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Cultural transition in colonial and postcolonial societies in three francophone West African novels by Ahmadou Kourouma, Francis Bebey and Mariama Ba

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CULTURAL TRANSITION IN COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL SOCIETIES
IN THREE FRANCOPHONE WEST AFRICAN NOVELS
BY AHMADOU KOUROUMA, FRANCIS BEBEY AND MARIAMA BA

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Cultural Transition in Colonial and Postcolonial Societies in Three Francophone West African Novels by Ahmadou Kourouma, Francis Bebey and Mariama Bâ (100 pp.)

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This paper analyzes the cultural conflict and transition between a traditional West African society and a modern one in the three francophone West African novels: Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les soleils des indépendances*, Francis Bebey's *Le fils d'Agatha Moudio*, and Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*. My study presents the historical and cultural background of West and Central Africa and analyzes cultural conflict in a thematic analysis of social structure, education and marriage. In these novels, the authors, in accordance with their models, prescribe a transition in Africa to a modern society resulting from a synthesis of traditional and modern approaches that create a particularly African postcolonial culture.
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Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les soleils des indépendances*, Francis Bebey's *Le fils d'Agatha Moudio* and Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* are three francophone West African novels that treat the theme of cultural transition in colonial and postcolonial African society. These three authors use the lives of their protagonists to depict society at the time of a historical transition. The historical context about which these authors write is the period immediately following independence from their former colonial rulers. Since the end of the 1960s, by which time all of the French African colonies had gained independence, francophone African literature has been a means of expression for the changing cultural environment. Due to the French colonization of countries such as the Ivory Coast, Senegal and Cameroon, the modern western culture was not only introduced, but imposed on indigenous, traditional cultures. By the time such countries had gained independence, institutions of western culture, such as education, Christian missions and modern industries had been set in place and, thus, already contributed to transforming traditional African culture. Therefore, independence did not mean that Africans could simply return to their traditional ways of life, nor that they necessarily wished to do so, but rather, that they were now faced with the arduous task of navigating by themselves in a new cultural heritage, a mingling of their traditional culture and the modern one.
In this introduction, I will briefly explain the historical and literary context in which these authors wrote and the approaches the authors adopted. I will also summarize the plots of the novels.

The traditional African and modern western cultures that came into contact during the colonial period fundamentally differ in philosophy and social structure. This antithesis forms the overriding theme of all these works, and we therefore need to define these concepts. The traditional communities with which we are concerned here share the common element of a strong identification with their past. Established by their ancestors and handed down through the ages, a system of beliefs developed that provide communities with their sense of identity as well as prescribing a specific social structure. Since traditional communities value continuity with their past, they are more fixed in their behaviour and less open to change than modern communities. By contrast, the modern influences which inform these novels are those of a society which looks to the future, not the past; which value change and progress over continuity and stability. Some examples of modern institutions that reflect this concentration on the future are Christianity, western education and industrialization. Whereas traditional religious values concentrate on an acceptance of the status quo, Christianity, with its emphasis on seeking redemption from sin, promotes an attitude of self-improvement. Western education introduces a questioning stance to experience. Nothing is taken for granted; explanations are sought for natural occurrences and there is an acceptance that these may prove inadequate in the future and need revision. There is a constant dynamic promoted by scientific studies towards finding new ways of dealing with life. New inventions require change and adaptation. Industrialization is based on a cash economy in which capital and investments are inextricably bound to concepts involving the future.
The break with the past that modernism represents requires that the definition of individuals and their social role adapt to the changing needs of the individual and of the community. It is this shift between traditionalism and modernism that is reflected in these three postcolonial African novels.

Because colonialism informs the cultural history of Africa of these novels, I will first briefly explain the salient aspects of French rule which affected African culture. In the 1880s the French colonizers sought to rule the colonies in order to expand their political and military empire. Toward this end, it was perceived necessary to dominate the African people and make them subservient to French authority. Ignorant of the value of the indigenous culture, European colonizers interpreted the native, "primitive" culture as generally inferior. Due to this perceived cultural inferiority, or even a perceived lack of culture, the Europeans set about educating the elite Africans in the "superior" European culture and thus introduced French formal education. According to Claude Wauthier, Leo Africanus was one of the earliest Europeans who expressed the extreme opinion of the barbaric nature of indigenous Africans:

"The inhabitants of the black lands are bucolic people without reason, wit or skill and with no experience of anything at all; they live like brute beasts without law or order." This picture by Leo Africanus in the sixteenth century, was one of the postulates of the civilizing mission of colonisation for more than one European intellectual. It was supported by theories such as Gobineau's on the inequality of human races or that of Lévy-Bruhl on the prelogical mentality of primitive peoples. It was also to become the standard view of African society for the average European (46).

Therefore, during the colonial period, West African social structures were to be determined by an outside, authoritarian regime which impinged on existing, indigenous
behaviour. Education was used by the colonialists to this end. As Emmanuel Obiechina states, Europeans sought to educate the Africans in the French tradition in order to extend their French influence, by preparing a class of elite Africans to act as interpreters to the colonized as well as stewards of francophone culture, such as teachers and administrators:

Education was utilitarian from the beginning. The spread of the Christian religion, the introduction of modern institutions and the running of modern government, required a cadre of literate men and women. Education was therefore geared towards producing clerks, teachers, evangelists and artisans—personnel for the lower ranks of the civil service and commercial enterprises and for teaching and missionary work (Obiechina, 1975, 9-10).

According to Dov Ronen in his study of Dahomey, "Colonialism . . . aimed to create an African elite capable of absorbing French civilization and who would gradually become the agents of change among their people" (147). By the 1920s, 3% of African children attended Christian or government school in French West Africa (Manning, 100). A smaller number of this elite were sent to study abroad to attend secondary school or university.

Negritude, a literary movement termed by one of its creators Aimé Césaire, developed as a reaction against the commonly held belief that traditional African culture was inferior to francophone culture, an attitude that had been growing since western standards had been imposed on indigenous Africans. The term Negritude first appeared in 1939 in Césaire's poem "Cahier d'un retour au pays natal" in the review Volontés (Chevrier 1988,16). As Mortimer says, it was a movement which rejected France's civilizing mission, "among Caribbean and sub-Saharan African writers, the refusal of assimilation coupled with the valorization of African culture gave rise to the Negritude movement of the 1930s" (1990, 7). This literary stance, expressed mostly in poetry,
stemmed from a revaluation of the African culture and a break from the European standard against which African culture had previously been measured. As Jahnheinz Jahn, the eminent theorist of African culture, states in his book *Muntu: African Culture and the Western World*:

>'Negritude' was liberation: these authors were freeing themselves from the European paradigm. . . . 'Negritude' was avowal: avowal of Africa. It became permissible to think and write in the African way; Africa was rediscovered, reawakened; from now on African culture was to, and did, furnish the standard (206).

However, this revaluation of traditional African culture was also coupled with a strong rejection of French culture.

In the thirty years since Negritude surfaced, novels such as those by Mongo Beti, Cheikh Hamidou Kane, and Seydou Badian suggest that there was a growing realization that it simply was not possible to reject French culture. Its influence was permanent and a way had to be found of living with it. From the 1960s, West African writers began to create local, i.e., African novels that allowed them to express their traditional past along with the modernizations that had been introduced. The authors incorporate aspects of their oral tradition into the western form of the novel.

In the novel, writers expressed the tensions caused by the confrontation of traditional African culture and modern, French culture and explored possible solutions for integrating the two. According to Adeola James these have been the subject of the West African text:

Common themes in African literature have been the devastating effect of Africa's contact with Europe, and the rehabilitation of Africa's cultural heritage to mitigate, heal or correct some of the injuries inflicted by colonialism. Some writers have addressed the conflict of the traditional world with the modern
world Africa is aspiring to build; specifically, the problems of polygamy, infidelity, corruption and abuse of power . . . . (1)

This literature, also termed neo-African literature, has contributed to redefining African culture in the face of modern demands placed on traditional culture. Modern African writers are not seeking simply to revive precolonial African traditionalism, but to create a neo-African culture, according to Jahn:

On the contrary, African intelligence wants to integrate into modern life only what seems valuable from the past. The goal is neither the traditional African nor the black European but the modern African. This means that a tradition seen rationally, whose values are made explicit and renewed, must assimilate those European elements which modern times demand; and in this process the European elements are so transformed and adapted that a modern, viable 'African' culture arises out of the whole. It is a question, therefore, of a genuine Renaissance, which does not remain a merely formal renewal and imitation of the past, but permits something new to emerge. This something new is already at hand; we call it neo-African culture. (16)

It is this renaissance in African literature that I would like to examine in the three francophone African novels of Ahmadou Kourouma, Les soleils des indépendances; Francis Bebey, Le fils d'Agatha Moudio; and Mariama Bâ, Une si longue lettre. This period is politically highly charged, and it is inevitable that these authors all adopt a programmatic stance in their writing. Faced with the potential for chaos to emerge from the raging differences unleashed by independence, they each seek to give guidance as to how order may be instilled in the societies in which they live. Therefore, not only do all of these texts describe various elements of strife pertaining to cultural transition, but the authors also use their works to express a model of their preferred society. They propose ideas for moving forward in the newly independent Africa, and are thus, reformists.
In *Les soleils des indépendances*, Ahmadou Kourouma describes a protagonist, Fama, who has lost all sense of identity in the cultural transition of post-independent Africa. Having fallen in stature from a prince of a tribe to practically a beggar, Fama's situation embodies Kourouma's criticism of the African rulers of independence who are as authoritarian as the former colonial rulers and who fail to incorporate any aspect of their indigenous traditionalism into the changing cultural environment. The model for the modern Africa that Kourouma implies in this novel is inherent in the form which is an insertion of the techniques of oral storytelling onto the modern western novel. For Kourouma, a careful integration of the old with the new is essential in the creation of a successful modern Africa. Francis Bebey in *Le fils d'Agatha Moudio* depicts villagers in the colonial period who to greater or lesser degrees are adjusting to the incursion of a modern way of life. The protagonist, Mbenda, first fails to understand the meaning and significance of the colonial rulers who bring with them a completely different culture and impose their laws on Mbenda and his fellow villagers. However, by the end of the novel, Mbenda has adapted to some of the aspects of the modern culture and is responsible for introducing modern practices into his village community. Bebey suggests a reconciliation of the traditional and modern cultures to ensure that both can survive in the developing modern Africa. Bâ's model for modern Africa in *Une si longue lettre* begins first with a criticism of traditional, patriarchal customs in Senegal. Her protagonist, Ramatoulaye, moves in the opposite direction in her shift in attitudes from Bebey’s traditional Mbenda. For most of the novel, Ramatoulaye criticises many of the traditional practices and is an advocate for a more modern culture. However upon further consideration of the ills of modern society and the effects of a modernity untempered by the strong morality of traditional African culture, Ramatoulaye rethinks her position and admits to the integral role of certain aspects of traditional African
culture in modern Africa. Therefore, although these three authors differ in their approaches, they all provide models for the integration of the traditional and modern cultures in Africa.

However, these works are not arid political manifestos. They are works of art. The authors create imagined worlds of characters and societies which attempt to depict the experiences of people actually living through these times, in order to demonstrate, through the lives of these characters, the efficacy of the political solutions which these authors prescribe. Before describing how the cultural transformations in Modern Africa are reflected in these three works, I will first give brief plot summaries of them.

Ahmadou Kourouma, born in the Ivory Coast in 1940, published his first novel *Les soleils des indépendances* in 1968. This work has been hailed as a classic of modern African literature. The story is principally about the demise of Fama, the last in the line of the Doumbouya, the ruling class of Horodougou tribe in the fictitious country of the Ebony Coast. Fama is displaced due to the changing cultural climate. Fama first lost his chiefdom due to colonialism; later, due to independence, he lost his livelihood as a trader. He is reduced to begging to earn a living. The other main character is his wife, Salimata, a strong resourceful woman who, unlike her husband, shows resilience in the face of adversity. They both come from traditional villages, but live together in a modern town, where Salimata sells porridge in the marketplace. Their marital relationship is marked by infertility, a situation that is intolerable for both parties. Salimata performs various traditional rituals to improve her fertility and Fama eventually visits prostitutes and takes a second wife in the hopes of producing an offspring.

Unhappy with his unsatisfactory position in the post-independent state, Fama
again takes an active role in politics; this time he does not fight for independence, but
denounces the corrupt politicians of post-independence. His activity earns him detention
and a life sentence in jail until one day all the political prisoners are set free as an act of
reconciliation on the part of the President. Having aged in prison and given up hope of
reconciliation with his wives, Fama's only wish is to return to his native Horodugu and
fulfil the prophecy of dying there, the last of the Doumbouya.

Not only does the content of this novel prove to be of interest as a description of
transitions in African society, but Kourouma has also created a new form of expression
which bridges the gap from the traditional oral culture to the western,
literary one (Wynchank, 192). This novel is a clever integration of aspects of orality,
such as using the natural idiom of Malinké, the Ivory Coast's language, and its
innumerable proverbs with standard French, so that Kourouma's novel has the flavour
of the oral style of the Griot's tale (Wynchank, 193). Mildred Mortimer also comments
on Kourouma's successful attempt at creating a distinctive African novel:

Kourouma experiments with language; he infuses French prose with Malinke
expressions in order to depict convincingly a traditional protagonist who has not
acquired the French education that would ensure him a place among the elite in
postcolonial Africa. Modifying both structure and language, the Ivorian novelist
adapts the European novel to African needs and specifications. . . . Kourouma
attempts to find a common ground where distinctly different cultural heritages
can meet (Mortimer 1990, 7).

This blending of African subject and form in the novel, according to Wynchank, separates
Les soleils des indépendances from previous African novels (192). Paradoxically, in
the style of his novel, Kourouma exemplifies the continuity of traditionalism if adapted
to the changing cultural environment while presenting a character defined by his total
inability to adapt.
Francis Bebey, born in Cameroon in 1929, published his novel, *Le fils d'Agatha Moudio*, in 1967. It received the Grand Prix Littéraire de l'Afrique Noire in 1968. *Le fils d'Agatha Moudio* is the story of a young village fisherman, Mbenda, who is also known as 'La Loi'. Mbenda is daring, good looking and physically strong, renowned as the champion wrestler of the region. He follows the authority of his mother, to whom he is very close, as well as the traditions and the elders of the tribe. In the opening scene, Mbenda confronts the colonial hunters demanding recompense to the villagers for allowing them to shoot monkeys in their forest. He is duly sent to jail but this raises him in the esteem of the villagers as well as calling him to the attention of Agatha Moudio, a modern girl of dubious moral values. Mbenda is bewitched by Agatha's charm, and she initiates him into the pleasures of sex. Although he loves Agatha, he rationalizes that to marry such a modern woman would be a mistake. He is actually pressured into marrying Fanny, the daughter of a friend of his father's, out of respect for his father's last dying request. The marriage is precipitated by his mother, in order to prevent Mbenda from marrying Agatha. However, under the pretext of Fanny's youthfulness, Mbenda refuses to consummate the marriage and continues to frequent Agatha. Fanny, having been ignored by Mbenda, produces an illegitimate child who Mbenda is forced to recognize as his own, lest he unveil his dubious marital state. Having fulfilled his community's wishes that he marry Fanny, he then decides to take Agatha as his second wife and form a polygamous union. However, Agatha, unable to remain faithful, produces in turn a mulatto child that fulfils Mbenda's mother's prophecy that Agatha will only cause him trouble.

Mariama Bâ, born in Senegal in 1929, published her first novel *Une Si longue
lettre in 1979 which received the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa in the same year. This novel is written in an epistolary form, consisting of Ramatoulaye’s correspondence to her best friend from childhood, Aissatou.

The exchange of letters is precipitated by the death of Ramatoulaye’s husband, Modou, who after twenty-five years of marriage left her and their twelve children to take a second wife, an adolescent and best friend of their oldest daughter. Ramatoulaye chooses Aissatou as a confidant during her mourning period, not only because they are childhood friends, but also because Aissatou also experienced this similar, painful event when her husband took a second wife. Whereas Aissatou choose to leave the marriage, rather than live in a polygamous relationship, Ramatoulaye opts to remain. Instead, it is her husband who fails to uphold the tenets of polygamy as prescribed by Islam, and fails to share his time between his two wives. Thus, Ramatoulaye recounts her trials as a single parent, as well as events before and after the death of her husband, such as: her education, their courtship, the relationship of Aissatou and her husband, Aissatou’s separation as well as her journey to independence, the traditional funeral proceedings and Ramatoulaye’s various suitors after Modou’s death.

In a lyrical and moving style, Bâ leads the reader through the trials of this Muslim African woman’s life, who through her correspondence, builds up the necessary strength to cope with the separation, while also achieving great insight into her life and the social changes in Senegal. Despite the struggles and difficulties of her life, Ramatoulaye realizes that the path to happiness is indeed open to her. “Malgré tout, déceptions et humiliations, l’espérance m’habite. C’est de l’hurms sale et nauséabond que jaillit la plante verte et je sens pointer en moi, des bourgeois neufs” (Bâ, 131).

In these three francophone West African texts, the authors uncover the struggles
and conflicts that affect the protagonists as a result of the changing cultural environment. The traditional worlds in which the protagonists grew up gives way to modernizations that, as in the case of Fama and Mbenda, destabilize their worlds to varying degrees. Ramatoulaye, due to her western education, has been socialized into the modern culture and therefore, seeks to introduce modernizations into the traditional, patriarchal culture. The authors convey their political messages in various themes which I describe in the following chapters. By using a thematic analysis, I will follow the protagonists of these texts as they attempt to grapple with the issues they face in their changing cultural environment. In chapter two, I will examine some of the specific examples of cultural shifts presented in these three texts. In chapter three, I will discuss the changing type and role of education in modern Africa as compared to traditional Africa. And finally, in chapter four, I will seek to show the changes in the essential social structure of marriage. Examining these three elements, social influence, education and marriage, which are major themes in these three works, will give us a clear indication of these three authors’ visions for the future in the changing cultural tide of post-independent Africa.
As I have shown, Ahmadou Kourouma’s Les soleils des indépendances, Francis Bebey’s Le fils d’Agatha Moudio and Mariama Bâ’s Une si longue lettre were written during a transitional period of postcolonial African history. Traditional social structures incorporated many elements of western culture such as education, industrialization and monogamous marital structures imported by the French colonizers. The experiences of the protagonists of these novels reveal the tensions inherent in any progression towards an accommodation of two such different cultures. In this chapter, I will trace the progression of those living through it. To begin with, though, one needs to clarify the nature of the two types of cultural structure that come into conflict in these novels so as to understand the consequences this has on the characters in these novels.

In traditional society, a strong sense of community is the essential characteristic which provides the individual with a sense of identity. Obiechina, a Nigerian critic, pinpoints this key element of community in the following passage:

Traditional life in pre-colonial Africa subsisted on the collective solidarity of people who shared common customs and beliefs and an identical world view, were linked by blood or marriage ties and were, by the close-knit nature of their social relationships, deeply involved in one another’s personal lives. We find that the value which sustains the society is collective responsibility, the responsibility of the group for the lives and well-being of the members. In both personal and social relationships, everything which disrupts the orderly life of individuals must be removed or set right. There is tremendous
respect for customs and tradition. The group and its interest always take precedence over the individual and his self-interest (1975, 2).

In a traditional culture, this strong social unity is achieved and maintained in various ways.

Traditional culture, in the West African countries where these novels are based, was developed in societies that have the following key characteristics. They are comprised of small, agrarian communities in which there is little movement in population. To a large extent, people are born, live and die in the same village. This has the inevitable consequence of minimizing outside influences. Social status is determined by birth and there is a strict division of labour. Therefore, there exists a high degree of social stability leading to a rigidity in societal norms. Also, since roles are clearly defined by society, the individual is provided with a clear sense of obligation and connection with the group. This clear sense of community is further reinforced by the fact that families live and work together in enlarged kinship groups, where, for example, custom regulates nutritional and sexual codes. Traditions are passed down orally, in the form of epics and fables, for example, from elders to children and are largely based on historical events, moral lessons and magic. The sacred and magical realms play a large role in the traditional society both by providing an explanation for otherwise inexplicable events, and also by providing a coercive force to control individual energies and thus protect societal norms. Initiation rites serve not only to educate the individual into adult society, but at the same time they confirm, strengthen and reinforce the identity of the community as well as the individual's participation in its continuing tradition.

In contrast to this traditional African culture, modern French culture introduced by the colonizers allowed for an increased fluidity in social position and function, due to
the job opportunities provided in the city. These opportunities caused an exodus from the country to the city, which resulted in a break from the traditional culture. However, urban social developments were also eventually felt by those living in the country. The greater independence offered by the modern culture required individuals to find a new source of identity to replace the one previously provided by the community. Decisions as to lifestyle and social attitudes were introduced. Furthermore, western education led the individual to question traditional social norms and eventually to question modern developments as well. Obiechina, in the following quote, attests to these shifts in culture that led to the valuing of the individual as a free agent:

The introduction of Western education, the creation of Westernized (sic) urban settlements (as distinct from traditional urban settlements), and the establishment of a cash economy and modern industries opened new opportunities to the individual, and drew together people from different ethnic areas into urban aggregations. To fit into the economic scheme the individual had to acquire literacy, and through literacy some specialized skill or profession. The result was that he removed himself from a community where status and social hierarchy had determined the individual’s place in society and where the individual counted in terms of the group to which he belonged, and entered a situation in which he was free to assert, if only in a limited way, his individuality. He thus predisposed himself to play a range of roles which did not exist in the traditional setting- roles depending on his level of education and professional training (1975, 5).

This transition from the traditional, agrarian culture to a modern, industrial one is the same progression that Karl Marx theorized for Europe. However, one significant difference is that many African intellectuals, including writers, though steeped in Marxist theory, stress the importance of keeping ties to their traditional culture. For this reason, in Africa the modern social order, although it significantly altered the traditional order, did not necessarily negate the individual’s experience of the traditional world. As is apparent in these three novels, the traditional influence is the
indelible experience of the past and continues to exist side by side with the new world. According to Obiechina, "even urban dwellers are strongly rooted in traditional African culture, despite being 'cosmopolitanized' intellectuals" (1975, 36). The combination of two distinct cultures, the traditional African culture and the modern western one has in effect created the modern African culture. This neo-African culture, expressed in each of these three novels, manifests itself in the contradictory cultural aspects that are presented together:

Thus, we find the scientific outlook existing side by side in these novels with belief in magic and mystical causality, particularly with generality of time and space, a high degree of socialization of personality with extreme individualism, linguistic particularity with the use of fixed expressions like proverbs, and rural traditionalism with urban modernity. All this follows because social and cultural change in West Africa involves the superimposition of a modern literary and technological culture upon a traditional, oral and predominantly agrarian one (Obiechina, 1975, 262).

However, this superimposition of the two cultures inevitably gives rise to friction. Serious struggles on both the parts of the individual and on the community have ensued, resulting in conflict before some sort of uneasy co-existence and then reconciliation could be found. All three novels depict dramatic and turbulent social change.

In Ahmadou Kourouma's text Les soleils des indépendances, the conflict between traditional and modern African cultures is indeed the central theme. Kourouma depicts the pitiable situation of Fama who is unable to adapt to the changing social environment, due both to his personality flaws and to the fact that he simply has never been provided the tools with which to adapt. Fama becomes the voice of the disempowered masses who have lost all sense of their identity in the changing social climate. In his particular case, he has been marginalized from work (trade has gone to those belonging to the
political party), clan (his cousin was named chief), place (he moved to the city) and family (he is unable to have children). The only things left to give him a sense of identity are a nostalgia for the past and a disdain for the current political situation. His struggle can be seen as a life-long attempt to establish his identity under progressively implacable conditions.

Fama is first encountered in the capital city where he lives with Salimata. This Malinké prince has been reduced to a scavenger, due to the country’s recent political independence. First stripped of his birthright by the colonial government which imposed tribal leaders of its own choosing on the clans, and then deprived of his livelihood as a trader because of the economic collapse after independence, Fama’s only option is to travel around to funeral ceremonies and collect money. “C’étaient les immenses déchéance et honte, aussi grosses que la vieille panthère surprise disputant des charognes aux hyènes, que de connaître Fama courir ainsi pour des funérailles” (Kourouma, 10). Despite the pitiful way in which he earns his livelihood, he is still superficially recognized for his previous social position. The praise-singer who is leading the ceremony announces the arrival of Fama, “Le prince du Horodougou, le dernier légitime Doumbouya, s’ajoute à nous” (Kourouma, 11). He is generally greeted with sarcastic smiles. “Que voulez-vous; un prince presque mendiant, c’est grotesque sous tous les soleils” (Kourouma, 11). Although the praise-singer tries to show him respect and tells him that “les coutumes et les droits des grandes familles avaient été respectés; les Doumbouya n’avaient pas été oubliés. Les princes du Horodougou avaient été associés avec les Keita” (Kourouma, 11-12), Fama becomes outraged because the Keita, from his perspective, clearly belong to a lower social class than the princes of Horodougou. “C’était un affront, un affront à faire éclater les pupilles. Qui donc avait
associé Doumbouya et Keita? Ceux-ci sont rois du Ouassoulou et ont pour totem l'hippopotame et non la panthère" (Kourouma, 12). When Fama shows his incredulity, the praise-singer "se lança dans d'interminables justification: symbolique, tout était symbolique dans les cérémonies, et l'on devait s'en contenter" (Kourouma, 12). In the transitional modern era, the traditional ethnic differences in social positions have been diminished and both groups have lost their individuality and identity. Fama can only hold on to these faded distinctions since he is incapable of finding anything else to replace his lost identity. He vehemently opposes these changes in the traditional culture and responds by criticizing the praise singer (the 'griot'), "Bâtard de griot! Plus de vrai griot; les réels sont morts avec les grands maîtres de guerre d'avant la conquête de Toubabs" (Kourouma, 12). Justifying his position, he addresses the group to bare his grievances. However, his speech is so insensitive to his audience and so self-obsessed that the people have no sympathy with him. "Assois tes fesses et ferme la bouche! Nos oreilles sont fatiguées d'entendre tes paroles!" The people are tired of " Toujours Fama, toujours des parts insuffisantes, toujours quelque chose! Les gens en étaient rassasiés" (Kourouma, 13). Bamba shouts, " Tu ne connais pas la honte et la honte est avant tout . . . " (Kourouma, 14). The insults are not only verbal but also physical as Bamba tries to stop his speech. To recompense Fama for this affront, an elder present offers him some money and Fama resists saying that he was fighting for his honour alone. However, "L'ancien insista. Fama empocha et resta quelque temps soucieux de l'abâtardissement des Malinkés et de la dépravation des coutumes" (Kourouma, 15). Pitifully, the same Fama, who a few minutes earlier was vigorously defending his honour and that of his clan, has sunk so low that he is obliged to accept the money from those insulting him. However, he lacks the qualities of a caring leader that a change in politics has simply passed up, and thus fails to elicit any sympathy. His character flaws- being short
sighted and selfish—coupled with his marginalization from all the sources that once provided him with a sense of identity, leave him feeling stranded and embittered towards society.

Fama is the voice of the disempowered. His cultural displacement at all levels gives him a powerfully disempowered voice. His character is such that he is in part responsible for his own marginalization, but only in part. Fama also represents the disillusioned traditionalists who had hoped, after independence, for a return to pre-colonial social and political structures which would enable those such as he to regain positions of power and influence in society. These positions, however, were taken by a western educated elite who had few ties to a traditional past.

Incapable of finding work in the capital city, Fama is left feeling lazy and despondent. Unemployment leaves him without a source of identity from work, as do the surroundings of the city with which he has no sense of connection. Salimata calls him "Un éhonté de mari!" (Kourouma, 31) and "le Fama vautour vide" (Kourouma, 46). Since independence and the realization that he and Salimata cannot have children, he feels that he has no reason to live. Childless, he cannot gain a sense of identity from his family. All of the sources that would have given him an identity as the member of a collective society are unavailable to him in the modern world.

The news of the death of his cousin Lasina, who displaced him as chief of his native village, causes him to return to the village. Fama would have originally been chief after the death of his father, but again due to his uncompromising attitude to change and his rude nature, preference was given to Cousin Lasina by the European administrator in charge of that area. In this way Fama has lost his sense of identity as part of a clan. "Parce que d'abord un garçonnet, un petit garnement européen d'administrateur, toujours en courte culotte sale, remuant et impoli comme la barbiche
d'un bouc, commandait le Horodougou. Évidemment Fama ne pouvait pas le respecter; ses oreilles en ont rougi et le commandant préféra, vous savez qui? Le cousin Lacina. . .” (Kourouma, 21-22). Upon Lasina's death, Fama is the incumbent leader of the Doumbouya tribe. Yet instead of it being the last opportunity of reintegration into his community, due to the changed economic situation, it is now a worthless position. (The “Toubabs” is the name for the European colonialists):

Etre le chef de la tribu, avant la conquête des Toubabs, quel grand honneur, quelle grande puissance cela représentait! . . . Dans ce monde renversé, cet honneur sans moyen, serpent sans tête, revenait à Fama. La puissance d'un chef de tribu d'affamés n'est autre chose que la famine et une gourde de soucis. Fama, tu devrais te préparer à refuser, à leur répondre non (Kourouma, 92).

In sizing up the compound that he could take over, Fama states, "Comme héritage, rien de pulpeux, rien de lourd, rien de gras. . . . En vérité Fama ne tenait pas sur du réel, du solide, du définitif. . . “ (Kourouma, 110). The clan’s dwindling importance and increasing poverty prevent Fama taking over as their leader.

Fama returns to the city, yet being illiterate and not having any specialized skills that would allow him to find a job, he is doomed to futility. Mere survival is all that is left to him. According to Kane: “Fama fera ressortir les misères de l'Africain moderne, abandonné à lui-même et qui ne se soucie plus que de la conquête des biens matériels. Pour lui, le monde devient vite une jungle” (1971, 237). Meaning at any level escapes Fama's grasp and he exclaims: "Monde terrible, changeant, incompréhensible!" (Kourouma, 103). Fama is almost paralyzed into inaction by his confusion in a changing world represented by the technologically advanced city:
Fama avait peur. Comme authentique descendant il ne restait que lui, un homme stérile vivant d’aumônes dans une ville où le soleil ne se couche pas (les lampes électriques éclairant toute la nuit dans la capitale), où les fils d’esclaves et les bâtards commandent, triomphent, en liant les provinces par des fils (le téléphone !), des bandes (les routes !) et le vent (les discours et la radio !). Fama eut peur de la nuit, du voyage, des funérailles, de Togobala, de Salimata, de Mariam et de lui-même. Peur de sa peur (Kourouma, 102).

With the death of the traditional world in which Fama felt comfortable, a world that assured him personal wealth and position based on his birthright, and also due to his inability to adjust to and find value in the modern world, he is displaced in society.

Fama’s situation can be contrasted with Salimata’s. Whereas Fama dreams of a return to the traditional days when he would have been chief of his village, Salimata’s bad experiences in her native, traditional village make her happy to adapt to the modern town. While she remains traditional in certain aspects, for example, in her attitude toward her husband as well as in her adherence to her traditional religious practices, Salimata adapts to the modern city enough to support herself and Fama. Yet, Salimata holds certain traditional attitudes, considering her husband as the ‘sovereign ruler’.

Avec les soins que la femme doit, quel qu’ait pu être le comportement de l’homme, quelle qu’ait pu être sa valeur, un époux restait toujours un souverain. La soumission de la femme, sa servitude sont les commandements d’Allah...” (Kourouma, 44). It is actually due to this traditional, subservient position that she accepts as a wife, that she is able to adjust to the modern city or “la ville blanche” (Kourouma, 57), as she calls it. There she sells porridge at the village square to “nourrir Fama, pour vêtir Fama, loger Fama” (Kourouma, 51). Even in the modern town, culture has not changed to such an extent that women were allowed a much more liberated role than in the past. Therefore for her, being the subservient wife is a traditional role that is still accepted by the modern society. Also, Salimata’s sale of porridge for a living corresponds to the
position that she would have held in the traditional village. There she would have been responsible, collectively with the other women, for cooking the meals. Thus, her domestic duties as well as her outside work in the marketplace provide her with a sense of identity that is an extension of the one she would have held in the past. Salimata's integration into the modern world is eased by her adherence to certain traditional customs that are still accepted in the modern town, allowing her a sense of identity in the changing social world of modern Africa.

*Le fils d'Agatha Moudio* depicts a number of situations that conflict old and new. Bebey's contribution is to give guidance as to how that conflict might be resolved. This novel is set in the colonial period and the struggle between the two powers: the colonial, modern and western on one hand and the traditional, African on the other are shown in many social contexts. Mbenda, the protagonist, at the outset of the text is mostly seen interacting with the traditional world, as represented by the elders and the tight knit community. Yet as the story progresses, he becomes implicated in the modernization of his indigenous culture.

It is in the first chapter of Bebey's text, when the traditional and the colonial cultures come into contact that the first example of conflict arises. Mbenda, according to the laws of the traditional society, believes that the colonialists who hunt for monkeys in their village's forests should recompense all the villagers for allowing them to do so. Mbenda speaks to the elders on this point: "Ces gens-là, ce ne sont pas des gens de chez nous; ce sont des étrangers. S'ils viennent chasser ici, nous ne pouvons pas leur permettre de le faire gratuitement. Ils devraient payer quelque chose" (Bebey, 7). The chief, Mbaka, realizes that to ask for recompense from the colonialists is impossible, since they own and rule the village: "Tu commences à oublier que ce sont ces gens-là qui
nous commandent, toi, moi, tous les habitants du village, de même qu’ils commandent notre forêt, notre rivière, notre fleuve, et tous les animaux et tous les poissons qui y vivent" (Bebey, 7). However, Mbenda convinces him by using an argument that shows his ignorance of the new world represented by the colonialists:

Mais ce sont ces gens qui ont inventé l’argent. Ce sont eux qui le fabriquent. Ils en ont beaucoup pour eux-même. Ils doivent donc en avoir pour nous aussi... je veux dire: pour nous en offrir un peu, par amitié, pour nous donner au moins l’impression qu’ils sont contents de venir chasser chez nous (Bebey, 7-8).

Chief Mbaka then agrees, and Mbenda informs the white hunters. The hunters' disrespect shows their complete disregard for African customs: "Eh bien, qu’il vienne ici, le chef, qu’il vienne, s’il veut nous voir. Mais surtout qu’il se dépêche, car nous sommes plutôt pressés de rentrer maintenant" (Bebey, 10). When Mbenda eventually tells them of their grievance, "La chose parut si déplacée au chasseur qu’il pensa un moment que c’était sûrement mon cousin Ekéké qui traduisait mal en français ce que le chef Mbaka disait en sa langue maternelle" (Bebey, 11-12). Mbenda, in turn, cannot understand the hunters’ reaction and wonders, "que pouvait-il bien y avoir d’incompréhensible là-dedans?" (Bebey, 12). These incidents depict the two cultures which are at cross purposes with one another.

In another cultural misunderstanding, Mbenda states that the villagers are persuaded that the hunters eat the monkeys they catch, "cette espèce animale à tête d’homme" (Bebey, 12) that they themselves would not consider eating. Mbenda expresses this stark difference in culture when he states that the villagers would never conceive of the monkey’s final destination, "Laisser pourrir dans une poubelle ces singes cueillis de l’arbre par les plus accablantes chaleurs tropicales? Allons donc" (Bebey, 12).
The hunters again display their western way of thinking in their reaction to paying the villagers for hunting privileges:

Nous ne vous devons rien. Nous venons ici pour chasser des singes qui n'appartiennent à personne. D'ailleurs, sans nous et nos fusils, la colonie de singes de votre forêt vous causerait bien du tort jusque dans votre village. Nous sommes des bienfaiteurs, et c'est vous, au contraire, qui devriez penser à nous payer quelque chose, au lieu de nous faire perdre notre temps alors que nous avons faim..." (Bebey, 13).

Mbenda refuses to accept this position and he presses the issue further, insisting that they will not leave from there without paying the chief. For Mbenda, this declaration is of great significance:

Tous les habitants de notre village étaient fiers de moi. Pensez donc: pour eux, je représentais des temps disparus depuis longtemps dans la nuit sombre des ans et de l'injustice. J'étais un vrai fils de Bilé fils de Bessengué, j'étais le fils de ce village qui comptait un certain nombre de faits glorieux dans son passé (Bebey, 14).

For being brave enough to speak out against them, Mbenda gains the respect of his entire community. However, although the hunters eventually pay them, it is simply to be able to leave. Soon Mbenda is contacted about the prison sentence that he must serve, "Quinze jours de prison, sans jugement aucun, pour avoir osé demander de l'argent pour le sel de cuisine nécessaire à notre communauté, c'était le tarif en ce temps-là" (Bebey, 16).

The price that Mbenda must pay for resolutely upholding their tradition, namely being sentenced to jail by the colonialist law carries the realization that later parallels his decision in his personal life, that a hard line cannot be taken when dealing with either one of the cultures. As a result of his first experience, of blindly and uncompromisingly upholding the traditional beliefs, Mbenda will in the future not act against tradition or modernity without taking one or the other into account.
In chapter six, Oncle Gros-Cœur acts individually and turns his back on tradition, an event which has devastating effects on his community. He is one example of an elder who represents some of the exploitations of modernity. The significance of his actions, of building a concrete house, a modern structure, symbolizes the death of tradition when cement is put around an orange tree, "... la mort de l'arbre à brève échéance" (Bebey, 103), according to Maa Médi.

Gros Cœur distances himself from the traditional values of the village since holding a job in the city which "lui a tourné la tête" (Bebey, 109), according to le roi Salomon. Not only does l'oncle Gros Cœur hire Salomon to build his concrete house, a symbol of his turn to modernity, but also Salomon complains that Gros Cœur treats him like a slave. Gros Cœur draws criticism not only from Salomon but also from the rest of the villagers, for having sold a piece of land that did not belong to him but rather to the entire community and then for using this money to build his concrete house. The elders rail against, "cet Européen de chez nous qui avait oublié de blanchir et qui vendait la terre de ses aïeux sans demander l'avis de ses compatriotes" (Bebey, 110). For his infringement against the traditional community and for allegedly having killed a man, he is tortured by the elders. They are not 'obstinately opposed to selling the land', but in the traditional way "on aime bien voir tout le village au courant des transactions" (Bebey, 110) and mostly they are opposed to one individual benefiting from land that belongs to them all. It is Gros Cœur's western individualism that they are opposed to. Also Salomon has spread a rumour via Dicky that Gros-Cœur had a magic frog. Their traditional belief in witchcraft contributes further to turning the villagers against him. Thus, although punishing Gros-Cœur almost to the point of death, with the intention of killing him, seems extreme by western standards, by traditional ones it appears to be acceptable. The elders are arrested by the police for attempting to kill Gros-Cœur. The
two worlds clash, again to the disadvantage of the traditional one since "Le juge [européen] les condamna à quatre ans de prison ferme et décida qu’ils iraient purger leur peine dans le nord du pays, à Mokolo" (Bebey, 116). Abimne Dickson Njinjoh points out the irony of this clash of the two cultures:

One more point of irony: superstition which is the back-bone on which the indigenous society thrives, ends up in tragic disaster to the discredit of the natural traditional order following the magic frog allegation against Gros-Cœur and resulting in the imprisonment of most of the village elders (95).

Imprisoning almost all of the village elders represents a serious threat to the traditional structure of the village since they are the foundation of all social life.

Despite the fact that warring Gros-Cœur and Salomon are the only two elders who are left in the village, again in a symbolic act, they eventually reconcile their differences. Even when the elders return from prison after four years, with two elders having died, including the chief Mbaka, they too manage to reconcile with l’oncle Gros-Cœur. This shows the forgiveness and charity that Bebey extols in this text. Whenever there is a clash in cultures in Le fils d’Agatha Moudio, the result is a transformation in attitudes. A middle ground is found and the community thus remains intact. Bebey does not use the examples of colonial oppression to rail against injustices past and present, but rather to show the necessity for reconciliation in a world where undeniably two cultures exist. Instead of calling for intolerance or discord, Bebey’s voice is one of acceptance and of finding creative solutions to a conflict that will otherwise not simply disappear:

The world view that emerges in his three major novels was shaped less by a resentment against colonialisit oppression than by a desire for reconciliation in a world where the injustices of the past can be transcended if people accept what
they cannot change and commit themselves to the creation of a society based on love and productive work (Bjornson, 262).

The final example in Bebey’s work of the traditional and modern worlds vying with one another for a place in the social world which will be treated here is in the introduction of the public tap, “la borne-fontaine”, in Mbenda’s village. The public tap is used by Bebey as a metaphor for the incursion of the modern culture. Mbenda states that due to the presence of this modern technology, he feels “l’écrasante supériorité de notre village sur ceux des environs”. No longer must they either rely on the rainfall nor on “cette eau sale de la rivière” (Bebey, 39) as the other villages must continue to do. Mbenda heartily accepts this modern convenience since its advantages of providing clean water and also of contributing to “des notions d’hygiène” (Bebey, 41) outweigh its disadvantages. However, Agatha, whose village does not have a public tap does not see the need for “ces choses venues de l’étranger . . . qui sème la discorde parmi les femmes partout où on l’installe” (Bebey, 39-40). She also remarks on the infinite superiority of nature which forms the foundation of the traditional society: “Le ciel a créé la rivière et l’eau de pluie pour notre bonheur; nous en disposons comme bon nous semble” (Bebey, 39). In their two differing viewpoints, one can see the conflict between tradition and modernity. Agatha, in regards to the public tap would like to see the continuation of traditional practices, gathering water and bathing in the river, practices that keep the individuals close to nature. Mbenda admits the truth in the fact that much gossip and fighting takes place at the public tap. He states that it has indeed inspired “un nouveau mode de vie parmi les habitants” (Bebey, 40) since it is a social fount of information: “...si vous voulez apprendre tout cela, avec les commentaires que ces nouvelles sensationnelles suscitent, alors, allez à la borne-fontaine et là, vous
appréciez le progrès à sa juste valeur” (Bebey, 40). But whereas Agatha, who is the
topic of village gossip, sees this increase in gossip at the public tap as negative, Mbenda
focuses on it as an interesting news source.

However, Mbenda later realizes that he may have been a little too impressed
simply by the idea of modernization. Looking back he recognizes that the water was
actually of questionable cleanliness and he reassesses his previous reaction to the public
tap:

Elle n’était pas limpide; elle avait un fond blanchâtre qui me fait aujourd’hui
douter sérieusement de sa propreté. Mais pour nous, c’était de l’eau sortant de la
borne-fontaine, c’est-à-dire de cette eau qui avait été traitée par les blancs,
"spécialement pour être livrée à notre village", comme nous disions, non sans
fierté. Cela nous suffisait pour la préférer à l’eau de la meilleure source, si
limpide et si pure fût-elle. Nous commencions à entrer gaillardement dans la vie
civilisée, celle-là qui avait sans peine conquis les habitants de la grand’ville, et
nous étions fiers à la pensée que de tous les villages de cette banlieue “lointaine”,
c’était le nôtre qui avait été choisi pour l’installation de la première borne-
fontaine (Bebey, 42-43).

Thus, although positive advances are to be welcomed within the context of the traditional,
native culture, Mbenda warns against being too impressed by modernization and
forsaking one’s own culture. The advances introduced could be of questionable value. In
this passage, Mbenda retreats from his overwhelming praise for modernity. The idea of
progress is not condemned, but rather the blind acceptance of western, modern
inventions. Manzanza states that this is the aim of Bebey’s work:

Mais par évolution, il n’entend pas l’abandon pur et simple des valeurs
ancestrales fondamentales. La modernisation pour Bebey passe par l’emprunt
puis l’intégration dans l’arrière-fond constitué par les valeurs traditionnelles
des éléments de la civilisation occidentale favorables au progrès de l’Afrique”
(331).
Modernity should be integrated into the traditional backdrop in order to fully benefit African culture, just as the public tap is quickly integrated into the villager’s social life. There is a clear progression in attitude in the text. When Mbenda, in the first chapter, approaches the hunters for recompense, he is completely ignorant of western culture and also denies its validity. In further chapters, for example in the episode of the public tap, Mbenda, at first, swings radically from one direction to the other, blindly welcoming the modern invention. However, he eventually grows in his understanding of the positive, as well as negative, aspects of modernity and its necessary place, albeit perhaps in an adapted form, in his traditional world.

In Mariama Bâ’s Une si longue lettre, the call for social change is the most outwardly apparent of the three texts that I am examining. Bâ’s more developed social criticism can be attributed both to that Une si longue lettre was written in 1979, ten years after Kourouma and Bebey’s works, and also to that in Senegal, a privleged French colony essential to the French colonialists, was the most culturally integrated of the French African colonies. Thus the protagonist, Ramatoulaye directly voices concern over many social issues that Bâ felt must be addressed. According to Edris Makward: “Mariama Bâ’s discourse, however, while never questioning the fundamental precepts of Islam, stemmed deliberately and convincingly from a dynamic conception of society, a strong belief in social and political change and progress” (272). Foremost among her concerns is the inequality between the sexes and the necessity to free her society from the stronghold of traditional, patriarchal customs. It is the fact that Ramatoulaye makes up part of the newly created social class, the intellectual elite of Africans, which to a large extent has allowed her to see an expanded context of social structures. Her position also allows her to express the social changes that are necessary and to formulate a
critique of tradition as well as develop her African feminism. According to Neil Lazarus, it is indeed the juxtaposition of the high status granted to Ramatoulaye as a member of the intellectual bourgeoisie, along with her low position as a woman in Senegal that makes her keenly aware of social injustices (211). "As female subject, thus, Ramatoulaye is repeatedly made aware of "the slender liberty granted to women" (Bâ, 51). As middle-class subject, she had experienced independence as a time of emancipation and achievement; as female subject, she is obliged to recognize, upon her husband's death, that for women nothing has changed" (Lazarus, 212).

In the first chapters of the novel, Ramatoulaye describes the traditional Muslim funeral ceremony that she condemns, for the insensitivity of the guests, the ostentatious display of affection in monetary terms, and the inability of traditional practices to align themselves to the real world. Those who arrive to pay their condolences are like the locusts in their number and their greed. Ramatoulaye has had to strip her house: "Le nom du défunt, populaire, a mobilisé une foule bourdonnante, accueillie dans ma maison dépouillée de tout ce qui peut être volé, de tout ce qui peut être détérioré" (Bâ, 13). Rama describes the gathering of people as a "brouhaha" of a loud and insensitive group: "Plus de monde, davantage de bousculade" (Bâ, 14). The ancient tradition of giving gifts at the funeral, so as to show one's affection for the deceased and to participate in paying for the ceremony, has become an ostentatious display of wealth that no longer bears any resemblance to the earlier practice:

Chaque groupe exhibe sa participation aux frais. Jadis, cette aide se donnait en nature: mil, bétail, riz, farine, huile, sucre, lait. Aujourd'hui, elle s'exprime ostensiblement en billets de banque et personne ne veut donner moins que l'autre. Troublante extériorisation du sentiment intérieur inévaluable, évalué en francs! (Bâ, 14).
On the practical side, Rama wonders how many lives this money would have saved if it had been given when the person was still alive and requiring costly medical attention. Not only is this practice of giving money characterised by Rama as a ridiculous show of wealth having little to do with any real display of affection, she then further criticizes the practice of having, in turn, to give the money to her family-in-law as well as to other relatives and old friends. "Notre belle-famille emporte ainsi des liasses laborieusement complétées et nous laisse dans un dénuement total, nous qui aurons besoin de soutien matériel" (Bâ, 16). Also the long line of "vieux parents, de vieilles connaissance, de griots, de bijoutiers, de laobés... requièrent, selon la qualité du partant, tantôt une pièce, tantôt un billet de banque" (Bâ, 16). Rama and her children, who most need financial support, are left 'utterly destitute' due to this customary practice. According to Aire:

Bâ condamne vertement l’avarice et le sans-gêne des belles-familles, le système éducatif en vigueur, ainsi que la vanité, la parade et l’exhibitionnisme qui caractérisent certaines pratiques religieuses ou traditionnelles, telles que les funérailles (637).

Not only do the traditional practices correspond in no way to what, in reality, is practical and necessary by failing to provide the much needed strength or comfort, Ramatoulaye also reproaches the system for reducing her, as a woman, to a mere object:

C’est le moment redouté de toute Sénégalaise, celui en vue duquel elle sacrifie ses biens en cadeaux à sa belle famille, et où, pis encore, outre les biens, elle s’ampute de sa personnalité, de sa dignité, devenant une chose au service de l’homme qui l’épouse, du grand-père, de la grand-mère, du père, de la mère, du frère, de la sœur, de l’oncle, de la tante, des cousins, des cousines, des amis de cet homme (Bâ, 11).
This lowly status appointed to women- the woman is reduced to property- is one of Ramatoulaye's main social criticisms (Lazarus, 212).

Although, Ramatoulaye condemns the perverted form of the traditional funeral ceremony on many levels, she does not reject the traditional structure itself. Evidence of this is that she chooses to adhere to the four month period of mourning, when according to Islam, the widow must remain cloistered at home. "J'espère bien remplir mes charges. Mon cœur s'accorde aux exigences religieuses" (Bâ, 18).

Ramatoulaye continues in her overt condemnation of other unjust practices and abuses in the traditional, patriarchal system. She is a strong voice in the call for change. When she is discussing the much needed changes in the social system with Daouda Dieng, a deputy in the National Assembly, she remarks that there are only four women deputies in the Assembly out of a hundred, a ridiculously small number. She then lists other opportunities that need to be improved for women:

Nous avons droit, autant que vous, à l'instruction qui peut être poussée jusqu'à la limite de nos possibilités intellectuelles. Nous avons droit au travail impartialement attribué et justement rémunéré. Le droit de vote est une arme sérieuse. Et voilà que l'on a promulgué le Code de la famille, qui restitue, à la plus humble des femmes, sa dignité combien de fois bafouée (Bâ, 89).

Not only does Rama call for changes on the parliamentary level, she also fundamentally believes that to improve women's lives, a renovation in the social system must first begin by raising society's esteem of women in all social positions:

Les femmes qu'on appelle "femmes au foyer" ont du mérite. Le travail domestique qu'elles assument et qui n'est pas rétribué en monnaies sonnantes, est essentiel dans le foyer. Leur récompense reste la pile de linge odorant et bien repassé, le carrelage luisant où le pied glisse, la cuisine gaie où la sauce embaume (Bâ, 93).
Ramatoulaye also takes up the cause of the working woman who has "... des charges doubles aussi écrasantes les unes que les autres, qu'elle essaie de concilier" (Bâ, 34). She describes how she must tear around, once home from teaching, to perform the household tasks.

Although, Ramatoulaye perceives of the further social progress that could be made to achieve respect and equality for women, she has not chosen herself to make a radical break with some of the traditional roles that are imposed on women. Ramatoulaye admits to having felt the 'social constraints' placed on her by having to accept the all too often, unpleasant visits from her family-in-law. But, speaking to Aissatou, Ramatoulaye states: "Nous subissions, différemment, les contraintes sociales et la pesanteur des mœurs. J'aimais Moudou. Je composais avec les siens" (Bâ, 33). For example, she has taken a position of tolerance of the despicable behaviour of her sister-in-laws in her home: "Je tolérais les crachats glissés adroitement sous mes tapis" (Bâ, 31), and of the endless visits of her mother-in-law, with her friends in tow, who wishes to show off to them, "la réussite sociale de son fils et surtout, leur faire toucher du doigt sa suprématie dans cette belle maison qu'elle n'habitait pas" (Bâ, 33).

However, while calling for social reform, on the domestic level, Ramatoulaye still accepts some of the traditional customs in her own life. She chooses to remain integrated into her traditional community of family even after her husband has abandoned her. "J'ai composé avec sa famille. Malgré sa désertion de notre foyer, son père et sa mère, Tamsir son frère me fréquentaient toujours ainsi que ses sœurs" (Bâ, 82). Ramatoulaye does not make a complete break with her traditional community, unlike Aissatou. According to Mbye Baboucar Cham, Bâ realizes that "... any movement in or of society must have its feet firmly rooted in healthy cultural ground if it is to be of any lasting and meaningful value to the welfare of individuals and society at large" (51). Although
Rama calls for reforms in the traditional society, she remains within an African social structure to ensure that the changes she calls for have a solid base in which to take place. Ramatoulaye does not propose a total dismantling of society, but she does call for a change that would allow for women and young adults to have the same rights and respect that were once accorded only to men or to the elders in traditional society (Cham, 51). By remaining within the context of her African society, Ramatoulaye hopes to be able to bring change to it in order to secure the modern progression that she feels is necessary in the African society. The fact that Ramatoulaye can perceive of egalitarian relationships while remaining in the traditional context allows for the introduction of change in unequal practices while also allowing for her to remain connected to her much needed environment.

These three francophone African texts clearly depict the struggle of transition in various social settings. Instead of the cultural predictability that living in the traditional social setting brought, the introduction of a modern culture has forced the characters to reevaluate their relations to one another in society. Fama and Salimata must struggle to find positions in the modern city. Mbenda finds himself in the position of first defending the traditional culture against the colonialists, then introducing modernizations into his traditional environment, and finally, working at an integration of the two cultures. Ramatoulaye overtly calls for many social changes in her postcolonial Senegal, yet allies herself to certain traditional constructs, recognizing their value as a secure base on which to overlay different social strata.
CHAPTER III
EDUCATION

In an established society, education is a means of perpetuating accepted cultural practices. But just as it reflects the status quo, education is also a means of transmitting changes in that status quo. Education then becomes a powerful vehicle for introducing innovation. Paradoxically, education is, therefore, one of the most important elements in the determination of either cultural stability or change. According to Christian Coulon in a study of education in Senegal, "Ainsi, l'éducation a un caractère dualiste. Elle est à la fois un instrument de changement et un instrument d'intégration" (2). He also states that a particular educational system is inextricably tied to the current political environment: "Le fait d'opter pour tel système d'enseignement plutôt que pour tel autre relève en définitive d'un choix politique" (Coulon, 2). Because education reflects the political and social environment, it is key to the understanding of the cultural transition from traditional Old Africa to New Africa.

In Kourouma's, Bebey's and Bâ's works, the insistence on specific types of education is, thus, far from being accidental. Rather, these three authors, who themselves form part of the educated African elite, express strong attitudes towards traditional and modern forms of education and their places in an evolving society. However, before considering the treatment of this theme in the texts themselves, I shall first give a summary of the history of education in francophone West Africa.
Although I shall proceed in chronological order, explaining first traditional African education, then colonial education, and finally, education in postcolonial Africa, this is not to suggest that each one has been eliminated by its successor. Rather, each continues to co-exist with the other, although the relative importance of each has changed. Thus, the traditional practices of education continue to exist today as does the structure of colonial education.

Traditional education is characterised by its general and informal nature. Education is not structured into various subject disciplines or imparted in a classroom setting. Rather, practical experience passed on the cultural heritage of society through experience. Children are not separated from the adult world and therefore learn alongside adults the skills necessary for survival. Also, traditional African languages were not written; usually the 'griots', or story tellers passed down orally the cultural heritage of a particular tribe. Manning, in Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa: 1880-1985, gives a clear explanation of the traditional type of education:

The education of most children in early colonial Africa was performed informally in the home and the village. Children learned household, farming, and herding tasks by working alongside their parents and their siblings. They learned their values and traditions by listening as their elders spoke. Their formal education, while of great importance, was generally of brief duration. It took the form of rites of initiation, such as circumcision for boys and, sometimes, clitoridectomy for girls. Before such rites, children received intensive instruction in history, philosophy, and religion, to impress on them the importance of becoming upstanding members of their society (99).

Although the majority of traditional education took place informally, formal education did occur in connection with the initiation ceremony. These essential ceremonies symbolized the rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood. They would usually include a form of physical procedure such as clitoridectomy, circumcision or scarring, followed
by a period of seclusion where the age-mates were instructed into the secrets of adulthood. "The instruction given in camp covered a variety of things, including tribal laws and customs, the do's and don'ts of sexual behaviour and the art of properly organizing conjugal relations" (Datta, 8). Along with this initiation instruction, the boys would receive various types of occupational training, in the form of apprenticeships, whereas girls would be instructed in their domestic duties. Apart from these formal initiation rites and apprenticeships, traditional education was of an unstructured and informal nature.

However, one exception to this traditional form of education was the Koranic education which was introduced into West African society as early as the fourteenth century (Nbiaye, 22). The purpose of Islamic education was to teach the learnings of the Koran as well as to teach the reading and writing of Arabic. "It is clear that Islamic education in pre-colonial Africa was highly formalized, characterized as it was by learning occurring at a specific place and time, mediated by someone who was specialized as a teacher" (Datta, 11). Due to its formal nature, Koranic education more closely resembled colonial, western education than its traditional African counterpart, although its main goal was religious in nature.

The first western educators in francophone West Africa were Christian missionaries who arrived around 1830 (Manning, 94). They regarded the Africans as an uneducated people and therefore sought to Christianize and civilize the natives. Their focus was on primary education and rote learning. Largely since World War One, the colonialists combined forces with the missionaries in an attempt to further their influence through the use of education.

To summarize colonial education in the early nineteen hundreds, Datta states:
Such education was dualistic in structure, in the sense that missions and the government constituted the two most important operational agencies. It was minimal both in quantity and quality. In content it had a definite European bias, and it laid a heavier stress on liberal arts to the neglect of vocational, technological and professional instructions (16). However, this colonial system, which we consider today as being inadequate, was not formed to create a high standard of education for all. Rather, according to Manning, this minimal quantity and quality of education served the colonialist's purpose: "Government primary schools were established with the idea of training an African elite to serve as clerks, as teachers, or to govern the masses. This elite would have to be literate, able to perform bureaucratic tasks, and loyal to the colonial state and its policies" (Manning, 100). In the modern period, of course, once this elite was able to take the ruling positions of the former colonial rulers, Africans generally began to value western education, seeing it as a means to social promotion and an improved lifestyle.

When francophone West Africa gained independence by 1960, the people had accepted westernized education into their modern culture. Far from seeking to abolish it after they achieved independence, West Africans sought mostly to intensify French education in order to bring it on a par with education in France. This was because during the colonial period, the available French education permitted advancement only to a limited degree. Once that limitation was removed, it was clear and became accepted that adopting western education to the fullest degree would afford the population greater opportunities those on a par with their former governors:

Bien plus, on peut même dire qu'aujourd'hui l'enseignement au Sénégal est plus français qu'il ne l'était à l'époque coloniale. En effet, jusqu'à la seconde guerre mondiale l'enseignement était avant tout colonial; il était français dans sa conception, mais se caractérisait essentiellement par le refus de faire bénéficier les Africains d'un enseignement égal à celui de la métropole. En réaction contre cette situation, les Africains ont réclamé un enseignement de type métropolitain. Telle est l'origine de la structure et des méthodes de l'enseignement actuel au Sénégal, comme dans la plupart des autres États africains" (Coulon, 6).
According to Datta, these key changes which have recently been made can be characterized as follows:

(a) a massive expansion at all levels;
(b) the provision for technical and professional instruction; and
(c) the Africanization of the curricula (22).

However, this trend was not universally welcomed; as mentioned above, relics of former systems and attitudes still remained; there were, and are consequently tensions between traditional attitudes and modern methods.

Having explored the general trends in education in West Africa, I will now examine the type of education the protagonists receive and its influence on their lives, as well as the effect that the changing type of education has on cultural development.

In Kourouma's work, Les soleils des indépendances, it is clear that in the newly emerging modern Africa, the roles for those who have received a traditional African education are limited. In modern African society it is no longer considered sufficient to be initiated into the traditional world, one must also be literate to be deemed as useful by society. Although not a lot detail of Fama's upbringing is included in the text, one can assume that he experienced a traditional African upbringing and education, including an initiation ceremony.

The narrator does reveal clues into Fama's upbringing. Early in the text, Fama is described as "Lui, Fama, né dans l'or, le manger, l'honneur et les femmes! Eduqué pour préférer l'or à l'or, pour choisir le manger parmi d'autres, et coucher sa favorite parmi cent épouses!" (Kourouma, 10). As heir of the Doumbouya line, Fama would have been brought up traditionally in his native village as a prince among riches. Yet his
traditional upbringing did not provide him with the ability to adjust to a changing political and social climate. With postcolonial independence, socialism ended free trade, eliminating his job in the market. Due to Fama's lack of formal western education, he is left alienated and without a position in the new society:

"...Les Indépendances une fois acquises, Fama fut oublié et jeté aux mouches. Passaient encore les postes de ministres, de députés, d'ambassadeurs, pour lesquels lire et écrire n'est pas aussi futile que des bagues pour un lépreux. On avait pour ceux-là des prétextes de l'écarter, Fama demeurant analphabète comme la queue d'un âne" (Kourouma, 22-23).

Displaced in a society of changing values, his illiteracy provide him no means of adjusting:

...Kourouma portrays the plight of the individual who has been left behind. Unskilled in modern technology as well as illiterate in French... Fama cannot join the ruling elite in the new era of the "suns of independence." He represents the disgruntled displaced masses lured from the village to the city by promises of opportunity only to encounter an ever-deepening poverty (Mortimer, February 1990, 36).

This alienation in modern Africa leaves Fama with a sense of longing for his lost childhood in the traditional village. However, his romantic visions of the past bear no resemblance to the present: "Du Togobala de son enfance, du Togobala qu'il avait dans le cœur il ne restait même plus la dernière pestilence du dernier pet" (Kourouma, 105). What remains from Fama's past is now only an illusion. Fama realizes this when he sees the pitiful sight that awaits him upon his return to the country. "Des habitants de tous âges accouraient, tous faméliques et séchés comme des silures de deux saisons, la peau rugueuse et poussiéreuse comme le margouillat des murs, les yeux rouges et excrémenteux de conjonctivite" (Kourouma, 106).
Despite the misery that he discovers in the country, Fama remains influenced by his upbringing and temporarily takes his place as leader of the tribe. "Avec les pas soups de son totem panthère, des gestes royaux et des saluts majestueux (dommage que le boubou ait été poussiéreux et froissé!), en tête d’une escorte d’habitants et d’une nuée de bambins, Fama atteignit la cour des aïeux Doumbouya" (Kourouma, 106). Yet, since traditional village life no longer exists, because of the dwindling political importance and economic means of those in the country, Fama realizes that it holds nothing of value for him. He returns to the city where he feels yet even more displaced than he did in the country. Despite his inability to reintegrate into the traditional country life, Fama continues to embrace the traditional life of the village and it is in this way that he is to be distinguished from Salimata:

Salimata s’est réfugiée dans la capitale qui représente pour elle l’espoir d’une autre vie. Sa fuite de la campagne à la ville symbolise le passage de la nuit chargée de mystère et de menaces à la ville où elle finira par triompher de ses traumatismes. Fama exalte le passé, ne vit pleinement qu’au sein de la campagne et des traditions. Salimata se détourne de son passé néfaste et des traditions villageoises dont elle n’a que trop enduré le pouvoir coercitif" (Kane, 1982,183).

Many negative elements of Salimata’s upbringing continue to haunt her in the city, such as the rape and imprisonment she experienced in her traditional village. She has, however, found a way to fit into the modern society by earning an income, and her new life is able to replace the old. Fama only lives in the faded glories of the past, unable to fit into what remains of the traditional world and equally unsuccessful in the modern world. His lack of western education coupled with his inability to adapt in any form to modern society, means that he neither fits into the dying old world nor the impending modern one.
Out of the three works discussed in this paper, the traditional African, formal education is most clearly depicted in Salimata's case. Salimata first hears from her mother about the initiation process that she will one day undergo. "Tu verras, tu seras un jour excisée. Ce n'est pas seulement la fête, les danses, les chants et les ripailles, c'est aussi une grande chose, un grand événement ayant une grande signification" (Kourouma, 32). The initiation is an important rite of passage that binds the traditional community together and is also shrouded in secrecy. Salimata's mother only vaguely tells her what will take place, and then only in the symbolic sense:

Tu verras, ma fille: pendant un mois tu vivras en recluse avec d'autres excisées et, au milieu des chants, on vous enseignera tous les tabous de la tribu. L'excision est la rupture, elle démarque, elle met fin aux années d'équivoque, d'impureté de jeune fille, et après elle vient la vie de femme (Kourouma, 32-33).

However, after the ceremony Salimata recalls, in no uncertain terms, what the ceremony entailed:

Elle revoyait chaque fille à tour de rôle dénouer et jeter le pagne, s'asseoir sur une poterie retournée, et l'exciseuse, la femme du forgeron, la grande sorcière, avancer, sortier le couteau, un couteau à la lame recourbée, le présenter aux montagnes et trancher le clitoris considéré comme l'impureté, la confusion, l'imperfection. . . (Kourouma, 34).

Far from the romantic, vague description that her mother has painted, Salimata recalls the precise reality of the painful operation: "Salimata se livre les yeux fermés, et le flux de la douleur grimpa de l'entre-jambe au dos, au cou et à la tête, redescendit dans les genoux; elle voulut se redresser pour chanter mais ne le put pas, le souffle manqua, la chaleur de la douleur tendit les membres" (Kourouma, 35). Before the ceremony, Salimata has anticipated this most important moment that will represent a turning-
point for her and will also fill her mother with pride if she is successful. However, Salimata's prediction that she will not survive the initiation process almost comes true and much to her shame she faints on the excision field: "Salimata n'a pas vécu le retour triomphal au village dont elle avait tant rêvé. C'est à califourchon au dos d'une matrone par une piste abandonnée, une entrée cachée, qu'elle fut introduite dans le village et portée dans la case du féticheur Tiécoura" (Kourouma, 36). It is then under the supervision of Tiécoura, the fetish-priest, that Salimata is raped. The abuse that occurs in the process of her initiation represents an abuse of the system and is a criticism of inhuman treatment legitimized by society. "Kourouma's critique of tradition is no more evident than at the moment when the sacrifice performed by the sorcerer-marabout becomes a pretext for attempted rape" (Miller, 230).

Despite Salimata's failed excision operation, she is still able to take part in the formal education that follows: "Salimata rejoignit la case de retraite des excisées, et cloîtrée avec les autres collègues elle vécut trois semaines de soins, de fête et d'instructions initiatives" (Kourouma, 39). Although Kourouma spells out in detail the physical operation of excision, clarifying to the non-Malinké reader the procedure, the 'lore of initiation' that the age-mates are taught while they are cloistered in the special hut remains shrouded in mystery, as is usual for most of the specific details relating to such traditional ceremonies. The importance of this formal education as a turning point in a girl's life is conveyed, although the specific content is not. Whereas in the West knowledge is deemed public, in the traditional African context, information acquired during initiation ceremonies is considered secret and is limited to others in the initiation group.

When Salimata later runs away from her traditional village, she is largely fleeing from the painful memory of her initiation and the ensuing rape. What she seeks,
as I will show in the following chapter, is a more equal relationship and a more humane environment than she has previously known. Salimata rejects the environment of her traditional education and although it continues to haunt her in her new life, she manages to adapt to the modern city.

In the city, there is a growing conflict between those who are modern and have a western education and those who have received a traditional education. Traditionally educated Africans regard the western educated as being less African than themselves. Western educated Africans regard the traditionally educated with equal contempt, considering them uneducated. Bakary, an acquaintance of Fama's, categorizes the judge who was educated in France as follows: "Ces jeunes gens débarqués de l'au-delà des mers ne pensent plus comme des nègres" (Kourouma, 172). Fama speaks of Naku, the former minister, in even ruder terms: "Malinké comme Fama, diplômé de Paris et comme tous les jeunes Malinkés débarquant de France, impoli à flairer comme un bouc les fesses de sa maman, arrogant comme le sexe d'un âne circoncis" (Kourouma, 169). Fama's traditionalism is reinforced by his use of Malinké popular expressions that denigrate the newly formed elite. When the judge reads the sentence of the conspirators, again this conflict between the modern and the traditional becomes apparent when the conspirators are condemned for not speaking French. "Vous êtes tous des chacals. Vous ne comprenez pas le français et vous avez voulu tuer le président. Voilà ce que le juge a dit" (Kourouma, 174). Their illiteracy in French implicates them even more in the conspiracy to kill the president. Thus, Les soleils des indépendances clearly depicts the growing division in West African society between the western educated and the traditionally educated. Thus Kourouma depicts education as a crucial factor in the changing social environment of his fictional Ebony Coast.
Salimata and Fama's educations are negatively depicted as being cruel and insufficient in the changing political climate of the modern town. Part of the educated elite himself, Kourouma criticizes the perpetuation of a two class system that allows the top minority to prosper with the help of a formal French education while the traditional majority remains desperately ill-equipped to make lives for themselves. This two track system, as has previously been pointed out in the introduction, was created by the colonialists who were only interested in educating the top few percent in order to carry out the administrative jobs that they themselves lack the manpower to fill. That the elite postcolonial Africans could perpetuate this repressive system is to have made little progress from the colonial days from which they had freed themselves.

Education is also essential in shaping the lives of the main characters in Bebey's *Le fils d'Agatha Moudio*. Although the majority of the education discussed is traditional in nature, the main character, Mbenda, did attend western school until the age of fifteen. However, formal western education did not suit his character so he decided to return to the traditional village and take up the village trade of a fisherman:

Je n'aimais pas l'école, et je n'allai pas à l'école; du moins, je cessai d'y aller dès que je sus compter suffisamment bien. Le grand air et la haute mer m'appelaient, et rapidement, je dis adieu aux bancs, aux camarades plus patients que moi, et au tableau noir que je n'oublierai jamais. A quinze ans, je devins pêcheur, et dès cet âge, je connus l'extraordinaire aventure de la pêche en haute mer, avec des vagues hautes comme des montagnes, et la frêle pirogue à la merci du bon Dieu, et les soirs sentant le poisson fumé, et la solidarité d'hommes courageux, avec pour idéal commun celui d'entretenir la vie d'autres hommes, au péril de leur propre vie (Bebey, 23-24).

Integrated into his traditional community, Mbenda values nothing in western education. Rather he is drawn to the sea by the strong connection he feels with nature, an essential
element of traditional life. Mbenda also seeks to be reunited with the traditional spirit of community that draws him to the trade of fishing. Unlike Fama, Mbenda has had the experience of formal education, however by rejecting it, he finds a place in the traditional world still possible in colonial Africa that was unavailable to Fama in the postcolonial Ebony Coast. Also Mbenda's mother and village elders have influenced him more in his traditional upbringing than a formal education ever could. Maa Médi, while a very loving mother, brought her son up with a strict hand:

Tout ce qu'elle faisait au monde était fait pour mon bonheur. Pourtant, elle ne m'aurait laissé, à aucun moment, le loisir de penser que je serais jamais un enfant gâté: "Si tu n'aimes pas l'école, me disait-elle quand j'étais enfant, tu n'iras pas à l'école. Mais, fils, c'est toi qui gagneras toi-même ta vie, par n'importe quel moyen honnête. Ne compte pas sur moi pour t'aider à devenir un fainéant, quel que soit l'amour que j'aie pour toi" (Bebey, 23).

Unlike other, more modern youths who have gone their own way, "Tant d'enfants, de nos jours, s'éloignaient de leur mère dès qu'ils pouvaient eux-mêmes gagner leur vie" (Bebey, 72), Mbenda chooses to obey his mother with the traditional respect due one's elders: "Je ne pouvais pas désobéir à Maa Médi. Elle était ma mère, avec tout ce que cela pouvait comporter de respect et de reconnaissance" (Bebey, 24). Although in his earlier adult life Mbenda followed tradition and heeded the advice of his mother and the elders, Agatha's modern thinking does eventually influence Mbenda's choice of spouse.

The western influence of the colonialists had infiltrated all aspects of life in Mbenda's village, yet traditional values and ways of life were depicted as indelible. The opening passage of the novel sets the scene of the influence of the modern town on the traditional village: "Notre village gardait le pied de la colline d'où descendait la rue grise venue de la ville lointaine" (Bebey, 5). Bjornson calls the road "a mixed blessing". He states, "If it grants them access to the modern world of schooling,
business, and the colonial administration, it also disrupts the equilibrium of traditional society by bringing the values of the modern world into the heart of the village" (272). Later, when Mbenda must choose between the spouse his father has designated for him and the girl with whom he has fallen in love, his traditional upbringing as well as the modern town influence his decision. His traditional upbringing allows for his village elders to choose his wife for him. According to Manzanza, "L'éducation reçue le conduit à accepter le consensus des anciens. Leur parrainage, admis par la coutume est une façon de prendre en charge et de guider les premiers pas des plus jeunes dans la vie adulte" (Bebey, 336). However when Mbenda decides to marry Agatha after having already married Fanny, he justifies it with modern convictions: "Je considérais que j'avais assez obéï ainsi, et qu'il était temps pour moi de prendre des décisions, moi-même. Pourtant, la première décision que je voulais prendre, c'était d'épouser Agatha" (Bebey, 154). The traditional and the modern education that Mbenda has received form him and influence his choice of spouses. The eventual compatibility of the two wives represents a reconciliation of the traditional and the modern worlds.

Fanny, Mbenda's first wife, is the archetype of the traditional girl. Raised traditionally by her parents, brought to Mbenda's village to be his wife, she is first educated by her future mother-in-law into the domestic duties expected of her in her husband's home. Fanny is first described when the elders of Mbenda's village go to her home to introduce the idea of her marriage with Mbenda. Fanny is a shy little girl submissive to the authority of her father. First the elders hear her "voix lointaine de petite fille" (Bebey, 66). And le roi Salomon admire "l'enfant précoce qu'était Fanny . . . Elle entendit l'ordre de son père. . . . Et elle se retira. . . . Fanny courut chez son oncle Njiba" (Bebey, 66). The traditional training she has received growing up also prepares her for the domestic and marital training that Maa Médi will give her. Since
She is a traditional, subservient girl, when the elders of Mbenda’s village abduct her from her village to become his wife, she feels that she has no choice but to accept what Maa Médi commands her to do: “Reste ici avec lui, pour le servir et lui faire des enfants, beaucoup d’enfants” (Bebey, 101). In another instance in which la mère Mauvais-Regard instructs her in ways to keep one’s husband, the narrator again shows Fanny’s compliance with authority. “Fanny obéissait. Elle ne pouvait faire autrement, elle ne se reconnaissait pas le droit de faire autrement” (Bebey, 134). However, before Mbenda and Fanny become officially married, she must learn her domestic duties from Maa Médi, “son futur métier de maîtresse de maison” (Bebey, 103). Mbenda states the task of his mother: “Il lui appartenait à présent de prendre Fanny en main et de la transformer en une vraie femme digne de son fils” (Bebey, 101). The tasks that she learns are in accordance with traditional women’s roles:

Elle allait aux champs avec ma mère, travaillait toute la journée avec elle, ramassait du bois mort, et rentrait le soir, abattue par une journée de soleil accablant. Maa Médi lui apprenait aussi à faire la cuisine, et lui indiquait mes plats préférés (Bebey, 121).

Manzanza emphasizes the importance of family and the close connection of its members in the initiation process:

Ce stage imposé à la future épouse est indispensable et déterminant pour le bonheur du foyer et l’harmonie de la communauté. Les parents de l’époux mettent à profit ce temps pour initier leur belle-fille non seulement à ses tâches ménagères mais aussi aux habitudes et aux goûts de son mari (337).

This process of education is one of the many essential ways in which the individual is initiated into the traditional life of the village.
Agatha, Mbenda's second wife, is Bebey's representation of the modern woman. The villagers consider her loose and according to Mbenda, this is the result of a haphazard upbringing: "La mauvaise conduite d'Agatha était la conséquence d'une éducation mal conduite, laissée au hasard" (Bebey, 35). This can be attributed her father having wished for a boy baby in her place. Deeply disappointed, he abandons her mother and refuses to see Agatha. Also when Agatha is fourteen years old, her mother dies. "Depuis, j'ai été abandonnée à moi-même. Et toute seule, j'ai grandi, oh, j'ai beaucoup grandi, c'est moi qui te le dis" (Bebey, 34). Her disappointment with her upbringing, and to her exposure to the modern town urge her to hope for a more equal type of marital relationship than her parents had. According to Etonde-Ekoto:

Agatha, jeune fille des temps modernes, représente le déracinement et l'acculturation. Sa quête profonde d'identité la marginalise. Formée quelque peu à l'école européenne, elle jette un regard de distanciation sur son milieu de base, questionne les critères sociaux et sa place dans le groupe. Elle choisit la liberté de sortir du sillage traditionnel et "d'épouser" le Blanc, de défier le tabou sexuel érigé par des générations de femmes" (346).

As a result of her education which she has largely received in the fast lane of the colonial town, Agatha thinks from a more modern standpoint. She considers what she would like from a marriage, taking her own personal expectations into account. Her desires are not in accordance with the attitudes of her traditional village, but rather are a result of her own reflection and the influence of the town. What she hopes to find in a husband is a modern man who works in town:

. . . Je devrais rencontrer un homme riche, et qui ne songerait jamais à épouser une deuxième femme une fois que nous serions mariés, même si moi je ne lui donnais pas de fils; je cherchais peut-être un homme qui me rendrait heureuse comme jamais cela ne m'est arrivé, mais je le voulais avant tout riche, et habillé d'un pantalon, d'une chemise, d'une cravate, d'une veste, et avec de beaux
However, once she has fallen in love with Mbenda, she accepts that her expectations are not the essential elements of a happy marriage. She is able to influence Mbenda, a traditionalist at heart to marry her, but this requires that she accept the status of second wife. Influenced by Agatha's attitudes, Mbenda eventually decides to take his own personal happiness into account and chooses to marry her.

Agatha's modern mentality and more western outlook can also be seen when her elders come to claim their traditionally expected gifts from Mbenda for having married their daughter. Their wedding took place very informally: Agatha arrived at Mbenda's house with her suitcase and her aunt declared them wed:

C'est vrai qu'Agatha m'avait formellement interdit de recevoir qui que ce fût, qui viendrait de son village pour me demander un cadeau sous prétexte que j'avais épousé "sa" fille. "Ils n'ont jamais rien fait pour moi, m'avait-elle dit, je pense donc que mon mariage ne les regarde pas, et qu'ils n'ont pas à en profiter."

(Bebey, 200).

Due to her upbringing and her informally arranged marriage, the modern Agatha does not feel that her elders merit any recompense from Mbenda. However, Mbenda seeks the advice of his elder le roi Salomon and acts in accordance to his own traditional character. "J'étais heureux d'aller lui offrir les cadeaux que le roi Salomon et moi avions apportés" (Bebey, 201). Later, when Agatha's father and village elders decide that Mbenda should pay for their homecoming celebrations as a substitution for Agatha's bride-price, Mbenda grudgingly accepts out of a respect for tradition. "Ceci est un détail qui me restera longtemps accroché au cœur, malgré la consigne du roi Salomon, selon laquelle les yeux ne devraient jamais regarder que du côté de la vie où se trouve l'avenir" (Bebey, 201). In these events, Mbenda always listens to the wise advice of roi Salomon. Although Mbenda has been influenced by the modern example set by Agatha,
he still remains within the confines of accepted traditionalism. He feels the necessity to
remain connected to the traditional village, whereas what counts for Agatha is her
modern concern for her husband alone. Mbenda basically believes in the local traditions
expressed by la mère Mauvais-Regard when speaking to Fanny:

Vous autres, les enfants d’aujourd’hui, vous commencez à ne plus faire attention
à ces traditions, mais crois-moi, elles ne seraient pas parvenues jusqu’à nous, si
nos ancêtres n’avaient longtemps expérimenté leur exactitude (Bebey, 131).

Although Mbenda chooses to remain aligned with the traditional community by complying
with its precepts, in comparison to the older generation, he is nevertheless relatively
modern. Far from complying uncritically with the traditional community, he is
conscious of choices available to him and sometimes chooses to act in accordance with
them and at other times not. He has this opportunity, first because his traditional
community continues to survive, and second, because the elders accept the inevitable tide
of change to a slightly more modern society.

In Une si longue lettre, Ramatoulaye’s attitudes toward traditional and modern
forms of upbringing and education undergo a change from the beginning to the end of the
text. These series of letters to her close friend are an examination of her past and
present life in which Ramatoulaye reflects on the changes taking place in Senegalese
society. Ramatoulaye emerges from this period of reflection renewed. She has a clearer
sense of self and purpose, having reevaluated some of her initial attitudes, for example,
toward education. As Christopher Miller says, the act of writing this series of letters is
for Ramatoulaye an educational process: “The writing of this letter to her friend brings
her along a path which allows her “to reconstruct a sense of selfhood (by which I mean
that she describes herself as ‘emerging from the shadows’)” (Miller, 282-283).
Throughout the text, Ramatoulaye emphasizes the importance of education in what she sees as the positive progression of cultural ideas and practices. Also as a teacher, Ramatoulaye firmly believes in the enlightenment that modern education provides. Brought up with the traditional ideas of her community, she breaks away from them, because of her modern teacher training that shaped her progressive outlook. However, after seeing some of the unharnessed effects that a modern education and upbringing has had on her children, Ramatoulaye reconsiders the traditional ideas that she had previously abandoned. At the end of the text, Ramatoulaye realizes that establishing a healthy sense of identity for her and for her newly emerging nation entails a reevaluation of the past and present, not an uncritical acceptance of either.

As discussed in the previous chapter, *Une si longue lettre* reflects a society that has already experienced a great deal of change from strict traditionalism. Bâ writes in a modern period still undergoing transition. However despite modern change, Koranic education continues to influence society. Islamic religion and education form the backbone of traditional West African society. It was introduced into West Africa long before colonialism could influence western education, and therefore was incorporated into traditional Senegalese culture. “From [North Africa] Islam spread to West Africa. Thus in northern and western Africa and also in a number of eastern and central African countries, Islam antedated Christianity and colonialism. . . . Indeed, Islam has played a major role in the shaping of culture and education in most countries of Africa” (Fafunwa, 16).

Since *Une si longue lettre* was written in a relatively contemporary period, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou viewed the Koranic education they received as girls to be traditional as opposed to the colonial, western education they perceived as modern.
Whereas traditional African education consisted largely of learning by doing, Koranic education consists of memorization of the Koran. Numerous passages in *Une Si longue lettre* link Ramatoulaye's Koranic education with her traditional African past. In the first chapter, Ramatoulaye establishes the close connections between herself and Aissatou that dates from their first school experience: "Nous, nous avons usé pagnes et sandales sur le même chemin caillouteux de l'école coranique" (Bâ, 7). Later in the text, Ramatoulaye recalls passages from her Koranic education when she is faced with the traumatic news of her husband's death. "Tranches de ma vie jaillies inopinément de ma pensée, versets grandioses du Coran, paroles nobles consolatrices se disputent mon attention" (Bâ, 9). Ramatoulaye's early Koranic education formed an essential part of her traditional African upbringing. She continues throughout the text to regard her earliest school experience and her Muslim heritage as positive aspects of her upbringing.

However despite this early education, Ramatoulaye does not accept all of her Muslim upbringing. It is a sign of her western education that she rejects the supernatural powers of the Muslim marabouts and prefers to rely instead on the powers of reason. The more traditional members in her community try to convince her that the marabout could bring back her estranged husband: "Non, je ne cédais pas aux sollicitations. Ma raison et ma foi rejetaient les pouvoirs surnaturels. Elles rejetaient cette attraction facile qui anihilé toute volonté de lutte. Je regardais, en face, la réalité" (Bâ, 73). She rejects many traditional attitudes in favor of a more rational and liberal policy. Separated from her traditional, Muslim community by her modern education, Ramatoulaye rejects many traditional attitudes in favor of a more rational and liberal policy.
Ramatoulaye praises the education she received at her teachers' training college for the liberating effect that it had on her. In turn, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou eventually see their task as teachers as one of emancipation, following the example of their past headmistress: "Nous étions de véritables sœurs destinées à la même mission émancipatrice" (Bâ, 25). This call for liberation chosen by their headmistress parallels the search for a new identity that is felt in the whole of Senegal: "C'est que la voie choisie pour notre formation et notre épanouissement ne fut point hasard. Elle concorde avec les options profondes de l'Afrique nouvelle, pour promouvoir la femme noire" (Bâ, 28). Ramatoulaye's language attests to the growing tide of African feminism and its strong call for social change.

Originally, Ramatoulaye held very strong attitudes towards traditional and modern forms of education. She felt that modern education was a liberating force that could lift the individual out of the "bog of tradition" (Bâ, 15, English edition). Ramatoulaye polarized traditional and modern types of education, characterizing the former as negative and outdated, the latter as a positive alternative, the key to the future. In a very early passage, where Ramatoulaye praises her former headmistress, Ramatoulaye's attitude toward education already reveals this bias:

Nous sortir de l'enlisement des traditions, superstitions et mœurs; nous faire apprécier de multiples civilisations sans reniement de la nôtre; élever notre vision du monde, cultiver notre personnalité, renforcer nos qualités, mater nos défauts; faire fructifier en nous les valeurs de la morale universelle; voilà la tâche que s'était assignée l'admirable directrice (Bâ, 27-28).

In this praise for her own modern education, Ramatoulaye implicitly criticizes the traditional culture that she views as rigid and entrenched in useless traditions and superstitions. Ramatoulaye's attitudes toward her native culture have been influenced
by her French headmistress who views her students as having been stuck as if in a swamp ("l'enlisement"), in their traditions, which she (ethnocentrically) considered as being composed of 'mere' superstition and custom. Ramatoulaye believes that to 'raise their vision of the world' and 'appreciate a multitude of civilizations' it is not necessary to renounce one's own culture. Yet, she does consider that there are certain qualities in the traditional culture from which people must be emancipated. This point has lead Janos Riesz in her article to ask:

Are we then to see Bâ as a naive victim of French colonial ideology? . . . Almost as if to counter such questions and objections, Bâ proceeds to defend the sort of education that she herself had received between 1943 and 1947. She does this in two ways: on the basis of the teacher's moral stance and from a perspective that makes sense within the context of the emancipation of women in colonial Africa (28).

As a young adult, Ramatoulaye positively responded to this colonial, assimilationist view of traditional culture as a reaction against the coercive control that the family and community traditionally held over the young and more specifically over women. Ramatoulaye's search for a more egalitarian, liberal atmosphere led her, at the beginning of the text, to equate traditional upbringing with persistent negative practices and modern education with positive change.

Ramatoulaye's parents' generation had maintained the traditional way of thinking which the modern Ramatoulaye generally portrays as negative. The older generation equally disliked the modern changes in society. When Mawdo Bâ marries Aissatou, his mother states that "L'école transforme nos filles en diablesses, qui détournent les hommes du droit chemin" (Bâ, 30). The older generation views modern education as a corrupting force. In Ramatoulaye's letters to Aissatou, there is a clear conflict between the old and new generations about the best form and uses of education.
Despite Ramatoulaye's campaign for bringing the liberalizing effects of modern education to society, she realizes that westernized education is not problem free, that it does introduce new kinds of social problems into Senegalese society. She summarizes some of the difficulties encountered in the adjustment of the European school system to Senegal. Whereas, according to Fafunwa, unemployment in traditional Africa was unknown, the new westernized schooling created a system of winners, the elite, and losers, the unemployed. "Unemployment, if it existed at all, was minimal and very few young men roamed the villages and towns with nothing to do. Education in Old Africa was not rigidly compartmentalised as is the case in the contemporary system" (Fafunwa, 10). Fafunwa also explains that because traditional education was practical and job oriented, it translated more readily into the reality of work. Ramatoulaye examines the new problems created by the new, more abstract learning and the specialised nature of western education. "L'ascension est laborieuse, sur le rude versant du savoir, à l'école des Blancs . . . . Que feront ceux qui ne réussissent pas? . . . La cohorte des sans métiers grossit les rangs des délinquants" (Bâ, 31-32). Ramatoulaye traces the ills of the modern school system from the restricted entrance at the kindergarten level to the inability for all to succeed at the university level, as well as the lost appeal of apprenticeships in the traditional crafts. Yet, she still maintains that despite its weaknesses, it is for the better that the modern form of education has displaced the traditional:

Eternelles interrogations de nos éternels débats. Nous étions tous d'accord qu'il fallait bien des craquements pour asseoir la modernité dans les traditions. Ecartelés entre le passé et le présent, nous déplorions les "suintements" qui ne manquereraient pas... Nous dénombrions les pertes possibles. Mais nous sentions que plus rien ne serait comme avant. Nous étions pleins de nostalgie, mais résolument progressistes (Bâ, 32).
This search for a new identity for their country, "l' Afrique Nouvelle" (Bà, 39), is spurred by the revolutionizing education which freed women like Ramatoulaye and Aissatou in the same way that freed modern education from subjugation by certain traditions.

In contrast to the new excitement based on the emergence of a modern era for African women and for Africa itself, Binetou and young Nabou represent a strong hold that traditional values still have on certain members of society. Binetou and Nabou are the second wives of Ramatoulaye's and Aissatou's husbands. Ramatoulaye describes Binetou as a lamb who has been sacrificed for her family's material wealth, having been forced to abandon her successful school career and marry Modou Fall. "Binetou est un agneau immolé comme beaucoup d'autres sur l'autel du 'matériel' (Bà, 60). By contrast, Nabou freely chooses to marry Mawdo; she was raised by her aunt in accordance with strict traditional practices that would make her docile, the perfect traditional wife. The narrator portrays both girls as victims of their traditional worlds. This type of victimization has turned Ramatoulaye against the traditional world.

According to Bazin:

In the African communities depicted in these books, families exert a great deal of pressure upon young people in order to uphold traditional taboos, customs and privileges in relation to marriage. Families have considerable say about whom their young people may marry. Adults recite proverbs and stories to the young that warn them of the disasters that will ensure if they disobey the long-established customs and procedures that are designed to govern behavior (183).

Young Nabou's upbringing best represents this coercive, traditional education.

Even though Nabou does attend French schools, the educational outcome is in conjunction with Fafunwa's "Seven cardinal goals of traditional African education" (11). Summarizing these seven goals, Fafunwa states "the ultimate goal is to produce
an individual who is honest, respectful, skilled, co-operative, and who conforms to the social order of the day" (11). Nabou attended the French primary and secondary schools for a few years until she was advised by her aunt to enter the State School of Midwifery. The aunt’s reasons for this type of education attest to her traditional attitudes concerning the education of women:

"Cette école est bien. Là, on éduque. Nulle guirlande sur les têtes. Des jeunes filles sobres, sans boucles d’oreilles, vêtues de blanc, couleur de la pureté. Le métier que tu y apprendras est beau; tu gagneras ta vie et tu conquerras des grâces pour ton paradis, en aidant à n’être des serviteurs de Mohamed. En vérité, l’instruction d’une femme n’est pas à pousser. Et puis, je me demande comment une femme peut gagner sa vie en parlant matin et soir" (Bâ, 47).

Aunt Nabou is interested solely in the social utility of vocational education. This type of education is also in line with the other precept that Aunt Nabou has taught her niece, "que la qualité première d’une femme est la docilité" (Bâ, 47). Aunt Nabou also trains her niece in "le secret des sauces délicieuses, à manier fer à repasser et pilon" (Bâ, 47) in order to be a perfect housewife. Apart from the subservient nature of her formal education, the education that her aunt provides through tales also reinforces the message of Nabou’s traditional place and the traditional qualities:

L’empreinte de l’école n’avait pas été forte en la petite Nabou, précédée et dominée par la force de caractère de tante Nabou qui, dans sa rage de vengeance, n’avait rien laissé au hasard dans l’éducation qu’elle avait donnée à sa nièce. C’était surtout, par les contes, pendant les veillées à la belle étoile, que tante Nabou avait exercé son emprise sur l’âme de la petite Nabou, sa voix expressive glorifiait la violence justicière du guerrier; sa voix expressive plaignait l’inquiétude de l’Aimée toute de soumission. Elle saluait le courage des téméraires; elle stigmatisait la ruse, la paresse, la calomnie; elle réclamait sollicitude pour l’orphelin et respect pour la vieillesse. Mise en scène d’animaux, chansons nostalgiques tenaient haletante la petite Nabou. Et lentement, sûrement, par la ténacité de la répétition, s’insinuaient en cette enfant, les vertus et la grandeur d’une race" (Bâ, 70-71).
Despite Nabou's subservient position and her traditional education with which Ramatoulaye disagrees, Ramatoulaye does see the end result as positive. "Douceur et générosité, docilité et politesse, savoir faire et savoir parler, rendaient agréable la petite Nabou" (Bâ, 71). Ramatoulaye opposes the methods, but she admires the end product. Nabou is undeniably a well-adjusted, pleasant girl who is an asset to her community.

On the other hand, Ramatoulaye brought her children up liberally in an atmosphere of trust, allowing for them to develop according to their natures. Her children are attending formal school and are university bound. Yet, she is shocked to discover three of her daughters clandestinely smoking and another who is pregnant. These evils lead her to question her oversimplified ideals: "Je croyais qu'un enfant naissait et grandissait sans problème. Je croyais qu'on traçait une voie droite et qu'il l'emprunterait allègrement" (Bâ, 110). These events cause Ramatoulaye to reflect on the traditional wisdom of her grandmother and the pat platitudes that she would have had available for every situation. "Mes tourments s'estompent à l'évocation de ma grand'mère qui trouvait, dans la sagesse populaire, un dicton approprié à chaque événement" (Bâ, 110). Ramatoulaye becomes nostalgic for the days when guidelines were strict and choices more clear cut. Having allowed her teenage daughters to go out, have friends over and wear the western trousers that she deems unattractive on the African female figure, Ramatoulaye wonders if their participation in certain activities is not due to overly liberal attitudes. She also wonders where this flow of progress and modernity will lead:

J'eus tout d'un coup peur des affluents du progrès. Ne buvaient-elles pas aussi? Qui sait, un vice pouvant en introduire un autre? Le modernisme
ne peut donc être, sans s'accompagner de la dégradation des mœurs?
Etais-je responsable d'avoir donné un peu de liberté à mes filles?" (Bâ, 112).

Later, when Ramatoulaye discovers that one of her unmarried daughters is pregnant, she decides to give three of the other girls sex education. She stresses the rational capacity of humans that separates them from animals and also human free will in choosing one's future. "C'est à son contrôle, à son raisonnement, à son choix, à sa puissance d'attachement que l'individu se distingue de la bête. Chaque femme fait de sa vie ce qu'elle souhaite" (Bâ, 127-128).

Yet, Ramatoulaye begins to understand that one must have a strong moral code along with this modern sense of freedom. She is nostalgic for this sense of morality that she, Aissatou and their husbands felt and that is being ignored in the modern era:

Notre société actuelle est ébranlée dans ses assises les plus profondes, tiraillée entre l'attrait des vices importés, et la résistance farouche des vertus anciennes.

... Nous sommes ceux du passé, "déphasés ou dépassés", "croulants", peut-être. Mais, tous les quatre, nous étions pétris de rigueur, avec une conscience debout, et de vivaces interrogations pointées douloureusement en nous" (Bâ, 106).

In this twenty-second letter, seventh to the end, Ramatoulaye’s reflection on her past, as well as on the current state of her children, causes her to reevaluate her attitude toward both traditional and modern forms of education. Perhaps modern education was successful for her because, from childhood, she had her feet firmly rooted in the strong morals of the traditional African world. The generation of Ramatoulaye's children, not having received this strict moral upbringing, is more open to experimenting with new and perhaps dangerous experiences:
Modern education has provided for the possibility of rising in social position that was once decided at birth. However, this positive change can lead to an environment which can be destructive, where personal ascension is more important than human compassion.

Bâ concludes that progress should be tempered with an understanding that education needs a firm rooting in traditional values. She demonstrates that a rejectionist stance is not a solution; one approach should not be adopted to the exclusion of the other. One must find a synthesis which marries those elements of each which are best suited to meet the challenges of a changing society, the liberal approach provided by a modern education and the moral lessons provided by a traditional one. In the extreme, a society devoid of values is as worthless as one where the individual remains in the chains of the community’s control. Ramatoulaye has evolved from the beginning of the text where she considered traditional practices as purely negative and modern ones as positive. By the end of the text, she realizes that there is a place for both practices and that indeed they are both necessary for the creation of a healthy society. Although fearful of certain developments, Ramatoulaye chooses to remain hopeful for the changes taking place in society as she resolutely looks to the future, the tense in which she appropriately ends her final letter.

Clearly these three texts illustrate the growing influence of western style education in postcolonial Africa. In all of the works discussed in this chapter, western education is the means to power and influence in the modern town. However, in the first
two texts, *Les soleils des indépendances* and *Le fils d'Agatha Moudio*, education seems to be simply beyond the reach of most Africans. For example, Fama was never exposed to western education in his traditional village, and although Mbenda did attend the French school, for him to follow in its path to its full conclusion would have been too much of a wrench from his comfortable, traditional village life. Both Fama and Mbenda remain outside the realm of the modern world, Fama because he was not provided the opportunity and Mbenda, out of choice. The consequence of having little or no western education in Modern Africa is that one is relegated to the traditional world, which in colonial and postcolonial Africa is of dwindling importance.

*Une si longue lettre* is the only text of these three in which the issues surrounding western and traditional forms of education are debated and resolved. Ramatoulaye's discussion of the issues in education reflect developments in her society. Modern education, despite its various shortcomings, is no longer something that is either unattainable or simply rejected because it fails to fit the traditional lifestyle. Rather, in Ramatoulaye's modern Senegal, western education is becoming more the norm, although Ramatoulaye recognizes that untempered modernism is not always the best or only alternative. Riesz points out that in *Une si longue lettre*, "The modern European system of education can produce mature, self-aware women who accept responsibility for their own lives, but so can the traditional African system of education" (30). Although Ramatoulaye clearly prefers the modern system, she also values qualities instilled by a more moralistic, traditional education. This type of debate and reconciliation is important in the intellectual climate required for the building of postcolonial modern Africa.
Marriage plays an essential social function in both traditional and modern societies. The structure of marriage and rules pertaining to it, however, address different issues, depending on societal demands and kinship relationships. As in almost all other areas of life, modern western attitudes relating to love and marriage, introduced originally by the missionaries and colonialists, have greatly influenced the traditional African structure of marriage. According to Obiechina, the introduction of the western concept of romantic love and monogamy in Africa significantly altered the traditional codes relating to marriage:

What is implied by the statement that romantic love came to Africa from the West is simply this: that the mutual attraction of people of opposite sex, and their integration through mutual affection and total preoccupation with this mutual relationship, the state which is recognized as 'being in love', receives much functional emphasis within the Western cultural tradition, and had hardly any emphasis at all within the African cultural tradition until the contact between Africa and the West altered the situation (1973, 32).

The three works examined in this paper treat issues directly relating to this shift in African attitudes from the traditional marriage structure to a more modern one.

Whereas in the modern western society marriage is a contract between individuals, in traditional African society it is a social contract between groups:
African marriage, like that of Europeans, is an association between two persons for mutual support and the procreation and rearing of children. But it usually has also the wider aspect of an alliance between groups of kin. Any marriage is a matter of interest not only to the parents of both parties but to a wider circle of relatives, particularly the members of the lineage of each (Mair, 1969, 4).

In an agrarian society, cooperation of the group is essential for its survival and expansion. Traditional culture emphasizes the group over the individual. In the traditional context this situation justifies arranged marriages that maximize stability and insure the creation of acceptable kinship ties. Mananza explains main aspects of the traditional marriage procedures as shown by Bebey in *Le fils d’Agatha Moudio*:

Traditionnellement, quand un jeune homme ou une jeune fille atteint l’âge nubile, son groupe clanique se charge de lui trouver un conjoint. La coutume autorise donc le clan à décider puis à négocier le mariage d’un de ses membres. . . . .

. . . [Bebey] définit le mariage moins comme l’union de deux personnes que comme un événement juridique et social important qui engage tout le groupe clanique et rêve ainsi un caractère social dans la mesure où l’union de deux jeunes gens tisse des liens entre leurs clans, ouvre une nouvelle parenté, car le mariage lie deux groupes familiaux par des droits et des obligations réciproques* (334).

Arranged marriages created kinship groups organized either patrilineally or matrilineally. Incest taboos regulated acceptable patterns of who could marry whom in order to insure social stability. According to Mair, groups working together and the establishment of polygyny resulted in greater prosperity in a pre-industrial society:

The larger the co-operating group, the greater the possibilities of wealth and of defence against enemies, and the more children are born to any group, the greater its hopes of expansion in the future. Legitimate children are secured by marriage in due form, and the importance of securing legitimate descendants accounts for the most characteristic features of African marriage law. Women have their own share, an important one, in the division of labour, and both the wealth of the group and its hopes of progeny are greater in proportion to the number of wives.
Thus the polygynous joint family, consisting of a man, his wives, and their children, is the ideal of most Africans (Mair, 1969, 1).

In traditional society a woman's marital duty is thus defined in terms of the various tasks relating to food production and in producing and raising children. The traditional couples spend little time together, because of the division of labour involved in the production of food (Mair, 1971, 18-19). Thus, many other elements contribute to the definition of individuals apart from just their married status. Rather than the individual gaining a sense of identity solely from marriage, in traditional society identity is gained from complex relations to the larger social group.

Furthermore, because marriage is essentially designed to create an environment for raising children in traditional African society, marital infidelity is not regarded with the same contempt as in western society:

The key to the attitude of Africans towards this subject is that the religious values associated with sex are concentrated on procreation and not on sexual activity as such. In many tribes sexual activity between unmarried persons is permitted and even expected, provided that it is confined within prescribed limits of time and place and does not lead to conception (1969, 3).

Once a couple is married, neither partner is necessarily barred from extramarital sexual activity. Under certain circumstances integration of marital infidelity, under certain circumstances, into the traditional society can be said to allow for greater social stability, since it would not necessarily lead to the disintegration of the marriage. Yet on the other hand, Obiechina points out that the possible destabilizing effects on the agrarian community has led to taboos existing to prevent individuals before they are married from acting on impulses based on romantic love:
... romantic individualism was understandably curbed by stringent taboos. For how could families go on using the institution of marriage for making desirable allies of other families if young people were free to run off and get themselves attached to anyone they took a personal fancy to? (1973, 34).

Although a close personal bond may very well result from traditionally arranged marriage, it is evident that it is not considered as a necessary element. Rather, issues relating to the extension and close cooperation of the kinship group are considered essential to the traditional marriage.

Modern marriages focus on individuals and their personal happiness and fulfilment. Romantic love is the ideal basis of marriage and because the individuals in the couple will spend considerable time together, it is essential that they be highly compatible. In a modern industrial society individuals in a couple do not necessarily rely directly on each other for the production of food, nor even for their income nor the performance of domestic duties; what links them together is their marital relationship itself (Mair, 1971, 18). Since this relationship is given the main emphasis in modern marriages, marital infidelity is cause for separation and thus social instability.

Because in modern marriages personal happiness and choice are emphasized, individuals are responsible for choosing their own spouses. Survival in a modern context does not depend on the close association of family members; spouse choice is then more an individual decision. Roles can be more flexible and equal, compared to the position in traditional marriages, and they can be moulded to suit the needs of the individual.

In the modern period in which these three novels were written, the focus on individuals and their personal happiness were at definite odds with traditional practices of marriage which still had a hold on African culture. There is also a common element in all three texts of the multiple marriages of the main characters. Each protagonist has
been married twice or has experienced the remarriage of his or her spouse. Bâ, Bebey
and Kourouma all use polygamous marriages to introduce issues of the changing cultural
environment. In the various marriages, the reader can see a shift in practices and
attitudes from a traditional culture to a modern one. Or as is the case in Bâ's Une si
longue lettre, the inverse is true. Certain characters uphold the traditional structures
of marriage, or revert back to them, while others are forerunners for change and
introduce modern concepts to the institution of marriage. All the characters grapple
with the conflicts that modern attitudes have introduced into their more traditional
environment, and they search for the resolution of those conflicts within the confines of
established marital structures.

In Kourouma's Les soleils des indépendances, Fama and Salimata, husband and
wife, exemplify opposing positions in the struggle between tradition and modernity.
They both come from a traditional society, but whereas Salimata chooses to enter the
modern world, Fama longs for traditional culture to be reinstated. Salimata's wish for
modernity in her life can be traced to her bad experiences in her traditional initiation
ceremony as well as to her first marriage in which Kourouma depicts traditional society
at its worst. This marriage to Baffi is an arranged marriage. Having barely recovered
from the torment of the initiation ceremony, she is led to her unknown fiance, married,
and then expected to perform sexually after the inspection and instruction of two
matrons. The passage depicts the fear and emotional turmoil that for Salimata pervades
this mysterious marriage ceremony imposed on her by force:

Salimata, transie de frayeurs, fut apportée un soir à son fiancé avec tam-tam et
chants. La lune jaune regardait dans les nuages, les réjouissances des noces
Brought to this marriage scene against her wishes, she is later unwilling to consummate the marriage. Baffi reminds her of the rapist who left her with mental scars by violating her after her initiation ceremony. However, tradition requires that since she has been married and the bridewealth has been paid, Salimata remain on her husband’s compound and help with the domestic duties. When Baffi dies three years later, his brother, Tiémokho, inherits her in accordance with tradition. In both circumstances, Kourouma criticizes tradition for its uncaring approach and its treatment of persons as objects:

The physical imprisonment that Salimata experiences twice, once when she must stay cloistered in her widow’s hut for three months, and again when she refuses to sleep with Tiémokho, symbolizes the imprisonment of the individual by traditional customs. Here, the tribe disregards the individual for what is seen as the larger, more important social custom. Of course, Salimata’s treatment is not typical of all traditionally arranged marriages. Kourouma purposely uses this negative slant to portray the traditionally arranged marriage at its worst. Salimata seems to have no choice but to escape this unbearable situation of “… l’excision, le viol, la séquestration, le couteau, les pleurs, les souffrances, les solitudes, toute une vie de malheur” (Kourouma, 46). She is forced to flee from her traditional environment: “Pour mener une vie de femme, il lui faut
s'évader de son village, de la tradition et choisir, elle-même, son partenaire dans la vie" (Kane 1982, 195). Salimata’s traditional environment fails to provide her with any sort of viable life.

At the end of her difficult journey thorough “les montagnes escaladées, les rivières passées, les forêts traversées” (Kourouma, 46), that represents her break with her traditional past, Salimata finds her reward: “C’était Fama, l’amour, une vie de femme mariée, la fin de la séquestration” (Kourouma, 47). In this new world to which she has escaped, she will choose her partner in life, Fama whom she sees for the first time dancing around a fire. Fama, equally pleased with Salimata calls her “la plus belle chose vivante de la brousse et des villages du Horodougou” (Kourouma, 47). Salimata’s second marriage, begins romantically as is more common in a modern union; they both choose one another based on their own desires, thus their actions reveal the shift in the cultural practices of African life. In traditional Africa before colonialism, Fama, of royal blood, would presumably have had a traditionally arranged marriage with a girl from a similar background. However, during the colonial period, much of the importance given to the traditional structures of African society had been undermined. It is indicative of larger social changes that Fama would simply marry a girl he fancies and, furthermore, a runaway who has been previously married.

Eventually infertility brings Salimata’s and Fama’s marital bliss to an end. “Fama rejoint, retrouvé, aimé et vécu, les jours de bonheur sortirent. Oui, Salimata vécut le bonheur pendant des semaines, des mois et des années qui se succédèrent, mais malheureusement sans enfant” (Kourouma, 51, emphasis mine). Although their marriage can be considered modern in certain regards, it still succumbs to traditional pressures concerning children and identity. For Fama, a child means the continuation of his lineage, the Doumbouya line. “Et l’enfant, si Allah l’accordait, il devrait être un
homme dont les millions d’années n’effaceront jamais les empreintes sur terre” (Kourouma, 44). Traditionally, boys are most coveted for this reason. Salimata craves to have a child to fulfill her motherly desire to love and nurture a child. But also motherhood is implicit to the traditional identity of a woman. "A la femme sans maternité manque plus que la moitié de la féminité" (Kourouma, 51). Salimata’s marabout also tells her, “Mais l’enfant pour une femme dépasse tout; le but de la vie est que naîsse un rejeton” (Kourouma, 77). According to Kane, “D’une part, la mentalité traditionelle voit dans la stérilité de la femme comme une forme d’inachèvement de sa personnalité” (1982, 195). Salimata’s desire to have a baby leads her to have a hysterical pregnancy which lasts two years and ends in shame and disappointment. Fama blames Salimata for their infertility. His opinion is also in line with the traditional belief that infertility is the woman’s fault. When Salimata does not conceive, Fama’s ardor for his wife begins to dissipate. They both pray and Salimata performs traditional religious sacrifices to promote their fertility, but to no avail. Thus, although Fama and Salimata have chosen to marry each other in accordance with more modern attitudes, they remain traditional in many of the ways in which they think and interact. His belief that it is Salimata who is infertile leads Fama to take prostitutes in the hopes of producing a child. “Parce que Fama se résigna à la stérilité sans remède de Salimata. Il alla chercher des fécondes et essaya (Ô honte) des femmes sans honneur de la capitale. Une première, une deuxième, une troisième. Rien n’en sortit” (Kourouma, 56). Fama becomes depressed and despondent until new hope is generated when he inherits the wives of his cousin, Lacina. He decides to marry the youngest of the two, Mariam, “une femme ayant un bon ventre, un ventre capable de porter douze maternités” (Kourouma, 135), in what is then his second marriage. This marriage, which is in accordance with
the tradition of inheriting his cousin’s wife, also has the traditional goal of producing children.

When Fama returns to town with Mariam, he introduces a life of polygamy to Salimata. Salimata first greets her co-wife happily, as she would be expected to do by tradition. However her true feelings of jealousy soon become apparent:

Salimata avait salué avec joie la coépouse et expliqué avec grand cœur et esprit qu’une famille avec une seule femme était comme un escabeau à un pied, ou un homme à une jambe; ça ne tient qu’en appuyant sur un étranger. Il ne fallait pas la croire, car ces tendresse et sagessedurèrent exactement neuf jours (Kourouma, 157).

On a rational level, Salimata accepts the concept of polygamy, although she is jealous of Mariam because she fears Mariam will become pregnant. Here again, we see a conflict in Salimata’s identity as a traditional, yet modern woman. Traditionally, a woman would accept polygamy as the natural way of “securing legitimate descendants” (Mair, 1969, 1). Salimata’s modern jealousy overrules her traditional logic that a co-wife is also useful in the household. However in Salimata’s and Mariam’s case, the discord is largely due to living arrangements in which Fama and his two wives share one little room with one creaking bed. According to Islam, a man must share his nights equally between his wives. However, the wives are also meant to have their own huts or at least their own rooms. Fama shares his nights between his wives, but the wife whose turn it is not then sleeps on the floor on a mat. Fama only half follows the law and, understandably, this sleeping situation is unacceptable to Salimata. “Donc, dans les ténèbres, quand Mariam et Fama couchèrent, le tara (le lit) grinça, Salimata hurla: ‘Le grincement m’endiable!’ . . .” (Kourouma, 158). Fama also ignores that according to Islam, a man can only have as many wives as he can financially afford (or up to four). Fama’s ignorance renders the polygamous situation unsuccessful. The narrator states that to resolve the menage à
trois difficultés, Fama could have bedded Mariam during the day when Salimata was absent, but that he did not because "La coutume l’interdisait" (Kourouma, 159). Fama only understands half of what custom forbids and for this, as well as for his inability to see clearly, Kourouma criticizes him:

Et Fama, que l’on connaissait toujours si ardent, devint dans cette affaire de mésentente entre les femmes, un attentiste. Il prétendait que la situation ressemblait à un taurillon sans corne ni queue; il ne savait pas comment la prendre, comment la terrasser. Tout ce qui se passait entre Mariam et Salimata avait été pourtant bien prévisible; on ne rassemble pas des oiseaux quand on craint le bruit des ailes. Et les soucis qui chauffaient Fama avaient été bien mérités; ils étaient l’essaim de mouches qui forcément harcèle celui qui a réuni un troupeau de crapauds (159).

Although Fama brings his misfortune on himself, it is also worth noting that Mariam, who previously lived in a polygamous marriage with Lucina and is a traditional country woman, does not complain about the sleeping arrangements, as does Salimata. The more modern Salimata does not adapt to the polygamous marriage and feels capable of voicing her dislike. This contrast shows Salimata’s shift in viewpoint from a traditional to a modern context.

The demise of Fama’s marriage with Salimata reveals his lack of understanding and perceptiveness, the same qualities which soon thereafter land him in detention, for his outspoken political involvement. Fama’s negative characteristics reveal the limits of traditional culture in a modern world. While Fama is in detention, Salimata shows her level-headedness and ability to adapt to circumstances. She begins to live with her marabout, Abdullahi, in the hopes of having a child. (Kourouma, 128) Fama realizes that his own foolishness has broken them up and that Salimata only stayed with him in the end because she could not stand to live with anyone else. Realizing that she has finally conquered her fear of men, Fama decides to leave her to her life, once he is out of
detention, and hopes that she will finally be happy. Even Mariam chooses to run off with another man. In the end, the traditionalism which Fama embodies has no place in the shifting cultural horizon. Salimata, with her traditionalism adapted to modernity, continues to find a way to survive and ensure a place in the future, whereas Fama and his entrenched traditionalism perish.

At the outset of Francis Bebey's *Le fils d'Agatha Moudio*, the protagonist, Mbenda is traditionally minded. At the age of six, Mbenda finds himself in the precarious situation of already being engaged to a girl who has not yet been conceived. "à l'âge de six ans, je me trouvais déjà fiancé, bien que ma future femme ne fût même pas encore conçue dans le ventre de sa mère" (Bebey, 27). This traditional situation arose when Mbenda's father, on his death bed, arranged a marriage for his son by asking his best friend, Tanga, to give his daughter to marry Mbenda, if ever one of his wives should have a girl: "La parole acquiert encore plus de puissance à l'heure de la mort, où les mots prennent l'allure d'ordres sacrés" (Bebey, 26). Bound by tradition, Mbenda accepts to marry Fanny, Tanga's first daughter, until further developments take place.

The introduction of Agatha Moudio, the modern element in his life, disrupts the previously peaceful, traditional events. Agatha goes to meet Mbenda in prison to bring him oranges and to introduce herself. She is extraordinarily beautiful, but has questionable moral values. Everyone in the village is convinced that she is well dressed because she frequents European men: "Elle connaît déjà l'homme'... 'Elle va tous les jours au quartier européen de la ville, c'est pour cela qu'elle est toujours bien habillée' " (Bebey, 18-19). However, her interest in Mbenda stirs his male desire and is enough to make him forget her bad reputation. Agatha is a modern girl who dresses well, frequents the modern town and is picked up in cars by her European lovers. Mbenda's
relationship with Agatha is a significant break with tradition since his future wife has already been chosen for him and also because Agatha is held in ill repute by all the fellow villagers. Agatha instigates a modern and unusual courtship. Drawn by his courage and his good looks, it is Agatha who first takes notice of Mbenda when he confronted the white hunters for recompense. "La voix du courage porte au cœur. Agatha était là. . . . Comme tout le monde, elle avait admité ma fermeté; plus que personne d'autre, elle avait apprécié mon torse nu brillant au soleil. . . (Bebey, 19). The first time she visits him at his home, Mbenda reports that she must have thrown a lot of salt into the fire in order to make it rain so hard that her visit would go unnoticed by the other villagers. Mbenda is at first concerned by what the other villagers, especially his mother, would say if they saw her in his hut and above all that his mother will find out. He knows that everyone disapproves of her and he is determined at first not to go against their traditional values. Very unconventionally, Agatha not only pursues marriage, but she even goes so far as to propose marriage to him.

The first time she speaks directly of her ideal conception of marriage to Mbenda, of finding personal fulfilment, she offers herself to him, "je cherchais peut-être un homme qui me rendrait heureuse comme jamais cela ne m'est arrivé . . . Mon avenir, ce sera désormais le tien, La Loi. Tu feras de moi ce que tu voudras, si tu veux me prendre pour épouse. . . " (Bebey, 36). However, when he shows his reluctance, she states plainly what their future will be: "Non, je vais te dire: c'est moi que tu épouseras, parce que tu m'aimes, et que moi je t'aime plus qu'aucune autre femme ne t'aimera jamais au monde" (Bebey, 37). Agatha's directness, along with her modern conception of marriage, makes Mbenda very uncomfortable, because tradition requires a woman to remain subserviant to man. Agatha's overt modernity frightens Mbenda:
Je ne sais quelle sensation désagréable parcourut d'un trait mon épine dorsale, comme la jeune fille parlait avec cet air plein d'assurance. J'eus un peu peur. Je me dis qu'avec une femme comme celle-là, l'avenir me réserverait sans doute, entre autres surprises, celle d'avoir à compter avec la personnalité très marquante de ma chère épouse. En somme, si j'acceptais Agatha, je veux dire, si j'acceptais de l'épouser, je m'engageais dans une vie à deux, telle que mes ancêtres n'en avaient jamais connu de pareille, tant il est vrai qu'ils pouvaient aussi bien, de leur temps, se passer de l'avis de leur femme quand ils ne voyaient pas la stricte utilité d'un tel avis (Bebey, 37).

Mbenda admits that he feels more comfortable remaining in the context of a traditional marriage. Furthermore, he sees no use for the modern equality between husband and wife and would just as soon not have to take into account Agatha's strong personality and modern ways. Tradition remains an important part of Mbenda's life. He is thus unwilling to commit such an abrupt break with tradition and he feels that neither would his fellow villagers:

La femme africaine des temps modernes, elle, a quelque chose à dire. Je lui souhaite de placer son opinion à l'endroit opportun de la conversation, afin que son mari, civilisé à cent pour cent, tienne compte de l'avis exprimé par elle. Tout le monde doit profiter du progrès. Mais dans notre village, du temps où j'affrontais le grave problème de prendre femme, les choses n'en étaient pas encore arrivées à ce stade élevé de la civilisation européenne, qui prône sans réserve l'égalité entre les hommes et les femmes d'ici-bas. Tant s'en fallait. C'est ainsi que, réalisant soudain que je n'avais aucun désir de jouer les grands pionniers de l'expansion de la femme africaine, j'arrivai à me convaincre qu'Agatha, même si je l'aimais beaucoup, n'était peut-être pas la femme qu'il me fallait vraiment, dans le contexte de notre petit village (Bebey, 37-8).

Mbenda does not wish to be a revolutionary initiator of modernity. Despite that he loves Agatha, he avoids making the decision of whether or not to marry her. He believes that whom one marries does not depend on personal choice but rather on the views of relatives and community elders. Although orphaned by the death of Agatha's mother and Mbenda's father, Mbenda does not, as does Agatha, view this as sufficient excuse to break with tradition: "cela ne signifie nullement que nous soyons seuls au monde, et autorisés..."
à prendre ma décision quelconque au sujet de notre mariage: il reste tout de même nos familles respectives à consulter" (Bebey, 38-9). However, Mbenda’s insistence on the incompatible nature of Agatha’s modernity with his own views is an excuse he uses when he chooses to ignore the love he feels for her and comply with tradition by marrying Fanny.

Mbenda’s choice of whom to marry is ultimately influenced by social pressures. The first most obvious pressure comes from the emotional blackmail of his mother who states that if Mbenda does not respect his father’s wish that he should marry Fanny then his father will not rest in peace, “Un acte indécent de [sa] part rouvrirait les yeux de [son] père dormant dans sa tombe, et troublerait la paix de son sommeil éternel” (Bebey, 51). Furthermore, although the elders tell him that it is his choice whom he will marry, “tu es libre de choisir ton propre chemin” (Bebey, 61), they have made it clear to him that the traditional path would be to let them choose his wife. The chief, Mbaka, states clearly the role of the elders in traditional spouse choice:

‘Nous allons te marier. C’est notre devoir de te marier, comme cela a toujours été le devoir de la communauté de marier ses enfants. Mais, si, à l’exemple de certains jeunes gens d’aujourd’hui, tu crois que tu peux mener à bien, tout seul, les affaires de ton propre mariage, nous sommes prêts à te laisser les mains libres, et à ne plus nous occuper de toi dans ce domaine-là’ (Bebey, 60).

And although the chief of the village seems to say that Mbenda has a free choice, Mbenda recognizes that a decision not to marry Fanny would, in effect, result in banishment from his village:

Je compris: j’étais au carrefour des temps anciens et modernes. Je devais choisir en toute liberté ce que je voulais faire, ou laisser faire. Liberté toute théorique, d’ailleurs, car les anciens savaient que je ne pouvais pas choisir
Mbenda chooses to stay integrated in his traditional village and thus complies with his mother and the elders by accepting to take Fanny as his wife.

That Fanny is still a child, (she is thirteen and he is twenty-two,) becomes an excuse not to consummate the marriage. He thus justifies his secret liaison with Agatha, before as well as after his marriage to Fanny. While Mbenda does do what is traditionally expected of him in marrying Fanny, by choosing to continue his relationship with Agatha, and by marrying her, he responds to two opposing needs in himself. His polygamous marriage to Fanny and Agatha represents a synthesis in the two sides of Mbenda:

This synthesis is symbolized by the harmony he enjoys with his two wives, for they correspond to conflicting definitions of himself. The young Fanny has been chosen for him in an agreement between his dying father and her father . . . ; his marriage to her was arranged by negotiations among the elders, and it signalled his integration into a traditional world order. In contrast, the temperamental Agatha is a modern African woman who initiated him into the pleasures of sexual intimacy, and he chose to marry her in a gesture that proclaimed his freedom to pursue romantic happiness (Bjornson, 266).

While on the one hand, Maa Médi and most of the community shun Mbenda for choosing to marry Agatha, the elders recognize that he had complied with tradition by previously marrying Fanny. However, it is curious that the overly modern Agatha who espouses such strong attitudes towards having a modern monogamous marriage nevertheless accepts the status of second wife. In addition, it is unclear whether Mbenda's choice of marrying Agatha is modern or rather is traditional in that it upholds the practice of polygamy: “une tradition ancestrale à laquelle le temps, hélas, s'attaque avec
acharnement de nos jours: la polygamie" (Bebey, 172). In the shift in traditional
African culture to the more integrated modern culture, it is significant that the elders
would agree that Mbenda, having fulfilled his traditional obligations by marrying Fanny,
should be allowed to marry Agatha. Trying to convince Maa Médi of this, the chief states:

. . . La Loi aime une fille. Il se trouve que c’est, selon nous, une fille perdue.
Mais lui, il l’aime, et il voudrait l’épouser. Il nous a d’abord témoigné son
respect envers nous, en épousant une femme que nous lui ordonnions
pratiquement de prendre; mais il entend, de même, que nous respections sa
personnalité en acceptant le choix qu’il a fait, de son plein gré, d’épouser Agatha.
. . (Bebey, 157-158).

The result of Mbenda’s compromise to tradition in marrying Fanny, is met by the elder’s
acceptance of his wish to marry the modern Agatha. However, Maa Médi who represents
conservative traditionalism still rejects as inappropriate Mbenda’s choice of a second
wife. However, after Mbenda and Agatha are married and Agatha becomes pregnant, Maa
Médi’s attitude changes. She accepts Agatha once she has fulfilled the traditional duty of
producing Mbenda’s child.

The actions of the following characters exhibit the shifts between traditional and
modern attitudes: the traditional Mbenda becomes more modern in marrying Agatha; the
modern Agatha accepts a traditional polygamous marriage to Mbenda, the traditional
elders accept Mbenda’s choice for a second spouse; and Maa Médi eventually accepts the
modern Agatha. All testify to the changing cultural marital structures in Bebey’s
francophone colonial West Africa.

In the description of Ramatoulaye, the main character in Une si longue lettre, Bà
first shows a modern attitude toward marriage when Rama meets Moudou Fall at her
teaching school while they are both students. Far from a traditional introduction of a young African girl to her future husband, (as Salimata was led to Baffi in *Les soleils des indépendances*), Bâ describes Ramatoulaye’s encounter with Moudou Fall like a scene out of a Hollywood movie:

Moudou Fall, à l’instant où tu t’inclinais devant moi pour m’inviter à danser, je sus que tu étais celui que j’attendais. Grand et athlétiquement bâti, certes. Teint ambré dû à ta lointaine appartenance mauresque, certes aussi . . . .
Quand nous dansions, ton front déjà dégarni à cette époque se penchait sur le mien. Le même sourire heureux éclairait nos visages (Bâ, 24).

Their love is the modern “coup de foudre”, yet rationally justified by Ramatoulaye: “la découverte de [son] intelligence fine, de [sa] sensibilité enveloppante, de [sa] serviabilité, de [son] ambition qui n’admettait point la médiocrité” (Bâ, 24). Thus Rama chooses Moudou, freely based on their mutual affection and the strength of his individual qualities.

The modernity of Ramatoulaye’s courtship becomes evident in contrast to Rama’s mother’s preferences in the choice of a spouse for her daughter. Rama’s mother preferred Daouda Dieng and also believed in the traditional wisdom that “une femme doit épouser l’homme qui l’aime mais point celui qu’elle aime; c’est le secret d’un bonheur durable” (Bâ, 87). Daouda Dieng, a doctor, is well-to-do and “. . . savait en tirer profit” (Bâ, 28). He knows how to win the hearts of possible future mother-in-laws by offering presents to her as well as to Rama. Next to these enticements, the poor student, Moudou, has nothing to offer. Ramatoulaye’s mother also finds Moudou “trop beau, trop poli, trop parfait pour un homme. Elle parlait souvent de la séparation voyant de tes deux premières incisives supérieures, signe de primauté de la sensualité en l’individu. Que n’a-t-elle pas fait, dès lors, pour nous séparer?” (Bâ, 26). The
mother is suspicious of his charm, does not believe that mutual love can last and that love should therefore not be the foundation of marriage. Moreover, she is enticed by Daouda’s wealth and charm.

Rama is not lured by Daouda nor the rhetoric that a traditional marriage insures stability, instead she decides to marry for personal happiness and chooses Moudou, despite familial disapproval of him: “Notre mariage se fit sans dot, sans faste, sous les regards désapprouvateurs de mon père, devant l’indignation douloureuse de ma mère frustrée, sous les sarcasmes de mes sœurs surprises, dans notre ville muette d’étonnement” (Bâ, 28-9). Bâ describes the difficulty Rama encounters when she goes against tradition and marries the man she loves. Forced to forgo the traditional marriage celebrations, Rama is subjected to the disapproval of the entire community. Bâ clearly reveals the generational conflict between the modern and traditional attitudes toward marriage held by the younger generation and by their parents and community.

Bâ parallels Rama and Moudou’s experience with the marriage of their good friends Aissatou and Mawdo Bâ, who have “un mariage controversé” (Bâ, 30). This couple met by Moudou’s introduction. They also marry against parental consent; in their case it is against the wishes of Mawdo’s mother. Here the difference in the couple’s backgrounds creates the dispute. Aissatou is a goldsmith’s daughter and Mawdo comes from royalty; his mother is a princess from the Sine. Rama explains, “Mawdo te hissa à sa hauteur, lui fils de princesse, toi, enfant des forges” (Bâ, 31). However, unconcerned with these differences, Mawdo expresses his modern attitude that marriage is a personal choice (Bâ, 30). Also Mawdo commits and follows up on his choice with action: “Il souligna son adhésion totale au choix de sa vie, en rendant visite à (le père d’Aissatou), non à son domicile, mais à son lieu de travail” (Bâ, 30). Mawdo’s visits to
her father express his modern commitment to equality. Although Aissatou and Mawdo
live happily, his mother, called Aunty Nabou by Rama, meanwhile prepares for her
revenge for this untraditional marriage: "La mère de Mawdo, alors que nous vivions
décontractés, considérant ton mariage comme un problème dépassé, elle réfléchissait le
deuil, elle réfléchissait la nuit, au moyen de se venger de toi, la Bijoutière" (Bâ, 42-3).

Aunty Nabou, plans to regain her eldest son, who since the death of her husband is
the only, and most important man in her life: "Elle vouait une affection de tigresse à son
‘seul homme’, Mawdo Bâ. . . " (Bâ, 42). Rama describes her as a woman who “. . .
s'obstinait dans les vérités anciennes. Fortement attachée à ses origines privilégiées,
elle croyait ferme au sang porteur de vertus et répétaia . . . que le manque de noblesse à
la naissance se retrouve dans le comportement" (Bâ, 42). With her son having
denounced her traditional values and way of life by marrying beneath him, she seeks to
win him back to her and to what she sees as the right path. She therefore adopts a girl
and brings her up traditionally in order to provide the perfect marital match for her
son. When this young girl, her namesake modeled perfectly after herself, has reached
marrying age, aunty Nabou presents her to Mawdo. “Devant cette mère rigide, pétie de
morale ancienne, brûlée intérieurement par les féroces lois antiques, que pouvait Mawdo
Bâ?” (Bâ, 48). Bâ condemns entrenched traditionalism through the vitriolic language,
“rigide”, “pétie”, “brûlée” and “féroces” that Ramatulaye uses to describe aunty
Nabou. Pulled by tradition, Mawdo feels obliged to marry young Nabou to prevent his
mother from dying of shame: “Pense donc, la fille de son frère, élevée par ses soins,
rejetée par son fils. Quelle honte devant la société!” (Bâ, 48). Because Mawdo must
reconcile the gap that his marriage to Aissatou has created between their modern way of
life and his mother's traditions, he more than Aissatou, feels the conflict that arises
between modernity and tradition. Aissatou's parents accept her marriage to Mawdo and
he accommodates tradition by visiting them and offering them gifts. Also, given that she is marrying above her family, there would be less reason for her family to object to the union. Thus, she does not share the intensity of conflict that arises for Mawdo in their progressive union.

Mawdo tries to resolve the conflict between tradition and modernity through a polygamous marriage as prescribed by Islam and share his nights equally between his modern and his traditional wives. For Mawdo, this appears to be the perfect compromise between the two worlds. Since he is marrying Nabou only to please his mother, he expects Aissatou to accept this compromise as a rational solution. Mawdo seems capable of separating his heart and body as is necessary to maintain this polygamous marriage. However on principle, Aissatou cannot accept any form of compromise: "On ne brûle pas un arbre qui porte des fruits" (Bâ, 49). Those espousing traditional wisdom also try to convince her that her sons need their father and thus she should stay with Mawdo. "On te menaçait dans ta chair: 'Des garçons ne peuvent réussir sans leur père" (Bâ, 49). However, Rama states that, "Ces vérités, passe-partout, qui avaient jadis courbé la tête de bien des épouses révoltées, n'opérèrent pas le miracle souhaité; elles ne te détournèrent pas de ton option. Tu choisis la rupture, un aller sans retour. . . " (Bâ, 49). In the letter that Aissatou leaves Mawdo, she expresses her uncompromising adherence in the modern cultural progression that she has chosen.

'Les princes dominent leurs sentiments, pour honorer leurs devoirs. Les 'autres' courbent leur nuque et acceptent en silence un sort qui les brime.

Voilà, schématiquement, le règlement intérieur de notre société avec ses clivages insensés. Je ne m'y soumettrais point. Au bonheur qui fut nôtre, je ne peux substituer celui que tu me proposes aujourd'hui' (Bâ, 50).
For Aissatou, polygamy is an unacceptable substitute for the mutual affection and equal relationship that they once shared.

Choosing to look resolutely to the future, Aissatou leaves to begin a new, independent life: "Et tu partis. Tu eus le surprenant courage de t'assumer. Tu louas une maison et t'y installas. Et, au lieu de regarder en arrière, tu fixas l'avenir obstinément" (Bâ, 50). In her letter as well as in her actions of 'choosing to make a break', Aissatou shows that she will not be a victim of tradition, but rather is a modern agent of change, unafraid of independence.

When Ramatoulaye's husband takes a second wife, in an attempt to regain his youth, Rama's reaction is more of a compromise with tradition than is Aissatou's: "Partir? Recommencer à zéro après avoir vécu vingt-cinq ans avec un homme, après avoir mis au monde douze enfants? Avais-je assez de force pour supporter seule le poids de cette responsabilité à la fois morale et matérielle?" (Bâ, 61). Despite Rama's children's protests, she chooses to remain in the marriage and braces herself for a life of polygamy, sharing the husband with whom she once had an equal relationship based on mutual love and camaraderie. Her choice is based on necessity as well as on her convictions and feelings. Knowing that her youthful beauty has faded, she decides that all that is left to her is to stay in the polygamous marriage with a man whom she still happens to love. This choice is a "choix que ma raison refusait mais qui s'accordait à l'immense tendresse que je vouais à Moudou Fall" (Bâ, 69). Although Ramatoulaye remains vehemently opposed to polygamy and resolutely affirmed in her belief in modern monogamistic and moral structures, she reconciles herself to the situation and only forms what Mokwenyé terms a "passive resistance" (91). D'Almeida agrees with this contention and states, "Indeed, Ramatoulaye is progressive but not radical and her choices bear this out. For instance, she is fiercely against polygamy; yet she accepts it
implicitly by choosing to stay with Modu after her marries Binetou" (166). However, as Ramatoulaye resigns herself to polygamy, Moudou does not return to her, thus disregarding the tenets of a traditional polygamous marriage. Rama is effectively abandoned by her husband and left alone to cope with raising her children and running the household. Rama admits that she is not a fully modern woman, since she does not wish to live independently: "Je suis de celles qui ne peuvent se réaliser et s'épanouir que dans le couple. Je n'ai jamais conçu le bonheur hors du couple, tout en te comprenant, tout en respectant le choix des femmes libres" (Bâ, 82). Although Rama admits that she only can 'bloom' in a couple, she resolutely fend for herself and for her family as she painfully copes with loneliness. It may appear outwardly that Ramatoulaye chooses to conform to the traditional polygamous structure by remaining married to Moudou, however her "passive action" confirms her belief in monogamy: "Je reste persuadée de l'inévitable et nécessaire complémentarité de l'homme et de la femme. L'amour, si imparfait soit-il dans son contenu et son expression, demeure le joint naturel entre ces deux êtres" (Bâ, 129-130). Ramatoulaye thus chooses to remain faithful to the love she continues to feel for her husband even after he has rejected her, and after his death by refusing all suitors. When Ramatoulaye rejects tradition by refusing to remarry for security after Moudou's death, Farmata chastises Rama's modern attitude: "Tu te trouves des raisons. Tu parles d'amour au lieu de pain. Madame veut des sautillements dans le cœur. Pourquoi pas des fleurs comme au cinéma?" (Bâ, 101). Superficially Ramatoulaye appeared to accept a polygamous marriage, but her acceptance of it stems from a realistic assessment of the thirty years she has put into her marriage and the twelve children who she has had to support, coupled with her strong belief in monogamy and love. Despite their differing reactions, Aissatou and
Ramatoulaye remain the sole bastions of modern monogamy while their modern husbands convert at their convenience to the traditional marriage structure.

Although Ramatoulaye blames Aissatou's as well as her own husband for being weak and responding to their basest animal instincts in choosing to take two wives, she gives tradition some of the blame for their actions. When Mawdo tries to justify his polygamous union to Rama, she mocks his excuses and condemns them: "Il me demandait compréhension. Mais comprendre quoi? La suprématie de l'instinct? Le droit à la trahison? La justification du désir de changement? Je ne pouvais être l'alliée des instincts polygamiques" (Bâ, 53). However, she also gives some of the blame to their traditional heritage: "Nos maris, Aïssatou, si malheureuse que fût l'issue de nos unions, nos maris avaient de la grandeur. Ils avaient mené le combat de leur vie, même si la réussite leur échappait; on ne vient pas facilement à bout des pesanteurs millénaires" (Bâ, 106). Yet while Ramatoulaye can rationally understand some of the pressures put on their husbands to revert to traditional polygamy, it is essential to note that their second unions are very poor substitutes for their first marriages and thus their shift in attitudes from modern to traditional is at their own expense. Both husbands miss the depth of understanding and love that are unique to their first marriages and were the result of an equal commitment to one another. In his second marriage, Moudou can never live up to the demanding chides of Binetou to be young and stylish. Mawdo's second wife, young Nabou, fails to live up to the care and understanding of Aissatou. "...Il n'y a pas de comparaison possible entre toi et la petite Nabou, toi, si belle, si douce; toi, qui savais éponger le front de ton mari; toi, qui lui vouais une tendresse profonde, parce que désintéressée; toi, qui savais trouver des mots justes pour le délassier" (Bâ, 51).

Whereas Rama, Moudou, Aïssatou and Mawdo have to varying degrees qualities in them which can be considered both traditional and modern, two of Rama and Moudou's
children, Daba and Aissatou as well as their husbands, express purely modern ideas in regards to marriage. Daba's husband justifies sharing the domestic duties such as cooking with his wife by saying, "Daba est ma femme. Elle n'est pas mon esclave, ni ma servante" (Bâ, 107). Also Daba holds the very modern idea that if either of the partners in a marriage is dissatisfied then one or the other may end the union. "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?" (Bâ, 107). Although Rama's generation has had to find compromises between traditional and modern life, her children's generation feels free to choose a purely modern path.

Mariama Bâ's novel can be read as a condemnation of the traditional practice of polygamy. However upon further attention, it becomes apparent that while Bâ scathingly criticizes the institution of polygamy and the traditional structures that support it, she does not do so for its own sake. Rather her work is an attempt to resolve the conflict between tradition and modernity inherent in the structure of marriage and the family. Bâ, as with the previous two authors, does not attempt simply to condemn all aspects of traditional African culture. Rather, by shedding light on the harmful aspects of certain traditional practices and attitudes, Bâ hopes to renovate the culture, keeping the positive aspects of traditionalism and combining them with the positive aspects of modernity. As Bâ criticizes negative traditional practices, she also criticizes negative modern ones (for example, Daba's modern attitude that if a marriage no longer suits either one of the two spouses then they may end the union). Bâ seeks to create an improved African culture by instigating positive social change. She does not simply wish for her society to emulate modern western culture, instead she hopes to contribute in the progression of a neo-African culture, a mingling of the African old and new.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, the colonial experience creates a maelstrom of conflicts and tensions in the colonized nation. The French colonialists' desire to maintain and expand their empire in West Africa led to the imposition of their modern western culture onto traditional African culture. Therefore, once independence from the colonialists was achieved, the indigenous populations were left the task of coming to terms with an alien way of life and integrating it into their traditional world. In the following passage, Patrick Manning remarks on the significance of these two cultures being forced together and the ensuing biculturalism:

A century ago European and African cultures faced each other in conflict and contradiction. White was distinct from black, and the powerful were distinct from the weak. Europeans and Africans differed in language, religion, economic system, and in their visions of the future. . . . European conquerors, and many Africans as well, could see only two alternatives before them. Either Africans would retain their old ways but remain permanently weak and under the thumb of Europe, or Africans would give up their old ways and assimilate to the ways of Europe.

In fact, neither alternative took place. Out of the conflict there emerged new cultural syntheses. Both European and African traditions have bent and accommodated to the pressures of the other (18).

In the three novels discussed in this paper, the authors attempt to prescribe methods of adjusting to the cultural changes caused by the confrontation of the European and African cultures. Cultural-change is the salient feature of these three works and for this, according to Obiechina, they are characteristic West African novels: "It
is the overwhelming awareness that the old traditional culture with its attendant values is breaking up and is being replaced by a new culture with emergent values which has made culture-change the all-pervasive theme in the West African novel” (1975, 263). Yet, whether the cultural transformation that has occurred as a result of colonialism is a “cultural synthesis” of the European and African cultures, as Manning would have it (18), or a “breaking up” of the old and a replacement with the new (Obiechina, 1975, 263) is still a matter for debate. By creating models for specific cultural transformations in the realms of the social world, education and marriage, these three authors confront these changes and form a particular cultural vision based on an amalgam of traditional and modern structures.

Kourouma conveys his image of the cultural displacement of the traditional Fama in post-independent Africa through the three themes analyzed in this paper. In the general social realm, Fama is displaced on many levels: work, clan, place [in society and in his domicile], and family. He is depicted in constant conflict with the evolving old and new social orders. Fama is no longer respected as a prince among the villagers, and in town he is reduced to singing at ceremonies in order to earn a living.

In the modern world, Fama's traditional education fails to secure him a place due to his illiteracy. His traditional upbringing has no relevancy in modern Africa. Instead, it is the western educated elite of Africans who dominate the social and political worlds. Kourouma depicts a two-tiered system of education that produces an elite of western schooled Africans who rule the country while the traditionally educated Africans are left behind.

Fama's initial marriage is one that is based on modern attitudes in that he chooses
his wife, but this prevents him from being able to successfully manage a reversion to a more traditional polygamous marriage.

Unable to secure a sense of identity, Fama resorts to fulfilling the prophecy of dying in his native land. However, far from Fama's death being disregarded, as might be expected if his world had become completely modernized by colonial ideas, the strong hold of tradition is displayed in the reaction with which his death is met: "Tout le Horodougou était inconsolable, parce que la dynastie Doumbouya finissait. . . . Les hommes priaient pour le dernier Doumbouya, les femmes pleuraient" (Kourouma, 202). The novel ends in the same way in which it began, with the death of a Malinké. This creates a circular pattern in the text by the repetition of the same passage that began it, an essential element in traditional West African storytelling:

Un Malinké était mort. Suivront les jours jusqu'au septième jour et les funérailles du septième jour, puis se succéderont les semaines et arrivera le quarantième jour et frapperont les funérailles du quarantième jour et . . . (Kourouma, 205).

Although Fama dies, traditionalism is depicted as living on. In form and content, Kourouma creates a distinctly African text that encapsulates his message for modern Africa: if traditional and modern Africa are to have a place in the future, a way must be found of integrating the two. Salimata is depicted as managing to adapt to the modern world while maintaining much of her traditional nature. In contrast, Kourouma slights both Fama, for failing to adapt to the modern world, and also the elite postcolonial Africans, for failing to integrate tradition with change. According to Kourouma, insuring modern Africa’s place in the future means finding creative ways of integrating tradition with modernity, as he himself has done in the form and content of his novel. In the style
of *Les soleils des indépendances*, Kourouma finds a place for tradition in modern Africa and in so doing creates a distinctly African vision for the future.

Bebey's novel, *Le fils d'Agatha Moudio*, although written in 1967 in post-independent Africa, has colonial Cameroon and its changing cultural environment as subject matter. By explaining the arduous process integrating modern European values into traditional African culture in the history of a traditional village, Bebey is striving to set some guidelines as to the form cultural progression and traditionalism should take in the future.

Using the three themes of social structure, education and marriage, Bebey proposes models for cultural transition. In the general social realm, Bebey argues that the laws of both colonial and African worlds must be respected if traditional and modern influences are to peacefully coexist in modern Africa. Reconciliation of the two social worlds is also exemplified in the themes of education and marriage. In the area of education, Mbenda has been formed both by his traditional community and also by the modern influences of the colonial town and the modern Agatha. The intermingling of these two schools inform his decisions. In marriage, Mbenda's successful polygamous marriage to the traditional Fanny and the modern Agatha is a symbol of the marriage of European and African values.

Bebey's vision of the importance of both traditional and modern values in Africa is encapsulated in the powerful example of Agatha's mulatto baby, an obvious symbol of the coming together of African and European worlds. Acting on the traditional wisdom of his elder, Mbenda hopes to pass on to this child the knowledge of life that he himself has received from his traditional community. In accepting this child as his own, he chooses to remain integrated into his community and takes up his role in preserving tradition.
This act, in the final passage, reconciles Mbenda, who has become more progressive throughout the story, with a traditionalism that itself has also evolved to meet the changing environment. According to Bjornson:

As the modern world encroaches upon traditional society, Bebey admits that cultural practices must change in response to changing circumstances and improved knowledge, but he insists that the insights themselves need to be retained. . . .

All the major characters in his novels confront the opposition between modern and traditional values, and each of them ultimately synthesizes a hybrid world view that resembles Senghor's "cultural cross-fertilization." (263).

Bebey's vision of cultural reconciliation hopes to carry modern African into the future. Bebey subscribes to the same political message as Kourouma, that in order to preserve some form of the traditional world in modern Africa, there must be a reconciliation of old and new cultures.

As demonstrated in the previous chapters of this paper, Ramatoulaye's transformation in attitude from the beginning to the end of Une si longue lettre can be seen as a reconciliation of some traditional practices with those modern ones in which she firmly believes in the realms of social relationships, education and marriage.

In the social world, Ramatoulaye calls for the incursion of modernity into many traditional, patriarchal customs. While remaining integrated into her Senegalese society, Ramatoulaye hopes to improve the status of women and rid her society of injustices.

Although Ramatoulaye believes that a modern education is essential in freeing the individual from the control of the traditional community, by the end of the novel, she has grown in appreciation for traditional moral values and their place in modern education.
Ramatoulaye concludes that a reconciliation in modern and traditional educational practices would be the best way forward for modern Africa.

In the area of marriage, Ramatoulaye forms a criticism of polygamy. Although she felt forced to accept the polygamous marriage imposed on her by her husband, she remains adamant in her belief in modern monogamy and idealizes its significance for society:

C'est de l'harmonie du couple que naît la réussite familiale, comme l'accord de multiples instruments crée la symphonie agréable.

Ce sont toutes les familles, riches ou pauvres, unies ou déchirées, conscientes ou irréfléchies qui constituent la Nation. La réussite d'une nation passe donc irrémédiablement par la famille (Bâ, 130).

And while, according to Makward, this belief in the importance of the strength of the family to society is not progressive in and of itself, "what was new, however, was the notion that marriage was above all based on the choice and initial attraction of the two principal partners" (275). Ramatoulaye's reconfirmation that "Elle] reste persuadée de l'inévitable et nécessaire complémentarité de l'homme et de la femme" (Bâ, 129), reaffirms her modern belief in monogamy and that if both partners respect it, it will contribute to the success of the family and to the Nation.

In the final passage of Bâ's text, Ramatoulaye also reconfirms the indelible mark of certain aspects of traditionalism in her life that she seems to have 'returned home' to. In her letter, Ramatoulaye anticipates seeing Aissatou the next day and wonders if:

- Plus commode, diras-tu. Mais, je ne te suivrai pas. Je t'étalerai une natte. Dessus, le grand bol fumant où tu supporteras que d'autres mains puissent (Bâ, 130).
Ramatoulaye is sure that Aissatou, returning from America where she now lives, will prefer the modern accoutrements to traditional African practices. Ramatoulaye's insistence on presenting her friend with traditional way of dining shows that she, having remained African in lifestyle, is more comfortable with these practices. Ramatoulaye's preferences expressed in this passage show that adapting to progressive attitudes need not necessarily mean parting with one's cultural heritage. Being modern does not equate with being western, as Ramatoulaye has demonstrated by remaining modern, yet distinctly African.

One leaves Bâ's novel with the same sense of reconciliation between the old and the new that has been expressed in Kourouma's and Bebey's novels, however in Bâ's novel the reconciliation has been in the opposite direction. She reconciles traditional practices with her preexisting modern believes while Kourouma's and Bebey's characters are compelled to adopt more modern structures onto their preexisting traditional ones.

These three texts, *Les soleils des indépendances*, *Le fils d'Agatha Moudio*, and *Une si longue lettre*, attest to the strong hold that both traditional and modern ways of life have on modern West and Central Africa. In the progression of the stories, the strife that initially exists between individuals who embody the opposing modern and traditional cultures gives way in varying degrees to reconciliation. What emerges from these novels is a new understanding of the continuity of tradition and the integration of change in the modern francophone African worlds. Kourouma, Bebey and Bâ are striving not only to reflect the changes in their societies, but also contributing to creating models for a modern Africa and thereby ensuring its survival in the future. They share the common
vision of the integration of traditional and modern worlds in Africa. Kourouma, Bebey
and Bâ are in this way successful in their contribution to the creation of a neo-African
culture, a mingling of the African old and new.
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