
Utopia and the (con)formation of an I and a country

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“S’il est vrai que l’utopie, loin de constituer une pure spéculation abstraite, entretient au contraire des rapports étroits avec l’histoire et constitue une réaction au présent vécu par l’auteur, elle ne véhicule cependant les thèmes obsédants de l’histoire réelle que pour les corriger ou les exorciser.”

[If it's true that utopia, far from being a pure abstract speculation, has, on the contrary, close relations with history and constitutes a reaction to the present experienced by the author, this utopia only transports the haunting themes of real history in order to correct or exorcise them.]

Raymond Trousson, “L’utopie, la mémoire et l’oubli”.

By basing the concept of “utopia” on Thomas More, Raymond Trousson establishes the difference between its acceptance as a literary genre and the notion of “utopism”. In his perspective, “utopia” refers to the narratives that meet certain structural prerequisites, rooted in an imaginary journey that allows the “foreigner” to discover an unknown world as an ideal world; “utopism”, on the other hand, identifies the set of literary or other proposals that are alternatives to the existing reality.¹

Utopia, which in the meaning of Thomas More implies criticism of the socio-political reality of the present, over the course of the twentieth century saw this orientation reinforced, by referring to the possibility of a total or partial change of the established order in a specific collectivity, society or country, “une telle orientation en désaccord avec la réalité ne devient utopique que lorsqu’en outre elle tend à rompre les liens avec l’ordre existant” [such an orientation that disagrees with reality only becomes utopic when, besides this, it has a tendency to break the bonds with the existing order], Karl Mannheim tells us (Mannheim, 1956: 225).

Although the term “utopia” today is frequently separated from its traditional lines as a sort of “catch-all”, in the words of Jean Servier (Servier, 1991: II), it is possible to find in it the “will to reconstruct”, the witness of a “sociological conscience”, born of a tragic sentiment of History and the desire to modify its course. Such a forward-looking vision exists in the work of the Ivorian novelist Aké Loba, in seeking “to construct” a new world beginning with the rejection of elements and dysphoric actions that, in the society of his time, he perceives as agents of social disorder, civilisational backwardness and disharmony between the I and the Other.

Taking into account the fictional path taken by Gérard Aké Loba, the reader cannot help but have problems enlisting him in the utopia camp, considering the term “utopia” in its broad meaning of critical and reformist intentions, attentive and denouncing, which appears to us to orient the fictional universe of the author, as a way of encouraging the Ivorians to redefine the social, cultural, political and ethical aspects of an axiological order that makes it possible to find a renewed identity of the country and man himself.

Taking the first three novels of Aké Loba: *Kocoumbo, l'étudiant noir* (1960), *Les fils de Kouretcha* (1970), *Les dépossédés* (1973), as the *corpus*, we propose to reflect on a complex reality, with dynamic processes engendered by the transformations of the world in change, in the constant search for a better world.

Linked to the first generation of writers, but opting for a more reserved stance than that of his congeners Bernard Dadié or Ahmadou Kourouma, Gérard Aké Loba, in his fictional universe, seems to support a project for a modern Nation, pointing in the direction of a constructive dialogue between Europe and Africa that dynamises the well-being of the Ivorians and the prosperity of their country, so it can enter into the era of Progress and, thus, into modernity.

In the wake of Léopold Sédar Senghor, who proposed the bringing together of antagonistic cultures, Gérard Aké Loba abandons the criticism of the opposing dualities to likewise propose a future path for Africa and the African consolidated in a perpetual

dialogue between diverse, but consonant, voices, encouraging his fellow men to develop their native land.

Aké Loba seems to us to underscore the emergence of a new era, founded on the osmosis and fusion of European and African values, betting on the education of new Ivorian generations, in a new conformation of women, in a different generational relationship. Based on the principles of equality, resting on the goals of a moral and an ethic that do not repel the contribution of Reason, she would implement a reforming order that is more just and harmonious, in accordance with the very concept of Utopia.

Attentive to his time, distancing himself from universalist essentialisms, Gérard Aké Loba, without omitting a presentation of the scourges of colonialism or of any other imperialist attitude, proposes educational fiction that looks to the future, encouraging Ivorians to embrace modernisation, the sharing of values, will power and projects that benefit everyone. As Pascal Bruckner observes, “le rêve d’une société parfaite est une constante de l’histoire” (Bruckner, 2000: 280) [the dream of a perfect society is a constant throughout history].² It can be said that the Ivorian writer became the driving force for a new order, acting, in fact, under the impulse of the utopian vectors, centred on the critical spirit, the idealisation and adoption of new postures on life.

Aware that the society to which he belongs must undergo profound changes in order to offer a better quality of life, the author does not limit himself to the (re)presentation of a static world, instead he suggests another world, under new rules. In this sense, Gérard Aké Loba brings onto the stage the vicissitudes of the present time to propose their correction. In a way, he becomes a “maker” of a country in search of a path promised him by cultural and economic development, seeming, then, to defend the practices of economic liberalism, based on technology and foreign investment.

With this in mind, he incites his people to education, as well as to renewal and social understanding, so as to give Côte d’Ivoire a reality in which it is capable of freeing itself from the traditional agents inhibiting the sought-after modernisation: superstition, dependency on family, clan or race, obscurantism, the inability to argue and the fear of facing up to the Other. Aké Loba dedicates himself not so much to denouncing the injustices of colonialism, but rather to constructing another reality more in tune with his time.

Aware of the change in society, the author proposes a civilisational (re)conciliation, based on the sharing of knowledge and techniques, in the acceptance of difference, and the mutual help between peoples, cultures and countries. In this way, he fits into the understanding of Christian Godin, for whom “l’utopie partagée est le ressort de l’histoire” (Godin, 2000: 73) [a shared utopia is the driving force of history]. By pointing to a future state, Aké Loba reflects on a present one that ought to join in progress, science, technology and personal and civic development. Sharing the belief in a future built on new opportunities, a world in displacement, where it is mandatory to know how to join the two facets, reason and spirituality, the author proposes “l’utopie ouverte vers le future des possibles” (*idem*, 17) [a utopia open to the future of what is possible].

Aké Loba does not avoid participation in a pan-African attitude, according to the subject matter of *Negritude*: embrace the fight for freedom and reject colonialism.

However, contrarily to, for example, Aimé Césaire or Léon Gontran Damas, for whom the claim is, above all, one of identity (namely, recognition of a black identity and ancestral culture, enhancing emotion, intuition and the value of returning to one’s origins), Aké Loba is closer to those who, in the fifties and sixties, more than demanding the mere valuation of the colour, demand the status of Man and Being implied in the course of history.³ Thus, his proposal is not simply a claim on identity and culture. It is, in fact, more comprehensive, and is established on a project that also delineates a political, technical, economic and educational outlook. In his view, during a transitional phase between colonial Africa and independent Africa, this project can only be accomplished with the cooperation of Europe. Closing Africa off from the world may be harmful because it is limiting and confining.

Understandably, the fictional universe of Gérard Aké Loba is centered on the questioning of mindsets and traditions that may perpetuate delays and controversies. Thus, conscious that the African continent in general, and the Ivory Coast in particular, should follow the tracks of modern civilisation, the writer rejects the idea of a pure return to their origins.

Kocoumbo, l’étudiant noir proposes a criticism of the melancholy of “Negritude” by condemning excesses of emotivity and passivity. Throughout his first novel, the writer reveals his scepticism in regard to unbounded nostalgia, criticises the valorisation of purely

African roots and the lack of productivity of his congeners, as well as their detachment in the face of an ascension that could project Africa along the route of the developed countries.

In this first novel, Aké Loba censures the conduct of black students because they are led to abjure their commitments and abandon their studies to live in rhythm to idleness, luxury, and a sick longing for the good old days. The biting look that is directed at them when they wander through Saint-Germain-des-Prés and the cafés of the Latin Quarter is focused, mainly, at the end of the narrative. Kocoumbo, the main character, wishes for another projection, that of a dedicated worker, thus, transmitting the author's own vision.

Therefore, in *Kocoumbo, l'étudiant noir*, the novelist proposes new objectives for the characters: to leave the country, travel, get an education and return to the African continent in order to contribute to the construction of another future for the country, one different from the present. In his opinion, the African world, in general, and Côte d'Ivoire, in particular, can only attain success if they accept the requirement, the effort and a continuing application. Thus, from his first novel, the author deals with the issue of the education of the future leaders of his country. An adequate education will lead them to be aware of their obligations, so that they participate in the construction of a new society, which the author wishes to be free, prosperous and modern.

The proposal of Aké Loba (con)forms to the new social, cultural and economic paths, by following the dynamism of History referred to by Christian Godin, in his treatment of utopia: "l'histoire sera alors conçue comme un ensemble dont le mouvement général, soumis à la loi du progrès (...) est impulsé par le progrès technique" (*idem*, 54) [history will then be conceived of as a set whose general movement, subjected to the law of progress (...) is driven by technical progress]. In the view of the African writer, only the machine and knowledge can make up for the precarious situations and reduce human miseries, making it possible to conceive of the construction of a utopia in Côte d'Ivoire.

By holding that Science makes technical and human progress possible, which is at the base of the construction of new societies, Gérard Aké Loba not only declares himself to be a dreamer, but a true utopist. By questioning the present of Côte d'Ivoire, the author says that change is possible through the "volonté de construire, en face de la réalité existante, un monde autre et une autre histoire alternative" (*idem*, 22) [will to build, in the face of the existing reality, a different world and another alternative history].

Thus, in *Les fils de Kouretcha*, the character of Tougon allows us to conceive of the conformation of a country founded on an ideal of progress and economic development. In fact, between what is real in fiction and what is real in History, the text seems to defend the policy of Houphouët-Boigny, in regard to the policy of investment in infrastructures that led to the ex-colony being considered as one of the most developed countries on the African continent in the decades of the sixties and seventies of the 20th century.⁴

Through his second novel, the author advocates and even proclaims the urgent need to build the Kossou⁵ dam, a mega-project that would contribute to the deforestation of the county, specifically in the region of Yamoussoukro – the home land of Houphouët-Boigny, as a matter of fact. Furthermore, he justifies the presence of the many French co-operators who remained in the country or who went there. In this sense, the writing of the author shows the confrontation between tradition and development.⁶ Convinced that that infrastructure would benefit all those living along the river, Aké Loba uses the image of the moderator Tougon to underscore the advantages that the construction of the dam implies.

As an utopist, builder and reformer, through this character, the author gives a glimpse of the idea that technology, machines and industrialisation are indispensable tools for improving society.⁷ As a matter of fact, we call to mind the retort by Tougon in this respect: “il faut défricher la forêt ; c’est le début de notre civilisation” (Loba, 1970: 83) [we must clear the forest; it is the start of our civilisation].

Man must carry on his battle against nature, in order to tame it: “l’homme couché, l’homme accroupi, l’homme debout, l’homme casqué” (Loba, 1970: 143) [man lying down, man squatting down, man standing, man with a helmet] can, in this way, enter into the era of modern civilisation. Even if this drastic transformation ends up creating dystopic effects, transforming the jungle into a kind of infernal forge; where the drums announce death, reason must reign. Although fear has settled in and the African village has plunged into a psychosis, leading some of the workers to interrupt their tasks, it is dynamism that must overcome inactivity.⁸ The text by Aké Loba seems, in this way, to exalt the maxims established by the national motto: “union, discipline, travail” [union, discipline, work]. Therefore, resorting to the rhetoric of Tougon’s arguments to convince the whole tribe to participate in the work of the riverside building yard. Some, through the force of their arms and hard work that should embarrass no one, others – even though Europeans – helping with

the scientific and technological knowledge they master. Despite the deforestation of the dense Ivorian jungle that would mark the new landscape, Tougon chooses to follow the path of modernisation to follow the precept expressed by Jean-Michel and Pierre-François Moreau: “L’utopie se veut articulation ordonnée du monde physique et du monde social, au bénéfice du second” (Moreau / Moreau, *s/d*: 8) [Utopia means the ordered articulation of the physical world and the social world, in benefit of the latter].

Seeking to follow the changes brought about by time, the novels of Aké Loba develop a broad and conscientious reflection in political, social, educational and economic terms that place the former French colony on the path of developed countries that are democratic and open to cultural plurality. For this author, African progress must articulate economic development with a heavy investment in the education of Man. Thus, he seems to say that it is necessary to forge societies in Africa that seek to instil in the African the will for his own perfecting, so as to raise up a country that is conscious of its past and believes in its future.

Thus, in *Les fils de Kouretcha*, by emphasising the posture of the African teacher Bayolaboyard, as a driver of changes, the author corroborates the importance of training and culture. Despite coming from the same tribe as Pierre Dam’no, Bayolaboyard has opposing opinions as to the learning of the students. On the one hand, Dam’no, like the colonists, maintained a backward and separatist school, destined only for the male members of the Kouretcha tribe (Loba, 1970: 11). In these terms, he cloisters his Fellow Man in the meshes of a double colonialism. On the other hand, as soon as he is entrusted with the education of the younger people, Bayolaboyard opts for an openness and an adaptation to society.

In light of what we have just said, the character of the African teacher Bayolaboyard seems to acquire a certain importance in the economy of the novel, if we take into account that the author places his wager on a modern education and in educational policies suited to contemporaneity. Bayolaboyard represents that non-conforming African moved by the dynamism of multiple initiatives, attentive to modernity and convinced that one must not only combat ignorance and educational backwardness, but also the discrepancy of that time between boys and girls in their studies.

Aware of the state of education in Africa, in general, and in Côte d’Ivoire, in particular, he denounces the differentiation in the results between the “apparent success” in school of the boys and the “inevitable failure” of the girls. In fact, this dichotomy arises in

association with two factors pointed out, not only by sociologists and historians, but also by writers who wished to sound an alert to the lack of educational and cultural measures.⁹ From the beginning, one can see that Aké Loba defends the unheard-of schooling practice of dialogue, which would contribute to the training of Africans, men and women, as free citizens with equal rights and obligations. As a matter of fact, one of the facets most closely examined in this fictional universe has to do with the problem of instruction, the educational policies and the fight against illiteracy.

Aké Loba is not opposed to innovations that bring about a rupture in certain ancestral habits and customs. The author seeks to reflect on the new role of women in the reshaping of a new Africa. In a new context, the intellectual capacity of women will be valorised, contradicting the old clichés. For this reason, the author advocates education for the African woman. Only in this way will she cease to be subservient and take the reins of action, prefiguring the new role that the feminine sex ought to play in society.

As a matter of fact, in *Les fils de Kouretcha*, Aké Loba calls attention to the “feminine” fatality. Contrary to the habitual, the text underscores the fact that Marie-Claire began her studies very early, at the age of five, because Balayaboyard recognised her intelligence, dedication and love of studies. The teacher set about to mould and educate the young girl so she could achieve a life free of oppression, opened up to her through her studies. Marie-Claire, however, ends up rebelling against the projected woman Bayolaboyard had dreamed of her becoming. The young girl, who at the end of the narrative becomes pregnant by Ahyban, appears reduced once more to her condition of woman and mother.¹⁰

The era of independence and modernisation of the African countries looks for a change in the mindsets and civilisational paradigms that tradition has kept stable. The woman, traditionally educated under the influence of the family, her age group and the initiation ceremonies, was confined to her group. The writing of Gérard Aké Loba thus focuses on the multiple aspects of African culture that he considers antiquated and the cause of discord.

It will be understood then that from his point of view, in a modern society, polygamy and arranged marriages must be opposed, because they are imposed and forged according to a tradition that fosters discontent in the family. In *Les fils de Kouretcha*, the question of

matrimony is dealt with from two opposing examples: a marriage accepted and a marriage rejected. Pierre Dam'no, who financed Marie-Claire's primary education, considers it his right to marry her, a right, however, that is rejected by the young girl, by her parents and by the teacher Bayolaboyard. On the other hand, the marriage of Eddie and Kouso, resulting from the will of their parents, produces only unhappiness for both of them.

In *Les déposés*, the criticism of polygamy is openly manifested through the disputes between the three wives of Païs. Although, in the beginning harmony reigned in this plural marriage – “les deux amies, moitiés d'un seul homme, vivaient un mariage sans faille” (Loba, 1973: 166) [the two friends, halves of only one man, lived in a faultless marriage] –, later, dissatisfaction, envy and malice take the place of friendship and fraternity. As a matter of fact, this novel focuses on a tradition that cloisters the African woman, showing Akrébié, at first “assujettie à ses parents” (Loba, 1973: 23) [dominated by her parents], and afterwards, already married, following Païs “son nouveau seigneur” [her new lord] (*ibidem*). In fact, at the beginning of the narrative, we are given the image of a young girl numbed by the rigour of her daily tasks. In this way, the author underscores the need to break with an ancestral tradition that condemns a woman to servility, under her family or under her husband.

Let us note, further, that the work of Aké Loba ponders the contact between men who have been displaced, migrants, and proposes a new conformation that is up to date, modern and forward looking. One can say that his proposal embraces “des formes de vie sociale qui ne soit pas enfermée dans un cadre rigide, qui puissent être à la fois locales et planétaires” (Wieviorka, 2000: 60) [forms of social life that is not enclosed in a rigid framework, which may be at once local and planetary].

As Michel Wieviorka points out in dealing with the question of utopia, the current major problem of our societies is to know how to conciliate the universal values of reason with the collective subjectivities that abound. In the meandering of fiction, Gérard Aké Loba also proposes that the future of Côte d'Ivoire must preserve a heritage with all its components: “tous les éléments nous sont utiles” (Loba, 1970: 108) [all the elements are useful to us], said Tougon, during his speech to encourage the construction of the Kouretcha dam. Attentive to the contradiction of a country recently decolonised and that agglutinates diverse inheritances, Aké Loba cultivates a literature adapted to this reality. In fact, in *Les*

filles de Kouretcha, this new configuration is present throughout the entire novel, specifically in the colourful markets of the city to which the young couple – Païs and Akrébié – moved. It is through the curious gaze of the woman that the multicoloured experience is read. In fact, despite the altercation that Akrébié causes, the description of the two Senegalese women, or that of the two Haoussa women, paints this new reality that brings a “rainbow” of peoples, costumes and multiple languages to the city.¹¹

In this sense, *Les dépossédés*, by relating the exodus from the country to the city, could well be a modern “chronicle”,¹² through its record of the present, the mention of the events of everyday life and the social changes that the Ivorian landscape is undergoing. These rural migrations brought together, in the outlying neighbourhoods, elements from different tribes and clans, who must learn how to live together. From the start, Gérard Aké Loba demonstrated that he was attentive to the social and geographic changes that result in a change of mindsets.¹³ Thus, Païs and Douézo are elements that explain a new social configuration. It should be noted that the initial misunderstanding between the two is not only due to tribal disputes, as is first thought to be the case, but also to the fear of the Different, viewed with mistrust and unfamiliarity, and the presence of obsolete cultural aspects that cause various “pathologies”.

Let us not forget that Douézo loses her memory, at times, which results in a diminution of her rational side, an inadequacy to deal with the Other and with herself, nurturing in her an experience of pain and panic, as she would confess to Païs. She ends up by affirming that the anger directed against Païs was, more than anything else, the result of fear, of the anxiety of belonging to a world outside of any logic, bringing upon her, therefore, crises of anxiety and loss of lucidity.¹⁴ One then can understand the friendship that arises between the rivals Païs and Douézo, who participate together in the growth of the city of Abidjan. For Aké Loba, an independent Africa must be founded on the respect for difference, human understanding and the defence of noble values, as in the song to harmony and fellowship between peoples of differing ethnic groups. In the words of its national anthem, there must be space for everyone in this “country of hospitality”.¹⁵

This does not mean that parity is, from the outset, reached. However, Aké Loba appears as one of the pioneers on this new horizon in Côte d’Ivoire, projecting a society that aims to be free of misunderstandings that destabilise and threaten with a precarious order,

and therefore, one susceptible of promoting a different mindset, one that promotes bonds of union and imbrication between the various ethnic groups of Côte d'Ivoire. A world in which all cultures have a place, exercising at the same time an action of unity and of diversity.

Like utopia, the social project mirrored in the fictional universe of Aké Loba is impregnated with the new ideas of his time, in order to awaken the conscience of the Ivorians, as the Elder of the Kouretcha tribe appears to suggest: “nous vivons dans une époque nouvelle, étrange et étrangère à nous pour le moment” (Loba, 1970: 150) [we live in a new age, strange and unknown to us at the moment]. It is a strange period with all its implications to which they should open themselves favourably.¹⁶ Thus, as an utopist, Gérard Aké Loba prefers to weave throughout his work multiple networks of connections and multiplicity, intertwining lines in a modifiable cartography, suited to the modern world.

The first three novels of Aké Loba appear to correspond to different historical periods, all of them referring to the construction of an I and of a country. As a matter of fact, his fictional universe takes us back to a construction with multiple individual and collective implications, at the governmental and national levels, which allow the Africans to build a healthy and balanced republic, idealised as utopic.

By taking an interest in the ethical essence of man and the meaning of life and in the political, economic and cultural problems, Gérard Aké Loba is, then, aware that he cannot put aside the direction of this new historical route. The fictional universe of the author, especially his first three narratives (*Les dépossédés*, *Les fils de Kouretcha* and *Kocoumbo, l'étudiant noir*), is marked by the conviction that it is possible to transform real time, project a future, and create Ivory Coast as a free and democratic country.

His novels examine the past manoeuvres or those being performed in societies in transformation, in a salutary dialogue between peoples and races, Europe and Africa. Aké Loba inscribes his drawing of his country, more open, more developed and in dialogue in the lines of a (re)conformed cartography. To identify the problems of the past and conjugate it with the present is the essential motto for thinking the future. The Akelobian novel

proposes, then, a cartography that puts an end to the radicalisms and diverse dominances that seems to fit in with the formula of Boaventura Sousa Santos:

“A utopia é a exploração de novas possibilidades e vontades humanas, por via da oposição da imaginação à necessidade do que existe, só porque existe, em nome de algo radicalmente melhor que a humanidade tem de desejar e por que merece a pena lutar.”
(Santos, 1994: 278)

[Utopia is the exploration of new possibilities and human wills, by means of the opposition of imagination to the necessity of that which exists, only because it exists, in the name of something radically better that humanity must desire and for which it is worth fighting.

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Notes

¹ The literary corpus of the *Dictionary of Literature Utopias*, published in 2000 by Raymond Trousson and Vita Fortunati, is restricted to texts formally linked to utopia as a literary genre. As José Eduardo Reis

observes: “He pointed out in this work that Utopia appears whenever in the framework of a narrative (which excludes political treatises) there is a description of a community (which excludes the *robinsonnade*) organised according to certain political, economic and moral principles and correcting the complexities of social existence (which excludes the golden age and Arcadia), whether it is presented as an ideal to achieve (constructive Utopia) or as a forecast of a hell (modern anti-Utopia), or whether it is situated in real, imaginary space or in time, or whether described at the end of a probable or improbable imaginary journey” (Reis, 2002: 14).

² As Lyman Tower Sargent observes: “We dream. We are always imagining a better life, an improved social order, a paradise” (Sargent, 2002: 75).

³ In the fifties and sixties, by influence of the Anglophone world, the concept of *Négritude* starts to fall in disuse. In a humorous tone, the Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka stated that the tiger does not need to claim its “tigritude”, but acts, of course, according to its condition as a tiger. In the Francophone world, Stanislas Adotevi’s criticism is clear in *Négritudes et Négrologues*, when he states that the concept of *Négritude* is confusing, essentialist and reducing (Adotevi, 1999).

⁴ Gérard Aké Loba looked favourably on the proposals of the RDA (Rassemblement Démocratique Africain), presided over by Félix Houphouët-Boigny. This defender of the independence of Côte d’Ivoire and, therefore, of its freedom from the European imperialist yoke, believed, however, that for reasons of efficiency and tactics, it should follow a strategy of dialogue with the former colonising power so as to promote his country as it set out on the road to real progress in the economic, social and political fields.

⁵ A dam that displaced populations, but which also separated the Ivorian north (Muslim) from the south (Catholic). A situation transposed to the novel with the fictitious place name, “Kouretcha”.

⁶ In this sense, note the understanding of Dago Lezou: “Le thème est l’hostilité des partisans d’une Afrique traditionnelle à l’introduction de la technique moderne. Plus d’un conflit de générations, c’est le conflit de deux tensions contraires: ‘tradition et modernisme’. L’auteur choisit bien sûr le progrès, dans le sens de la politique nationale, avec une intention apologétique manifeste. Son héros, le préfet Tougon, est le conciliateur averti, tolérant, partisan chevronné de la concertation (du ‘dialogue’, comme on dit en Côte d’Ivoire)” [The theme is the hostility of the supporters of a traditional Africa to the introduction of modern technology. More than conflict between generations, it is the conflict of two opposing tensions: ‘tradition and modernism’. The author naturally chooses progress, in the sense of national policy, with an obvious apologetical motive. His hero, the prefect Tougon, is the conciliator, informed, tolerant, experienced partisan of agreements (of the ‘dialogue’, as they say in Côte d’Ivoire)] (Dago Lezou, 1977, 45).

⁷ This message coincides with that of Etienne Cabet, in his utopia *Voyage en Icarie* (1840), in which he accentuates the link between technical progress and social progress, seeing that the industrial revolution and the progress of machinery made possible the emergence of a bourgeoisie that benefited from the advances in science and economy.

⁸ In *Les fils de Kouretcha*, the defenders of modernity and technology do not only have to overcome the traditionalists that are opposed to the profaning of the river, fearing the reprisals of the sacred divinity, but they must also demonstrate scientifically that the delays in the construction of the dam are due to errors in calculations and not to the intervention of magic.

⁹ See the letter from Aké Loba addressed to the President of Ivory Coast, included at the beginning of his third novel: “Bientôt le Continent Noir va prendre part de plein droit au Mouvement de l’Évolution Culturelle. (...). Ce rendez-vous de la pensée exige une longue et minutieuse préparation, car l’esprit de création et d’invention ne peut avoir racine pour s’épanouir librement et avec aisance que dans une société solidement structurée et agencée.” (Loba, 1973: 5) [Soon the Black Continent will participate with full rights in the Cultural Evolution Movement. (...). This encounter of thought requires a long and careful preparation because the spirit of creation and of invention can only create roots to blossom freely and easily in a solidly structured and organised society.].

¹⁰ Despite the changes proposed by Aké Loba, the feminine characters remain bound to these conditions. In *Les dépossédés*, Akrébié hopes for a marriage with a young man who can give her a life in the city, far from the hard work imposed on her by the village. Mofoué and “La Citadine” are concerned with increasing the descendants of Païs. In this regard, they corroborate the assertion by Robert Clignet, when he points out that the woman “est un objet de communication (...). En ce sens que le mariage n’est pas un accord entre l’homme et la femme, mais entre deux groupes sociaux (...) qui assignent à la femme la tâche essentielle de la procréation. Avoir un enfant la fait participer à la société des hommes responsables, et non seulement elle, mais aussi son époux.” [is an object of communication (...). In this sense in which marriage

is not an agreement between the man and the woman, but between two social groups (...) who assign to the woman the essential task of procreation. To have a child means that she participates in the society of responsible men, and not she alone, but her husband, as well] (Clignet, 1962: 23).

¹¹ Note, then, the co-existence of Difference in the market at Abidjan: “Il est dix heures du matin, Akrébié se rend au marché. Elle entend comme dans un rêve la sirène de la scierie rappeler aux épouses l’heure de la cuisine. (...). Comme elle est arrivée à destination, elle se dirige sans hésiter du côté des étals des bouchers dans l’oubli le plus total de ses attitudes étudiées. Elle fend la presse des acheteuses sénégalaises dont le grand vêtement bouffant, artistement tissé et la coiffure volumineuse lui inspiraient naguère le regret de n’être pas née au Sénégal, bouscule la cape et la houlette des grands Peuls qui n’en daignent pas plus pour autant abaisser leur regard et leur majestueux turban jusqu’à elle, expédie son emplette, passe encore ici, repasse là, revient sur ses pas, tourbillonne à travers d’autres groupements de vendeurs ; on l’aperçoit au loin penchée au-dessus des aubergines étalées à même le sol, on la revoit en arrière de l’échafaudage d’une porteuse de bananes, là-bas elle faufile entre deux Haoussas, aux calottes rouges. Auprès de ces gens-là, elle ne se voit même pas petite” (Loba, 1973: 55). [It’s ten o’clock in the morning, Akrébié heads for the market. She hears, as in a dream, the siren of the sawmill remind the wives of the time in the kitchen. (...). As she has arrived at her destination, she heads without hesitation to the butchers’ stalls completely forgetting her studied attitudes. She pushes between the Senegalese women with their large puffy clothes, artistically spun, and the voluminous coiffure that not long ago inspired in her the regret that she hadn’t been born in Senegal, jostles the cape and crook of the large Peuls who do not deign any more to even so much as lower their gaze and their majestic turban to her, finishes her purchase, moves on here now, goes back there again, retraces her steps, swirling through other groups of sellers; we catch a glimpse of her at a distance over the aubergines laid out right in the sun, we see her again behind the scaffolding of a stand of bananas, there below, she snakes in and out between two Haoussas, with red skullcaps. Next to those people there, she does not see herself as small.]

¹² We see this text as a chronicle, not in the genealogical sense of the term, but in the view of a writing that carries on a dialogue with time, a *chronos*, taking us back distinctly to the decade of the forties of the 20th century

¹³ In the chapter “L’Afrique en voie de transformation”, in *La création romanesque devant les transformations actuelles en Côte d’Ivoire*, (op. cit.), Gérard Dago Lezou evidences the rural model and the traditional society in the light of the different transformations that would, through a conflict of generations, bring into opposition tradition and modernism, the taste for the city and for luxury, leading to the encounter with a new configuration.

¹⁴ The text highlights Douézo’s fear in the following manner: “L’autre jour, vers sept heures du soir, je te suppliais de me dire qui j’étais, quel était mon nom, d’où je venais ; tu m’as pris pour un fou, tu disais que tu avais peur de mes yeux parce qu’ils brillaient trop... Tu sais, on est à plaindre quand on ne sait pas qui l’on est et d’où l’on vient.” (Loba, 1973: 152). [the other day, around seven o’clock in the evening, I begged you to tell me who I was, what my name was, where I had come from ; you thought I was crazy, you said you were afraid of my eyes because they were too bright... You know, we need to be pitied when we don’t know who we are or where we come from.]

¹⁵ See the words to “L’Abidjanaise”, the national anthem of Côte d’Ivoire: “Salut ô terre d’espérance / Pays de l’hospitalité / Tes légions remplies de vaillance ont relevé ta dignité / Tes fils chère Côte d’Ivoire / Fiers artisans de ta grandeur / Tous rassemblés et pour ta gloire / Te bâtiront dans le bonheur / Chers ivoiriens, le pays nous appelle / Si nous avons dans la paix ramené la liberté / Notre devoir sera d’être un modèle / De l’espérance promise à l’humanité / En forgeant unis dans la foi nouvelle / La patrie de la vraie fraternité.” [We salute you, O land of hope / Country of hospitality / Thy gallant legions Have restored thy dignity / Beloved Ivory Coast, thy sons / Proud builders of thy greatness / All mustered together for thy glory / In joy will construct thee / Proud citizens of the Ivory Coast, the country call us / If we have brought back liberty peacefully / It will be our duty to be an example / Of the hope promised to humanity / Forging unitedly in new faith / The Fatherland of true brotherhood.]

¹⁶ In the negative sense it may take on, that is, in an essentialist resumption of a centrist identity instead of proclaiming the multiple roots of a common basis. Let us recall that at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, a serious conflict broke out between different ethnic groups who were displaced, misunderstood and rejected. Aké Loba deals with this problem, showing himself to be against this contentious *Ivorianness*.