as a place for achievement of personal and psychological transformation

One advantage of being a university student is the opportunity it gives members to learn how to remodel and update themselves in personal manners and social presentation. Here, what is called for is not the exercise of putting on sophisticated and expensive clothing, combined with putting on an air of exaggerated importance. The simple thing that is required is *responsible decency*: in the way you talk, dress, laugh, eat and sleep and relate with others, including your seniors and juniors.

Thus if you know that you snore during sleep you should try to find out what makes you to do that so that a remedy could be pursued. In the same way you need to watch out for the kind of body odour that comes out from your armpit, and ensure that you try to stay clean always. In all these, of course, the bottom line is that you must not allow yourself to graduate out from the university remaining

unpolished and therefore character-wise untransformed, looking the same old you as you were at the time of your university admission and registration.

Theme Five: *The importance of achieving maturity in living with others*

A life in the university is not a life lived in self isolation. The common experience is that you will have to have some room-mates, or study mates, and some few people that you may like to designate as your close friends or associates. To succeed in such a life you are expected to work on those aspects of yourself that are antagonistic to the life of an enlightened and civilized community like the University.

And the negative traits to work on if you have them are those bordering on the problems of selfishness, or self-centeredness, clannishness, class consciousness and segregation, tribalism, greediness, lack of self-control, dirtiness and laziness, lack of empathy (or the exercise of giving of due recognition to the view point of others and taking other people's reasonable complaints into account), inability to sacrifice for the welfare of the other, lack of a sense of history (such as inability to remember that s/he who is well off today may not continue to be well off tomorrow), lack of a sense of moderation or proper sense of proportion, lack of the spirit of give and take, and the life of outright wickedness.

These are qualities that make an individual a cousin to lower animals and therefore unfit for a fruitful life in a civilized human community like the University. And it must be presumed that none of you here are burdened by any of such negative traits. But if by chance there is any one or two of such individuals among you, the immediate suggestion must be that they have to take the advantage of being in the university to work on themselves in order to transform themselves into a more refined and more mature human individuals capable of answering and taking pride, on graduation, in being among the members of the university-educated generation.

Those who are not able to achieve this transformation and still want to be in the university must, of course, be ready to live a very strained and stressful life here; the type given to a lot of discomfort and uncertainty,

and the type capable of losing rather than gaining from the usual prospects and opportunities of university life.

Theme Six: *The importance of spiritual development and investment in the transcendence*

I need to stress in an orientation letter such as this that many young people tend to think that a mark of spiritual maturity and development is to refuse to attend church services on Sundays and other important days of the week, while in the university. Such students believe that they go to church merely to please their parents and now that their parents are not around, they can as well stay put in their rooms sleeping while their mates rush out to attend the Sunday services.

Most students who identify with this orientation do so as a way of showing that they are now of age; away from the inhibitions and nuisances of the secondary school experience and conservative parenting. In reasoning this way, however, such students appear to sound like Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (15 October 1844 – 25 August 1900), the German philosopher: 'away with God in my life!' Yet it is important to remember that classical writers of old have continued to remind us that it is only the fool who does not know the source of his own being, who has said in his heart that there is no God.

In this regard the simple suggestion I want to share is that it is nothing but a sign of responsible modesty and humility to acknowledge that the ultimate control of our affairs in this University is God, the Almighty, that power from whom all good things come. It is therefore a sign of due maturity to remain religious in faith and actions even in our youthful age. Most authorities have shown that identification with religion has a mental hygiene function. And it is now known that people live long and survive the vagaries and contradictions of old age, who believe in God and take their religious/spiritual life seriously.

Yet it must be mentioned that even with taking your spiritual life seriously, you must do all things in their appointed time. For you gain nothing but self-deceit in visiting and hiding in the chapel while your mates are in

the lecture halls receiving lectures. Such an approach to religion or spirituality is not the type that enriches people, but a disorderly type. To enable you to attain maturity in your spiritual life while in the university, the University has provided you with well structured Chaplaincy services and pastoral care programmes, including assortment of spiritual books available in the university bookshop, all intended to promote your own spiritual edification while here.

Theme Seven: *The importance of being happy with who you are and being confident in yourself*

The university environment is a nursery ground and a great collection for some of the best talents of a nation and indeed of the world. He or she who succeeds in gaining the membership of such a community of students and scholars, such as you have done, must see themselves as worthy of basic dignity and respect; irrespective of where you come from and the nature of your family background or physical characteristics. This is because by the very fact of gaining admission into such a City of Intellect like the University, you have already succeeded in distinguishing yourself among the tens of thousands of your age mates in the world.

And by this you are already preparing yourself for a life of higher responsibility and dignity in tomorrow's society. Consequently, none of you here must allow yourself to be intimidated by either the presence or charm of the continuing students or by the superiority complex of some handful of your mates who may try to put up an air of inflated importance or self-image merely to scare those who are not sure of themselves. Most people who indulge in this kind of cockish behaviour are those who confuse the idea of *what they have* (whether beauty or well-to-do parents), with the idea of who they really are.

You do not have to be scared by any such people, because the light they have and boast about is like that of the candle, temporary and perishable. It comes up dimly, stays bright for some time and then dies out completely. What should give you courage and the anchor of confidence in the course of your life in the university is that what counts in our age, is a life of solid personal achievement.

And your principal inspiration here should be to be known not because of "where you come from" or the nature of family background, but because of your solid personal achievement. It is the value that lasts longer and the definite road to honour and acclaim in the contemporary world.

Theme Eight: *The Student Counselling Service is a place for healing through meeting*
The Student Counselling Service, as you must have been made to understand is one of the resources or care providers the University has put in place to help you to grow. Do not confuse it with the kind of counselling services you were familiar with in High School. The University Counselling Centre as you must have read from the Centre's brochure is for people of all ages, whether students or staff and whether single or married. Its principal goal is to help people to discover and to develop themselves. And the result it strives for is to assist each client to sort out their problems or the challenges confronting them.

The expected advantage in making use of such services is the emergence of some bold psychological relief on the part of the individual concerned. Its services are relevant for people with emotional, academic, personal-social, premarital, career, roommate conflicts, boy-girl misunderstandings and marriage and family problems. It is thus not only concerned with the issue of educational/career assessment and counselling.

And, the professionals available at the Centre are well trained counselling/Clinical psychologists, very qualified and experienced for attending to your needs. Such a Centre has also a qualified Secretary/Administrator or Operations manager who is there to warmly receive you and register your appointments. This means that even in the rare cases that you may come and discover that the officials at the Centre are fully engaged, such as by being in a meeting, or teaching, or attending to other clients, there is usually somebody around the reception to guide you on what you need to do; or when to call again, if need be.

I have decided to mention this, in a letter like this, in order to reassure you that in the last analysis you are not alone even here in the

University, where your parents and relatives may be living far away from you. For in the thick and thin of your life here, we, the entire faculty and staff members of Kenyatta University as well as the counselling professionals that staff the Students Counselling Service, are always available for you to count on, on your parents behalf. Our job is to help you to succeed. And we would be happy to be of help.
Thank you.”

CONCLUSION

The above model of a typical epistolary speech, couched along the lines of Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, demonstrates that using the letter writing genre, a full orientation speech can be delivered to students in a typical university setting, covering a wide range of themes of interest to the students' psychosocial-cultural life. Commenting on the enduring value of such a genre in the counselling and psychotherapy context, Epston (1994, p. 85) observes that 'Conversation (in form of one-to-one counseling) is by its nature, ephemeral ... but the words in a letter don't fade and disappear the way conversation does; they endure through time and space, bearing witness to the work of therapy and immortalizing it. A client can hold a letter in hand, reading and rereading it days, months and years after the session.'

Using it as an orientation speech as could be seen from the example given above, such a letter holds more appeal value to new university students who typically approach such letters as they do with letters focusing on their personal interests in ordinary life. Seeing such letters as operating in the same wavelengths as other issues that impact on their future and general destiny in life, they are able to garner sustainable interests in reading such letters and could draw from them important principles and lessons by which to live. Consequently, the epistolary model is an extremely valuable resource for delivering counselling to students at the university that requires more attention in professional counsellor education and practice in the South and other regions of Africa than it presently receives.

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