A WRITING FOR SYNTHESIS IN LES SOLEILS DES INDEPENDANCES

A Thesis

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by

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INTRODUCTION

Set in post colonial West-Africa (probably the Ivory Coast), Ahmadou Kourouma’s *Les Soleils des Indépendances* was published in 1968, eight years after most African countries achieved independence. A general euphoria had reigned in countries like the Ivory Coast when independence was declared in 1960, for many people expected a utopian era to follow the long period of colonial rule. However, their expectations remained unfulfilled. This new political reality and its consequences constitute the subject matter of *Les Soleils des Indépendances*. In particular, the novel focuses upon the story of a middle-aged couple, Fama and Salimata, who have remained childless after twenty years of marriage. Their sterility symbolizes the unfulfilled promise of their past experience and their inability to cope with the present.

The newly established governments did not deliver the promise they had held out to their citizens. In response to the disillusionment that followed, many writers began to depict the harsh realities of political independence. Collectively, their works have come to be known as the "new realism" -- a realism that is intimately related to the new political reality of contemporary Africa. For Fama and Salimata, the new reality means a life of poverty, spent in the capital city, far from their respective native villages.

The title quite literally refers to the days of independence. In Malinke, one of the principal African languages spoken in this region, days are referred to as "suns". The Malinke people live in an area that roughly corresponds to the northwestern region of present-day Guinea. Thus, a border created at the time of independence artificially divides the Malinke people. Such consequences of independence play an important role in Kourouma’s novel.
Particularly noteworthy in this respect is an allusion to the alleged political plot to overthrow the government of Félix Houphouët-Boigny. This presumed plot of 1963 was later, in 1970, officially declared as never having taken place. Nevertheless, at the time, several people were detained and imprisoned. Fama, the main protagonist in the novel, is one of the victims of this supposed new event. Although Kourouma never explicitly links this incident with Fama’s situation and the publisher denies any resemblance between fact and fiction, situations like this one reveal how Kourouma’s narrative often closely parallels real life.

Instead of the utopia it promised, African independence ushered in a new reality of chaos and confusion, disillusionment and bitterness, poverty and obscene wealth. The need for survival and the desire for riches both bred a tension created by the expectations generated by independence. The discovery of the harshness of this constitutes the background for Kourouma’s writing. He is "unécrivain engagé" in the limited sense that he is profoundly concerned with the political reality that is entwined with the story of the protagonist in his novel. But cultural and traditional history play as much a part in the narrative of the couple as does political history. Although Kourouma’s treatment of the narrator results in condemnation of some traditional ways and in the critique of some political consequences of independence as they relate to the two protagonists, he never offers solutions or espouses specific political positions. Les Soleils is a literary production, and its primary concern revolves around the human, personal history of two individuals within the framework of a society that is trying to come to grips with a unique problem, i.e. the need to forge a new and viable sense of identity.

An integration of African and European values is perhaps necessary in this endeavor. Many times, characters use the term "les Africains" to indicate a sense of identification with all African people, an identification that goes beyond the immediate and the local. Modern Africa shares much of its history, for colonialism and the struggle for independence was similar in many parts of the continent. Thus, the major issues raised in this novel are sufficiently general to warrant their extension to the rest of Africa. In fact, many of them have a universal significance that is
relevant to similar problems in other parts of the world as well.

An analysis of the two protagonists in *Les Soleils* enables us to envision the possibility for a synthesis in the cultural sense between an African and European heritage. Symbolically the solution to the sterility of the couple applies to a universal post-independence Africa. "Writing for Synthesis", the title chosen for this thesis, can be understood within this larger framework. However, my discussion will be limited to the two protagonists in *Les Soleils*. Focusing on their differences and interpreting their sterility will permit a synthesis within the bounds of the problem explored by Kourouma.

Several critical articles have appeared immediately following the publication of Kourouma's novel in 1968. Some of them are no more than summaries of the novel. Articles by Christophe Dailly, Bernard Magnier and Jean Cléo Godin fall into this category, whereas Ch.-G. Wondji's article "Le Contexte Historique" goes a bit farther in the sense that it seeks to establish an historical-philosophical context within which the plot summary can be understood.

A second group of essays by writers like Thérèse Dufeil, Frederic Michelman, Kwabena Britwum, J.-P. Gourdeau, and Aloysius U. Ohaegbu, treat specific themes of the novel, particularly the failure of independence and the victimization of Africans by the history that has been imposed on them. General aspects of the novel, such as sterility and illegitimacy, are discussed in studies by Harris Memel-Fôtê and Emile Langlois, who contend that the sterility theme echoes the general mood of despair in postcolonial Africa, although he also points out that the novel sustains an ironically humorous tone throughout.

More specific in their approach to *Les Soleils* is a group of articles that deal with narrative structure, or the process of writing. For example Evelyne Lavergne ascribes an "authenticité romanesque" to the novel and links it to the tradition of what she terms, the Western rationalist novel. Others, like Gérard- D. Lezou and Jean Derive have examined various elements of the African tradition in Kourouma's novel, elements that include myth, legend and orality. Rosemary Schikora, Adrien
Huonnou, and Kester Echenim place particular emphasis on the oral traditions that shape the persona of the narrator and establish the novels unique narrative register.

One comprehensive study was published in 1985 under the title *Comprendre "Les Soleils des Indépendances"*, written by Jean-Claude Nicolas. This very complete study reviews multiple aspects of the novel and concludes that, as a literary work, its originality prevents it from being judged by traditional Western modes of literary criticism. My own approach focuses on the couple’s sterility and on Salimata’s hope for a child. Symbolically, their personal problem and its solution signifies both the impasse of the new African states and the hope for a new identity through a cultural "métissage," i.e., a synthesis between the values of the colonized and the ex-colonizers. Unlike Nicolas, I do not believe that the principle of hope for the future is vested in socialism.

Kourouma’s narrative develops a human perspective, that is far broader than the political one suggested by Nicolas, as the couple’s personal history testifies. However, I do agree with Nicolas when he contends that the novel is an affirmation of the desire to make a specifically African contribution to literature "le livre témoigne de la volonté de réafricaniser la littérature ... un African osait africaniser le français pour parler sa langue. Le geste ne répondait pas une intention de provocation mais à une exigence intérieure." (Nicolas 177) The fusion of various linguistic elements in the novel thus echo the perceived need for a synthesis of European, Western, and African ways of thinking about the world.

For Nicolas, Salimata is an incarnation of the African woman, absorbed by social and domestic duties. Her time is the present, the real, yet he sees her as an hysterical. In my opinion, such a judgement reflects a somewhat shortsighted view of Kourouma’s female protagonist. As I shall argue in Chapter II, her importance becomes apparent when we grasp Emmanuel Lévinas’ understanding of time and apply it to the narrative, for we will then be able to see that time is capable of becoming an enactment of love, an evolutionary process, and this is precisely the way in which Salimata views it.
METHODOLOGY

In the process of my analysis I became aware that Kourouma created a dialectic of opposites, a dialectic between orality and literacy, between the past and the present, between cultural and individual imperatives, between the feminine and the masculine, and ultimately between hope and despair. Out of this dialectic of opposites grows the awareness of the possibility for synthesis. Through the narration, Kourouma makes choices which point toward this possibility. It is through the character of the male protagonist, Fama, that the past makes its crushing presence felt, within the framework of a patriarchal structure. For this reason, I have chosen a psychoanalytical approach to come to understand Fama, whose name in Malinke means chief.

Because this protagonist manifests an inability to gain access to the symbolic order, I have chosen to adopt a Lacanian approach to the interpretation of his character. The Lacanian model of psychoanalysis stresses the role of language in the functioning of the symbolic. In the analysis of Kourouma’s male protagonist, it becomes clear that the imaginary acquires a greater and greater importance for him. Indeed, it is the denial of access to the symbolic that explains Fama’s need to seek refuge in the imaginary.¹ During the course of the first chapter, the specific role and function of the imaginary in Fama’s psyche will be discussed in detail.

However, justice cannot be done to Salimata by a psychoanalytical approach because it would lead to mere psychoanalytical labeling. One could build a case of hysteria around her character, as Nicolas does in his critical study of the novel, but such an approach would not do justice to her story, because it does not explain her significance in the total framework of the novel. However, an approach based on a

¹ The imaginary and symbolic in Lacan can be roughly equated with the Freudian terminology of the id and superego. However, in Lacan the interaction of these structures is much more fluid than in Freud, owing to Lacan’s focus on language. For a theoretical understanding of these two concepts, see Jacques Lacan. *Encrits*. Pages 11, 25, 31, 52, 68-70, 149, 276, 349-350, 383, 437, 463-464, 546, 554, 670, 728.
phenomenological understanding of time will allow me to reveal the full complexity of her character and to clarify the symbolic importance of her role in the novel. She embodies hope for those who are afflicted with her particular dilemma (sterility). By extension, she also represents a positive movement in the dialectic between hope and despair. In fact, the dilemma of this couple can best be understood in terms of such a dialectic. Just as her husband embodies the past and the despair of a traditional African chief, she represents hope for the future. The analysis in this thesis demonstrates how this dialectic emerges.

My understanding of Salimata will be based on a reading of Emmanuel Lévinas’ *Le Temps et l’Autre*. The key concept for my purposes is his understanding of time as "une nouvelle naissance." Time in this sense does not imply a linear concept of past, present and future. On the contrary, time as a new birth accomplishes itself through the experience of maternity, through the hope for a child, and it is this hope that becomes Salimata’s "raison d’être." In order to place this hope into the context of Lévinas’ concept of time, Chapter two of this thesis will be devoted to a detailed discussion of the problem as he presents it.

THE NARRATIVE BACKGROUND OF THE NOVEL’S SYMBOLIC CONTENT.

The story of Kourouma’s novel unfolds in the postcolonial "République des Ebènes" and tells the story of Fama, a middle-aged Malinke prince, who has been impoverished by the economic and political realities of the the post-independence era. He and his wife, Salimata, live in a lower-class neighbourhood of the capital city, which in many ways resembles Abidjan. Fama has been reduced to begging at various Muslim ceremonies. In fact, *Les Soleils* opens on such a scene -- a Muslim ceremony that takes place on the occasion of the burial of a fellow Malinke.

In contrast to her husband, Salimata makes an honest living by selling rice and soup at the various construction sites in the city; she also cares for her husband and cooks for him. Her most absorbing preoccupation is her desire for a child.
Concerned about her apparent inability to conceive, she consults the marabout Abdoulaye on many occasions in the hope of curing her sterility. One night he nearly rapes her, but she stabs him in the shoulder in self-defense.

Her story is one of pain, but it is also one of generosity and courage. Having barely survived an excision (a clitorectomy performed during the rite of initiation from childhood to adulthood) that had been followed by two rapes, she escaped to the city and joined Fama, whom she had briefly met in her native village during a festival. They had noticed each other immediately, and the attraction she felt toward him as the result of this first encounter had been strong enough to motivate her solitary flight through the bush in search of him. After Fama was jailed, she lived with Abdoulaye, the marabout, and hopes to have a child with him.

In the end, Salimata's life becomes one of violence and courage, functioning as a tale that clearly condemns traditional ways. At the same time, the narrative exemplifies the possibility of overcoming psychological scarring. She herself transcends the confines of village life and embraces life in the city. She does not nurse old wounds and succeeds, by living life fully and by acting on her desire for a child, for her decision to live with Abdoulaye gives her a chance at motherhood. This chance does not exist as long as she remains with Fama, for twenty years of marriage with him have left her childless. The fact that she can live with, and desire, a man other than Fama, means that she has transcended the experience of the rapes, which had previously left her unable to have a relationship with any other man besides him. She had met Fama initially before the excision and the rapes, in other words, before the trauma of her initiation into adulthood. By stabbing the marabout, when he too is about to rape her, she rids herself of her fear of men and thus opens herself to the desire for men and the possibility of conceiving a child. Her ability to forge ahead, and to seek a solution for her personal problem, allows her to focus on the future, and to sustain her hope for a child.

Part two of this three-part novel occupies a central position, in a symbolic as well as in a literal sense. Although the action moves forward, the contents of this
middle section suggest a return to the past, for they revolve around the burial ceremonies of Fama’s cousin, Lacima, who had replaced him as acting chief of the Doumbouya tribe in the village of Togobala. (an actual village on the border of the Ivory Coast and Guinea) In this part of the novel, Fama travels to his native village, where a dying way of life is evoked, one which the two authority figures in the village try to revive by attempting to convince Fama to remain there and to assume his traditional role as chief.

The main action in this second part of the novel is the actual burial of Lacima. With the burial ceremony as principal "actant", this section explores the content of a way of life. In particular, it clarifies the way in which tribal values structured legitimate rule in traditional society and explains why this system can no longer function. Togobala is now part of the Republic of Nikinai (Guinea) where a representative of the official regime presides over the village. As a result, Fama, the hereditary chief, must content himself with a titulary position, next to the appointed committee members of the one- and- only party.

The third and final part of the novel takes Fama back to the capital city. He brings a new second wife with him, for she was part of his inheritance from his dead cousin. Forced to share her home and bed with this new younger wife, Salimata cannot adapt to the situation. Required by custom to be present when her husband of twenty years makes love to the new wife on alternate nights, she is haunted by her desire to bear a child. She cannot tolerate the presence of another woman in her bed.

At this time, Fama throws himself into politics and joins a group of old political cronies. In this way, he escapes the reality of his inability to father a child and suppresses an awareness of the discord in his household. But his political involvement eventually results in his detainment and imprisonment on the pretext that he failed to report an ominous dream involving the country’s prime minister. Some time later, in a reconciliatory gesture, he and the other detainees are released and pardoned by the government. Although the former prisoners are offered large sums of money and promises of positions in the government, Fama turns his back on such
bribes.

For the first time in his life, Fama has the opportunity to realize his lifelong ambition of obtaining an important position as head of a "coopérative", a position that would enable him to have the recognition and money he has always wanted. But he foregoes this prospect to return to Togobala. Why does he return to the village of his birthplace at his crucial time? On the basis of his comments in part two, we know that Fama does not believe in a reconstruction of the old way of life. It is true that he is ill. His health has been seriously affected by the time he spent in prison. As an amnestied former prisoner, he could receive free medical care; however he decides instead to travel to Togobala to die. It is a symbolic act. He wants to preside over his village as tribal chief during the final days of his life. The only positive element in this choice is not to see Salimata again. He does not want to remind her of his presence so that she can have a chance at motherhood with the marabout, for Fama has been told that she and Abdoulaye have made peace and that Salimata has overcome the trauma of the excision and the events that followed it.

Toward the end of the novel, the government of the Ebony Coast undergoes a purge, during which the prime minister hangs himself and paranoia reigns among the people. The new prime minister praises values like brotherhood, humanity, caring, and forgiveness. In his eyes, the new government represents a benevolent paternalistic hierarchy in which the people are like children, the nation like a mother, and the new economic program is like the mother’s lover. Yet his words hardly reassure the people, for the impression that he leaves at the political level is one of uncertainly, fear, and renewed oppression.

In such a political atmosphere, Fama is essentially castrated, infertile, ineffective politically and economically. His castration must be understood as an inability to participate in the new order of things, as it takes shape within the context of the postcolonial era. Unable to carve out a place in life for himself in the city, Fama decides to return to Togobala, in the Republic of Nikinai. Denied access to Nikinai by the border patrol, he disregards their warning and attempts to cross the border on
foot by running across the bridge. When the border patrol shoots at him, he runs under the bridge and into the river, where a cayman (crocodile) mortally wounds him. His choice to cross the bridge and to leap to his death is a final heroic attempt to go home. But he cannot go home again. He dies the death of a romantic hero, who, in the face of his own solitude, manages to salvage a modicum of dignity and pride. It is an heroic act in the face of an overwhelmingly hostile world.

Fama is the last symbolic defender of dignity, in the sense given to the word by the old tribal ways. His crossing of the bridge might be regarded as unavoidable, but he himself consciously chose to return to his native village and to die. He did not know that the crocodiles would attack him. According to the myths of his tribe, he was supposed to be invulnerable to them. However, the old symbolic order no longer functions in the modern environment. Nature echoes the confusion of an upside-down world, in which the center has been displaced while a new order is slowly taking shape. Fama knows that he is the last surviving prince of his tribe and that his death signals the end of the lineage.

He knows the meaning of his gesture because the myth of the origin of his people, the Doumbouyas, contained an implicit explanation of it. Thus, in the final scene of his life, he is identifying himself completely with the legend and myth that surround his tribal origins. He functions completely on the level of the imaginary. As Fama evolves in his attempt to understand what is happening to him, he becomes more and more withdrawn. He never understands, but in the process of his attempt to understand, the reader is given the case history of a castrated African chief. The old tribal ways are dying, and when the chief of the Doumbouya is no more, a way of life has died with him. An era in history has come to an end, and Kourouma has chronicled it in the life of his male protagonist in *Les Soleils des Indépendances*. 
CHAPTER I. FAMA

1.1 FAMA CASTRATED BY HIS FELLOW MALINKE

In the opening chapter of Les Soleils, Fama is compared to a "molosse" (watchdog), one who watches over Malinke traditions and who wants to defend the honor of his caste. As a Malinke prince, his totem is the panther, but this prince has been reduced to the status of a dog, one dependent on others for his survival. Like many other merchants, his livelihood is dependent upon gifts distributed at the burial ceremonies in the capital. Nevertheless, he wants to be recognized as a Malinke prince, and he demands the respect due such a personage. When given a chance to speak, Fama bores his audience at the mosque. We are not given the content of his speech, but we know that he cites numerous proverbs, and that his address is interrupted by the coughing of an old "griot", and that he is finally ordered to sit down by Bamba: "Assois tes fesses et ferme la bouche! Nos oreilles sont fatiguées d'entendre tes paroles! (14)." Ultimately he is forced to stop talking as the assembled Muslims rise in an uproar when Fama and Bamba prepare for a physical confrontation.

The important thing to note here is that the issue is not so much what Bamba says, but rather the display of assurance and manhood on his part: "le fils de chien de Bamba montrait trop de virilité! Il fallait le honrir, l'empoigner, le mordre (14)." While eulogizing the dead, the "griot" questions whether Fama, now reduced to begging, hassling and seeking to conceal his dishonor, has anything in common with the other descendants of the great military families of the Malinke. Fama insists on

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2 A. Kourama. Les Soleils des Indépendances. Paris: Seuil, 1970. All subsequent quotations will be from this edition and are included between parenthesis in the text.
being respected as if he were still a great prince, and although these accusations ring true, he interprets them as a personal attack.

Fama has obviously lost the respect of his fellow Malinke. Under these circumstances, he sees himself less viril than an ordinary little man. He takes himself very seriously and cannot laugh when an allusion to an unfaithful wife is made. Because of his own feelings of inadequacy, the doubts of his own virility, and his powerlessness on the social and economic level, he has begun to experience a loss of identity. The power of speech is no longer his; he has been denied this right by his fellow Malinke. In Lacanian terms, one could say that the symbolic has been denied him. He can no longer function in a social context because he has been rendered ineffective by other Muslims in the capital.

The image of the dog becomes all the more poignant and realistic in this context. As a self-proclaimed watchdog over the old traditions, he has been booed and ridiculed. His mission of cultural guardian, transmitted to him by years of custom and tradition, has been seriously attacked by his fellow Malinke. Yet there exists a very close bond between Fama and the assembled people in the mosque. They too are described as dogs: "Une meute de chiens en rut: tous ces assis de damnés de Malinkés se disant musulmans hurlèrent, se hérissèrent de crocs et d'injures (17)." Both he and the others share the abasement and the dishonor of being reduced to begging. Fama's economic dependency on Malinke ceremonies is an injury to his pride; coupling it to the denial of speech makes him an outcast. Denied access to the other Malinke in the capital through the use of the spoken word, he has been effectively reduced to the level of the imaginary.

Once he has been denied access to the symbolic arena of language, Fama has, in Lacanian terms, been castrated. His signifier has been taken from him, for as Lacan says: "... le phallus est un signifiant, dont la fonction, dans l'économie intrasubjective de l'analyse, soulève peut-être le voile de celle qu'il tenait dans les mystères." (Ecrits, 690) Language is a signifier which Lacan equates with the notion of phallus. He seems to be saying here that language, as a signifier, can shed light on otherwise
veiled mysteries. In other words, the function of language as a phallic signifier is all-important in the process of psychoanalysis.

The castration is imposed on Fama from the outside, by a social group as a whole. The protagonist had previously functioned as a normal individual. He and his wife, Salimata, had been quite happy together in the past, and he had been a successful merchant. But at a moment when Fama has reached middle-age, the political and economic reality of the days of Independence have deprived him of his manhood. Therefore, it is this reality that accounts for his castration.

Although Fama views himself as diminished at this point, he has not yet internalized the rejection, and he projects his feelings on to the audience he is about to leave. He compares them to dog-headed baboons: "Diminué par la honte et le déshonneur, comment pouvait-il rester? D'ailleurs c'était sans regret; la cérémonie avait dégénéré en jeu de cynocéphales. Alors laissons les singes se mordiller et se tirer les queues (17)." The image of the "cynocéphales" contains implicit allusions to both "dog" and "monkey". Monkey-like behaviour occurs when people ape and imitate others; it is the behaviour of an amorphous crowd where individual distinctions are missing. The idea of dog suggests servility. The people whose respect he desperately wanted to gain only a few minutes before have, in his own mind, degenerated to the point where he can dismiss them as animals. Essentially, he is repressing his own servility and projects it onto the others.

In the mosque, Fama is out of touch with his own people. He insists on the respect due him as prince of the Doumbouyas, but, to no avail. In reality, the days of Independence have reduced him to the level of a beggar. Once a prosperous merchant who travelled to markets all over Africa, he now must beg for survival, like many of the others. Yet this new economic status has not changed his moral nature. The difference between him and the other Muslims lies in his insistence upon traditions that are independent of economic status. In contrast, the others base their attitude and behaviour toward him solely on his impoverished social and economic condition: "un prince presque mendiant, c'est grotesque sous tous les soleils." There is
a disparity between his self-image and the way the others view him. He has not yet internalized the rejection in the mosque, and his moral convictions set him apart from the others. For how long can he continue his private battle for his beliefs? With the symbolic arena of language gone, Fama, from this point on, will progressively function on the imaginary plane. He will literally and figuratively return to the world of his childhood.

The return to childhood operates on two levels: the physical and the psychological. In part two of the narrative, Fama returns to the village of his childhood to celebrate a second burial, that of Lacima, his cousin, who had replaced him as the puppet chief of the Doumbouya tribe. Psychologically, the transition from reality to memory takes place immediately following Fama's exit from the mosque in chapter two of part one.

Ah! nostalgie de la terre natale de Fama! Son ciel profond et lointain, son sol aride mais solide, les jours toujours secs. Oh! Horodougué! tu manquais à cette ville et tout ce qui avait permis à Fama de vivre une enfance heureuse de prince manquait aussi (le soleil, l'honneur et l'or), quand au lever les esclaves palefreniers, présentait le cheval rétif pour la cavalcade matinale, quand à la deuxième prière les griots et les griottes chantaient la pérénité et la puissance des Doumbouya, et qu'à après, les marabouts recitaient et enseignaient le Coran, la pitié et l'aumône. (19)

Instead of bliss, he now has to face a loss of honor, a loss of power, a loss of income, and perhaps most importantly, a loss of structure and love in his life. He now wanders aimlessly. True, he still observes the Islamic prayers which, to some extent, structure his life, but significantly, his prayers are interrupted by that which most preoccupies him, namely his wife's sterility. After he enters the mosque, he does not find peace. When he listens to a "griot" he does not hear praise. Fama, the living symbol of these values, has been told, that these values are observed only *pro forma* and that he should silence himself.

Fama's absorption in the imaginary, as stated earlier, operates on the purely psychological plane in the city. Upon his return to his native village, however, a curious phenomenon occurs. His imaginary coincides with his physical surroundings.
The world of his childhood is there in front of him, although it is impoverished and has been almost completely abandoned by the people of the village. The passages that describe his rediscovery of this world are composed in fluid and free-flowing lines. They suggest of a mysteriously unified universe, where the spiritual, natural, and psychic come together for a short time in some kind of pantheistic dance which soothes Fama’s spirit and psyche. The images in these passages unite the past and the present. That which was and that which is come together. There seems to be no break in time; these happy, mysterious moments operate outside of time, without any apparent reason.

One such occasion occurs when Fama, his griot, and other village members visit the cemetery. Fama has just returned to Togobala, for the funeral. The pilgrimage-like procession to the cemetery is one of the important rituals that must be observed during the forty days following Lacima’s death. Specific Muslim prayers are recited at the tomb of the deceased. But the ultimate prayer is uttered in an unknown space and time. When the ancestors mysteriously reach and touch the living, kneeling assembly by the tombstones, communion is achieved. The imaginary is operative during this communion, this ultimate unification and coming together. The past, the glorious past of Fama and his Doumbouya family, is a kind of paradise lost for him, but has become real during this brief moment of prayer.

Kourouma’s language translates this moment of unification through the blending and mixing of abstract and concrete images. His language creates an harmonious, other-worldly atmosphere. Curiously this passage is situated halfway through the narrative. In the linear progression of the plot, Fama’s past has been told; his future, the progression of his life toward death, will occupy the last half of the narrative. Symbolically, Kourouma’s language has created a rare moment of perfection, a perfection whose significance lies in the signified, in the content of the imaginary.
1.2 ECONOMIC CASTRATION, A DIRECT RESULT OF ILLITERACY.

The stream-of-consciousness narration continues to enumerate one loss after the other. The Malinke culture had been based on war and trade. Both have been lost. The waging of intertribal war has been eliminated in colonial times. Capitalistic trade, which prospered during colonial times, was replaced by the "coopératives" during the days of Independence. Fama aspired to an important position in a cooperative venture, but to obtain it, he would have to court the president and praise one-party rule. However, Fama did not act according to the logic of the new system; on the contrary, he made the customary sacrificial offerings and even killed a black cat in a well! This sacrificial killing is not explained in the novel, but what is clear is that it does not help Fama attain his goal.

In fact, he did not obtain any of the prestigious positions with which he might have been content. His exclusion from power was not due to a lack of participation in the political battles preceding Independence, but to his illiteracy. This is how Kourouma expresses Fama’s political impotence:

Comme une nuée de sauterelles les Indépendances tombèrent sur l’Afrique à la suite des soleils de la politique. Fama avait comme le petit rat de marigot creusé le trou pour le serpent avaler de rats, ses efforts étaient devenus la cause de sa perte car comme la feuille avec laquelle on a fini de se torcher, 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’écarte, Fama demeurant analphabète comme la queue d’un âne. (22,23)

His rejection on account of his illiteracy raises an extremely important issue in the African context -- the introduction of the written word to cultures that are profoundly rooted in oral traditions. Illiteracy is not a problem for Fama alone. The majority of his fellow countrymen also can not read or write, they too are a priori denied the right to participate in the power structure of post-colonial Africa. Yet this denial of a political preferment does not upset Fama nearly as much as does the loss
of access to his fellow Malinke through the spoken word.

In the above quotation, the narrator equates reading and writing with rings on the fingers of a leper. Leprosy is a loathsome disease which slowly eats away the body, and leprous fingers covered with rings is a grotesque image, for an ornamental decoration on a disintegrating part of the body is by its very nature repugnant. Metaphorically, leprosy represents the ailing, disintegrating state of the country governed by these ministers and represented by the ambassadors. The repulsive and sick acquisition of riches is associated with reading and writing, which came from a foreign culture and, in one sense, resemble a destructive disease. Although not as useless as rings on the hand of a leper, literacy is to some degree "futile"; the connecting words "aussi que" in this comparison imply a similarity, a sameness. From Fama's point of view, the futility and repulsion created by this image ultimately debases literacy, making it function in this context as an invasive sickness.

This vision of rings on a leprous hand also conjures up revulsion in Fama because his total being is linked with a cultural conditioning that is uniquely and exclusively oral. For this reason, he does not consider his inability to read or write to be particularly significant. He quickly resigns himself on that point and puts all his faith and trust in the Muslim patriarch, Allah. Much like a trusting child, Fama concludes that Allah, the symbol of the omnipotent father, will not let him starve to death. This reliance on a father figure, after the disappointment of not having obtained a position in the new administration reinforces the loss-of-identity theme that emerged clearly in the scene at the mosque. This tendency to rely on the Father throws Fama back in to a childlike dependency on Allah and forces him to go begging, the consequences of which were apparent in that scene at the Muslim funeral. Viewed in these terms, Fama's illiteracy and his denial of access to his fellow Malinke through the spoken word signifies a double rejection, for he is denied access to both African and European power structures.

The fact that Fama cannot write and the consequences of this lack underscores the importance of literacy and perhaps more than any other factor illustrates the
personal, economic, political, and social imbalances inherent in the developing societies of post-colonial Africa. It underscores an "otherness" in the guise of the written word, an otherness symbolic of a larger otherness -- cultural otherness introduced by the European colonizers during the pre-independence period. This otherness has not yet been assimilated, much less internalized. Yet the infrastructure, the frame of the European political and bureaucratic machinery, has been put in place, and the nature of its presence testifies to its in complete, mechanical character, as exemplified in the imagery of the rings on a leper's hand. The protagonist rejects this invasion from the outside, and all through the narrative he refers to this otherness as "bâtardise", that which has come into being illegally, that which is not pure. The absence of access to the written word renders Fama economically impotent and reduces him to begging and to an overreliance upon the benevolent help of Allah. His economic impotence is also the basis of the disdain, disrespect, and rejection he suffers at the hand of his fellow Malinke in the mosque.

1.3 POLITICAL CASTRATION AT TWO LEVELS: THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE GROUP.

1.3.a The individual level

As Fama travels to his native Horodougou aboard a truck, he is informed about what has happened during his absence. The land of the Malinke has been divided. Part of it now lies in the Ebony Republic, part of it now belongs to the Republic of Nikinai (probably a reference to present-day Guinea), where a socialist regime has assumed power. Thus, a whole region that had been inhabited by a single people has been arbitrarily divided into two parts, each falling under the jurisdiction of a different government. The group that had previously formed an organic whole is now subjected to two different notions of statehood, an abstraction that is totally foreign to them.
This situation explains the symbolic significance of Fama’s final desperate leap across the border where he dies, for he was attempting to get back to his own Horodougou area, which is now in Nikinai. He could not cross the border because he did not have the necessary piece of paper that would have allowed him access to the land where he had been born. That piece of paper means nothing to him, but to the authorities guarding the border, it represents their political authority. Fama’s reality and theirs have grown so divergent as to clash. This incident symbolizes the conflict that separates traditional oral culture from modern societies based on the assumption of mass literacy. The power structure here hinges on a piece of paper, a written abstract of a person’s identity. Living primarily in an oral culture, Fama does not carry such proof of his identity, and he proves incapable of convincing the border patrol merely through the use of the spoken word.

His orality has become useless to him again. Without the piece of paper, he does not count in modern society. It does not matter that he is the legitimate heir to a part of the land the border patrol guards. To them, he is a nuisance because he refuses to wait peacefully along with the others who desire to cross the border. Once more, Fama is stripped of his identity because that identity is tied up in his physical being, in his status as prince of the Doubouya tribe, and ultimately in his orality. The other (in the person of the border patrol) does not see or recognize this sort of identity. Consequently it does not exist for them. In other words, Fama’s identity as legitimate heir to the Doubouya throne no longer exists in the modern world because of the other’s failure to recognize it.

Something has been taken from him, and he is no longer a full-fledged citizen who, as part of the body politic, has a voice in the decisions of that body. He is the victim of an arbitrary border that denies him access to the land which by heredity is his own. Again Fama cries out "bâtardise." From his perspective, this new situation is the illegitimate one. From a broader perspective that takes into account the new political realities and their effect, Fama has lost political representation. He has, in fact, been castrated in his political being. He no longer belongs to the body politic. Something is missing in his identity as a citizen, and he has been rendered even more
incomplete. He no longer has a social, political or economic identity. Underlying the castration at these three levels is his culture-bound orality, which, with the advent of the other, the colonizer, has rendered this prince of the Doumbouya impotent.

The same phenomenon is repeated at the group level when the loosely applied concept of socialism gives rise to a dramatic and at the same time comic and carnivalesque incident.

1.3.b Castration at the group level.

While travelling aboard the truck that takes Fama from the capital of the Ebony Republic to his village, he is told about an incident, one that does not directly involve him, although it does illustrate the phenomenon of cultural otherness on the group level. This incident, which takes place in Nikinai, illustrates the application of socialism in the African context, although it is transmitted to us through the African palaver, a traditional oral means of communication and consensus-seeking.

Diakité, one of Fama's co-travellers in the truck, was able to escape from socialism, thanks to "la lune qui marche dans le ciel (86)." He was the son of a wealthy landowner and farmer. When the time of independence, when socialism and one-party rule arrived in the country, Diakité's father, who belonged to the opposition, was told that he could no longer oppose the government and that he had to adhere to one-party rule. Henceforth, he would have to pay dues to that party for himself, his family, his sixty head of cattle, his ten wives, and his three trucks. He did so, but that proved to be insufficient, for he then had to make backpayments covering the ten years that the party had been in existence. He did so.

However, his travaux were not yet over, a few months later, "comme était venu le parti unique, arriva l'investissement humain (86)." The father offered his three trucks for use of the construction of a bridge, but they were promptly burned by the party youth because there was no gasoline. In any case, there were no roads either, since they had fallen into disuse during the days of independence.
On another occasion, party heads demanded both the father’s and Diakité’s direct participation in the building of the bridge. The father protested, saying that he and his son were both needed on their land to work the cattle since it was harvest time. That evening, Diakité was accosted on the bridge, his pants were taken off, and his genitals wrapped in a cord. He was strapped to the bridge by his hands and his feet. When the father appealed for help to the secretary general, the latter simply replied that: "le socialisme étant la fin de l’exploitation de l’homme par l’homme, l’on ne devait plus marcher sur un pont à la construction duquel on n’avait pas participe. Le vieux l’adjura, il demeurait inébranlable; le socialisme était le socialisme!”

Exploitation here is taken quite literally, a direct bodily, physical participation would have been required. Taken to its illogical conclusion, the attitude evident in the secretary-general’s reply is revealed as both cruel and self-defeating.

Situational thinking is a type of thinking circumscribed by the concrete given of a particular situation, and it is clearly operative in this incident, both with regard to the short-sighted application of socialist principles and in relation to the punishment meted out to those who are supposedly guilty of exploitation. Obviously Fama is only one among many who suffer the consequences of the transition from an oral to a written culture.

Like the conflict between Fama and the border patrol, the above incident shows how the citizens of Nikinai have been rendered politically impotent. It has more dramatic implications for Fama, as it adds yet another lack and signifies yet another level of impotence. Both incidents (Diakité’s and Fama’s crossing at the bridge) reflect the disenfranchisement of the people by national policy, by arbitrarily imposed borders, and artificially created national bureaucracies in Africa.

1.4 FAMA RECONSTITUTED, MADE WHOLE AGAIN.

At the village level, Fama does, however, score a political victory. During his stay in Togobal for the forty days of his cousin Lacima’s funeral, Fama defeats the
opposition and gains a position on the village committee. This event merits a closer look, since it is the only triumph, small as it may seem, in Fama's progression toward death. It is precisely because of its smallness, because of its local character, that it gains significance, for it glorifies the cultural heritage of Fama, the prince of Horodougou and its people. Ultimately, this incident amounts to the triumph of an orally-bound group. In it, we see how the palaver functions, what Fama means by legitimacy, and what values the village of Togobala lives by.

Awaiting the fortieth day of Lacima's funeral, two palaver groups form, one around Fama, Diamourou, the griot, and Balla, the infidel sorcerer. The other group is headed by Babou, chief of the village and head of the village committee. Joining him for the event is a representative of the governor, "un étranger", and his own griot. The griots act as go-betweens. They are ambassadors, each representing the interest of his own group and using his own special skills in speaking and diplomacy. At the start of the palaver, the two groups have totally divergent positions. The foreign representative to the village committee wants Fama to kneel in front of the head of the committee to pledge loyalty and obedience to the revolution, and to the committee itself. He also demands that Fama promise not to hate or to criticize the causes championed by the committee and the party. In opposition to them, Fama's followers want him to be unconditionally named the president of the committee.

These are the apparently irreconcilable positions at the beginning of the palavers, but: "On était Malinké, et le Malinké ne reste jamais sur une seule rive (137)." The people move back and forth between the two groups and listen to both positions. Ultimately, they choose neither of them. They identify politics as "foreign" and label it as a curse sent by the devil. What really matters are not ideas or abstractions, but people. As the narrator asks rhetorically "et pourquoi, pour ces diableries, se diviser, se combattre, casser et user la fraternité et l'humanisme (137)?" What is happening is that a people's discourse moves back and forth between the two articulated political positions before a consensus is reached.
This discourse is woven into the text as a production, an action, a spectacle, a staging, but a staging without a script. It does not find an expression in the symbolic, in language. On the contrary, it might more appropriately be likened to a ballet. This script was written long ago, or, it might be better to say that it was never written at all. It did not have to be. By the sheer force of repetition, it became perfected over the course of time. It developed its own rhythm, ritual, and body language. Literally and figuratively, it is a fluid presence. These people are spectators and actors at the same time. They applaud, laugh, protest, move between the two palavers, eat, drink, take off their shoes and spend the night sleeping around the two camps.

They are an appreciative audience: "Mais tout cela s'aménait après des regards flamboyants, des intonations variées et des proverbes, s'accompagnait d'autres regards, de mouvements de la tête et des mains et d'autres proverbes, l'assistance exultait et buvait. Elle n'en demandait pas plus: le palabre pour le palabre (140)." The people's participation saves this village from being devoured by the two opposing camps and makes the compromise possible. It is not the knowledge that confrontation will fail to resolve the problem because, in fact, everyone was ready for a fight: "Mais alors, pourquoi? pourquoi chacun préparait-il une confrontation brutale, une sorte de combat de taureaux? Pourquoi jetait-on sa pleine brassée de bois mort sur le feu (138)?" However, the fight they are anticipating does not take place. Instead, the two opposing camps reach a compromise that allows Fama, the traditional chief, to exercise in pride, which is his right by birth. Pride and power are his for a brief moment. The patriarch is simply present. His griot does the talking for him: "le griot dans la parole était dans le propre de sa caste, comme un Doumbouya dans la guerre, un poisson dans l'eau ou un oiseau dans le ciel (140)." A harmony as the one found in nature, characterizes the organization, the structure of the Doumbouya tribe.

War was the strength of this chief's ancestors. He now wages a war of sorts and victory comes not in military combat, but in the political arena. The hierarchy of this traditional society is allowed to function, but only through the presence and the
particular function of the people, who exercise a mediating function. Their silent back-and-forth maneuvering represents the Malinke spirit and attests to its flexibility. This palaver-performance attests and reaffirms the viability of the counter-revolutionary position that Fama has adopted toward the modern government. His concept of legitimacy reigns for the first and last time. This passage is the only one in which the word "bâtardise" does not appear, for "bâtardise", is equivalent of illegitimacy in Fama's mind. Togobala's people have made this victory possible by simply recognizing Fama as leader and Babou as the "foreign" presence to be heard. The "l'humanisme" and "fraternité" ideals cited by both camps were injected into the palaver in a chorus-like fashion through the participation, the simple presence, of the people of Togobala. For them, compromise and synthesis result from a communal effort, an effort that adheres to custom and tradition.

Most certainly Fama and his followers have scored a victory. He is now admitted to the committee. He did not have to recant his beliefs. His pride as prince was maintained. The people enjoyed themselves. The mutilated body of the village of Togobala has been reconstituted as a whole. As their leader, Fama has been exonerated, rendered whole himself. For a brief moment, his counter-revolutionary stance is vindicated. For a brief moment his masculinity is restored. He sleeps well and is no longer impotent and passive before Mariam, one of the wives he inherits from his cousin Lacima. The palaver, vehicle of an oral society par excellence, gives Fama back an identity that had been lost until this time.

It had been lost because his competence in oral communication had been subordinated to written literacy in the modern world. The concept of "le palavre pour le palavre" amounts to a choice of life for life's sake, at the expense of ideas, of abstractions. Furthermore, Fama's identity is restored only because he has been recognized as a prince, as the leader of his people. Ultimately, his leadership is his identity. That explains in part why he so desperately wants to return to Togobala after his imprisonment. It also explains why he has no identity outside of his region. The nature of his counter-revolutionary stance becomes clear when it is seen from this perspective. Going back to the traditional ways of his village effectively restores
the identity that he had lost in the city.

The imposition of arbitrary borders upon West-Africa has often destroyed the sense of wholeness that characterizes traditional African societies and manifests itself in their language. Although Walter Ong argues that oral societies experience difficulty with abstract thinking, Kourama's novel demonstrates that they embody a wholeness that enables them to achieve results in some ways superior to those achieved by abstract thought. It is not that the people from these societies are incapable of thinking in abstractions. On the contrary, they are convinced that abstractions resulting from rational thought are only part of a universe of thought that also includes imagination, passion, and knowledge acquired through the senses. Any a priori choice to focus solely on abstract thinking omits the experiential aspects of life. The villagers of Togobala do not make such an arbitrary choice, for they are fully involved in living.

Kourouma's description of the palaver evokes the sense of a performance that emerges from such a full involvement in life. In this context, his text becomes pre-text, an enactment of life, an artistic spectacle. In effect, the distance which the readers travel in their imagination allows them to regard the ongoing discussions as a performance. It is the same distance that exists between life and its representation in art. The assembled groups at the palaver are closer to life as a total experience than people who are products of a modern society that has lost its wholeness.

Kourouma's text does more than simply record the traditions in which this wholeness is embedded. If that had been his only accomplishment, he would merely be a social anthropologist. But by telling the story of Fama, he places this wholeness within the context of the marginalization in the modern world. Described in parts one and three of the story, the events before and after the village meeting demonstrate the futility of the world view that is linked with this sense of wholeness. From the perspective suggested by the events in which it has been framed, the traditional palaver in the village setting has become a remnant, a fossil, an isolated event, separated from the larger, broader experience of contemporary life.
The hyphenated notion of pre-text is not simply a play on words. It represents an attempt to encompass the total experience of life in Togobala: "A laisser se continuer, il n'y aurait plus eu d'humanisme, de fraternité; plus d'équilibre des forces invisibles qui sauvent le village, mais la haine entre les familles, la colère des génies, la malédiction des mânes (141)." Wholeness, unity and a sense of mystery are positive forces that guard against evil, which is perceived here as that which divides, that which threatens the harmony between people and families. The people in their village know where everybody comes from, what families they belong to. They even know that, at the moment of death their double, their "dja", will separate from their body and continue to live. They are welcomed in the world of the death by deceased family members. The ancestors exert power over the living. The traditional griot sings the praise of each individual and links that individual up with his or her ancestor. The griot knows the history and orally transmits it from generation to generation. It is a history that binds together and keeps intact the wholeness of the individual with in the community.

Unlike Oedipus, who has to go looking for his origins, Fama and people like him, know who they are and where they are from. In Togobala, he is not lost; his identity is secure. The small size of the community and its oral tradition are what make this self-assurance possible. Anything outside this experience is perceived as a threat, a revolutionizing presence. Text and the written word are part of this presence, part of the "foreignness", of the "bâtardise" that upsets Fama. Ironically, the text and the written word also give the outside world access to the wholeness of Fama's oral culture, for that is precisely what Kourama's text accomplishes.

1.5 DREAM LANGUAGE - REPRESSION AND VALIDATION OF FAMA'S INTEGRITY - OR TRIUMPH OF THE IMAGINARY.

The existence of Kourouma's text signifies first and foremost the death of the wholeness witnessed in Togobala. Life there, in all its supposed simplicity, is doomed to die. Death is the thematic nucleus from which Fama cannot rid himself.
Central to all the chapters, death provides the book's underlying structural framework. For example, Les Soleils opens with the death of Ibrahima Koné: "Il y avait une semaine qu’avait fini dans la capitale Koné Ibrahima, de race malinké, ou disons-le en malinké: il n’avait pas soutenu un petit rhume... (7)." Part two continues in a similar fashion: "La suprême injure qui ne se presse pas, ne se lasse pas, n’oublie pas, s’appelle la mort. Elle avait emporté le cousin Lacima du village (83)." Though not directly mentioned in Part three, death is implied by the subtitle: "Les choses qui ne peuvent pas être dites ne méritent pas de noms (157)." Underlying this notion is the suggestion that what can not be said nevertheless knocks at the door of consciousness, even though it has not yet been named. What can not be spoken can perhaps be written, but Fama's illiteracy is an imprisonment, and it will ultimately lead to his death.

Why does the narrator not want to be clearer on this point, on the coming death of his protagonist? Contained in "ne peuvent pas" is the notion of an interdiction, a kind of taboo; in "ne méritent pas", a judgement has been made. What are these things that cannot be said, and who is attempting to say them? The speaker is obviously the narrator, but joining him in this statement of taboo and disapproval is an amorphous presence, pervasive but not identified. The passive voice translates this kind of presence. It is the voice of the oral tradition that is speaking, and it is speaking out against the inhumanity of the treatment that Fama received in the prison and that precipitated him into a state of almost total dejection.

Seeking to identify the site of this prison camp, Fama is obliged to reject all geographical areas known to him -- the savanna, the forest, and the lagoons -- for at night he can hear the animal noises of all these regions combined. This place without a name is everywhere and nowhere. It is also inside him: "Ce camp était la nuit et la mort, la mort et la nuit (167)." It signifies a further loss of identity in his progression toward death. On the symbolic level, he is a nobody; he has been imprisoned, not because he is politically dangerous, but because of his failure to report a dream! When finally called upon to respond to the charges against him, he is delighted because he now has a function. He does after all hold a place in the
symbolic order: someone with a name, an approximate birth date and a birthplace, someone who is accused of not reporting his dream. The authorities see the dream as the confirmation of a conspiracy aimed at overthrowing the government by one of its ministers, who has been educated in France.

In the dream, Fama has been called upon by a woman dressed completely in white to warn this rebel minister of his impending death, and the defeat of his cause. The woman in the dream seeks out Fama because he possesses a certain "qualité d'homme (171)", because he supposedly is honest and has a desire to preserve traditional values. Such things cannot be spoken of, for if they are, one is condemned like Fama, or one commits suicide like the minister. However, they can be written about, albeit in a veiled, shrouded dream-language, and by virtue of a complex narrator-reader relationship, such as the one Kourama creates in Les Soleils.

1.6 TEXT AS CULTURAL REBIRTH.

Kourouma appropriates for himself the idiom of the oral tradition and gives birth to a writing that testifies to its strength and suppleness. Throughout this text, he uses the Malinke proverbs and the rhetorical strategies of the oral tradition. In doing so, he appropriates a cultural identity for his writing and transposes a way of being, of speaking, of thinking, into the symbolic act of writing. The living people, viewed as one form of representation, as one sign, have become symbolized through another sign, that of written language.

The particular text that Kourama wrote was born at the threshold of this culture's disappearance as an orally defined entity. This disappearance is presaged by the death motif that haunts the novel. Simultaneously, a new cultural affirmation is born in the form of writing, and it links Malinke thought, emotion and values to the outside world, to that which is "foreign" to its being, to that which the prince of Horodougou keeps mentioning as impure, as "bâtardise". He himself could hardly take a different position because he is the living symbol of the values, of this way of
living. Yet he is both more and less than a symbol; he personifies a myth that is dying, and whose end is in sight.

But even this death had been foreseen by the legend of the origin of the Doumbouya. The end had, in fact, been predicted when one of its leaders, a Bambara (a Christianized Malinke), chose not to fight an invasion by Malinke Muslims in the North. Instead of fighting, he negotiated a compromise according to which power would remain in the hands of the Bambara, although the invading Muslims were allowed to enter the area. This event represented a crucial turning point because, within the context of the myth, power that is not maintained by fighting is illegitimate, whereas the power that emerges from this agreement resulted from piety and a spirit of accommodation. As a retribution for this betrayal of the traditional concept of power, the descendants of the Bambara would be seriously weakened. In fact, they were envisioned as coming to an end at the time when technology was appearing on the scene "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 de bâtards commandent, triomphant, en liant les provinces par des fils (le téléphone), des bandes (les routes!) et le vent (les discours et la radio!) (102)." The end of the tribe is coming, because these modern devices are in place. As head of the Doumbouya, Fama’s end too is near.

He is also more than a symbol in the sense that he is a living human being with fears and doubts and unhappiness. He fears the future because it will be lost to him, for he realizes that his end is near. He fears Salimata because her sterility shames him. He fears his own fears more than anything else because the myths he believes in, the life he has lived, have not informed him how to face death. His death is unavoidable, but he has been taught courage, and his leap across the bridge attests to the fact that Fama can act courageously. Nevertheless he has to die because of history, because of myth, because of the treatment he suffered in the modern African state, because of the "bâtardise" he encounters wherever he turns. Yet his language will go on living through the text of Les Soleils des Indépendances. The days of
independence as seen from the protagonist's perspective become the days in which he has been obliged to live away from Horodougou. The days that gave him his identity as prince and in which he could assert himself as a man.

The possibility of confronting this situation by stalling, by staying in one spot is suggested by Sery, Fama's co-traveller during his first trip to Horodougou. This apprentice chauffeur knows a recipe for Africa's peace and happiness. Africans, he contends, should stay at home: "Connaissez-vous les causes des malheurs et des guerres en Afrique? Non! Eh bien! c'est très simple, c'est parce que les Africains ne restent pas chez eux (88)." Likewise, the myth of the origins of the Doum-bouya relates that, although the ancestors came from somewhere outside the area, they prospered and produced saints and sages while staying in one spot.

Fama initially abandoned his native village in order to fight for independence because he thought he could benefit financially from his engagement in the struggle for national liberation; however, the markets withered after independence, and his illiteracy prevented him from obtaining the position he coveted in a co-operative enterprise. His failure is clearly based on his inability to become fully independent from his place of origin and from a mode of being rooted in the province of Horodougou and its oral traditions. Only after suffering repeated setbacks does he become a counter-revolutionary in a desperate attempt to save himself, his self-esteem, his ego. His motivation is self-preservation, but as the events of the novel demonstrate, he cannot go back home again. He is the incarnation of traditional values, and as such he has no alternative but to die. Les Soleils is thus the story of failed independence. Whether Fama is viewed as a castrated Malinke or a failed opportunist, his fate encapsulates the fate of an entire people.

Discussing the psychodynamics of orality, Walter Ong relates the results of studies of conceptualization schemes in non-literate population groups. He concludes that they have problems with self-analysis because it calls for a certain amount of abstract thinking. Although Fama at no time submits himself to analysis, readers of Kourama's text are given information that allows them to enter Fama's psyche.
Through the process of writing, the narrator becomes not only Fama's spokesman, but also his analyst. As such, he carries out the psychoanalytical process. He observes and comments. At the end of Fama's first day in Togobala, the narrator concludes: "En vérité Fama ne tenait pas sur du réel, du solide, du définitif... (11)." In this passage, the narrator himself is denying Fama an active, participatory role. He is, in fact, denying him responsibility.

By means of such statements, the narrator proclaims to know the truth. He actually asserts that Fama is not real or solid. However, since he knows the truth, he has access to a reality that Fama does not acknowledge. The narrator in his relationship to the protagonist is therefore like the psychoanalyst, and from a psychoanalytic perspective, he is the one who castrates Fama, reducing him to irresponsibility. That which is "real", "solid", and "definitive" is the text that reveals Fama's flight into the imaginary and exposes him as a protagonist who is denied access to the symbolic -- to a place in the political, economic, and social order. Toward the end of the story, dream language takes the place of spoken language until finally, at the end only fantasmagorical visions remain.

The illiteracy issue, understood within the broader context of the entire society, introduces the relationship of the uneducated masses with their new Western-educated leaders. It is characterized by the leaders' patronizing attitude and by their parental-like demands upon those they supposedly lead. This attitude is clearly illustrated by what occurs one day when Fama and other political prisoners, are released without explanation.

At this time, the president of the Ebony Republic personally comes to the prison and makes a speech. In it, he compares himself to a mother who had been obliged to punish her children because they spilled the rice dish that she had prepared for her lover. Metaphorically, the rice dish represents the economic development of the country. Since the economic future of the country was threatened by the overturned rice dish, the people who participated in the political conspiracy against the leaders had to be punished. Now, it was decided that in the name of goodness, gentleness,
justice, and patience, the children who had misbehaved in such a way would be forgiven. The values he cites represent good health, and because he claims they are eternal, he declares that good health in a social sense can be permanent. If anger, injustice, impatience, and baseness represent a temporary state of sickness, he concludes they can be cured. The implication of his remarks is, of course, that he has cured this sickness by treating and releasing the prisoners.

However, the real reason for the president's change of heart is economic. Foreign investment had shied away from the Ebony Republic, and he hopes to change the image of the country by creating the impression that all its citizens are working together for the common good. He even cites a proverb to support his point: "Un seul pied ne trace pas un sentier; et un seul doigt ne peut ramasser un petit gravier par terre. Seul lui, le président, ne pouvait pas construire le pays. Ce sera l'œuvre de tout le monde (182)." The president alone can not rebuild the country, he needs the help of the people to prove to the foreign investors that his country is at peace and that investment can flourish there.

The details of a plan of action for economic development are not explored in his speech because they conjure up notions of economics, finance, markets, and other technical terms that belong to another world, the Western world, the world of literacy. Characteristically, the president falls back on a proverb belonging to an oral tradition that has been passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. Likewise, he portrays himself as the mother of his nation and the people as his children. In order to make his point, he resorts to the situational thinking characteristic of oral cultures. The interesting point here is that this type of thinking carries with it a parent-like relationship, for the leader is assumed to have knowledge that is hidden from those he is attempting to lead. Once again, illiteracy signifies a gap which prevents the people from participating in the political process; they are simply asked to behave as good children.

At the same time, those children who were punished for misbehavior (i.e. the prisoners), are promised rewards for their future good behavior. Responsibility,
rights, participation in the process, protection under the law -- such concepts are part of a Western institutional structure, and they are non-existent in the traditional African society. In the name of an old proverb, submission and obedience are what this president is actually demanding. The result is a mutual castration. Ultimately no one bears responsibility. Justice is not served. The rulers do not, and perhaps cannot, represent the people. The political power holders are not held accountable because they do not really represent their people. The pressure on the leaders comes from the outside, from the other, under the form of foreign investment that is either granted or withheld, or in the form of pressure from neighbouring states.

Illiteracy and its broader implications underlie this infantile relationship between the people and their leaders. At no time, does this president identify his interest with those of the people. The only reason he addresses the people and invokes the previously mentioned lofty ideals is to win the approval of the international community: "Les investisseurs s'éloignaient de nous, les journaux supputaient ma fin prochaine : et des présidents des États voisins me faisaient des affronts (181)." The metaphor of the mother, her children, and the lover conjures up the classic triangle; where the third term, the lover, is absent, an abstraction to which the children have no access. Knowledge transmitted through literacy is not theirs. In this case, the absence of knowledge, gnosis, signifies absence of power, which remains in the hands of the other, the absent lover, the foreign investors. The result of this relationship is, as I mentioned before, the mutual castration of the people and of their so called leader.
CHAPTER II. SALIMATA

2.1 TIME, A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

My analysis of Fama was based on a psychoanalytical approach because the thrust of his thought is oriented toward the past. Salimata’s vision, in contrast, is directed toward the future. An understanding of the future in phenomenological terms would therefore seem appropriate to illuminate the significance of her experience of time. Because Emmanuel Lévinas’ work *Le Temps et l’Autre* ³ provides an excellent insight into the issue of temporality, I will first explain his notion of time as future and then apply it to an interpretation of Salimata’s character.

His analysis is ontological and sets out to prove that the human condition (l’être) has its own dialectic. In particular, his interest focuses on an understanding of the phenomenon of solitude and its importance in the total picture of the human experience. An exploration of the causes of solitude leads him to a definition of subjectivity that takes into account the importance of our materiality and its consequences. According to Lévinas, our materiality clarifies our relationship with space. He compares our relationship with time to the mystery of death, which he calls the "other". The "other", as a category in the dialectic of the human condition, is totally unknown and cannot be known. He nevertheless draws a parallel between our relationship to death and our relationship to eros. For him, the relationship between the sexes cannot be one of knowledge, possession, and understanding. It is impossible "to know" our relationship with eros, he asserts, because it is characterized by a

³ Initially, the thoughts contained in *Le Temps et L’Autre* were presented in the form of conferences delivered before the Collège Philosophique in 1946 and 1947. They were first published in 1948 in the *Cahiers du Collège Philosophique* under the title *Le Choix. Le Monde. L’Existence*
plurality, by an "otherness", a second term. Like death, eros happens to us without our consent, the second term is outside the knowable world; therefore, it is incapable of being grasped. Like death, our relationship with eros is a mystery, one which opens time and a window to the future.

Lévinas points out that it is perhaps inaccurate to talk of "our" relationship with eros because he has a masculine vision and a masculine experience of femininity in mind when he draws the parallel between death and eros. He then raises the question of whether the same can be said of masculinity from a feminine point of view? I believe it can, with some modifications.

Lévinas' usage of the terms solitude and hypostase are important to my redefinition of his approach and in my application of it to an understanding of Salmata in Les Soleils. A discussion of the meaning of these terms will also help explain why he believes that our materiality determines our relationship to space and why our relationship with time hinges on our relationship to the other. In his idiolect, the other (as in "autrui") relates to the here and now, whereas the other (as in "l'autre") relates to the future.

Solitude, its origin in the dialectic of the human condition.

Solitude is the result of a person's existence (l'exister). It is that which cannot be communicated. Existence as such remains the most private part of a person. Expanding knowledge or improving communication skills does not affect the solitary being. Solitude is rooted in being and remains completely and totally incommunicable. The causes for solitude are not psychological. It is not because people find themselves alone and isolated that they experience solitude. It is because of the ontological nature of solitude, because of the nearly incomprehensible relationship between what Lévinas calls "l'exister" and "l'existant." It is a difficult terminology to translate, although it corresponds roughly to "Sein" and "Seiendes" in Heidegger's meditations on the insoluble character of solitude inherent in the uniqueness of
being. No degree of consciousness or isolation have an impact on solitude, for solitude stems from the separateness, the impossibility of linking together the notions contained in "il y a" and the fact that a person exists:

Concevoir une situation où la solitude est dépassée, c'est éprouver le principe même du lien entre l'existant et son exister. C'est aller vers un événement ontologique où l'existant contracte l'existence. J'appelle hypostase l'événement par lequel l'existant contracte son exister. La perception et la science partent toujours des existants déjà munis de leur existence privée. Ce lien entre ce qui existe et son exister est-il indissoluble? Peut-on remonter à l'hypostase? (22)

At the moment of hypostase both the I, the subject, and its solitude are born. Is it possible to overcome solitude? The answer to that question lies in a further exploration of hypostase and in an examination of the nature of our materiality.

*L'hypostase, its relevance and nature*

That which might be regarded as the content of "l'exister" cannot be grasped, yet it also cannot be ignored. It affirms itself as a certain nothingness, as a verb, not a noun. We cannot ignore it because it insists on being there, a paradoxical slumbering field of action. We cannot confirm it as an entity because it can not contain a subject. A subject has a beginning and an end. The field of action, "le champ de forces", is thus impersonal, anonymous.

These difficult concepts are compared to insomnia, which is similar to the slumbering field. During insomnia we cannot escape into unconsciousness, because we cannot sleep. Like the "champ de forces", insomnia has no beginning and no end. Refuge in sleep is impossible because the self cannot impose itself. It is a "sans soi." Perhaps this is the source of our anxiety, not the fear of nothingness, 'le néant", but the knowledge that there can be no end. This may be what Hamlet realizes when he says: "to be or not to be, that is the question." Lévinas interprets this question to mean: can one really die? Death, suicide, does it really bring about a state of nothingness? Lévinas seems to think not.
In Heidegger, the concept implicit in the phrase, "le néant anéantit", translates a purely existential point of view and refers to the weight of a nothingness which kills. Lévinas diverges from this point of view. In his dialectic between "l'exister" and "l'existant", the impossibility of escape, which he parallels to insomnia, becomes clear. The difference between Heidegger and Lévinas is suggested by the words separation and differentiation. The "I" is still present in Heidegger, and it is expressed through the term "Jemeinigkeit", which alludes to a sharing. In Lévinas, on the contrary, there is separation: "Ainsi se fait jour l'idée d'un exister qui se fait sans nous, sans sujet, d'un exister sans existant." Even though we cannot prove the existence of "l'exister", we can speculate about it. As Lévinas declares, "La perception et la science partent toujours des existants déjà munis de leur existence privée (25)."

In this dialectic, the role of language, "le mot", seems predominant. This relationship underscores the link, or necessary inter-relatedness, between writing and phenomenology. Even though we are unable to locate the exact place of language in the overall picture -- in "l'économie générale de l'être (25)" -- language operates within "l'existant" since it cannot function without a subject. Idealist philosophy rests on something ("quelque chose") to which the subject ("l'être") has no access. Therefore, Lévinas is not disturbed that he cannot prove the existence of "l'exister":

"Et le fait de recourir, pour comprendre ce qui existe, à ce qui n'existe pas, ne constitue point une révolution en philosophie. La philosophie idéaliste a été en somme une manière de fonder l'être sur quelque chose qui n'est pas de l'être."

The introduction of the key role of our materiality by Lévinas is based on the above discourse, as well as the phenomena of the "I", or hypostase, as the following discussion will make clear.

*Solitude and its relation to our materiality*
The comparison between "l’exister" and insomnia leads to a further questioning of consciousness. Paradoxically, consciousness signifies the possibility of withdrawal into sleep because of the affirmation of the self, "le moi", in "l’exister." At the moment when the self dominates over "l’exister" (l’hypostase), the "I" becomes solitary and alone, and an identity appears. This identity is the shaping of the present, a breaking with the anonymous or the infinite. The present is always "évanescence" because it comes from the self; it has inherited nothing from elsewhere, and this autogenesis constitutes its greatness and its solitude: "la solitude n’est donc pas seulement un désespoir et un abandon, mais aussi une virilité et une fierté et une souveraineté (35)." In this sense, Lévinas’ conclusion differs from an existential understanding of solitude, which leads to despair. As he points out, proud solitude is one of the themes of Romantic literature: "la solitude fière, aristocratique, géniale (35)."

This is a first understanding of time as present. A second understanding involves the relation of the "I" with the "other". It clarifies the nature of our relation to the future. With the emergence of the self out of the anonymous, there is a dialectic return of the "I" unto the self. Our materiality is at the root of this return, but, born at the moment of hypostase, the "I" cannot soar for long because of the presence of our materiality. The subject is emprisoned, as it were, in a body. The necessity to take care of ourselves represents another component of our solitude. Thus, our daily occupations constitute a response to the imperatives of our materiality. At the same time, they represent an attempt at resolving the solitude connected with it. "La vie quotidienne est une préoccupation du salut (39)." Lévinas calls it a first morality, "une première morale", a first lesson, a spiritual guide.

An understanding of the source of our solitude in this dialectical perspective undercuts most of the claims of socialism. Economic struggle is not and cannot be a liberation from our animality with the promise of a superior spiritual life as the eventual reward. Our materiality cannot be overcome because there can never be a binding promise of metaphysical bliss. Economic struggle is the struggle for salvation. Our activities in the world are a constant attempt to overcome our materiality, to
break, or to overcome the tie between the self and the I, "pour surmonter sa matérialité, c'est à dire, pour dénouer le lien entre le soi et le moi (44)." How do we overcome this dilemma and untie the knot?

Through knowledge, born of our relationship with objects, we temporarily overcome this inwardly turned knot with the self. "Jouissance et sensation", which Lévinas equates with knowledge and light, i.e. that which is illuminated and thus can be known, constitute a liberation from our initial materiality. It is not a liberation in the total sense of the word, but a temporary relief, an "oubli de soi", because reason and knowledge are still anchored within our being. There is something emanating from ourselves, and it allows us to move toward the object. It also brings us back. In the process, the object becomes "illuminated". We never really encounter anything totally "other" because, if we could, we would not be able "to know" it as an object. This insight leads Lévinas to remark that reason is alone. It never meets anything "other". As a consequence, the structure of reason is always that of a solipsism.

Through a relationship with the objects in the world around us, we try to overcome the solitude that is ours by the weight of our materiality. In so doing, we establish a relationship in space, i.e. we create a distance between the objects in the world and ourselves. Because we can not truly untie the knot between the "I" and the "self", solitude continues to prevail.

"Dans la peine, dans la douleur, dans la souffrance, nous retrouvons, à l'état de pureté, le définitif, qui constitue la tragédie de la solitude (55)". Suffering and death can not be known. They escape knowledge, or, to use Lévinas' terminology, they cannot be "illuminated". The subject has no control over suffering or death, which will happen to us in the future. In the present, some control is possible. With death, such freedom is lost completely: "Quand la mort est là, je ne suis plus là, non point parce que je suis néant, mais parce que je ne suis pas à même de saisir (59)." This is why the other in this context is totally "other", is "l'autre."
An important correlative to this analysis of suffering is the passivity that characterizes the total impact of suffering and death upon the individual. Lévinas therefore compares passivity, the total absence of responsibility, to the sob, "le sanglot", of childhood. "Mourir, c'est revenir à cet état d'irresponsabilité, c'est être la secousse enfantine du sanglot (60)." Passivity then is the absence of hope. As long as there is hope, the "I" makes a statement, affirms itself. There is activity. In death, activity becomes impossible, "nous ne pouvons plus pouvoir (62)." Death, "the other", is totally unknowable. It is the future because it happens to us without our consent. It befalls us so to speak. Death is the ultimate other; it introduces a plurality. Since that which is the difference does not emanate from our being, it cannot be known. It is a mystery.

An analysis of our materiality leads to an understanding of our relationship with objects in space. Our materiality in effect shapes our spatial relationships. Understanding is possible in this instance because it emanates from ourselves in the sense that this knowledge is never really different from ourselves.

An exploration of solitude leads to the conclusion that death establishes our relationship with time because it is an experience that is totally outside of ourselves and with the "other." It is a relationship with the future. Because the "other" cannot be known, we cannot have a spatial relationship with it.

Facing a mystery by facing the other means that the other cannot be known, possessed. There can be no oneness with the other. Approaching the other can only be accomplished in terms that cut loose from those that describe a knowable world. Our erotic relationships will serve as a prototype. Seen from a masculine point of view, the feminine is that which is totally different. It is "la contrariété qui permet au terme de demeurer absolument autre....(77)." Only because the feminine is different as a category and not different as a quality, does it remain unknowable. This is why Lévinas has chosen our relationship to eros as a prototype to approach an understanding of the future as "l'autre."
In our relation to eros, our identities as subjects still exist, and yet the mystery inherent in that relationship remains. The pleasures of love stand apart from other pleasures insofar as the "I", is alone in the latter, whereas in the former it is not. Yet even in that plurality, the specificity of the "I" and "the other" is maintained. In the love relationship each partner maintains his or her identity. Both are and remain subjects. One does not become the other’s object. Fusion in love is impossible. By definition, power and knowledge are anathema to the very nature of "the other" (l’autre). The other, the future, death, happen to us, as Lévinas says, without our consent.

"Volupté" (the ecstatic pleasure of love) in this prototype becomes the event in and by itself of the future. In the face of this event, the "I" is powerless.

La relation avec autrui, c’est l’absence de l’autre: non pas absence pure et simple, non pas absence de pur néant, mais absence dans un horizon d’avenir, d’une absence qui est le temps. Horizon où pourra se constituer une vie personnelle au sein de l’événement transcendant, ce que nous avons appelé plus haut la victoire sur la mort ...”(83)

The absence of death, ("l’autre") from a relationship with the other ("autrui"), opens the possibility of a future "un horizon d’avenir." Therefore, death can be transcended. How does Lévinas envision this possibility?

The event that allows the transcendence of the "I" without loss of identity is contained in our relationship to eros. It is a victory over death. In this relationship, the "I" still and always falls back on the self. Is there a possibility for the self to transcend itself and yet to maintain itself, simultaneously? Lévinas thinks so, and he sees that possibility existing in paternity, specifically in the father-son relationship. The knot tied at the moment of "hypostase", of the coming into being of the "I" and of the return of the "I" unto the self, can be broken through the link of paternity: "Ce n’est donc pas selon la catégorie de la cause, mais selon la catégorie du père que se fait la liberté et que s’accomplit le temps (86).” Lévinas’ use of the term "fécondité" in his discussion of the paternity issue opens the possibility of applying this insight to a feminist understanding of Salimata in Les Soleils.
A final correlative in Lévinas' understanding of our relation to the future is the role of eros in connecting the present and the future. We cannot grasp the future; it remains unknown because we have no dominion over death. Although our relation to eros is a mystery, the link between the future and the present lies in our relationship with others, it resides in intersubjectivity, which holds the hope for eros, love, and a new birth.

2.2 DIVERGENT IN THEIR TEMPORALITY, FAMA AND SALIMATA LOSE ONE ANOTHER.

Incapable of finding a communality in their time-space relationship, in their temporality, Fama and Salimata are destined to lose one another and to be separated for good. Knowing himself sterile, Fama leaves Salimata her chance at procreation, her one desperate hope. He gives her this chance by not returning to the capital after his release from prison. In this way, she does not have to feel responsible toward him, and she can continue to look toward the future.

Fama's space changes: he moves from the capital to the village and back to the capital, only to be deported and thrown in jail. When released from prison he forsakes the city, taking the bus to the point where he will leap to his death. Little by little, the outside and the other are shut out. He has given up on life in the city; he no longer hopes for a child. When offered money and a chance to live a comfortable life, Fama rejects them in almost complete silence. In Lévinas' terms, the link between the present and the future becomes non-existent. He no longer has a relationship with the other.

Salimata's space remains the same throughout the narrative. The only exception to her stability in space occurs when she flees from her native village through the bush, never to return again. In the capital, her activities revolve around the marketplace where she sells her rice dishes to construction workers. When not selling food, she remains at home, preparing her goods or taking care of her own and Fama's
needs. These needs must be satisfied if the two of them are to survive. Almost totally absorbed by these concrete daily tasks, she remains in the capital city, not understanding why Fama insists on being in motion as he travels from place to place.

Just as Fama is incapable of facing the new political order because of his socio-political-economic impotence, he is also unable to fulfill Salimata’s hope for a child because of his sterility. In terms of Lévinas’ dialectic, it might be said that Fama cannot conquer death because he is unable to provide an heir who could assure the continuance of his lineage. If he cannot conquer death by transcending the "I" through paternity, can he gain some measure of control by leaping to his death? In view of his understanding of the Hamlet quote, Lévinas would undoubtedly view such an attempt as a futile exercise.

Nevertheless, one must remember that Fama’s end was foretold in the legend of the origin of the Doumbouya. In living out this prediction, in enacting his own death, Fama has found a sense of purpose, a place in the pre-revolutionary, pre-colonial order of things. He lives out his life as a function of the tribal origins and gradual disappearance of his tribe. Fama has failed both in his relation to space and in his relation to time. Like the tombs he visits, Fama’s legacy is a monument to the dead. Fama could not have a relationship with the future because he essentially remained impotent, "un vivant". With him dies his lineage, his heritage, his hope.

In contrast, Salimata succeeds; her spatial-temporal relationships tend to coincide, for there exists a fluid interaction between space and time for her. The question then becomes: why does she succeed where he fails?

2.3 AN ESSENTIAL DIFFERENCE

Salimata embodies hope, the desire for a future, for a new birth. In the African context, it is the desire for re-birth, for Kourouma’s vision of rebirth, and it reflects his vision of the feminine. On the symbolic level of writing, this vision of the feminine, which points the way toward a new beginning, is embodied in Salimata, who
represents and accomplishes the principle of hope. Based on Lévinas' understanding of time, work, responsibility, love-eros, intersubjectivity and fecundity, my analysis of the triumph of life over death, as enacted and lived by Salimata, differs from a Freudian approach in which the libido is assumed as a given, as the point from where analysis starts. The problem with this approach is that it fails to situate the libido in the totality of the human experience, in "l'économie générale de l'être".

Freud saw the libido as a function whose malfunctions he tried to understand and remedy through the talking cure. He explored the issue, rather unsatisfactorily, in a 1933 lecture entitled Femininity. In order to salvage his castration and Oedipal complexes in this context, he speaks of the little girl as a little man and attributes to her a penis envy, a sense of lacking. In his concluding paragraph, he seeks to exonerate himself somewhat by acknowledging his own shortcomings: "That is all I had to say to you about femininity. It is certainly incomplete and fragmentary and does not always sound friendly. But do not forget that I have only been describing women in so far as their nature is determined by their sexual function (Women in Analysis 93)." This in fact is how Fama views Salimata.

He sees her primarily as the possible bearer of a child. When he becomes convinced of her "sterility", he simply seekes out other women who might perform that same function just as well, if he can only impregnate them. This attitude explains why he so readily adopts Mariam, who comes to him as part of his inheritance in Togobala. Contrary to the opinions of both Fama and Freud, however, the feminine can not be described. It cannot be contained in terms of a functional definition. It is not well-suited to the boundaries of a patriarchal model. For these reasons I have turned to a phenomenological approach in an attempt to explain Salimata and what she represents within the total picture of Les Soleils.

The difference between Salimata's relationship to time and space and that of Fama can be understood as signifying the existence of a polarity. At each a different and distinct reaction to the political, social, and economic reality depicted in Les Soleils takes place. But such a view would be causal, or in Lévinas' terms, "selon la
catégorie de la cause". Underlying a polarised reality, there is still oneness, or a living of the same reality. Within the context of Kourouma’s writing, both Salimata and Fama are subjected to the same politico-socio-economic conditions of the postcolonial era. Their reactions to this neo-colonial situation derives from an essential difference, namely what Lévinas calls the difference. By this term he means that which is different as a category, not just a qualifier of some aspect of a given reality. Salimata’s essential difference, is a relationship of love characterized by mystery, since power and knowledge are by definition absent from it.

2.4 PASSIVITY, ABSENCE OF HOPE, LEAD TO IRRESPONSIBILITY.

Salimata is first portrayed as a victim. In her village, when she is returning from the place of excision, she had to be separated from the other girls because she has become very sick, but in spite of her illness, she is raped by a "fétiçeur." She then experiences a series of forced but unconsummated marriages, sequestration, and isolation from the rest of the village. During this entire time, she suffers from terror, fear, and rejection. But Salimata overcomes this torment, flees from the scene of her suffering, and eventually joins Fama.

What characterizes Salimata’s experiences during the excision episode is passivity. She is totally helpless and powerless, not only with regard to the excision and the pain associated with it, but in the face of the rape situation as well. In physical terms, these events happen to her because of tribal custom and convention; they are culturally imposed upon her. In psychological terms, she must cope with the scarring that took place during and after the rape; but she is defenseless. Those who are supposed to be responsible for her well-being fall asleep and are awakened by her screams after Tiécoura has fled. Although she knows the "fétiçeur" raped her, the other villagers blame the incident on a supernatural "génie", her "génie". Her rape is thus explained away by alluding to a force that was alleged to have shadowed Salimata’s life as well as her mother’s. At the time of Salimata’a excision and
ensuing marriage, the "génie", not having been consulted, supposedly became jealous and raped her to gain revenge. In her eyes, however, Tiécoura was more like a wild animal: "En vérité, quand même il n’aurait pas rappelé le viol, Tiécoura dans la réalité nue était un bipède effrayant, répugnant et sauvage (38)."

After the night of the rape, her first husband is forced upon her and when she refuses him, no one understands. The commonly accepted explanation is that Salimata is possessed by the devil, and that she will always be haunted by the "génie" who raped her the night of the excision. Even though we know that Salimata was raped by Tiécoura, the other villagers refuse to acknowledge this truth, and they continue to blame a supernatural force over which no one has any control. Salimata’s entourage, including her mother, the two old women who were supposed to stand watch on either side of the bed the night of the wedding, and everyone else in the village choose not to blame a human agent, but a force from the outside.

Under these circumstances, Salimata suffers physically and psychologically. In a very real sense, this suffering is imposed on her from the outside, but not by a supernatural agent. She has no control over the excision, the rape, or the forced marriages. These events are imposed on her by her environment, by convention, and by tradition. She remains totally powerless in the face of them in part because her elders have themselves denied responsibility for these events because they insist that this force, this seemingly unavoidable, insatiable monster comes from the outside.

Suffering, says Lévinas, is like death; it happens to us without our knowledge, without our consent. We cannot anticipate it like knowable experiences of life. Within this phenomenological framework, it can be said that Salimata’s suffering happens to her in the future because she has no control over the "other", death.

As a result of her experience, she is ostracized and must spend ten years of her life in drudgery, performing simple household tasks. In her seclusion and isolation she is denied a relationship of intersubjectivity because she has no access to the others. According to Lévinas, an interaction with the other ("autrui") represents the possibility of a link between the future and the present. At this point Salimata’s
connection to the future is one of suffering only; hope is absent from it because suffering is characterized by passivity. She will suffer for ten years because of two unconsummated marriages. She is separate and different from other women, for she is assumed to be possessed by the devil. In her seclusion and isolation, she is denied a relationship of intersubjectivity, a relationship with the other.

Furthermore, since suffering is characterized by passivity, which in its extreme expression becomes the sob of the child, she undergoes the suffering, and she does not take responsibility for it. She does not seek control because her situation seems hopeless to her. Eventually, after twenty years of marriage, Salimata comes to view this particular experience (i.e., the excision and rape) as the cause of her infertility. In this sense, she does gain knowledge and understanding. At this moment of understanding, of knowledge, she will temporarily untie the knot between the "I" and the self. There are two significant events in Salimata's life when she soars in a glorious affirmation of her identity: the first occurs when she flees the village to join Fama in the city, and the second involves the sacrifice scene with the marabout.

Following her rape, Salimata refuses her first husband and his brother, who becomes her second husband after the first one's death. For her, all men smell of Tiécoura and remind her of the unbearable pain she experienced the night of the excision. As a result, she has become unable to conceive. The excision is a procedure that takes away and diminishes. It mutilates and disfigures the body, taking part of Salimata's femininity and leaving her psychologically scarred.

Transposed onto the body of a people, a nation, the notion of excision, of cutting out a part of an organic whole calls to mind the way in which African chiefs sold black slaves to white traders. This betrayal mutilated the body of those African nations that participated in the practice. In the case of Salimata, the women who are supposed to watch over her well-being fall asleep and fail to prevent Tiécoura, the rapist from taking advantage of her her. They failed in their duty. Likewise, those who could have protested the sale of their fellow men, generally from a tribe other than their own, remained silent.
The symbolism inherent in the excision also provides an appropriate metaphor for the colonialist intrusion into Africa. In Salimata’s story, the excision robs her and empowers the blatant patriarchal domination that characterizes life in her village. Similarly, slavery robbed the body of the nation to empower and to enrich the traders, the representatives of a patriarchal Western system. Furthermore, the attribution of Salimata’s rape to a "génie", a god-like figure can be seen as corresponding to the colonizers’ rationalization of their own actions vis-à-vis the colonized. Rape is an act of violence that deprives the victim of its integrity. Likewise, colonial exploitation is an act of power imposed from the outside on a passive, suffering body. The so-called genius-génie of the West was imposed on the colonized and neo-colonized Côtes des Ebènes in the same way that the savage, greedy body of Tiécoura was imposed on Salimata. On the symbolic, phallic, autocratic level, rape has left the country unable to conceive. It has plundered and deflowered, leaving the country physically, culturally and economically weakened. Like colonized Africa, Salimata was rejected, left to do menial tasks, and considered to be possessed by evil.

2.5 A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PRESENT - AN EVANESCENCE.

The memory of a happy encounter, which to her signified health, virility, love, and hope, initially brought Salimata from her native village to the city. Proud solitude, the glorious "I" as Lévinas describes it, the courage of the romantic hero, drives her to flee the house of her first husband to escape the enslavement and unhappiness that she has experienced there. She runs through the bush alone at night; she doesn’t fear wild animals, but she does fear that her husband might follow her and chase her down like an animal. This fear gives her the courage to continue running, even when she is very tired, because she knows that, if she is caught, she will be killed.

This wild flight from bondage brings her to the city, where she joins Fama and where her twenty-year marriage to Fama starts and ends. They lived happily for a
long time, because Salimata truly loved Fama and desired him very much. She wanted a child just as much as Fama did. In fact, she becomes so preoccupied by her desire that she acquires all the signs and symptoms of pregnancy. She is even registered on the local health services’ list of pregnant women, but after more than a year she is forced to admit that she is not pregnant, that she had merely experienced "une grossesse nerveuse", a false pregnancy.

On the symbolic level of writing, Fama and Salimata signify the infertile couple, from whom new life cannot spring. Their infertility signifies a missed future. Salimata’s hysterical pregnancy is a false hope just like the days of independence, which had seemed to hold so much promise for the country. In the end, it too only gave birth to the illusion of independence.

The analysis of Fama in chapter one bears witness to the breakdown of the old order, politically and economically. This breakdown can be compared to the processes that take place in Salimata’s body and mind. Just as the swelling in her body grew with the hope for a child, so did the hope for a new beginning swell and grow in the Ivory Coast with the suns (days) of independence. But, like Salimata’s pregnancy, that independence was a false hope; it was independence in name only. Salimata is a beautiful, good, faithful Muslim woman, and Fama is the prince of Horodougou. They were born to know and taste only the best, but they fail as a couple because they can not establish a link with the future by producing a child. By extension, the political reality of Les Soleils -- the present as evanescence -- is a failed present because it lacks a link to the future. Postcolonial Africa cannot conquer death as long as rebirth cannot be envisioned as a concept that would enable its people to transcend the old body politic. What is needed is a synthesis between the two influences, the old and the new, the Western and the African.
2.6 A SACRIFICAL OFFERING - KNOWLEDGE GAINED THROUGH THE WORK OF SELF-REFLECTION

The need to take care of our materiality is, according to Lévinas, a first lesson, a first teaching, "une première morale", as well as "une préoccupation du salut." Fama has failed in work. The old order can not participate in economic reconstruction, largely because it is based on an oral tradition and because the country’s leaders and its people have become involved in a mutual castration. Fama has also failed in his relationships with his fellow-men. His knowledge stops at the realization that what he represents is no longer vital and must therefore die. Through the symbolism of Salimata’s act of self-defense (the stabbing of Abdoulaye) and the sacrificial offering of the rooster, she gains knowledge of her problem: namely, that the old pain and fear must die within her before she can forge a new path and find a new freedom. Through a transcendence of pain, a new identity, the glorious "I", will shine through and make a place for her and the marabout. Rebirth can only take place when the old is abandoned, making possible an access to the future. Realizing that her infertility is a direct result of the violence she has undergone, Salimata can open herself to other men, and experience the genuine promise of having a child.

When she throws the sacrificed rooster into the water, she symbolically relinquishes that part of her that was the victim. Up to this point, she has thought that she should try against all odds to have a child with Fama. She has now gained an awareness of her participation in the infertility of the couple that she and Fama were. On the basis of this knowledge, she can conceive of a solution. She can stop praying to Allah for a child and instead give herself a real chance of becoming pregnant by the marabout. Symbolically, she opens herself to hope, and establishes the possibility of a relationship with the future.

Within the context of the whole work, this last purifying ritual suggests that the solution to the impasse that her country faces, is not to be found on the political level, but rather on the individual level. It lies in a raising of consciousness, in a
becoming aware. In her case, it lies in assuming responsibility for the role she played in the couple’s infertility. As a result of this insight, she becomes capable of investing her desire in a different man. Given Fama’s impotence and that of the power structure he represents, and given the absence of legitimacy in the new government, which is a puppet in the hands of the lover (foreign investment), hope lies with a new individual awareness (as we saw in Chapter one of this study) and (as has become evident in Chapter two) with the possibility of intersubjective relationships.
CONCLUSION

The pursuit of an individual identity rather than a purely communal one is depicted in the dialectic of Kourouma's novel. Access to political, social, and economic power is denied to those who are imprisoned in the inflexible mores of a small village setting. An important component of this access to power is the need for access to written literacy. Culturally and artistically, the oral tradition is a rich heritage. In order to join the rest of the world, however, Africa will need to forge a new identity that incorporates part of the foreignness, the individuality, and the literacy that have come from outside. Knowledge which gives access to power, on the individual as well as on the national level, must be attained so that people can begin to build a new legitimacy. To accomplish this goal, the children who spilled the rice dish destined for the lover, need to become emancipated. They need to acquire the status of adults, responsible citizens.

Even a first reading of Les Soleils reveals a narrative which in and by itself is already an "actant", a catalyst of symbolic, cultural "métissage," for Malinke expressions and proverbs are fused with French vocabulary and syntax in the text. The blending of Malinke and French elements is indeed a writing for synthesis that is mirrored in the signified of the work.

Les Soleils des Indépendances is a story about death and birth, in a West African country during the days of an independence that masks the harsh realities of neocolonialism. Kourouma's writing exposes the true nature of these realities. The rigidity, the exploitation, and the naive expectations that characterize oral culture in the village are fated to die. But death is necessary, for it enables a new hope to be born. This hope, a link between the future and the present, is nurtured and sustained by overcoming the knot of solitude and suffering. It is the hope for a new identity, Africa's own identity, an identity that will link it with the future. It is a hope for a
rebirth, that will allow Africans to maintain their identity while transcending it. As Kourouma suggests, this transcendence can be achieved through the category of love. A virile giving combined with a fertile receiving gives birth to hope. This metaphor holds out the promise for a solution to the dilemma created by the days of independence in postcolonial Africa.

The Lacanian model of psychoanalysis employed in Chapter I has demonstrated the loss of power in connection with Fama. It was particularly well suited to study his character because he represents an African patriarchy that is no longer capable of participating in the kind of society that is emerging in independent African states. By drawing upon Lévinas' *Le Temps et l'Autre*, I have shown that time can be viewed as a relationship with the other, and I have applied this concept to an understanding of Salimata. We can now see how she has a chance for the future, a chance that is embodied in her desire to transcend the present through the promise of maternity.

The synthesis of these two approaches enables us to comprehend the dialectic of the past and the future as presented in the two major characters, thereby opening for us a new way of comprehending the nature of Kourouma’s achievement in *Les Soleils des Indépendances*. 
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