

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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***The Suns of Independence / Les Soleils des indépendances* (1981)**
Ahmadou Kourouma (1927-2003)

Sources:

Les Soleils des indépendances, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1968.

The Suns of Independence, translated by Adrian Adams as (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1981)

OVERVIEW

Auteur: Ahmadou Kourouma was born in Boundiali, Côte d'Ivoire, in 1927, and passed away in Lyon, France, in 2003. After early studies in Mali, he served in the French army and later completed higher education in mathematics and actuarial science in France. His professional life took him through Algeria, Cameroon, and Côte d'Ivoire, where he worked in insurance and finance while remaining a sharp critic of political power, which led to periods of exile. Kourouma became one of the major voices of Francophone African literature, publishing *Les Soleils des indépendances* (1968), *Monnè, outrages et défis* (1988), *En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages* (1998), and *Allah n'est pas obligé* (2000). His last novel earned several major literary prizes, including the Prix Renaudot and the Goncourt des lycéens, confirming his place among the most influential African writers of his generation.

Book: *Les Soleils des indépendances* appeared in 1968, first in Canada, because French publishers were hesitant to accept its bold style and political tone. The novel follows Fama, a Malinke nobleman whose world collapses as independence reshapes society, politics, and traditional authority. Written in a French infused with Malinke rhythms and imagery, the book stood out immediately for its voice and its critique of post-colonial leadership. In Côte d'Ivoire, it became a landmark text that captured the disillusionment many felt after independence. Internationally, it was praised for its originality and won several distinctions, helping establish Kourouma as a central figure in African literature.

Background: Kourouma wrote the novel during a period when many African countries were navigating the first years of independence. The initial enthusiasm of liberation had given way to authoritarian regimes, single-party systems, censorship, and widespread political frustration. Traditional structures such as chieftaincies were weakened or abolished, and new borders divided territories that once formed unified cultural spaces. Culturally, the book reflects the tension between ancestral customs and modern state institutions, and it incorporates the storytelling techniques of Malinke oral tradition. Historically, it captures a moment when societies were trying to redefine themselves while facing corruption, instability, and the erosion of old forms of authority.

MAIN CHARACTERS

FAMA The last prince of the Horodugu, stripped of his prestige by independence.

SALIMATA Fama's wife, whose deepest longing is to have a child.

JAMURU The family *griot* devoted to restoring Fama to his rightful place as chief of the Horodugu.

BALLA The fetish priest, who resisted conversion to Islam and helps Fama recover his lost prestige.

SYNOPSIS

Suns of Independence follows the turbulent journey of Fama Dumbuya, the last heir of a once-powerful Malinke dynasty whose world collapses as independence reshapes every structure around him. Once born into prestige, Fama now wanders the capital like a beggar, attending funerals to collect offerings and clinging to memories of a past where his lineage commanded respect. The city exposes him to humiliation, poverty, and the erosion of traditions that once gave meaning to his identity. His wife, Salimata, carries her own burden of trauma and longing, working tirelessly while praying for a child she may never have, trapped between devotion, fear, and the weight of her past. When Fama learns that his cousin Lasina has died, he returns to his native village, hoping that reclaiming the chieftaincy will restore his dignity. Instead, he discovers a community weakened by political changes, divided by new borders, and stripped of the authority that once defined the Dumbuya clan. The village committee, empowered by the new regime, challenges his legitimacy, while the *griot*, Jamuru, and the fetish priest, Balla, attempt to revive the old order through lineage, charms, and appeals to ancestral spirits. Fama moves through this world like a man caught between eras, unable to adapt to modern politics and incapable of fully recovering the traditions he idealizes.

The novel traces his slow unraveling as he confronts the limits of pride, the fragility of memory, and the harsh reality of a society where independence has brought neither justice nor stability. Through Fama's decline, the story paints a vivid portrait of post-colonial disillusionment, showing how the suns of independence, once celebrated with hope, can burn just as fiercely as they illuminate.

PLOT

PART I

CHAPTER 1: *The Mastiff and His Shameless Way of Sitting*

A Malinke Man Passed: The narrator says that a Malinke man died a week ago. In Malinke tradition, people say he could not withstand a simple cold, which is their way of speaking about death. His shadow is believed to leave the body, return to his home village to settle what must be settled, then come back to the capital to observe the funeral rites: the burial, the seventh day, and the fortieth day. Only after these ceremonies does the shadow travel again to the village, where it will be reborn in a Malinke child, because a man of the blacksmith caste is never meant to rest in foreign soil. Before independence, an elder blacksmith would have been responsible for guiding the shadow home. He would retrieve it, escort it back to the ancestral land, and ensure that the complex blacksmith funerary rites were performed correctly.

The Shadow's Vigil and the New Griots (praise-singers): Whatever the circumstances, the shadow ensures that the funeral rites are carried out with devotion and sanctity, that offerings are placed, and that every sacrifice is made. Funerary ceremonies have long been a source of profit for *griots*. Since the suns of independence, many Malinke merchants, especially the elders whose businesses no longer prosper, have become *griots* who wander from funeral to funeral, attending every ceremony from morning until night. People refer to them with disdainful sobriquets such as vultures or bands of hyenas. Fama Dumbuya, descendant of the princes of Horodugu, is one of these vultures. This is what the suns of independence have reduced a panther to: keeping company with hyenas.

Fama's Bitter Decline: On the indigenous side of the bridge that once links the Black quarter to the White city, Fama presses his pace, cursing the sun, the dust, and the crowds that seem to have gathered solely to torment him. He is late for the seventh day funeral of Koné Ibrahima. Fama cannot believe his misfortune. He, Fama, born into gold, abundance, honor, and women, is now nothing more than a scavenger: "*Fama Dumbuya! A true Dumbuya, of Dumbuya father and Dumbuya mother, the last legitimate descendant of the Dumbuya princes of Horodugu ... was a vulture*" (4). This is what he has become, a man who once moved like a panther now condemned to wander from funeral to funeral like a vulture.

Fama Arrives Too Late: Fama arrives late to the funeral, and the *griot* announces his presence with a thinly veiled reproach. He proclaims that “*the prince of Horodugu, the last legitimate Dumbuya, has condescended to join us... a bit late*” (6), exposing Fama to mocking smiles and sidelong glances. Fama, once born into gold, abundance, honor, and women, now survives like a scavenger, begging for his share among the offerings of funeral ceremonies. The *griot* adds that Fama’s delay has not disrupted custom and that a place has been reserved for him among the Keita. Fama bristles. Who dares associate the Dumbuya with the Keita, panthers with hippopotamuses? Among the Malinke, such a confusion is a grave offense.

Outburst and Humiliation: Fama begins to grumble loudly, indifferent to the crowd’s growing irritation with his constant tantrums at funerals. A man, Bamba, shouts back that it is always the same story: always Fama, always insufficient shares, always complaints. He orders Fama to sit down and be quiet, claiming their ears are tired of hearing him. Insulted, Fama leaps at Bamba, and a scuffle breaks out. Fama is quickly overpowered, but the elders still judge him to be in the right. To soothe his wounded pride, they offer him a few banknotes and some kola nuts. He pretends to refuse them, then slips them into his pocket.

A World Without True Griots: The funeral resumes in its familiar mixture of regrets, tears, and laughter, but Fama has no heart for any of it. He blames the *griot* for the humiliation he has suffered, for the erosion of his dignity. He tells himself that there are no true griots anymore. The real ones were buried with Samory Touré, the great African conqueror. What remains are dog-sons who cluck from ceremony to ceremony, chasing the scent of offerings. In Fama’s eyes, they are no longer guardians of tradition but opportunists feeding on the ruins of a world that once honored men like him.

CHAPTER 2: *Without the Scent of Green Guava*

Fama’s Fury and the City’s Divisions: Fama fumes. He waits for Bamba in the street, determined to avenge the insult of a man who dared lay a hand on a Dumbuya. As he scans the distance, his eyes rest on the white quarter: clean, orderly, built by black hands that do not live there. The black quarter, by contrast, sprawls in filth, noise, and overcrowding. To Fama, it mirrors the fate of the black man, of all black people. He concludes that Bamba is no different from himself, another damned soul who deserves nothing more than the punishment destiny has assigned him.

Nostalgia and the Memory of Home: Fama sinks into nostalgia. The mud, the humidity, the poverty of the city weigh on him and make him long for his native village. He thinks of “*its deep distant sky, its soil arid but firm ... Memories of childhood, of sunlit days, the dry harmattan ... and smells of Horodugu*” (12). In the midst of urban decay, these memories rise like a lost horizon, reminding him of a world that once held meaning, solidity, and dignity.

Memories of Lost Markets: As Fama steps into the marketplace square, the smells rise around him and remind him of the great African markets he once knew as a successful merchant. Those markets have disappeared since the colonizers left. A small pang of regret catches him. He remembers being among those who fought the colonizer and called for independence, only to see the trade that sustained him collapse afterward. He thinks, almost aloud, that colonization favored trade; independence killed trade.

The Price of Independence: Fama concludes that he should have chosen colonization over independence, even though colonization robbed him of his hereditary title as chief of Horodugu. The commandant had preferred a distant cousin, Lasina, a man eager to please and quick to bow. Yet Lasina too, and God does not sleep, loses his prestige when independence arrives and the single party takes control.

The Bitter Reward of Independence: Fama remembered how much money and energy he had spent insulting France and fighting for freedom, convinced he was helping bring independence into being.

However, the single party did not even bother to reward him with a modest position. It did not name him secretary-general of a sub-section, nor director of a cooperative. As for becoming a minister, he admits he did not have the education for that. Independence had taken his business from him, and in return had given him only a new national identity card and a membership card for the brand-new single party. Reduced to these tokens, Fama found himself waiting for his daily bread from the providence of Allah.

A Moment of Contentment: Fama thought the day had been good after all. He had enough money in his pocket to afford a few decent meals. He stepped into the mosque just as a storm was gathering. When the wind began to rise, he climbed the minaret to call the faithful to prayer. From that height, he saw the full misery of the black quarter spread out beneath him. A curse escaped his lips before he could stop himself, and he immediately apologized to Allah, who had been generous to him in health and in sustenance. His happiness, he told himself, would be complete if Salimata, his wife, could give him a child.

A Wish and a Heavy Truth: Fama's thoughts drifted to Salimata, to the tenderness of their life together, to the comfort she brought him. Realizing where his mind had wandered, he apologized again to Allah for letting such personal thoughts intrude in a sacred place. And yet Salimata, a pious and respectful woman, had tried everything to become pregnant. She had prayed, consulted marabouts, taken medicines, performed dances, covered her body with smelly concoctions, offered sacrifices, and even pushed him into awkward nighttime gymnastics meant to increase their chances. All of it had been in vain.

CHAPTER 3: His Neck was Hung About with Collars Bristling with Magic Charms, Like the Spike-Studded Collars Worn by Baboon-Hunting Dogs

Salimata's Night of Restlessness: That night, Salimata could not sleep. Wakefulness haunted her until dawn, letting the thread of her youth unwind in her mind. She remembered her mother, who for years had waited only for the day of her initiation, her excision, who spoke of nothing else, who dreamed only of the glory her daughter's excision would bring to the family. Her mother had described excision as a step that would purify her, end the years of ambiguity, and finally introduce her into the world of women. For a month, her mother kept reminding her, she would live in seclusion with other girls her age, out in the fields, surrounded by songs and dances, and she would return pure and radiant. Salimata's excision was her mother's pride, her anticipated triumph, the event for which she prayed every day. At last came the moment when her mother told her, *"Be brave, my daughter! Bravery in the fields of excision is a mother's pride and the whole tribe's"* (21).

Interrupted Thoughts and Resentment: Salimata was deep in these memories when Fama's snoring and sudden kicks, surely caused by a biting insect, interrupted her. She cursed under her breath, jabbed him in the backside with her elbow, and silently damned this empty man, this good-for-nothing by night and by day, for whom she rose early to prepare millet porridge to sell at the market, so she could feed him, clothe him, and house him. At midday she went to the capital to sell rice, scraping together enough money to pay the marabouts she consulted for his virility and her fertility. A man who, in her eyes, was no man at all.

The Day of Excision: Salimata returned to her memories of the day of her excision, a day that had brought her mother shame and discouragement and had been a torment for her. She had not returned with the other girls. She had fainted under the exciser's blade, and at dusk they carried her through a hidden entrance to the hut of Chekura, the village's old fetish priest, so he could treat her. She awoke under the weight of Chekura, who had just violated her in her sleep, and she fainted again.

A Myth to Hide the Truth: In the village, they concealed the truth beneath a mythical explanation. They said it was a spirit who had assaulted her. The spirit of Mount Tougbé, who had finally allowed her sterile mother to conceive her, had been angered that she was being excised without his consent and had come to take revenge by violating her. That was the story they told. Salimata had never believed it.

A Marriage That Never Truly Begins: Three weeks after her excision, Salimata, washed and declared purified, was escorted into the courtyard of her future husband. On the wedding night she refused him. Two

matrons held her down on the bed and forced her legs apart so that Baffi could claim her. But Baffi reminded her too much of Chekura, the sorcerer who had raped her, and Salimata screamed, struggled, clawed, and finally seized Baffi's large hernia. Defeated, he pulled up his trousers and withdrew. For several nights the same grim ritual repeated itself with the matrons and with Baffi, each attempt ending in failure. The elders concluded that this girl, who had been violated by a spirit, was unmarriageable. However, Baffi had already paid the bride price, and Salimata's mother could not repay it.

A Wife in Name Only: The elders agreed that Salimata would live in Baffi's courtyard as his wife only in the sense of household duties, but she would not share his bed as a spouse. She cooked, cleaned, and worked as expected, but she remained untouched, a wife in name only. This arrangement lasted four years, until Baffi's hernia finally carried him off. After her three months of widowhood in isolation, Salimata, who was hoping to be released from the marriage and from the burden that had shadowed her since the night she first entered his home, was passed onto Baffi's brother, Chemoko, who, apart from Baffi's hernia, looked exactly like him, and thus like Chekura.

Chemoko's Threats and Salimata's Escape: Chemoko hesitated for years before bringing Salimata into his home. Her jealous spirit frightened him. One day, however, unable to resist the beauty of the young woman, he made up his mind and confined her in a hut in his courtyard. For many nights he circled the hut with a knife in his hand, threatening to stab her if she refused him, but never daring to come close enough to act. One night Salimata escaped and ran alone into the bush. She ran to this young man whose sweet words and look had fascinated her once in the village, Fama.

A Prayer for Motherhood: Salimata emerged from these painful memories and prepared for her day of selling. She took her shower and sat on her prayer mat for the morning prayer. She implored Allah to give her a baby, just one. But by what means? Her husband was impotent. Allah the merciful, she wondered, *"What stood foremost in God's will? Fidelity or motherhood? Motherhood, surely, motherhood above all"* (28). Would Allah blame her if she fulfilled that maternity with a man other than Fama, a man who did not have Chekura's ugliness and did not inspire fear in her? She reproached herself for asking Allah to bless intentions of adultery while sitting on a prayer mat.

Salimata's Obsession with Motherhood: Salimata's desire for a baby had become a true obsession. She dreamed of infants through entire nights, felt the presence of a baby in the ladle she washed, and sensed a baby sucking at her breast in her sleep, only to wake up disappointed. Once, she was even declared pregnant and announced her condition throughout the neighborhood. Every morning she went to the dispensary with her maternity booklet in hand, her spoon ready to drink the syrup given to pregnant women. Over time, her belly flattened again. The doctors called it "a nervous pregnancy." The Malinke, for their part, said it was her jealous genie who had impregnated her. A genie's pregnancy never goes to terms. Salimata felt deeply ashamed.

Fama's Fading Hope and His Transformation: Salimata relived the days when Fama and she had believed a child was on the way. He had been attentive and showered her with gifts each time he returned from his travels. But when her belly flattened, his affection vanished, and he went to look for that child elsewhere. He took one wife, then two, then three, yet nothing came of it. As his business affairs declined, these women drifted away from him and left. He became a completely different man, unrecognizable, bitter and harsh. It was then that he threw himself into politics with the passion of a wounded prince determined to undo fifty years of insults and humiliation inflicted by the white colonizer.

The Plateau and Its Divided Landscape: The capital's wealthy white district, the Plateau, filled with beautiful villas and buildings with flowered balconies, was always under construction. From time to time, a white woman on a balcony rocked a happy baby. The black laborers working on these construction sites formed Salimata's clientele. Each morning, they hurried toward her as soon as they heard her cry "porridge! Good, sweet porridge!" and saw her unload her bowl of porridge. They knew Salimata's great weakness, her longing for a child, *because "a woman who is not a mother lacks more than half of what makes a woman"* (33). So, they approached her without money, offering blessings instead. "God grant you a child." This single phrase was enough for Salimata to give them porridge on credit.

The Cycle of Credit and Loss: From one bowl served on credit to the next, Salimata's porridge disappeared without bringing her a single coin, only promises of payment. She returned to the ferry landing to take the boat back to the black quarter in time to walk through the market, buy the rice to cook and sell, and visit the marabout, so she could come again at the midday break with a fresh bowl of rice. The workers emptied that bowl as well, still on credit. Day after day, Salimata repeated this exhausting cycle, carrying her food, serving her customers, and receiving almost nothing but blessings and deferred promises in return.

CHAPTER 4: When Has God Ever Shown Pity for Misfortune?

Salimata's Midday Generosity: That midday, Salimata counted her earnings. She had been lucky, and there was still rice left in the bowl. She wondered why she should not make a small offering and share it with the poor. She called out to the unemployed men and the beggars and handed out plates of rice. The beneficiaries blessed her, saying, "*May God give you good fortune, a lucky market and many children*" (39). Soon, more needy people gathered around her.

The Sudden Humiliation: Salimata's bowl quickly emptied, but the crowd did not step back. They pushed forward, overturned the bowl, trampled her, tore off her wrapper, exposed her breasts and her hips, stole her money, and then ran off to plunder other vendors. Salimata was left alone under the sun, humiliated by the very people she had helped. She wondered if this was a sign of Allah's anger toward her. She decided she needed to consult the marabout.

A Visit to the Marabout: Salimata went to visit Abdullahi, the neighborhood marabout. He was a vigorous man, known for his confident presence, and she never left him indifferent. Each time she went to see him, she adorned herself with jewelry, bright smiles, and shining eyes. Abdullahi told her that a harmful force was moving toward her and needed to be driven away. He prescribed the sacrifice of a red rooster and a ritual in his hut, placing her in uncomfortable and intimate positions, before assuring her that the danger had been removed.

A Desperate Plea: There was still one matter left. Salimata confessed her deepest sorrow: "There is still sterility to haunt me; the talismans and medicines have not yet rooted it out. Take pity on me" (50). Abdullahi answered bluntly that Fama was hopeless. "*Your husband, I say this with a clear tongue and conscience, will never make a woman fruitful. He is sterile as a rock, as dust, as the harmattan wind*" (50). He then ordered Salimata to come closer. In that instant, she suddenly saw in him the repulsive image of Chekura, her past tormentor, and she stepped back in fear.

Escape Under the Rain: Abdullahi grabbed her and pushed her onto his bed, where she fell, terrified. As he prepared to force himself on her, she fought back, throwing every object within reach at him. She seized his knife and plunged it into his shoulder. While he screamed in pain, she fled into the rain, unseen by anyone, crying not only from terror but from the crushing realization that she might never have a child, because Fama was sterile.

PART II

CHAPTER 5: He was Tethered by the Genitals, and Death was Closing In; Luckily the Moon Came to the Rescue

The Death of Cousin Lasina: Lasina, the cousin chosen by the colonial administration to replace Fama as head of the Horodugu, had died. With his passing, the responsibility of leadership now fell to Fama. Salimata encouraged him to leave behind his miserable city life and return to the village to claim the chieftaincy that every Dumbuya dreamed of inheriting. She saw it as an opportunity for dignity and renewal.

A Burden Rather Than an Honor: Fama, however, felt no enthusiasm. To him, this inheritance was a poisoned gift. The tribe had lost its prestige long ago and had become nothing more than a cluster of poor

and needy people who would come to him every day asking for help. On the other hand, accepting the role would also give him the right to Lasina's four widows, including the beautiful Mariam, who had once been promised him. Salimata had convinced him not to marry Mariam, warning him with a mix of humor and realism: "*Fama, Fama, just think, take a look at yourself. Do you really think you can mount the two of us? With me it is as much of a job as drawing water from the top of a hill. And those aches and pains in your back and sides after every night ...*" (62). Fama had refused Mariam because he had neither the stamina nor the money for a second wife.

Memories Along the Dirt Road: As Fama traveled along the bumpy, dusty dirt road, passing through peaceful villages, nostalgia washed over him. He remembered his childhood, when he and his friends hunted bush rats in the savanna. The familiar landscapes returned to him: lazy cattle grazing in the fields, thatched roofs blending into one another, and the marshes scattered across the countryside. These sights reminded him of a simpler time, far removed from the frustrations of city life.

A Hero's Welcome: Fama finally arrived in the village of his first stayover. He was welcomed and fed like a hero. The villagers refused to hear anything about his struggles against the single party. Politics was forbidden in the village. Instead, they told him about recent deaths, marriages, betrayals, and newborns in the Horodugu. Fama felt relieved to enjoy what he called an "African night not bastardized," a night untouched by the noise and corruption of the city. For the first time in a long while, he felt at peace. That night, surrounded by familiar sounds and sheltered by the calm of the village, Fama let himself drift into sleep. The weight of his worries faded, replaced by the comfort of being home, in the Horodugu, though there was still some travel to do to reach Togobala.

CHAPTER 6: Pacing Away in the Night of the Heart and the Shadow of the Eye

Crossing Into Nikinai: After passing the last village of Ebony Coast, the passengers prepared to enter the Socialist Republic of Nikinai, where Togobala, Fama's village, was located. At the border post, a customs officer committed the bold offense of asking Fama for his identity card, insisting that he was entering foreign territory and could not proceed without proper identification. The remark struck Fama like an insult.

A Clash at the Border: Fama exploded in anger and hurled insults at the officer. The head of the post, who was Malinke like Fama, intervened and reminded the indiscreet customs agent that Fama was a descendant of the Dumbuya line. The officer shrugged and replied that he did not care. Fama, boiling with rage, pretended not to hear the comment, his pride wounded but his silence heavy.

Arrival in Togobala: Fama finally reached Togobala and was escorted to the Dumbuya compound by a jubilant crowd. The village mourners launched into a deafening display of grief, rolling on the ground and wailing over the death of his cousin Lasina. Exhausted, Fama found all this ceremonial noise unnecessary, but he submitted to the ritual of comfort and gratitude, repeating with forced solemnity, "*Thank you all! ... God reward you all.*"

Night of the Ancestors: When night fell, Fama was expected to sleep in the ancestral hut, as tradition required, the same hut where Lasina had once slept. Though the people of Togobala were Muslims, they remained deeply devoted to their ancestral rites. It was unthinkable for Fama to spend the night in a place where so many forebears had died without first performing sacrifices to keep the spirits away. Thus, he lay down in a smaller hut among clay jars filled with offerings.

A Burden Disguised as an Inheritance: The next morning, Fama inspected the legacy Lasina had left behind. What he discovered was far from the noble inheritance he had imagined: eight old huts, cracked and weather-worn, that would require major repairs; three thin sheep; two goats; and a single starving calf. He counted the people as well: four men, two of them elderly, and nine women, seven already advanced in age. Added to this were the taxes, the dues owed to the single party, and all the obligations tied to the chieftaincy. Faced with this reality, Fama realized that Lasina's legacy was not an honor at all, but a burden.

CHAPTER 7: *Swarms of Lizards and Vultures Tore Open His Ribs; He Survived Thanks to Balla's Wisdom*

Jamuru's Secret: Fama asked Jamuru, the Dumbuyas' *griot*, how a head of household could possibly survive in such poverty. Jamuru replied that every chief had his own secret and then revealed his own. Years earlier, the white commandant had fallen in love with his young virgin daughter, Matali, and had forced himself on her, fathering two mixed-race children, one after the other. Even after the commandant's departure, when Matali later married the Fulani interpreter, Matali and her children never forgot Jamuru. One became a provincial governor, another a secretary-general and mayor-deputy. Thanks to them, the hardships of colonization and the difficult years of independence passed over him without leaving a mark, for he always lived in abundance. Fama noticed that, indeed, Jamuru looked far healthier than the other inhabitants of Togobala.

The *Griot's* Litany and Fama's Rising Pride: Jamuru was about to speak of Lasina when the Sises, the Keitas, the Konates, and the Kuyates arrived to offer their salutations and condolences, each bowing before Fama, as the *griot*, true scholar of lineage, explained the ancestral ties linking every family to the Dumbuya. With each name recited and each connection traced, Fama felt his pride swell; for a moment, he forgot the years of begging in the city and his marriage to the sterile Salimata, and he felt once again like a prince restored to his kingdom.

Balla the Unbeliever: When the greeters finally withdrew, the old fetish-priest, Balla, entered. Balla had resisted every call to convert to Islam and remained an unshakable unbeliever. Jamuru disliked him and saw him as an abomination in a community that claimed to be devout Muslim. But the two men had more in common than they admitted. Both had managed to survive colonization and the harsh years of independence: Jamuru, thanks to Matali and her powerful descendants, and Balla, thanks to the Malinke, who prayed five times a day but constantly sought his charms for wealth, revenge, healing, or protection. Whether his fetishes worked or not, Balla always profited and had remained plump and comfortable in the misery of Togobala.

A Shared Cause and a Doubtful Prince: The one thing Balla and Jamuru agreed on was their resentment of independence, which had abolished the chieftaincy and dethroned cousin Fama, replacing him with a village committee and its president. For both men, restoring the Dumbuya dynasty was essential, and each worked toward that goal in his own way: Jamuru, by distributing kola nuts and money in Fama's name and promising to appeal to the governor, Matali's former lover, while Balla, by working to mystically strike down committee members and anyone who opposed the dynasty's return. *"Thus, in the quest to regain power Fama could rely on a fetish-priest, a praise-singer, money, and political support ..."* (78). The problem was that the prince himself did not believe in the cause and perhaps did not even want it.

Fama at the Cemetery: Fama went to the village cemetery to pray by the grave of the late Lasina, and Balla insisted on coming along, even though he was an unbeliever. The landscape of Fama's childhood was now stripped of its small forests, and the cemetery looked desolate. Some graves were empty, desecrated by hyenas. Lasina's grave, a simple mound of red dirt, was protected by a lamp meant to keep hyenas away for at least the first ten days. Fama then asked to be taken to the graves of his mother and father. He was stunned to see the sides of their graves riddled with holes made by rats and lizards, and vultures flew off at their approach, having been feeding on a dead dog.

Night Terrors and Balla's Advice: That night, Fama had a nightmare and confided in Balla, who claimed he had foreseen it. Balla advised him to perform sacrifices to drive away Fama's enemies, enemies that Balla said he had scattered during the night, but who could always return.

CHAPTER 8: *The Suns Sounding the dry Season and Fama, His Nights bristling with Bedbugs and Mariam, Were All Trapped; But the Bastards Did Not Win*

Harmattan Memories: In what Fama called "a very good dry season" and Balla dismissed as "a miserable puny wretch of a harmattan," a restless wind rose over Togobala, carrying dust, dead leaves, and gusts

that tore off thatch roofs, rolled calabashes and swept away loincloths. In that turbulent weather, the two men reminisced about Fama's childhood and about how Balla had become the greatest hunter of the Horodugu. Gifted by the spirit of hunters, Balla was no ordinary tracker, and he loved retelling the legendary hunt in which he battled a buffalo, matching the beast in feats of magic and metamorphosis until he finally overcame it.

A Prince in Disgrace: Visitors continued to stream into Fama's compound, this time with outstretched hands, expecting alms. The little money Fama had brought quickly dwindled, and with it his patience. He grew irritable and harsh, but the *griot* and Balla stepped in and paid on his behalf. Fama felt ashamed to depend on Jamuru and Balla to save face: *"In broad daylight, right in the middle of Togobala, the last of the Dumbuya had become his servants' parasite. It was pitiful, disgraceful, unbelievable!"* (88). Even once the money worries were eased, Fama still felt his nights painfully lonely, empty of feminine warmth, empty of Mariam.

Mariam in Fama's Thoughts: Fama had not stopped thinking about Mariam since the day he arrived in Togobala, when he first saw her among the other widows in the hut where they were to spend their forty days of seclusion. He had found her beautiful, as if she had gathered all her charms for this period of mourning. Mariam had given him a tender, pleading smile and said, *"Jamuru speak to your master ... tell him that we rely on him alone; he is our father and our mother"* (89). From that moment on, Fama thought less and less of Salimata, who in his eyes would not be worth half a kola nut compared to Mariam, who was beautiful and bewitching.

Warnings About Mariam: Jamuru warned Fama that despite her childlike air, Mariam was a woman to keep firmly within the net. She smiled at everyone, he said, and refused no advances, not even those of young men who no longer respected the customs of their elders. Balla reassured Fama that there were no faithful women left in the Horodugu anyway but promised he would keep Mariam under control. He would place a charm on her so that any man who tried to lie with her would be unable to withdraw until Fama pronounced the magic phrase, or else see his organ shrink until it disappeared into his lower belly. And Fama continued to dream of Mariam, imagining himself with her, lost in fantasies he could not shake.

The Committee's Visit: The *griot* and Balla warned Fama that the members of the village committee, whom Fama and his clan considered "sons of slaves," would soon subject him to questioning. When the day arrived, Fama and his supporters were joined by the committee members, the *sous-préfet*, and their own *griot*. The committee president, Babu, spoke first, offering long praises to Fama for having participated in the struggle against the colonizer. He insisted, the purpose of the meeting was the search for truth, guided by their humanism and their shared Muslim faith. Babu navigated his speech with great tact, careful not to offend anyone present.

The Demand for Submission: When it was Fama's turn to speak, he refused to answer directly, unwilling to lower himself before "a son of slaves," and let Jamuru speak for him. The *griot* talked with eloquence until nightfall, pausing only for the fourth prayer. The men separated, then returned to continue the palaver around a wood fire until the first rooster's crow. By the next afternoon, the committee's true intention finally emerged. According to their spokesperson, Fama was required to kneel before the committee president, kiss the ground, retract all past insults he had uttered against him, swear on the Qur'an that he "pledge allegiance to the party and the revolution," and promise that neither openly nor in secret would he ever again slander the party president.

Jamuru's Protest: Jamuru immediately protested. What the committee's delegate proposed was completely different from what had been agreed upon and, he warned, would endanger the village. It was the kind of breach through which, as he put it, the cockroaches of independence could storm the house-village and tear it apart. The villagers, united as one, insisted instead that Fama be integrated into the party rather than humiliated or fought by it.

A Compromise for Stability: Their pressure worked. Fama was made a member of the committee while still retaining the head of the Doumbouya clan. The villagers continued to protest, determined to preserve harmony and prevent the committee from undermining the fragile balance of Togobala.

CHAPTER 9: After the Successful Funeral Rites, Came the Ill-fated Journey

The Forty-Day Ceremony: The narrator explains that the Malinke commemorate the fortieth day after death because it marks the moment when the deceased is finally received by those who passed before him. But this welcome is not unconditional: The ancestors will only make room for him if they are drunk on blood. This is why abundant sacrifice is required. Animals must be slaughtered so that blood flows, ensuring that the dead man is properly ushered into the community of spirits.

From Abundance to Scarcity: Before colonization and the era of independence, prosperity made lavish sacrifice possible. A good Malinke could count on a secure place among the dead because his family could afford to spill enough blood to satisfy ancestral expectations. But since independence, famine and scarcity have reshaped the ritual landscape. Offering even a single scrawny goat has become a feat, a sign of hardship rather than abundance.

A Rite Strained by Modern Realities: The forty-day ceremony, once a confident passage into the world of the ancestors, has become a struggle against material limits. The ritual endures, but its grandeur has faded; the community must now do what it can with little, hoping that even meager sacrifice will suffice to open a place for the departed among those who came before him.

Restoring the Dumbuya Honor: Jamuru, Balla, and Fama had sworn to restore the dignity of the Dumbuya lineage, and they kept their word. Balla contributed a young bull. Lasina's son-in-law, who had not yet paid his wife's bride-price, offered a cow. And two of the five bulls Lasina had entrusted to a woman in a neighboring village, animals that would have quietly slipped into her herd had it not been for Malinke gossip and the vigilance of Balla and Jamuru, were reclaimed, since they formed part of Fama's rightful inheritance.

A Feast That Marked the Ancestors' Favor: The Dumbuya were honored. This was all the more striking because funerals like Lasina's, where so much blood flowed, where men, women, children, and even animals jostled for their share, where breasts, hips, and torsos swayed to the pulse of drums and balafons, had become exceedingly rare. Balla had seen only three such ceremonies in the Horodugu since the suns of Samory, and Jamuru only four. The slaughter of four oxen, the abundance of meat, and the exuberant tumult of the crowd made Lasina's fortieth-day funerals a spectacle worthy of the ancestors, a reminder of a grandeur that had nearly vanished.

Why Fama Insisted on Leaving: Fama decided to return to the city to announce to Salimata, and to all who knew him, his intention to settle in Togobala and assume the Dumbuya chieftaincy. Yet Balla, after consulting his fetishes, warned him against the journey, declaring it riddled with hidden dangers. And the question lingered: Why would Fama stubbornly insist on leaving when he had everything in Togobala, an entire village at his feet, a fertile young woman, Mariam, and money supplied by Balla and Jamuru?

A Restless Pride: Fama's insistence revealed a deeper restlessness, a need to proclaim his restored status beyond the boundaries of Togobala. Prestige confined to the village was not enough; Fama wanted witnesses, validation, and perhaps revenge against the city that had once belittled him. So, he persisted, ignoring Balla's warnings, and allowed himself to be escorted to the station. Fama left Togobala with Mariam at his side, determined to confront whatever awaited him, especially Salimata's predictable resentment towards Mariam.

CHAPTER 10: Things that Cannot be Talked About Do Not Deserve a Name

A Return Marked by Joy and Ceremony: Fama arrived in the capital with Mariam, whom he left at a friend's house before returning home. Salimata welcomed him with genuine joy, unaware of what was to

come. Later that afternoon, a delegation appeared at Fama's door, bringing Mariam and presenting her to Salimata with solemn courtesy: *"Here is your co-wife; consider her your little sister. The village people have sent her to help you in the magnificent work you are doing on behalf of your husband, Fama."* Salimata received Mariam with grace, determined at first to honor the gesture.

The Rivalry: Harmony dissolved quickly. In the single room Fama shared with both wives, Salimata could no longer perform the nightly fertility rituals she had imposed on herself for months; Mariam's mocking glances unsettled her deeply. And when Mariam's turn came to join Fama on the small bamboo bed, Salimata complained that the creaking drove her mad. What had begun as polite coexistence turned into a daily struggle for space, dignity, and emotional survival.

A Household in Turmoil: The tension escalated until Salimata, pushed beyond endurance, brandished a knife each night, threatening to slit her rival's throat. Caught between two women locked in open hostility, Fama abstained from both, unable to restore peace. The household became a bleak stage for endless quarrels, a domestic battleground where no one slept, no one yielded, and no trace remained of the joy that had greeted Fama's return.

A Nation on the Brink: The entire country was in turmoil, shaken by rumors of imminent insurrection. People whispered that everything could collapse at any moment, and Fama multiplied political meetings with his old comrades from the anti-colonial struggle. This time, he hoped a revolution would sweep away the rule of those he called "sons of slaves." He no longer hid his enthusiasm for change, nor his desire to see the old order restored, an order governed by fetishes and ancestral chieftaincies.

The Machinery of Repression: When the first anti-government posters appeared on the walls, when the first strikes were announced, and when the sound of a grenade echoed through the capital, the government launched a brutal campaign of repression. Foreign advisers were expelled, and ministers were arrested and imprisoned. Fama's former associates were taken one by one, and the noose tightened around him. He should have taken precautions and fled, but instead he boasted, *"A Dumbuya, a real one, never turns his back on danger"* (109).

Descent Into the Underworld: One night, as he left a political meeting, Fama was arrested along with his friend Bakari and thrown into the underground cells of the presidential palace. There, in the dim corridors and suffocating darkness, he recognized all his friends who had vanished before him. The underworld of the presidency had become the final gathering place of the regime's enemies.

Interrogation and Betrayal: Questioned and tortured, Fama was transferred with his fellow prisoners from one holding camp to another before finally being brought before a tribunal. The judges pressed him about his supposed ties to Nakou, a Malinke minister whom Fama had visited only once in his begging rounds, without even earning a handshake. They also interrogated him about a dream in which Bakari appeared as a messenger. Under torture, Bakari had confessed the dream: Nakou would fall into the hands of persecutors unless he performed a sacrifice, and Fama, thinking it wise, had shared the dream with Bakari so they could warn Nakou.

A Dream Turned Into a Crime: For this, Fama was charged with participating in a plot to assassinate the president. The judge informed him that Nakou had hanged himself in his cell after "confessing everything." As Fama awaited judgment, he convinced himself that he would be acquitted. Since when had anyone been condemned for a dream? Was he required to report his dreams to the government? The absurdity of the accusation reassured him briefly. But the verdict shattered his illusions: Fama was sentenced to twenty years of criminal imprisonment. In the face of this injustice, stripped of allies, dignity, and hope, he surrendered his fate to Allah, the only refuge left to him.

CHAPTER 11: *The Wild Birds Were the First to Understand the Significance of What Had Happened*

The Last Thoughts of a Condemned Man: Fama was convinced that his life was coming to an end. What he regretted most was not having been able to tell Salimata how deeply he appreciated all the effort she had devoted to him and all the good she had done for others without ever being rewarded. He wished he could have asked her for forgiveness. One morning, guards came to him with new clothes and ordered him to put them on. They informed him that cars carrying national dignitaries had arrived at the camp.

An Unexpected Gesture of Clemency: Fama took his place on a bench beside other prisoners while drums and *griots* filled the air with noise. Then the president of the ebony republic appeared with his escort. The president spoke of love, humanism, and the kindness of Black people. Fama could hardly believe his ears. The president asked the prisoners to turn the page of the past, to forgive him, and to look toward the future. He embraced each detainee, handed each one an envelope of money, and released them all. Fama felt a deep sadness at Salimata's absence. All the other prisoners had their wives beside them. Salimata was nowhere to be seen.

The Ruins of Fama's Former Life: Bakari advised Fama to forget both Salimata and Mariam. They had behaved without shame during his absence. Salimata had taken up with the marabout she once stabbed, and Mariam now lived with a taxi driver. In Togobala, the old fetish priest Balla had not been surprised when he heard of Fama's arrest. He simply said that Fama would never see Togobala again. Since then, Balla had died. Despite Bakari's pleas, Fama decided to return to Togobala. He was going there to die near the graves of his ancestors, not to live. Fama wished that Salimata, the only one he truly wanted to see again, would find happiness and the children she had long sought. He would not remain in the capital to stand in the way of her future. As for Mariam, she had been a mistake from the beginning.

A Final Crossing and a Fatal Fall: Fama climbed into a truck heading toward Togobala. At the border of the Socialist Republic of Nikinai, all the trucks came to a halt. The customs officers explained that the frontier was closed on both sides. Fama refused to accept this. He ran toward the border with cries of defiance and fell into a ravine where the crocodiles of the Horodugu were basking in the sun. A guard fired at the crocodile. On the other side of the border, another guard, thinking he was under attack, fired back. A chaotic exchange of gunfire followed. When the shooting stopped and rescuers reached Fama, he had been gravely wounded by the crocodile. Fama died later in the infirmary.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

FAMA (*proud, bitter, nostalgic*)

Proud, Fama clings to his princely lineage even as his life collapses around him. Bitter and nostalgic, he survives by replaying the glory of a past that gives him more comfort than anything in the present.

Proud Fama carries a deep and unyielding pride rooted in his lineage as the last legitimate descendant of the Dumbuya princes. This pride shapes his reactions to every slight, whether it comes from a *griot*, a customs officer, or a member of the village committee. Even when he has become a scavenger at funerals, he clings to the memory of his former status and refuses to accept any association with families he considers inferior. His pride is both his armor and his weakness, protecting his sense of identity while isolating him from the realities of his decline.

Bitter Fama's life is marked by a bitterness that grows with each disappointment. He resents the city, the single party, the collapse of trade, and the loss of the authority his clan once held. His bitterness extends to his marriage, to his sterile body, and to the humiliations he endures daily. This emotional landscape makes him harsh, irritable, and unable to see hope in the present, even when opportunities arise.

Nostalgic Fama lives in constant nostalgia for the world of his childhood and the glory of the Dumbuya clan. The landscapes of Horodugu, the harmattan, the markets of the past, and the authority of ancestral customs form a refuge he returns to whenever the present becomes unbearable. His memories give him a sense of belonging and dignity that the modern world refuses to offer. Nostalgia becomes his way of resisting change, holding on to a past that defines him more strongly than anything he experiences in the present.

SALIMATA (*resilient, devoted, haunted*)

Resilient, Salimata endures trauma and humiliation while continuing to work, pray, and hope. Devoted and haunted, she seeks motherhood as a way to silence the memories that shadow her life.

Resilient Salimata endures a succession of ordeals that would have crushed many others, yet she continues to rise every morning to work, pray, and hope. Her resilience appears in her ability to survive excision, violation, forced marriages, and constant humiliation without losing her sense of dignity. She builds her life through effort, selling porridge at dawn and rice at midday, carrying her bowls across the city with determination. Even when the poor shove her and expose her body, she gathers herself and seeks solutions, convinced that she must keep moving forward.

Devoted Salimata's devotion shapes every aspect of her life. She is devoted to Allah, whom she implores with sincerity and fear, even when her prayers drift toward forbidden desires. She is devoted to Fama, despite his impotence, his bitterness, and his inability to provide for her. She is devoted to the idea of motherhood, which becomes the center of her emotional world and the reason she accepts sacrifices, medicines, rituals, and exhausting labor. Her devotion is both her strength and her vulnerability, guiding her choices while exposing her to manipulation.

Haunted Salimata lives under the weight of memories that never release her. The trauma of excision, the violation by Chekura, the years spent as a wife in name only, and the threats from Chemoko form a shadow that follows her everywhere. These memories interrupt her thoughts, disturb her sleep, and shape her fears, especially when she encounters men who resemble her past tormentor. Her obsession with motherhood is also tied to this haunting, as if a child could finally silence the pain that has accompanied her since adolescence. Her life becomes a struggle between the desire to heal and the ghosts that refuse to fade.

JAMURU (*astute, pragmatic, manipulative*)

Jamuru is Astute. He uses lineage and ritual to maintain influence in the clan. Pragmatic and manipulative, he aligns himself with power and shapes events to secure his own survival.

Astute Jamuru is an astute *griot* who understands the social fabric of Horodugu better than anyone. He knows how to navigate lineage, alliances, and political shifts, and he uses this knowledge to protect himself and elevate his position. His ability to recite genealogies with precision gives him authority and influence, especially when he reinforces Fama's pride by reminding him of his ancestral ties.

Pragmatic Jamuru approaches life with a pragmatic sense of survival. He has lived through colonization and independence without suffering the misery that crushed others, thanks to his ties to Matali and her powerful descendants. He does not cling to ideals or nostalgia in the same way Fama does. Instead, he focuses on what works, whether it is distributing kola nuts in Fama's name or aligning himself with those who can offer protection and resources. His pragmatism allows him to thrive in a world where tradition and modern politics collide.

Manipulative Jamuru often uses his influence to steer events in directions that serve his interests. He flatters Fama when it is useful, warns him about Mariam when it suits the clan's control, and shapes

narratives that reinforce his own importance. His mastery of praise, lineage, and ritual gives him the tools to manipulate perceptions and decisions.

BALLA (*unshakable, cunning, influential*)

Unshakable, Balla stands firm in his ancestral beliefs and refuses to bend to new religious or political orders. He is Cunning and influential, thriving through charms and rituals that give him authority over a community that still depends on him.

Unshakable Balla is an unshakable figure who refuses every call to convert to Islam and remains firmly attached to the old spiritual order. His confidence comes from the power he believes he received from the spirit of hunters, a power that once made him the greatest hunter of the Horodugu. He stands apart from the community, untouched by doubt, and continues to practice his rituals with the same assurance he had in his youth. This steadfastness gives him authority, even among people who claim to be devout Muslims.

Cunning Balla survives in Togobala through a sharp and calculating intelligence. He knows how to profit from the Malinke who pray five times a day but constantly seek his charms for wealth, revenge, healing, or protection. Whether his fetishes work or fail, he always gains something, and he remains plump and comfortable in a village marked by poverty. His cunning allows him to navigate political changes, social tensions, and religious contradictions without ever losing his influence.

Influential Despite being an unbeliever, Balla holds significant influence in the village. He is one of the few who can sway decisions, intimidate opponents, and shape the direction of the Dumbuya clan's ambitions. His charms, sacrifices, and spiritual authority give him a role that rivals that of the *griot*, and he becomes essential in the effort to restore the dynasty. Even Fama, who doubts the cause, relies on Balla's presence and advice, especially when fear or uncertainty strikes him at night.

THEMES

Tradition vs Modernity: Tradition and modernity collide throughout the narrative in ways that reshape identity, authority, and the meaning of community. The world Fama inhabits was once governed by ancestral rites, lineage, and the sacred continuity between generations. Funeral customs, the vigilance of the shadow, the authority of *griots*, and the prestige of hereditary chieftaincy formed a coherent system that gave structure to life and death. These customs appear in the text with sacred weight, as when the Malinke believe a man's shadow returns home to supervise the proper unfolding of funerary rites. This worldview depends on a shared respect for rituals and for the figures who safeguard it. Modernity disrupts this foundation.

Independence transforms *griots* into wandering opportunists who attend funerals for profit rather than devotion. Fama himself becomes a symbol of this deterioration. He was born into gold, abundance, and honor, but he now moves from ceremony to ceremony in search of offerings, a scavenger in a city shaped by political change and economic decline. The capital embodies the imbalance between imported modern structures and the lived reality of the people who built them. The white quarter stands in clean order, while the black quarter sinks into overcrowded misery. Fama's nostalgia for Horodugu reveals how tradition functions as a refuge, a place where identity once felt anchored. However, his return to Togobala shows that tradition has weakened under the pressure of modern political systems. The chieftaincy he inherits consists of cracked huts, starving livestock, elderly dependents, and obligations imposed by the single party. Rituals continue, but they no longer guarantee authority or stability. The village committee, a product of modern governance, replaces hereditary leadership and challenges the old order. Fama becomes a prince without real power, suspended between a past that has lost its strength and a present that offers no secure ground.

The narrative suggests that modernity does not erase tradition. Instead, it distorts it, leaving individuals in a space where ancestral values cannot sustain them and political structures fail to provide dignity. Through Fama's decline, the narrative presents a society struggling to reconcile two worlds that no longer fit together, and a man who carries the weight of that conflict in every step he takes.

Justice/injustice: The narrative reveals a world where social systems fail to protect dignity and instead reinforce suffering. Fama's dethronement illustrates a profound injustice rooted in political opportunism and the collapse of traditional authority. The colonial administration replaces him with Lasina, a man chosen for his obedience rather than his legitimacy, and independence later confirms this loss by abolishing the chieftaincy altogether. Fama's lineage, once a source of respect, becomes irrelevant in a modern system that rewards loyalty to the single party rather than ancestral rights. His return to Togobala exposes the full extent of this injustice. The inheritance Fama receives consists of cracked huts, starving animals, elderly dependents, and heavy taxes. The village committee, created by the new political order, judges him without regard for his heritage and treats him as a relic who must justify his presence. His eventual arrest and sentencing in the capital continue this pattern. He is punished in a system that values appearances over fairness, and his release depends on political spectacle rather than genuine justice.

Salimata's experience reveals another form of injustice, one rooted in social complicity and the failure of communal ethics. She tries to help the poor by sharing her rice, but the very people she feeds trample her, strip her, steal her money, and leave her humiliated in the sun. Their blessings turn into violence, showing how generosity can be exploited in a community shaped by desperation and moral collapse. Her visit to the marabout deepens this injustice. Instead of offering guidance, Abdullahi attempts to violate her, repeating the trauma she suffered in her youth. The community's silence about her past assault and its willingness to pass her from one man to another without concern for her safety reveal a structure that protects aggressors and abandons victims. Through both characters, the narrative presents a world where justice is fragile and often absent. Fama is denied the respect owed to his lineage, and Salimata is denied the protection owed to her humanity. Their stories show how political systems, social customs, and communal behavior can create environments where injustice becomes routine and where individuals must navigate suffering without reliable support.

Sexual Violence: *The trauma of rape and community complicity* The narrative presents rape as a trauma that reshapes Salimata's entire existence and exposes a community that protects its own structures rather than its victims. Salimata's assault occurs at a moment when she is already vulnerable, weakened by excision and surrounded by rituals that claim to preserve purity and honor. Instead of confronting the violence committed by Chekura, the community constructs a myth about a spirit from Mount Tougbé, a story that transforms the assault into a supernatural event and shields the aggressor from accountability. This choice reveals a collective refusal to acknowledge harm, because acknowledging it would require questioning the rites and beliefs that define social cohesion.

The community's complicity continues in the way Salimata is treated afterward. She is passed from one man to another without regard for her consent, confined, threatened, and repeatedly placed in situations where sexual violence is possible. Salimata's suffering is a burden that others prefer to hide rather than heal. The trauma shapes her relationship to her own body, her sense of womanhood, and her longing for motherhood. Her obsession with pregnancy, her visits to marabouts, and her shame during the false pregnancy show how deeply the abuse has fractured her identity. The community's silence reinforces this fracture, because it denies her the possibility of naming what happened. The narrative suggests that rape is more than an individual act of violence. It is sustained by a network of beliefs, customs, and decisions that protect men, preserve appearances, and sacrifice women's safety. Salimata's trauma persists because the community refuses to confront the truth, and this refusal becomes a second form of violence that shapes every aspect of her life.

Appearance vs. Reality: *Hypocrisy/versatility* The novel displays characters and institutions that shift their behavior according to circumstance while claiming to uphold fixed principles. Fama's world is filled with figures who present one face in public and another in private. The *griots*, once guardians of lineage and truth, now wander from funeral to funeral seeking profit, praising whoever pays them and disguising greed as devotion. Their transformation shows a form of versatility that serves survival, but it also exposes a deep hypocrisy, because they continue to speak the language of tradition while abandoning its ethical foundation. The political system displays similar contradictions. Independence promises dignity and renewal, but it dethrones legitimate chiefs, rewards obedience instead of merit, and replaces ancestral authority with committees that enforce rules without respect for history.

Fama himself embodies the tension between hypocrisy and versatility. He clings to the prestige of his lineage while begging for offerings at funerals, and he condemns the *griots* for their opportunism even though he depends on the same system to survive. His anger at being judged by the village committee

reveals a man who demands respect from tradition but refuses to accept the responsibilities that tradition requires.

Salimata's experience exposes another dimension of hypocrisy. The community that claims to value purity and honor conceals her assault under a myth, protects her aggressor, and later exploits her generosity. The people she feeds with her rice bless her with promises of prosperity, then trample her, strip her, and steal her money. Their behavior shows a versatility shaped by desperation, but it also reveals a hypocrisy that hides cruelty behind polite formulas. Even the marabout, who presents himself as a spiritual guide, uses his authority to attempt another violation.

Through these intertwined stories, the narrative portrays a society where hypocrisy becomes a strategy for survival and versatility becomes a tool for navigating instability. The result is a world where moral language persists, but moral action collapses, leaving individuals to confront institutions and communities that shift their values whenever it suits them.

Gender: Womanhood/motherhood Womanhood in the narrative is shaped by a demanding set of expectations that link a woman's value to her labor, her purity, her obedience, and her ability to bear children. Salimata's life illustrates how these ideals govern every stage of her experience. Work becomes the foundation of her identity. She rises before dawn to prepare porridge, sells rice at midday, visits marabouts, and carries the weight of sustaining her household. Her labor is constant, visible, and essential. However, it brings her little reward. Purity is presented as another pillar of womanhood, enforced through excision and guarded by community rituals. The ceremony is framed as a moment of pride for her mother and for the tribe, even though it exposes Salimata to physical danger and emotional trauma. Respect is demanded from her in every interaction. She must honor elders, obey husbands, and maintain composure even when she is mistreated. Salimata's generosity toward the poor shows her desire to embody this ideal, but the violence she suffers from the very people she tries to help reveals how respect is expected from women but rarely returned to them.

Motherhood stands above all other expectations. The narrative shows that a woman without children is considered incomplete. Salimata internalizes this belief so deeply that her longing for a baby becomes an obsession. She dreams of infants, visits marabouts, and endures shame when her pregnancy is declared false. Her desire for motherhood is shaped by cultural pressure rather than personal freedom. The community reinforces this pressure by blessing her with promises of fertility, by judging her worth through her ability to conceive, and by treating her sterility as a failure. Through Salimata, the narrative presents womanhood as a role defined by sacrifice and endurance. Work demands strength, purity demands pain, respect demands submission, and motherhood demands a body that can produce life. These expectations create a world where women carry burdens that others refuse to acknowledge, and where their value is measured through ideals that limit their autonomy. The story reveals how these ideals shape identity and how they confine women within roles that serve the needs of the community more than their own aspirations.

Racism: The white/black social divide The narrative presents the white and Black social divide as a structural reality that influences everyday existence, identity, and the meaning of progress. The capital is split into two distinct spaces separated by a bridge. The white quarter, the Plateau, the city center, appears clean, orderly, and prosperous, with villas, flowered balconies, and visible signs of comfort. It represents a world built by black labor but inaccessible to black inhabitants. The black quarter, by contrast, is crowded, noisy, and marked by poverty. Fama sees this contrast as a mirror of the broader condition of black people, a reminder that independence has not erased the inequalities created during colonization. This physical divide influences how characters understand themselves and how they interpret their place in society. Fama's bitterness grows each time he crosses the bridge that once separates the black quarter from the white city. He remembers fighting for independence, convinced that freedom would bring dignity and opportunity. Instead, he finds himself wandering through funerals, begging for offerings, and watching the white quarter flourish while the black quarter sinks deeper into misery. Salimata's daily work also reflects this divide. She sells porridge and rice to black laborers who build the white district, men who construct homes they will never inhabit. Their blessings to her reveal a shared hope for prosperity, but their poverty shows how limited that hope is. The divide shapes the city's moral landscape as well. The white quarter symbolizes a modernity that promises progress but relies on exploitation, while the black quarter symbolizes a community struggling to survive under systems that claim to represent national unity. The narrative suggests that independence has changed the political structure but has not transformed the social

hierarchy. The white and Black divide remains visible in architecture, in labor, in opportunity, and in the emotional lives of the characters. Through Fama's frustration and Salimata's exhaustion, the story reveals how this divide becomes a daily reminder of exclusion, a force that shapes identity and reinforces a sense of displacement in a society that claims to have entered a new era.

Colonization, independence, and destabilization: Colonization, independence, and destabilization are the structural frameworks of the narrative, shaping the collapse of social edifices and the disorientation of individuals who once relied on ancestral order. Colonization imposes a foreign hierarchy that disrupts traditional authority, as seen when the colonial administration replaces Fama with his cousin Lasina, a man chosen for his submission and malleability rather than his legitimacy. This act weakens the Dumbuya dynasty and introduces a political logic that values submission over heritage. Independence arrives with promises of renewal, dignity, and national pride, but it fails to repair the damage created by colonial rule. Instead, it produces new forms of instability. Trade declines, merchants lose their livelihoods, and political power becomes concentrated in a single party that rewards loyalty rather than competence. Fama's experience captures this destabilization. He spends money and energy fighting for independence, convinced that freedom will restore his status, but he receives nothing except a national identity card and a party membership card. His business collapses, his authority disappears, and he becomes a wandering figure who survives by attending funerals. The village reflects the same pattern. The chieftaincy is abolished, replaced by committees that enforce rules without respect for lineage. The inheritance Fama receives consists of cracked huts, starving animals, elderly dependents, and heavy taxes, showing how independence has transformed traditional leadership into a burden rather than an honor. Even the landscape bears traces of destabilization. Forests disappear, graves are desecrated, and the cemetery becomes a symbol of neglect. The narrative suggests that colonization disrupts the foundations of society, and independence, instead of repairing them, introduces new pressures that deepen the fracture.

Characters like Fama and Salimata navigate a world where old systems have lost their strength and new systems fail to provide stability. Their struggles reveal how political change can unsettle identity, weaken community bonds, and create environments where individuals must confront uncertainty without reliable support.

Nostalgia: Nostalgia is a pervasive emotional current that binds Fama, Balla, and Jamuru to a world that has slipped away. It is a longing for childhood landscapes, for the rhythms of village life, for the authority of ancestral customs, and for the social order that once placed the Dumbuya clan at the center of Horodugu. Fama's memories of hunting rats with childhood companions, of lazy cattle grazing, of thatched roofs merging into one another, and of the dry harmattan that shaped the seasons, create a contrast with the filth, noise, and humiliation of the city. These recollections are a refuge from the present and a measure of everything that has been lost. When the harmattan rises over Togobala, carrying dust and dead leaves, it becomes a trigger for shared remembrance. The wind prompts Balla to recall the time when he was the greatest hunter of the Horodugu, gifted by the spirit of hunters and capable of battling a mystical buffalo through feats of magic and metamorphosis. The same wind prompts Fama to revisit the years when the Dumbuya name commanded respect and when his own life moved with the grace of a panther rather than the scavenging gait of a vulture.

This nostalgia extends to the economic world that once sustained the clan. Fama remembers the great African markets he knew as a prosperous merchant, markets that disappeared with the departure of the colonizers. He reflects on the collapse of trade after independence and on the irony of having fought for a political transformation that destroyed the very activity that had given him wealth and status. He thinks of the money and energy he spent insulting France and calling for freedom, only to receive nothing but a national identity card and a party membership card. His regret is rooted in the memory of a time when commerce flourished and when the Dumbuya name carried weight. Independence did not restore that world. It replaced it with scarcity, humiliation, and political structures that ignored him. Nostalgia becomes a lens through which he interprets the present, and through that lens, the past appears coherent and dignified while the present appears fractured and unjust.

The longing for ancestral order is equally strong. Fama, Balla, and Jamuru share a sense that the authority of fetishes, the rituals of the ancestors, and the hierarchy that once governed Horodugu created a stable world. They resent the abolition of the chieftaincy and the rise of village committees led by men they call sons of slaves. In their eyes, these new leaders lack legitimacy because they do not belong to the lineage that once ruled the territory. Jamuru's litany of genealogies, recited before Fama, reinforces the

idea that the past offered continuity, and rightful hierarchy. Balla's charms and sacrifices evoke a time when spiritual power was recognized and when the community relied on the fetish priest for protection, revenge, and healing. The nostalgia for this world is tied to concrete practices, to the clay jars filled with offerings in the ancestral hut, to the belief that spirits must be appeased before one can sleep among the dead, and to the conviction that the laws of the ancestors once kept social order intact.

This longing also encompasses the geography of Horodugu itself. Fama remembers a territory that could be crossed freely, without identity cards or border posts. The division between the Ebony Coast and the Socialist Republic of Nikinai feels like an affront to the unity of the land he once knew. When a customs officer demands his papers, Fama experiences the request as a personal insult, a sign that the world has been broken into pieces that no longer align with the memory of a single homeland. The border becomes a symbol of fragmentation, a reminder that the political transformations of the twentieth century have carved up the spaces that once formed a continuous landscape of belonging.

Through these connected forms of nostalgia, the novel reveals characters who live in the present but remain anchored in the past. Their memories shape their judgments, their resentments, and their hopes. The harmattan, the childhood hunts, the vanished markets, the ancestral rites, and the undivided territory of Horodugu form a constellation of images that define their identity. Nostalgia becomes a force that explains their bitterness, their resistance to change, and their desire to restore a world that can no longer return.

Hopes and disappointment: Hopes and disappointment structure the emotional development of the narrative. They guide both Fama and Salimata through cycles of expectation that collapse under the weight of social change, poverty, and personal struggle. Fama begins with the hope that independence will restore dignity to men of lineage, reward his political engagement, and revive the authority of the Dumbuya name. He imagines a future where his heritage grants him respect and where the new nation recognizes his sacrifices. This hope dissolves when independence destroys the trade that once sustained him, when the single party ignores his loyalty and sacrifices, and when he becomes a wandering figure, a scavenger at funerals. Fama's return to Togobala carries another hope, the hope that the chieftaincy will restore his identity and reconnect him with the world of his ancestors. Instead, he discovers cracked huts, starving animals, elderly dependents, and obligations that drain his remaining strength. Even the dream of Mariam, who seems to embody beauty and renewal, becomes another source of disappointment as he realizes that desire cannot repair the collapse of his authority.

Salimata's hopes follow a similar pattern. She hopes that work, prayer, and generosity will bring her stability and respect. She hopes that motherhood will complete her identity and heal the wounds of her past. Her longing for a child becomes a central hope, one she nurtures through rituals, medicines, and dreams. This hope is repeatedly shattered by false pregnancies, by the marabout's deception, and by the knowledge that Fama cannot give her the child she desires. Her generosity toward the poor carries another hope, the hope that kindness will bring blessings, but she is trampled, stripped, and robbed by the very people she tries to help. The novel presents hope as a force that keeps characters moving forward, but also as a fragile promise that collapses under the pressures of political instability, social hypocrisy, and personal vulnerability. Disappointment becomes a constant companion, shaping the characters' understanding of themselves and revealing a world where aspirations rarely find solid ground.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **How does Kourouma use Fama's humiliation at funerals to symbolize the collapse of traditional authority after independence?**

Students can examine how Fama, once "born into gold, abundance, honor, and women," is now reduced to a "vulture" attending funerals for offerings. Students can consider how this reversal reflects broader political and cultural disintegration.

2. **In what ways does nostalgia function as both refuge and illusion for Fama as he moves through the capital?**

Students can explore how memory becomes a coping mechanism and whether it blinds Fama to present realities.

3. How does Salimata's story expose the gendered violence embedded in both tradition and modernity?

Students can discuss how Salimata's suffering contrasts with Fama's political frustrations, and what this says about whose independence truly mattered.

4. What does the novel suggest about the moral and spiritual contradictions of post-independence society through figures like Jamuru and Balla?

Jamuru thrives thanks to colonial-era connections, while Balla profits from charms despite being an "unbeliever." Students can analyze how both men survive by exploiting systems, old and new, and what this reveals about the ethics of survival.

5. How does the border crossing into Nikinai dramatize the fragmentation of cultural space after independence?

The customs officer's demand for an identity card deeply offends Fama. Students can explore how new borders disrupt ancestral continuity and challenge Fama's sense of belonging.