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LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ  
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COMMENTED TRANSLATION OF AN EXCERPT FROM

TANTE BELLA by Joseph OWONO

Presented by Henry CHENNY N. NSANG

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Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of the  
University of Ottawa in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts, Applied Linguistics (Translation).

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UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA  
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INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION.

Tante Bella is the work of a Cameroonian writer, Joseph Owono, who is greatly concerned about the emancipation of African women: prior to writing this novel, he published an article entitled "Le problème du mariage dotal au Cameroun français", which is briefly mentioned in the book and in which he examines the negative social impact of bride price,<sup>1</sup> especially on women.

Tante Bella is divided into two parts: the novel proper, and a sort of prologue conceived as a discussion in which different individuals express their opinions on the question of bride price and the emancipation of African women. The prologue offers useful insights into the problems presented in the novel.

The novel proper recounts the sufferings of Bella-- an aunt of the author's friend--from childhood to old age and death. Bella's bitter experiences result in one way or the other from the question of bride price and also from her status as a woman. The author presents the story of Bella's travail as the tragedy of the African woman. Hence, the novel is a vehicle through which he advocates

social reform, launching a fierce battle against institutions of the past, especially bride price, which have become harmful to society. Denouncing past as well as present customs and practices, Owono pleads for the emancipation of African women.

The question of women's emancipation is thus the central issue in Owono's book, and like several other aspects of the text, requires further clarification for the North American public to which this translation is geared.<sup>2</sup> We hope to give this public access to a text emanating from a vastly different culture, by providing some historical and sociological background on important aspects of the text. Thus conceived, both the translation and the commentary will be a vehicle for rendering this culture accessible to the North American or Western reader.

The Western reader will certainly be familiar with the problem of women's emancipation which has, for some time, been a burning issue in his society. However, in reading Owono's book he must understand this issue within its African context, for the situation differs in certain ways from that of the Western world. The author,

as earlier stated, is fighting against those customs and practices that militate against the African woman, glaring inequalities which make her the man's subordinate, and not his helpmate as should be the case. Bride price, in the writer's opinion, is at the root of it all: a man who wishes to marry "buys" a wife, who thus becomes his property. He may therefore "use" her at his discretion. The bride price binds the woman to her husband in all circumstances. Besides, the woman's life, as portrayed by Owono, is one of drudgery: rising in the wee hours of the day, she attends to household chores, then leaves for the farm, to toil until sunset, when she returns home to prepare dinner for her husband and children. Those unable to find husbands because of the high bride price or unable to withstand the rough treatment inflicted by their husbands flee their homes and take up prostitution. Owono depicts the woman as a victim of society, one whose condition requires immediate change.

It must however be pointed out that Owono's commitment to the cause of women is rendered difficult by two major considerations: first, other men generally consider it unbecoming for a man to concern himself with such an issue. Secondly, the women generally accept what might

be called their "traditional" role: housekeeping, child-rearing and farming have been accepted as part of the business of being a wife. Besides, the women have their own secret societies and dances and even though they might be forbidden to eat certain kinds of food, they generally do not view themselves as leading a life of bondage. On the whole therefore, men and women alike are prone to be apathetic towards questions of women's emancipation.

The situation depicted by Owono in the pre-independence days has undergone little change today, especially in the rural areas. And yet, change has been very much a part of Cameroonian society in recent years. Even prior to independence, there was a compelling need for adjustments in response to a changing society. The most significant aspect of this change was education. Women were given equal opportunities in schooling and education did in fact open the door to "freedom". Today, as always, the educated woman's lot is far better than that of the others: there is no job discrimination, nor are there discrepancies between the wages of males and females; if she is battered

or unhappy in her marriage, the educated woman may sue for divorce, whereas her uneducated counterpart is incapacitated by her illiteracy. Some of the female characters in the prologue are holders of high school diplomas and are trained teachers and nurses; in contemporary Cameroonian society, women have risen to all kinds of positions. Some of these educated women show concern about women's emancipation; very often, the idea is limited to the intellectual circles, which form a small minority. Activities in favour of emancipation take the form of radio programmes and women's magazines, but there are no rallies or demonstrations.

All in all, then, bride price stands out as the main problem; in the book, it becomes the symbol of all the traditional customs that humiliate and enslave women.

Tante Bella therefore exemplifies what Robert Pageard categorizes as "Le roman social et réformateur", which examines the problems of change from traditional to modern society:

Il s'attaque aux problèmes que pose le passage de la société ancienne patriarcale et mystique à la société nouvelle fondée sur la raison et le respect de la liberté individuelle. Donc conflit entre générations.<sup>3</sup>

X

X

The extract to be translated is taken from the first part of the book, which is set in the city. The characters are middle-class civil servants. A strong French influence is discernible in almost every aspect of their life-style: they drink citron-Perrier, listen to music by the Orchestre Philharmonique de Paris, and drive Citroen cars. Apart from these superficial commodities of western living, the most important changes effected during the colonial period stemmed from the introduction of the French educational system.

These people were the early products of the French colonial policy and its educational system. The colonial policy was that of "assimilation"; it was aimed at moulding French citizens out of native peoples. The French colonies were considered simply as extensions of French territory-La France d'Outre-mer-and in fact had representatives in the French Assembly. Proficiency in the French tongue and acquisition of French education were considered prerequisites to, and guarantees of progress: one could gain easy access to the posts of school teacher, clerical assistant, or interpreter for the colonial administrators. Thus, primary and secondary school pupils used

French text books and syllabuses and French was decreed the exclusive medium of instruction. They were taught French History and French Geography. They sang the French national anthem and were even taught to sing the pride of being French. One bit of school slang used in the text reflects the extent to which French culture in the broadest sense had become part of the students' lives. The educated Cameroonians Owono lets us eavesdrop on refer to their fellow students from the northern part of the country as "Quimpériens" ie. people from Quimper<sup>4</sup> a town in Northern France about which they had probably learned in their History or Geography lesson. The teachers, who were recruited in France, felt they had a civilizing mission. Most of the education in the early part of the colonial period was in the hands of missionaries who were instrumental in destroying many of the inherited traditions, cultural values and institutions, which they labelled "manifestations of the devil". The work of the schools was reinforced by the presence of a relatively large number of French settlers who went so far as to provide printing presses for local publications in French and whose intolerance of native tongues encouraged the

learning of the French language at school.

One result of this French-oriented education was to disseminate the idea that indigenous people receiving such training were superior to their "savage", uneducated compatriots. At their worst, this new breed of Frenchmen snobbed their bréthren; at their best, these "évolués", as they were often referred to, considered themselves the torch-bearers of change and progress for their people. The famous "négritude" movement, for instance, was a literary movement founded by students from Black French-speaking colonies. Through Literature, they did much to re-awaken Black Africa to its cultural identity and to decolonize the African mentality, even if mostly only among the educated few. Cultural consciousness was increasingly regarded as a precondition for the success of the political awakening and subsequent independence of francophone countries. Such a movement was a reaction against the colonial system. In our text, people like Grospieds can be considered to fall into this group, the only difference being that Grospieds believes change will come only through self-examination: his criticism is directed not against the outsider and the abuses of the

colonial system--as was the case with many novels set in this era (1930 - 1960)--but against the very roots of his own society.

Being aware of the strong French influence that typifies the prologue and its characters, the reader would expect the novel proper, which is set in the rural areas, to be a more genuine reflection of an authentically Cameroonian background. This is perhaps so, to the extent that there is a certain amount of local colour: graphic descriptions of village scenes and customary rites and practices. Such is not the case, however, as far as language is concerned. For one thing, since the novel proper is supposed to be a transcription of childhood memories put together by the author's friend, dialogue, which is a valuable source of language with regional characteristics is practically non-existent. In other words, there are scarcely any terms or turns of phrase in French that are modelled after the lexis or phraseology of the native African idiom, as is the case in many African novels, especially those with rural characters.

Such "Africanisms" do sometimes constitute a major problem in translation; but even at the SL level they are not always readily understood by SL native speakers, being essentially calques of African words or phrases embedded in the source text. Therefore, it is not necessarily translation which brings out the problem of such "Africanisms".<sup>5</sup>

The prologue on the other hand, although not particularly rich in linguistic local colour, does contain much that is of interest from the standpoint of translation. Its very "weaknesses"--some of which we feel are relevant features of Owono's writing and of Cameroonian French and as such should be carried over into the target text--demand special attention on the part of the translator. One such "weakness" is the lack of homogeneity in the use of registers. It was mentioned earlier that this part of the book presents a group of old school mates and some of their acquaintances having a bull session over a drink. In many instances, the language is appropriately colloquial, as in the following passage:

Je vous prie de me croire, la Chambert, faut pas s'y froter. Comment sait-elle les trouver les mots pour nous bassiner ainsi. J'en restai baba et mes copains aussi. En réalité, j'éprouvais

un malin plaisir à l'idée qu'une femme en remontrait à une demi-douzaine de gars affligés de complexe de supériorité qui veut que tout ce qui est masculin soit supérieur à tout ce qui est féminin...(p. 28 of text book)

Elsewhere, however, the language becomes stiffly formal and ill-suited to the situation:

Un examen superficiel du problème permet d'aboutir à des considérations hâtives, leur dis-je, mais lorsqu'on s'y est penché quelque temps comme moi, on ne peut manquer d'en découvrir toute la gravité et chercher à tout prix à pallier le danger que comporte la dot actuelle. Je suis même persuadé qu'il ne sera pas facile de le faire comprendre à mes compatriotes tant que chacun n'aura pas étudié le complexe par lui-même...( p. 108)

This second quotation sounds very much like the words of some speaker at a colloquium or conference. The constant switch from one level of usage to another, which is typical of the text as a whole, has definite implications for translation.

The lack of registral homogeneity so evident in the conversations embedded in the text reflects to some extent, it must be pointed out, Cameroonian usage in general: it is sometimes necessary to play down the distinction between formal and informal usages in

spoken French or English, because, in the Cameroonian context, we are dealing with non-native users of different geographical origins and ethnic/linguistic backgrounds, for whom these European languages are a sort of lingua franca. For the characters in the text especially, French is not only a second language, but one whose acquisition began at a late age--education in the early part of the colonial period usually began in the late teens--i.e. when the pupils were already proficient in their mother-tongues. This previous linguistic experience certainly affected their acquisition and use of the French language. Besides, two other factors must also be taken into account: first, the social context, i.e. the fact that the characters are discussing what is considered an intellectual topic in an informal situation, is highly conducive to the kind of usage observed in the text. Secondly, there is also the fact that generally, even among the intellectuals, the choice of level of usage is usually given little attention in speech: a study on Central African French, for instance, indicates that even among the educated élite, there is a "confusion

of styles"<sup>6</sup>--styles here meaning not only at the level the distinction between "Standard French" and "langue familière", but at the broader level of metropolitan French and "African French". However, the mixture of styles is not necessarily unconscious, especially between metropolitan and African French, for as Vonosprach observes:

African speakers make a clear distinction between the two "languages". Intellectuals can speak both separately without making any "mistake" in any of them. Speakers who use popular French know that they speak "African French" and not "whiteman's French".<sup>7</sup>

The character of the spoken French reproduced in our text is also partly imputable to the complexity of the linguistic situation in Cameroon, where, although the official policy is bilingualism in two foreign languages, French and English, most Cameroonians, literate and illiterate alike, know not only their own mother-tongue but also one or more <sup>other</sup> indigenous tongues. In addition, there is also pidgin English, which is the lingua franca in the Anglophone sector and some Francophone areas. Therefore, in the final analysis, the present policy means

trilingualism for many Cameroonians and for the majority multi-lingualism.

The complexity of the linguistic situation also has repercussions on the choice of the RL dialect to be used in rendering the conversational passages in the excerpt. In actual fact, there are two main varieties of spoken English in Cameroon: pidgin English, mentioned above, and what might be called Cameroonian spoken English (CSE). Pidgin English is unsuitable as an RL dialect to be used to render these passages for three main reasons: first, it is not codified i.e. it does not have a written tradition. Moreover, it is not one uniform dialect but a whole spectrum of sub-dialects marked by regional variations, with influences of the Cameroonian languages and also of French in the French-speaking areas; one would have to choose among the many varieties of pidgin English and such a choice would considerably restrict the receptor text readership. Finally, it would not be an authentic representation of the way the Anglophone intelligentsia (who, in the mapping from source-culture to receptor-culture, would be the equivalents of the Francophone élite

in the original) speak among themselves. Such people **only** use pidgin English occasionally to establish an amicable atmosphere in conversation or at social functions. These considerations, together with the fact that pidgin English would be incomprehensible to the North-American reader for whom the translation is conceived, rule out its use to render the conversational passages in the excerpt.

The other variety of Cameroonian English, CSE, would be more readily accessible to the North-American reader. Although it has a predominantly British influence, it deviates somewhat from British usage, owing to the fact that it evolved from a colonial educational system that encouraged the use of vernacular in the primary schools, while teaching in the higher forms was in English. This system fell within the general framework of the policy of self-development, or Indirect Rule, adopted by the British in their African colonies. Unlike the French, therefore, the British had no closely controlled educational and language policies. As a result, CSE developed "on its own". There were relatively few Englishmen

in Cameroon, and they were principally involved in large-scale agriculture--tea, coffee, banana, rubber and palm plantations. Teaching at the primary school level was mostly in the hands of Nigerian-trained Cameroonians. For some time, English language textbooks by Englishmen were used, but these were soon replaced with books with a more African content, by Nigerian authors. In the secondary schools, the Catholic and Protestant missionaries of Dutch, Irish, Swiss and American origin generally placed greater emphasis on religion even though they also taught languages and science subjects. As a result of all this, CSE sometimes bears the imprint, at the lexical and syntactic levels, of highly diverse influences, including the African mother-tongues and, increasingly, French in the urban areas and in the administrative context. The use of CSE as an RL dialect is therefore likely to pose slight problems of comprehension for the North-American reader.

In the last analysis, standard English usage would appear to be the most appropriate choice, as it to a considerable extent reflects CSE without being obscure

to the receptors of our translation.

The question of choosing an appropriate dialect for the translation is just one of the many linguistic aspects of the text posing problems. The excerpt also contains a number of words and turns of phrase which the translator must recognize as being peculiar to Cameroonian spoken French and whose semantic and registral content he must properly assess and render.

At the syntactic level, for instance, certain constructions like "promou...quoi?" may be misleading if taken at face value. In this particular case, for example, the utterance is more a declarative statement (denoting mockery), than the interrogative statement it appears to be. At the lexical level, certain words are used with extended meanings, e.g. "candidat"(N), as in the following statement:

...ils vivent en concubinage avec des femmes  
qui, elles aussi, n'ont pas rencontré de  
candidats fortunés.

In other cases, words are used with meanings different from those they would have in Metropolitan French. An

(N) see the section of the commentary devoted to "Cameroonianisms".

example of such a case is "dotée", (N) as in the expression "les femmes non-dotées". All these elements pose translation problems, especially when, as in the text, they are used with the particular intention of reflecting the "linguistic local colour", for RL equivalents are not readily available.

Besides these regionalisms, there are also problems of cultural origin. The word "dotée", mentioned above, is derived from the substantive "dot" (dowry), which itself is an example of a cultural problem i.e. one stemming from the differences between SL culture and RL culture, each of which represents a distinct world.(N1)

The translation problems also include rendering words and expressions coined by the author, like "défenseur de jupons", and "bourgeois-gentilhommienne"(N2) the problem in the latter being created by the underlined morpheme. The non-overlapping of English and French adjective systems is in fact a major source of some of the translation problems in the text: the fact that the French adjective system may use morphological means to

(N1) See the section devoted to "cultural problems in the commentary.

(N2) See the section devoted to "expressions coined by the author".

convey information that is not conveyed by the English adjective means that the translator must resort to lexical items where French relied on morphology eg. "Camerounais...Camerounaises" (N3).

There are other problems, such as the translation of connotation, and the expression "les femmes noires". In the former case, the translator must determine, in that order, why he feels the text is making use of connotative mechanisms, then the nature (personal vs. system-bound) and the specific content of the connotation, and finally, an RL rendering that will reproduce the effect observed in the original.(N4) In the case of "les femmes noires" certain extra-textual and extra-linguistic considerations come into play in determining an appropriate translation for the expression.(N5)

These are some of the translation problems encountered in the excerpt. Thus, besides being deeply rooted in

(N3) See section devoted to "anisomorphisms".

(N4) See section devoted to "connotation".

(N5) See section devoted to "les femmes noires".

the history and culture of Cameroon, Owono's Tante Bella also contains a diversity of general and specific translation problems, which will be the subject of our study.

Two approaches will be adopted in the study: theoretical and descriptive. In the former, the problems will be discussed in the light of existing translation theories. As for the latter, it is described by José Lambert as follows:

Elle offre l'avantage de se fonder non sur des critères postulés dès la départ, mais sur des modèles d'explication susceptibles d'être revus. Son objectif n'est pas d'établir si la traduction est équivalente ou non, si elle est bonne ou non, mais comment elle se caractérise, comment elle fonctionne, où elle se situe.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, besides suggesting solutions, our aim in drawing on the descriptive method will also be to bring to light certain translation problems.

TRANSLATION

Because human nature is complex, each individual has his own personality, which determines his natural reaction in any given milieu. This accounts for the diversity of human problems and the equally diverse solutions people find. And, in general, although the specifics of a problem may seem to be the same for everyone, the solutions usually vary according to each individual's reaction.

So, we each have our pet subject. I, like other people — Otherwise why would I go and get involved in questions concerning the emancipation of African women? The kind of stuff where you're all alone trying to lecture a whole continent on the need to change the status of women.

I'm vaguely aware that others have tried to deal with this issue, but I've no idea how far they've gone. What I did realize soon enough was that Cameroonian men aren't interested; but worst of all, Cameroonian women aren't interested either!

So that's that. It drives me crazy when I think of the whole plan I'd drawn up, to provide my fellow countrymen with women who could be able helpmates to them. They branded me the ladies' champ.

Okay, but as far as I'm concerned, since I used to claim that I'd originated the doctrine of women's emancipation single-handed, I'm not going to give up. That's why I still defend it hotly when someone starts teasing me about my brilliant pet ideas. Whenever that happens, I treat him to the whole plan, which I know by heart, and the guy in question winds up having to admit that my principles are sound.

And I must say it happens a lot. For instance, the other day, I was arguing with Nyala Antoine Ekoa, (ANI) \* a classmate of mine who now works as a veterinary assistant and whose ideas on the advancement of women are diametrically opposed to mine. A good half a dozen of us were sitting around having a drink and the discussion became very lively. \*

Antoine started things off by saying to me:

"Oh! by the way, tell me, Grospieds, why are you always trying to get involved in affairs one can't make head or tail of?"

"What d'you mean?" says I.

\* AN-Additional Notes(which follow numbered notes).

"Well, I read in 'Radio Press' that you were trying to get the bride price system abolished. So I say to myself: "It's his bloody *eccentricity* - again that's making him do such a stupid thing.' Now look here, if you've no other way of killing time, how about inventing a machine that pounds plantains for instance? That'd help the women whom the traditional pestle has been wearing out for thousands of years. But doing away with bride price, now that's a hard nut to crack, let alone make others swallow or digest.<sup>77</sup>

"You've missed the point entirely" I rejoined. "The bride price issue is just one phase of our plan of action."

"Well then, explain, what is it all about?"

"All we want to do is promote the advancement of African women."

"Promote... what?"

"Why you...", I said, "pro-mote the ad-vance-ment of A-fri-can wo-men."

"Look at you! You haven't changed one bit since I last saw you ten years ago. We're growing older all the time, but you continue to stick to your idealistic and childish illusions. Otherwise, why would you go about wasting your breath on stuff like promoting... whatever, you who..."

"Come on Antoine, let him continue," Sollo suggested. I was getting impatient and I lashed out:

"I'm not the least bit surprised," I said. (At school, the guys from up North were known as "Quimpériens"). "He probably thinks while he was being gored at Ngaoundéré, (AN<sub>2</sub>) we in the south were sleeping."

"Being gored", Nyala retorted, "okay, it's part of a veterinarian's job. But I just believe we should..."

"That we should be bulls, right?" I said.

Staring at me murderously, Antoine continued:

"...we should be practical and..."

"Go on!" I said to him, "your syringes, Burdizzo

forceps and antiperipneumonic vaccines are all you think about."

"Okay," says Nyala, "now you want to know what I think of you? Well, you're just one hell of a pretentious, ambitious, ridiculous idealist, a..."

What he thought of me was indeed not very commendable, and this, plus the fact that he had spent ten years in the North with the Moslems, who have no equals when it comes to insults, make what he said to me and the way he said it, unprintable.

"Enough! you hell of a "Quimpérien", I replied.

Antoine was really angry now and swearing:

"Lahilla illalal!(9) Bikéféro, birawandu (10) (son of a pagan, ... son of a bitch). "Nyala" Antoine and I continued in this manner for some time hurling spiteful remarks at each other, with so much conviction that our friends were stunned. In the end Mbende had to step in.

"Look here you two," he said to us, how about saving your compliments till later? The rest of us here have no desire whatsoever to put up with your rotten

personalities and your filthy talk. Having been with you at school, I should've known what to expect when I came here, but I thought it'd be a happy occasion for two friends to be reunited after so many years. But no, you're still the same two little brats who'd climb up on the tables in the school refectory, and spray each other with the palm-oil soup our cook Barnabas used to make, who'd hurl cocoyams (AN3) at each other's faces not giving a damn what trouble they were causing their friends, and then climb down and quietly go hand-in-hand, back to the dorm, then, for no apparent reason, start all over again, punching each other all over the bed they shared. I've never really understood your so-called friendship, which in spite of everything is obviously such an intimate, sincere and deep one. Anyway, just let us discuss the topic intelligently without flying off the handle. I've always wanted to ask Grospieds a thing or two. That'd do us all good, if only to mark the occasion; I mean Antoine's being back among us."

"That's okay with me," I said. Of course, you know my present position is a result of my previous

research on the status of women. After approaching the problem of bride price impartially and objectively from all angles, I've come to the conclusion that bride price is responsible for a good number of human problems which can only be assessed and understood by those who've tried to observe and analyse its degrading social impact in this country. In the south and south-western regions, the number of marriages has fallen by half or more in the last twenty years, while the amount demanded for bride price has risen so sharply that the average young man is unable to marry when he wishes to, and have his own home.

Obviously impressed, but still skeptical, Mbendé asked:

"Are you sure bride price alone is responsible for the present decline in the number of marriages, assuming there is really such a decrease?"

"No doubt about it," I answered. I had visited a number of registry offices<sup>11</sup> and the chart I had drawn up showing the average number of marriages indicated a decrease of nearly 50% within the last twenty

years. Of course there are other factors that may cause people to marry later or not at all, but bride price is certainly the greatest obstacle for Cameroonian bachelors; that, at least, is the opinion of the many people I've consulted. Finally, the minimum bride price at present can be anywhere between 50 and 70,000 francs CFA,<sup>12</sup> and that speaks volumes, since it's very difficult for the average Cameroonian to raise this amount, which invariably goes along with a considerable quantity of goods in kind sometimes amounting to more than the sum paid."

For some time now, I had had the impression Mvondo wanted to interrupt me. In the end, he could no longer resist.

"Only lazy people are unable to marry," he burst out. "Today, as two hundred years ago, only those who want to, and are willing to work hard to raise the required bride price get married."

He looked round as if to seek approval. Though he seemed disappointed, he still went on:

"The idea of bride price hasn't changed. For a

long time, we've been making great sacrifices in order to marry. Today's young bachelors still practice this custom, which certainly has its advantages since it's been in our society for so long."

He continued to expound on this argument, which seemed to make a great impression on the others, whose expression as they looked at me showed they thought I was cornered. Anyway, that's what Kimfack thought when he took up Mvondo's line of reasoning, half questioning me and half commenting:

"Isn't it odd," he said, "that the custom of bride price should suddenly become antidemographic when it has been governing our marriages for centuries? If you want my opinion, here it is: bride price may account for some of the difficulties confronting young men wishing to marry but it doesn't discourage marriage. For as Mvondo pointed out, the bride price system hasn't changed, it's the future husbands and wives, the young men and women that've changed."

He seemed pleased with his own remarks and ended

up by saying:

"That's where solutions must be sought. Something should be done to rekindle the interest in marriage which today's young people of both sexes have lost."

"Otherwise," piped up Mvondo, "even if bride price were abolished, there wouldn't be an increase in marriages. Young people no longer like to marry, that's all."

The same line of reasoning was for ever coming up in conversations on bride price. It was therefore with the utmost calm that I replied:

"A superficial examination of the problem might lead to such hasty conclusions, but if one studies the matter for any length of time, as I have, one is sure to realize how serious it is and one will then try in every possible way to palliate the dangers of the present bride price system. I'm even convinced that it won't be easy to make my countrymen understand the problem in all its complexity unless we each examine it individually. For instance, when you two insist that the principle underlying the custom hasn't changed you're showing your ignorance. I know you don't have all the facts about the problem of bride price, so I'm going to explain them to you."

All my friends seemed interested in the discussion. They were hanging on my words, so to speak, and their faces expressed various feelings: doubt, indecision, opposition, etc.

That Sunday in Yaoundé was a typical June Sunday. It had been a hot day. All the windows in the living room were open since it was stuffy inside. At the beginning of the discussion, I had ordered from my Electrolux refrigerator some cold Beaufort beer for the true Cameroonians that we were. But the six glasses were still half-full and the now warm beer, having lost some of its froth had become bitter. On the coffee-table around which we were seated, the ash-tray was full of cigarette butts of various brands burning away and filling the room with clouds of acrid, sickening smoke.

I took out my packet of "Nationales" and offered it around. Nobody wanted any, as everyone was smoking his favourite brand. Someone struck a match and helped us light our cigarettes. A strangely fringed cloud of blue smoke rose slowly over our heads and while my five companions reclined in their armchairs, I leaned forward and without addressing anyone in particular, I resumed.

"You see," I said, "to talk of bride price as a custom or to defend it for purely sentimental reasons, is to show one's ignorance. I know that by speaking out against bride price, we naturally leave ourselves open to the charge of "Europeanizing" our traditions. That, though, is something no one can accuse us of, for I must admit that when I first got involved in these matters back in 1949, I wanted essentially to marshal arguments proving that bride price was beneficial, as ammunition against those who opposed it and called for its abolition, or tried to discredit it in the eyes of..."

At that moment, I felt a sharp pain in the index finger of my left hand; I shook my arm briskly: the cigarette I had forgotten I was smoking had burned me. I let go of the butt, which, unfortunately landed on the knees of Nyala Antoine, seated just to my left. The latter suddenly spread his legs, overturning the table and everything on it.

To make a long story short, glasses of beer and empty bottles went crashing to the floor and cigarette

butts coated with ashes flew all over the place. This really cleared the air.

When the pieces of broken glass had been picked up, the beer was replaced with the dry Martini that the majority preferred.

Such a diversion is sometimes useful in a difficult argument where one has to uphold a view that is strongly opposed by one's listeners. It gives one the time to catch one's breath and tighten one's defences.

Mbendé had by no means lost sight of the argument. He reminded us about getting back to the point: "So you go on the warpath to defend the tradition of bride price," he said, "and end up as its number one enemy, a spokesman for Europeans and missionaries. How d'you explain that?"

"That's what I was about to do when my friend the "Quimpérien" came up with one of his tricks," I answered.

Even without turning, I could feel Nyala's eyes boring into my left temple just above my eyelid. He burst out angrily:

"Why you... windbag! I guess you did it on purpose. You wanted to set me on fire didn't you? Okay, I'm getting out of here right now; you'll end up poisoning me."

With these words, he rose and made as if to leave, but was sent right back into his seat by four pairs of arms, with remonstrances of "Come on, Antoine, calm down old boy!"

I kept right on smiling, for "Nyala" was simply putting them on and wasn't the slightest bit angry with anyone. It was his way of having fun. So I continued as though nothing had happened.

"So, as I was saying, I started out in favour of bride price and ended up against it. I had approached the problem with no preconceived notions but I was quickly caught up in my own game. Once I'd become familiar with all the aspects of the problem, I behaved like Saint Paul: I turned against the very thing I'd once defended. I can't go into all the evils of the bride price system

here but I wish to make it clear that being aware of the evil, I'm now convinced that bride price is responsible for a host of social problems."

I went on stressing the danger of bride price, the recrudescence of venereal diseases, the decline in the number of marriages, depopulation.

For further information, I referred them to my study entitled "Le problème du mariage dotal au Cameroun français" which appeared in "Etudes Camerounaises", number 39-40 of March-July, 1953, and in which bride price had been presented objectively.

Armed with verifiable figures on the decrease in the number of marriages, on population levels and on the sharp rise in the amounts paid as bride price, I got them to see that bride price was no longer the beneficial practice it had been in the past.

As I went on, I noticed that feelings of sincere compassion were beginning to show on their faces, which just a while ago were skeptical if not adamantly opposed to the very idea of interference with the bride price

system, but now expressed anti-bride price feelings.

My words had hit home and all my friends now agreed with me, or at least seemed to approve of the principle of abolishing bride price. It seemed I had touched a soft spot by asking them to look beyond the narrow-minded considerations of race, individuality or tradition and ask themselves: "Is bride price today beneficial for African society or not?"--a question which places one before one's responsibilities and, according to me, can only lead to an anti-bride price stance.

I stopped to light another cigarette and continued:

"As for the principle on which the system is built and that some people defended a while ago," I said, "I'm certainly not telling you anything by reminding you that it's very much out dated. Traditional bride price consisted exclusively of locally available goods, sometimes supplemented by some form of money. With a little determination, any bachelor could raise bride price for marriage; but all that has changed now that the sum of money has become the main part of bride prices. We still have our sheep, palm oil, hoes etc; the goods that made

up the traditional bride price in the past. But you'll agree all the same that 100.000 francs is a pretty tough amount to put together. You all here got married quite a long time ago and are naturally indifferent to the problems bachelors are facing; and even if you were to remarry today, your salaries as civil servants would certainly enable you to raise the required amount pretty fast. But remember that most of the young men who wish to marry are not that fortunate... So, as they are unable to get the required amount, they forget about marriage and live in sin with women who weren't able to find well-to-do suitors. This leads to loose morals, exploitation of young girls and all the suffering that goes along with it."

My listeners were clearly beaten. They had realized the danger.

## Chapter II

I had completely forgotten that the Chamberts and Mlle. Azombo were coming to have a drink at my place at 6 pm that day. And it was exactly 6:20 pm. when my wife darted across the room to open the outer door saying, "Come in"

almost at the same time that we heard the tap-tap on the glass door. I later learned that she had been watching them from the window in the children's room as they came. That was only part of her good habits.

Three persons came into the living room: two young women and a European.

All smiles, my wife said, "Welcome my dears, and you too, Sir." The trio replied, "Thank you," shaking hands with her.

We, in our own group, were standing in rather funny postures with dangling arms and polite social smiles.

It took me a few seconds to recover my senses. Then I remembered I had to play master of the house.

"We were beginning to think that you had stood us up," I said, at once recovering my senses and playing my part.

Mme. Chambert quickly broke in with that little voice of hers. "My husband had too much work today,"

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she said to me, "and we were only able to close the pharmacy at 6 o'clock. Then we went to pick up Mathilde. We're sorry to be late and do hope we haven't inconvenienced you too much."

"Oh not at all Ma'am," I said.

"Don't be silly!" my wife cut in.

Then I turned towards my five companions and got all tangled up in the introductions.

After a flurry of handshakes, smiles and how-d'you-do's, the ladies were asked to be so kind as to sit down on the now vacant couch, while my friends sat down again in their armchairs and M. Chambert replaced me in mine. As for me, I perched slightly backward on a wooden chair, looking for all the world like a preacher in his pulpit.

I don't know if everyone is like that, but whenever I have to introduce several persons to several others, I always end up completely exhausted. And I try to get it over with as quickly as possible by talking fast.

In spite of my wife's winks, I was still completely

confused. Poor Rosalie had to take it upon herself to ask the ladies what they would like to drink.

It was "two citron-Perriers."

As for M. Chambert, after peeking into our glasses, he said he'd have the same as us. The refrigerator received a new order and carried it out; this time it was two citron-Perriers and a dry Martini, served with three types of pastries--very sweet, very crunchy things--that my wife had been preparing all afternoon.

Everyone made himself comfortable and once more the conversation took a general tone. My friends were getting further acquainted with the newcomers.

That's how they got to know that the Chamberts had been married for a few months. M. Chambert was between thirty-five and forty, French, and operated a private pharmacy--Pharmacie de la Milice--on the Mvolyé Catholic Mission road, close to the military camp. Mme: Chambert was about twenty-nine, a Cameroonian of the Bassa tribe, holder of the baccalauréat<sup>13</sup> She had spent five years in France

and had practised mid-wifery from her home where

her patients used to visit her. She had given up practice shortly before marriage and until then had been known by her maiden name: Marguérite Ewéné. She had been my wife's classmate. Her husband was very much in love with her and made no attempt to hide it.

Mathilde Azombo was a teacher at the Messa (AN4) Girls' School; she had also held a Metropolitan scholarship<sup>14</sup> and had earned the baccalauréat and the CAP.<sup>15</sup>

I was acquainted with Mlle. Azombo because of the youth movements for the advancement of women, in which we were both involved. In addition to her learning, she also had strong moral qualities. She was honest and hardworking and was highly esteemed in town.

I appreciated her very much as she gave me strong moral support and was living proof that our women could become so much more than what they are now. However, many men found her disconcerting because she often disagreed with their views on enlightened women.

It was now almost half past seven. We had talked

about a thousand and one trifles, those things you talk about just to make conversation. For some time now, Marguérite had been trying in vain to attract her husband's attention. When at last he looked at her, she immediately made a little sign, and almost instantly Chambert said it was time to leave.

"You were discussing important matters when we came in," he said. "We're very sorry to have disturbed you."

"On the contrary," said Mbendé, "it's we who're sorry to have spoiled your evening by our presence. We'd been here all afternoon and were just about to leave when you came in. That's just what we're going to do now, with your permission Ma'am", he ended, addressing my wife.

"Oh! please, gentlemen, Rosalie cut in, "stay on for a while; my husband and I are very pleased about this visit or rather this happy stroke of luck that has brought you all together tonight. While I was out in the kitchen, I followed your conversation every once in a while and these are things that concern us and that I'd like to hear you discuss before Mme. Chambert and Mlle. Azombo, who might have something to say."

Then turning to the other women:

"Isn't that right, my dears?" she said, simpering. "They were discussing the emancipation of African women, you know."

"Oh really!" was all Marguérite replied, giving Mathilde a knowing look.

"Please say a word to these gentlemen, Mathilde, you're used to it. As for me, I've long since lost every hope of ever seeing eye to eye with my countrymen. I've had nothing but antagonism from them; it's as if having an education were a crime."

"Oh you know," Mathilde replied, "it's getting late and I was hoping you'd take me back early enough so I can get dinner ready. You know of course, that I do my own cooking."

Instantly, I switched to my voice no. 14 (grave, sweet and modulatory) and with expression no. 31--the gallantry of a would-be nobleman--I cooed:

"Please, Mademoiselle," I said to Mathilde, "tonight, we request the pleasure of your company for dinner,

here. And you too, fellows. Then, turning towards my wife, and reluctantly letting expression no. 31 slide, I asked:

"What d'you think, old girl?"

"Yes, of course," my wife said to the company.

At first, everyone said it wasn't possible but through argument and persuasion, Rosalie carried the day, reminding all of us of the guiding principle of good fellowship: "If there's enough for two, there's enough for three." She went out to the kitchen and gave orders to our boy, Joseph the cook-servant-laundryman... Another round of dry Martini and citron-Perrier. Then biscuits for the ladies.

I told Mathilde that my friends and I had indeed exchanged ideas on the topic and that it was Nyala who had started things off.

"I didn't know what it was all about," Antoine apologized. "I simply wanted to get to the bottom of things, having heard only rumours about the young women's movements you're involved in. I must say that Grospieds'

explanation has left me fully convinced. I had always thought his intention was to do away with bride price and bring in the white man's marriage customs, a thing which I'd never accept if I were asked. But he's made me understand that wasn't the case, and the danger of the present bride price system, as he depicted it, has made me reconsider the issue from a different point of view. I've revised my opinion on bride price and I feel that it's in the interest of African society that bride price should be abolished wherever it produces an anti-demographic and anti-marital effect."

I was very pleased but also very surprised that Nyala had taken a stand so early in the discussion and above all, that he so clearly sided with me. He had always been against me on such issues, so I was glad to have him on my side. He's the kind of guy who'd never walk out on you in times of trouble. Had Mathilde's beautiful eyes played a part in all this?

In any case, it was a victory, especially as my friend reflected the others' views.

"However, although it's indispensable to abolish bride price," Nyala continued, "we musn't lose sight of the difficulties this is bound to cause, assuming of course, that the masses even accept the principle."

"That's right," Mbendé admitted, "Grospieds has won us over on the principle. I must, however, warn him that the people won't be so easily sold as we've been tonight. That'll be the real problem. Sure, the danger is there, but it's so widespread and has become so familiar that people end up being blind to it, unless they actually set out to track it down, as he has. And already, I can see one of the main objections to be overcome: will those African women married without bride price consider themselves bound to their husbands in the task of procreation and child rearing? Aren't there enough examples of such women who've shown complete disregard for their marriage? Personally, my fear is that if the tradition is changed, women would really become licentious."

"In other words," Mvondo observed, "abolishing bride price will eventually turn out to be more harmful than bride price itself is today. While I favour the abolition principle, I feel we should also consider the

question of timing. Let's wait and see. The future will certainly bring a more beneficial solution than embracing an extratraditional influence that's bound to encounter considerable opposition from traditionalists and others masquerading as upholders of tradition."

Sollo disagreed and made this clear to him:

"Now, old boy," he flared up, "we've just admitted that the amount paid as bride price has been increasing ever since money became the main part of it, and you still feel that things'll get better with time? On the contrary, bride prices will continue to increase. For my part, I think the best thing to do would be to limit the abuses that the emancipated women would surely commit in marriages without bride price. Let's remember that for our women, bride price is a material seal of the marriage bond and that, consciously or unconsciously, they've been under its influence for hundreds of years. So, if today we have to abolish it in the interest of our race, something else should be found to replace it in our women's minds."

"Quite true," I said, adding: "We'd in fact be

failing to understand the problem. if we ignored the way our women would react in free marriages. However, there's no use trying to exaggerate or generalize cases of unruliness that certain women married without bride price are supposedly guilty of."

I further pointed out to my friends that bride price has the same influence on women's minds as the whip on children. Considering the changes now taking place in Black African society, we must expect bride price to lose--as is already the case--the good influence it's exerted on women's minds so far, and we must try to establish new foundations for the family, more in line with contemporary life.

I ended up convincing my friends, especially Mvondo, that bride price could be replaced with other factors that can influence women's fickle minds in a more beneficial way.

I must admit, though, that their arguments were well-founded, especially as they reflected the feelings of the majority of my compatriots...

Kimfack got the ball rolling once more by making apologies to Mlle. Azombo.

"Well, I've no intention of hurting anybody's feelings," he warned. "Here we are, trying to abolish bride price. Anyway, let me get back to a point I made this afternoon: that women<sup>o</sup> no longer want to marry. Young girls get carried away by the pleasures of the outside world. They're no longer satisfied with one man, nor can one provide their numerous needs. All told, girls want to remain free and married women divorce for the same reasons. The result is moral dissolution and you name it. In short, it's not so much the amount of bride price that's preventing marriages or causing its decline. It's simply that women no longer like to marry."

The discussion then took a new turn. All three women wanted to speak at the same time. Each felt that the cool Bamiléké<sup>16</sup> man's remarks were aimed particularly at her...

"You still don't understand, do you!" Marguérite snapped. "You still don't realize what harm "man" has

done to those poor creatures walking the streets of Mozart, Nkané<sup>17</sup> or wherever they may be... Every woman, at a tender age, visualizes her heart's choice and lives intoxicated by the dreams of her future home. Getting married is our ideal. Then come our foes, men, with their lying and cheating, ready to serve you on bended knees, like a queen. They lack the qualities of the hero of the young girl's dreams. But what does it matter? They all speak the same language, full of sweet promises that are soon brushed aside once the treasure's been stripped. After the first night, they're only seen again a year later. And those who keep their promises quickly get discouraged by the amount of bride price greedy fathers demand..."

As his wife spoke, Chambert was watching us, and every once in a while he would blush with pleasure, running his tongue over his lower lip. But at other times, his big myopic lenses would turn in our direction as if to set us ablaze with the reflecting light that gave the man a forbidding look.

He apparently didn't like the way we were treating

women, especially the former Mademoiselle Ewéné.

"There are many fine things about your traditions," he began. "I'd even say—and many Europeans share that view—that some of your customs are respectable and enviable because of their positive influence on African society. That's why we, the French, are careful not to interfere with your customs, so long as they're in line with the social order we're here to defend. That's roughly, the principle underlying our social policy in our African possessions. It's the policy of assimilation that's often attacked by our enemies and even our countrymen who don't have our administrative responsibilities..."

Rosie was now serving the men another round of whisky. The pharmacist settled for a cold Perrier and emptied his glass at one gulp.

"The present bride price," he continued, with more confidence, "creates two kinds of psychological complexes: it gives men a superiority complex towards women, and women an inferiority complex towards men. Such mentalities are not at all conducive to peace in the home, especially now that your women are beginning to assert themselves. Moreover, since it's really the women who raise

children, you can't expect a more permanent change in the future generations if your women are not given a place in your society. On the contrary, so long as they're not convinced of their importance and the part they play among you, and have not established their identity they'll always be a severe handicap to progress in Africa... The bride price system is very much outdated and it's now impossible to re-establish the true traditional significance it once had. Many people think of it as capital or better still a chain for binding women, and not as the seal of an alliance. The women themselves no longer see it as symbolizing the materialization of marriage, but as a compulsory burden to bear, one which they can't wait to throw off as soon as there's a chance. As far as I'm concerned, it's past the time to defend bride price on grounds of tradition. It would be better to find out whether or not it's beneficial for African society. The changes in your society, I repeat, shouldn't be one sided. The life of society is founded at the grassroots, and so long as your women aren't your partners in progress, such changes will remain incomplete."

Ending thus, Chambert reclined in his armchair, smiled at his wife and relit his pipe.

No one spoke. There was a brief moment of uneasy and meaningful silence that lasted about thirty seconds. None of us seemed willing to get the discussion going again.

COMMENTARY

#### 1. Fidelity

The question of fidelity to the style in the source text is a primary consideration in translating the conversational passages of the excerpt. In this context, fidelity involves reproducing, in the RL, all the "relevant features" of the source text, including its "flaws". By "flaws" here, we are referring specifically to the general lack of registral homogeneity, i.e. the constant passage from colloquial to formal usage, which is prevalent throughout the conversational passages of the excerpt.

The mixture of registers is observable at the lexical and syntactic levels. Colloquial usage, for instance, is reflected in the frequent occurrence of such items as "le gars", "le type", "le truc", "y a pas"... que je lui répons," "...rapport à..." etc. This level of expression is appropriate for a group of old school mates debating a topical issue. When the latter suddenly slip into stilted utterances, as they do in many instances, the text loses much of its credibility. From the translation standpoint the following question is

posed: should the original be improved upon, i.e. should the inappropriately formal passages be rendered colloquially in order to obtain a RL text with greater stylistic coherence, or should the character of the original be maintained? Either of these options could be defended.

The first option is upheld by authors like Alexander Tytler (1747 - 1813), who, while maintaining that "The style and manner of writing in a translation should be the same with that of the original,"<sup>18</sup> also expresses the opinion that, as a general rule, it is incumbent upon the translator to present his author in the best light even if this involves effecting linguistic and stylistic alterations in the original. Tytler feels that the original is perfectable whenever the translator, guided, as always, by his sense of taste, deems fit. In his own words, "An ordinary translator sinks under the energy of the original; the man of genius frequently rises above it."<sup>19</sup> All in all, therefore, Tytler's recommendation is for improvement. (The implications of improvement in our context are described above).

Some authors take issue with this approach.

According to George Steiner, for instance, the "magnification" or "transfiguration" which occurs when "the translator produces a piece of work which surpasses the original in stylistic quality or emotional scope,"<sup>20</sup> is as "treacherous" as an inadequate restoration of the original. In this, he shares Dr. Johnson's view that "A translator is to be like his author, it is not his business to excell him."<sup>21</sup> Steiner's conclusion is that where this happens, the original is subtly injured and the reader is robbed of a just view.

In dealing with the problem raised by the excerpt, one would be more inclined to subscribe to Steiner's view, for, beside the reasons he advances, it was earlier observed--in the introduction--that the lack of registral homogeneity, although a source of weakness in the book, is actually a fair representation of the speech of some Francophone Cameroonians. It can therefore be seen as underlying an intention or "communicative aim" on the author's part: that of reflecting the linguistic local colour. Hence, in our translation, we have attempted to maintain the style of the original, for, as Louis

Kelly points out:

...the translator seeks to find in the translation the same equilibrium between signifié, signifiant and human user as in the original text and not to represent it as something it is not.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. Cultural problems

Besides style, culture, which may broadly be defined as the sum total of the objects (animate and inanimate), concepts, values, beliefs, arts, customs and practices of a people, is another factor that constantly stands the risk of misrepresentation in the passage from SL to RL. One such cultural item is represented by the word "foyer", which occurs a few times in the excerpt, as in the following statement:

...la moyenne des jeunes ne peuvent plus prendre femme au moment où ils en ont besoin pour créer un foyer. (p. 12, p. 100)

The English "home" would generally be considered an equivalent of "foyer"; but not exactly so, according to Nida. In a chapter on the principles of correspondence in translation, he discusses intraorganismic meaning<sup>23</sup> as one of the elements requiring adjustments in the RL in order to obtain "dynamic equivalence"<sup>24</sup> "Foyer"

is cited as exemplifying the significance of such cultural considerations and their place in the translation process:

Intraorganismic meanings suffer most in the process of translating, for they depend so largely upon the total cultural context in which *they are* used and hence are not readily transferable to other language culture contexts... In French for example, there is no term quite equivalent to English "home", in contrast with "house", and in English, nothing quite like French "foyer" which in many respects is like English "home", but also means "hearth", and "fireside" as well as "focus" and "salon of the theatre". Emotively, the English word "home" is close to the French "foyer", but referentially, "home" is usually equivalent to "maison", and "habitation", and "chez" (followed by an appropriate pronoun).<sup>25</sup>

Thus, to follow Nida's reasoning, the problem of finding an equivalent for "foyer" in our excerpt would be further compounded by the fact that the word is being applied to a non-French cultural context. It must be borne in mind, however, that our translation is based on what we actually have in the SL text, rather than what we are supposed to have. In other words, what we are translating here, is the French word used, and not the total concept of the African reality it is supposed to represent.

In addition, the above quotation from the excerpt exemplifies what Nida calls "referential" usage.<sup>26</sup> To the

speaker, "foyer" simply represents something that has to come at some point in life. This reflects, to a certain extent, the attitude of some males in many traditional African societies, where life is viewed as consisting essentially of four stages: birth, initiation, marriage and death, each of which is marked by special ceremonies. At the third stage, the male has attained manhood and is expected to marry. He must also have his own home in order to start a family, concepts which are both encompassed in the expression "...créer un foyer", which has been translated by "...to have his own home."

On the other hand, some of the female characters use the word "foyer" more "emotively":

Même moi, Dieu sait que ma plus grande pré-  
occupation, c'est de me trouver un mari, et  
de vivre enfin dans la paix d'un foyer.  
(Mathilde p. 27 of text book)

Toute jeune, chaque femme se représente les  
traits de l'élue de son coeur et s'enivre  
des rêves de son futur foyer.  
(Marguérite p. 114)

Thus, to the women, the home symbolizes peace and

represents the ultimate goal in life, bringing with it a sense of fulfillment. Their use of "foyer" in these instances, has a home-sweet-home ring to it.

However, although the English "home" may seem an appropriate translation of "foyer" in both its referential and emotive usages, Nida maintains that the question of equivalence remains unresolved. In a strict sense, this argument is tenable, for as Seleskovitch points out, in each language, a term has a range of associative meanings that might not be readily transferable into another language. She provides further clarification of the problem Nida raises by stating that:

...deux langues ont beau posséder un mot pour une même chose, ces deux mots correspondent rarement l'un à l'autre dans toutes leurs acceptions ou traits de signification... Dire que les mots qui désignent une même chose en deux langues sont traduisibles ne veut donc pas dire qu'à un vocable donné correspond toujours un seul vocable dans l'autre langue, ni que la totalité des significations ou traits de signification qu'il détient y sont transposés par la traduction.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, languages expressing two inherently different cultures cannot always be superimposed upon one another:

no two languages are sufficiently similar to be viewed as representing the same social reality, since the worlds which they conceptualize are distinct worlds, not merely the same worlds with different labels attached.

The difference in social realities is even more obvious when it comes to the SL word "dot" (dowry), which represents a concept considerably different from the African reality.

In Western culture, "dowry" is simply the property a woman brings her husband at marriage. In African culture, on the other hand, its equivalent is the "bride price" constituted by the money and property brought by the man to the bride's parents or relatives. Ideally, it consists of a token amount of money and is conceived as a material seal of the marriage bond. On the man's part, it is a pledge to fully shoulder the responsibilities incumbent upon a husband and a father, a life-long commitment to furnish his inlaws with goods and services.<sup>28</sup> The woman also feels bound by the bride price to respect the marriage, for in certain cases, the money is not spent but

rather earmarked with a view to providing a wife for another member of her family.

The monetary aspect, as one character rightly indicates, is increasingly taking precedence in bride price arrangements. As a result, bride price has generally undergone a sharp rise and actually varies according to factors such as the bride's level of education. The coinage "bride price" adequately reflects the present nature of this custom.

No corresponding coinage exists in French, and this probably accounts for the author's use of "dot", which has been translated by "bride price" rather than "dowry" for the reasons discussed above.<sup>29</sup>

### 3. "Camerooniansisms"

The last problem discussed in the previous section results from the author's using a foreign language to express his culture. It has been observed that this often gives rise to lexical neologisms. Such neologisms, of course, are a sub-class of the regionalisms that sometimes occur when a foreign language (French here) is more

or less appropriated by non-native users (Cameroonians) and incorporated into their culture. "Cameroonianisms" therefore, are those terms and turns of phrase that are peculiar to Cameroonian French usage.

One such word is "doter", a verb derived from "dot". "Doter" as used in the excerpt means "to pay bride price for a woman" rather than "to provide a nubile woman with property or income which she will bring her husband," as in Metropolitan French. "Doter," as used in our text, is thus a semantic neologism. While "une femme dotée," in Cameroonian French, is a woman for whom bride price has been paid, "une femme non-dotée" of course means the reverse. This usage is illustrated in the following quotations from the excerpt:

...Les femmes noires en mariage sans dot sauront-elles se considérer comme liées à leur mari dans la tâche de la procréation et de l'éducation des enfants? N'y a-t-il pas assez d'exemples où les femmes "non dotées" ont fait preuve d'un manque dotal de respect pour une telle union? (p. 112)

"En effet, ce serait méconnaître le problème que de pas se soucier de la réaction de nos femmes en mariage libre. Tout de même, il ne sert à rien de vouloir généraliser les cas d'insubordination dont certains femmes "non dotées" se seraient rendues coupables. (p. 113)

In the above quotations the two expressions "les femmes en mariage libre" and "les femmes en mariage sans dot" are synonymous with "les femmes non dotées", but are rather long and wordy. Hence, besides being faithful to Cameroonian usage, the expression "non dotées" is more concise.

In Cameroonian English there is no expression corresponding to "doter" as used in the excerpt. However, "les femmes non dotées" has been rendered by "women married without bride price". The translation retains the linguistic local colour, if not the concision of the original.

In the above example a standard French expression acquires a different meaning, but in other cases, the word or expression undergoes semantic extension. One such word is "candidat."

"Candidat" is defined in the Dictionnaire du Français Contemporain as: "Personne qui se présente à un examen ou un concours, et qui sollicite sa nomination à une fonction, son élévation à un titre." So, in Metropolitan

French, this word would be used in the contexts of examinations, elections or nominations. In Cameroonian spoken usage, however, there are additional meanings, as in the following passage:

Alors, comme ils ne peuvent pas trouver la dot exigée, ils oublient le mariage et vivent en concubinage avec des femmes qui elles aussi, n'ont pas rencontré des candidats fortunés. (p. 106)

"Candidat" here, of course, means partner (i.e. husband) or suitor, rather than "candidate". This is a case of what Nida and Taber call "contextual consistency" i.e. the strategy which consists in "translating a source language word by that expression in the receptor language which best fits the context rather than by the same expression" [candidate, for instance] in all contexts (which is called verbal consistency)<sup>11</sup>. This is necessary for, very often, in Cameroonian spoken usage one would hear statements like "Est-ce qu'il y a des candidats pour ces bananes?" (i.e. des personnes qui en veulent?), or, "Est-ce qu'il y a des candidats pour le ping-pong?" (i.e. des personnes qui veulent jouer).

Generally, therefore, the constant in the various uses of "candidat" in Cameroonian usage is "Personne... qui sollicite". The word thus tends to be broader in meaning and not restricted to the contexts of examinations or elections.

Cameroonianisms, as stated earlier, also include certain turns of phrase, of which "promou...quoi?" is an example. It occurs in the following conversation between Grospieds and Antoine, who speaks first:

-Alors, explique-moi. De quoi s'agit-il donc?  
 -Il s'agit tout simplement de promouvoir l'évolution de la femme noire.  
 -De promou...quoi?  
 -Mais, espèce de..., je dis: de promouvoir, de pro-mou-voir l'é-vo-lu-tion de la femme noi-re.  
 -Ah! la la! Je te retrouve encore le même après dix années de séparation. Nous vieillissons, mais tu gardes toujours, toi, tes illusions idéalistes et enfantines. Autrement pourquoi irais-tu chanter des histoires de promou...je ne sais plus quoi...( pp. 97-98)

Such utterances consist of the partial repetition of the word or words of one's interlocutor, followed by "quoi". Far from indicating that the speaker has failed to hear or recognize the words of his interlocutor, the formula denotes mockery or opposition. To invent an

example relevant to the Canadian context, if one were opposed or indifferent to the idea of patriating the Canadian constitution (repatriement de la constitution) one's reaction to the mention of that idea would be something like "repatrie ...quoi?", or "repatriement...quoi?". In the above example from the excerpt, the speaker's object of ridicule is the whole idea of women's emancipation which he views as puerile and illusory. Grospieds, by repeating his own words, fails perhaps to register Antoine's mockery; but the repetition may also be seen as Grospieds' determination to make his point, especially as his utterance takes a more emphatic turn (indicated by syllable separation). Even then, Antoine still turns a deaf ear to Grospieds, uttering another formula quite similar to the first one: "promou...je ne sais plus quoi." Such an attitude befits Antoine whose ideas on women's emancipation, as we learn earlier in the text) are "diametrically opposed" to those of Grospieds.

The translation problem here consists in rendering a signifier comprising, not lexical or syntactic elements, but prosodic traits, composed, in this particular case, of syllabic or lexical ellipsis which, together with

the interrogative pronoun "quoi," constitute a register marker of signified "mockery" or "disparagement." No similar mechanism exists in Cameroonian English. However, "promou...quoi?" has been rendered by "promote...what?". This translation fails to bring out the mocking intention in the original, but makes it possible for Grospieds to repeat his words. Hence, in the RL, Antoine's attitude toward women's emancipation is only revealed in the long utterance following Grospieds' repetition.

We realize therefore, that generally--even when the intention in the original is clearly understood--there are no readily available English equivalents for the Cameroonianisms in the foregoing discussion. This is due essentially to the lack, in Cameroonian spoken English, of similar regionalisms that could at the same time reflect the linguistic local colour as in the original.

The translation problems encountered in rendering these Cameroonian "creations" share some similarity with those stemming from the author's personal creations. This can be attributed to the fact that the creations

all have a common origin: they result from the tendency of the users (the author and Cameroonians) to exploit the resources of the French language in ways that diverge somewhat from those common to its metropolitan users.

#### 4. Expressions coined by the author

In the excerpt, the expressions "défenseur de jupons" and "(galanterie) bourgeois-gentilhommiennne" are personally coined by the author.

"Défenseur de jupons" is apparently derived from the colloquial French expression "coureur de jupons", which means "womanizer" or "skirt-chaser". In the text, the term is used by other men to deride Grospieds for being an advocate of women's emancipation. "Ils m'ont traité de défenseur de jupons", Grospieds complains.

This statement has been rendered by: "They branded me the ladies' champ." "Ladies' champ" colloquially expresses the idea of support for women, but does not fully bring out the mockery and/or disparagement conveyed by "défenseur de jupons". This accounts for our use of "branded" whose negative connotation compensates for the said loss.

As for "galanterie bourgeois-gentilhommiene", it is certainly an allusion to the manners of the eccentric Monsieur Jourdain, the central character in Molière's 17th century comedy: Le Bourgeois-Gentilhomme. M. Jourdain is a vain and ignorant "bourgeois" who, eager to pose as a man of quality, takes up noblemen's habits. His new, affected mannerisms are similar to the genteel style in which Grospièdes invites Mathilde to dinner: "Je vous en prie, Mademoiselle, ... faites-nous le plaisir de diner ici ce soir". Such behaviour is what the author describes as "galanterie bourgeois-gentilhommiene".

The element of creativity or novelty in "bourgeois-gentilhommiene" is in the last word: the normal adjectival form of "gentilhomme" is "gentilhommesque". The author thus deviates from the conventional form in using the suffix -ien(nne). Such an ending might be an indication that the type of behaviour in question is peculiar to a specific "bourgeois-gentilhomme" with whom the reader is supposed to be familiar.

However, while the character M. Jourdain, the "bourgeois-gentilhomme", might be readily recognized by

those acquainted with French literature, it would be difficult to think of a corresponding character in English literature. Hence, to translate "bourgeois-gentilhomme", we have to resort to lexical expression: "the gallantry of a would-be nobleman", thus stating in plain terms what in the original is more subtly indicated.

#### 5. Sound effect

Other stylistic devices such as metaphor, simile, rhyme etc. are more conventional and, generally, more readily accessible to the reader than those discussed in the previous section.

In the text, rhyme is used in the following quotation:

Nous commençons à croire que vous nous aviez posé un lapin, dis-je, retrouvant le pôle, et en même temps mon rôle. (p. 19, 107)

The quotation comes at the point in the excerpt where the narrator's invited guests, whom he had completely forgotten about, arrive at his home. Thus taken "unawares", he and his companions assume awkward postures wearing funny smiles on their faces. Completely perplexed, the

narrator has to remind himself to play master of the house, which causes him to utter the words in the quotation.

The sound effect achieved by the rhyme "pôle" and "rôle" may therefore be assigned the expressive function of adding to the comic atmosphere described above, which pervades this portion of the text. As such, the claims of form in the quotation are of considerable significance. However, since rhyme is more often than not language-bound, our translation overlooks form and gives precedence to reproducing the meaning: 'We were beginning to think you'd stood us up', I said, at once recovering my senses and playing my part."

#### 6. Anisomorphisms

An attempt to reproduce meaning in the RL through the same formal mechanisms as in the SL can also be a source of immense problems because of anisomorphisms i.e. the fact that each language exhibits a distinctive system of organizing grammatical significates into meaningful expressions.

There are a few examples in the excerpt where

anisomorphism plays an important part:

Quant à moi, j'ai vu assez tôt que ça n'intéressait pas les Camerounais, mais le comble c'est que ça n'intéressait pas non plus, les Camerounaises.  
(p. 96)

In the above statement, "Camerounais" and "Camerounaises" have been rendered respectively as "Cameroonian men" and "Cameroonian women". However, the French achieves a certain effect in that the appearance of "Camerounaises" at the end of the statement takes the reader by surprise, as he would normally assume that the term "Camerounais" used previously includes women.

The whole statement in French therefore becomes a criticism of the attitude of Cameroonian women toward a problem concerning them, and "le comble" acquires its full weight, in that while it is perhaps understandable that men should be indifferent to women's problems, it is inconceivable that women should.

The English translation fails to convey the same impact, for "Cameroonian men" immediately sets aside the males and the reader more or less expects something to be said about the females. This expectation is fulfilled,

resulting in the loss of the "surprise" effect: the English version expresses the idea without rendering the impact. Thus the translation misses the essence of what Nida calls "dynamic equivalence" i.e. "the closest natural equivalent to the source language message", which is directed primarily towards the "equivalence of response".

The difficulty here stems, of course, from the fact that while in French gender may be indicated by an inflection of the noun (here, addition of "es"), there is no such possibility in English. Hence, what is subtle and even incisive in French becomes flat and colourless.

The situation described above is similar to that discussed by Henry Schogt in "Stylistique de la traduction". Schogt refers to an episode in the novel Zazie dans le Métro by Raymond Quéneau, in which Zazie, the protagonist, goes with her uncle, a homosexual, to a homosexuals' bar. In the description, they talk about "un serviteur écossaise": a waiter, followed by an adjective in the feminine, which is an immediate indication of the kind of waiter it is. One English translator renders this by "a Scotch lassie

waiter", but Schogt observes that such a translation is not nearly as subtle as the French original:

Dans une langue qui ne dispose pas des moyens flexionnels du français, la seule voie ouverte au traducteur est celle de l'expression lexicale. Le resultat n'est pas très heureux bienque le message objectif ne soit pas changé: "Oh! the noisy girl, said a Scotch lassie waiter". Avant de reprocher à la traductrice Barbara Wright d'avoir été trop emphatique et lourde là où il fallait être subtile, on fera bien de trouver d'abord une traduction qui soit plus conforme à l'esprit de l'original. <sup>30</sup>

The same comment may apply to the problem in Tante Bella, where we have a good illustration of how differences in type of signifier (morpheme vs. lexical items) expressing a given signified, in the source and target languages, can weigh heavily on the translator even when the material involved is of no great complexity from the standpoint of conceptual content.

Thus, in both of the above cases, something in the original has been lost and the translator will seek to make up for the loss in the receptor language through "compensation", which Vinay and Darbelnet define as:

Procédé stylistique qui vise à garder la tonalité ou le sens de l'ensemble en rétablissant sur un

autre point de l'énoncé la nuance qui n'a pu être rendue au même endroit et par les moyens que dans l'original.<sup>31</sup>

Although the definition seems to attach much importance to the idea of displacing the "nuance" in the receptor language, this is generally of secondary importance: the authors later point out that compensation is in fact an integral part of all translation and besides, some of the examples they furnish involve no such displacement at all.<sup>32</sup> The central idea is therefore that re-producing the particular intention in the original, in one way or the other. In the above example from Tante Bella one might have recourse to an exclamation point, for instance.

In addition, there is an interesting case in the excerpt, - in which information suppressed in the translation can be recouped through inference from the rest of the text.

The original reads: "Trois personnes entrèrent dans la salle: deux femmes et un Européen". The rendering of "Européen" by "European" entails a loss in that the

English does not specify that the European in question is male (as in the rendering of Camerounais, above). Nonetheless, common sense makes it clear that the separation of the two ladies from the European is an indication that the latter is in all likelihood male, otherwise the narrator would simply say something like: "Three ladies, one of whom was a European". Also, the reader will infer that the young women are African. Further in the text, welcoming the three newcomers, the host says "Soyez les bienvenues, mes chères, et vous aussi, Monsieur." It then becomes very clear, in English, that the European in question is male. However, while in French this fact is made clear from the start, in English it is only implied, and the reader is left to draw the inference.

The dropping of "male" or "man" in the translation of "Européen" exemplifies a case where the translator has to jettison some of the information in the original, in order to avoid a stylistically heavy text.

On the whole, therefore, differences in morphological organization between source language and receptor

language constitute a source of translation problems. This is especially so when in the SL, the morphological signifiers are used with what would be sensed as a specific and somewhat implicit intention, as in the first two examples.

Other SL-RL differences affecting translation occur at the level of cultural values, which are somewhat reflected in such aspects of language as connotation.

#### 7. Connotation

Alors, comme ils ne peuvent pas trouver la dot exigée, ils oublient le mariage et vivent en concubinage avec des femmes qui, elles aussi, n'ont pas rencontré de candidats fortunés. Le resultat est la licence de moeurs, l'exploitation des filles et toutes les misères qui l'accompagnent.  
(p. 18, 106)

In the above quotation, "concubinage" is presented as an aspect if not a cause of low moral standards.

Hence, the speaker goes beyond making a simple statement of fact; he is also making a judgmental comment on "concubinage" which in this specific speech-act, carries a negative connotation.<sup>33</sup>

In actual fact, "concubinage" generally carries

an unfavourable connotation and therefore exemplifies a system-bound connotation.<sup>34</sup> It is usually avoided and replaced with "cohabitation", and in ordinary conversation people would much rather simply say "Je vis avec...", than "Je vis en concubinage avec..."

In English, the translation problem is twofold: register and culture. Although the word "concubinage" exists in English, its frequency of occurrence, in speech especially, is extremely low. In addition, the lifestyle it refers to is an increasingly common trend in mainstream North American society: personals in many dailies abound in advertisements seeking an opposite-sex housemate, apartment mate or roommate. The young people refer to this as "living-in", an expression which, like "living together" has a rather neutral tone. "Living-in-sin" seems more appropriate as a translation of "concubinage", because, not only does it reflect what might be called the "conservative" opinion about such a life-style, but it also brings home the negative connotation.

It might be argued that the English translation

states in clear terms what is only suggested in French. It must be pointed out, however, that generally, those who disapprove of this life-style (as does the speaker in the text) directly refer to it as "living-in-sin".

### 8. "Femmes noires"

The expression "les femmes noires" which occurs frequently in the excerpt poses a special translation problem:

"Car autrement, pourquoi serais-je allé me fourrer dans des questions d'émancipation des femmes noires? Un truc où vous êtes tout seul à prêcher à tout un continent.."(p. 9)

"Il s'agit tout simplement de promouvoir l'évolution de la femme noire." (p. 10)

Throughout, "femmes noires" has been rendered by "African women" rather than "black women", for three reasons. First of all, the text is referring specifically to the case of African women and not to that of women of the black race in general, as is clearly indicated in the first quotation where there is reference to "un continent"--presumably Africa, since the author is African. Secondly, the term "Black" in the North American context and especially in the United States, is very

often used to mean "Black American", or, in some cases, black immigrants, who would be mostly of West Indian origin. This statement by an American movie star bears testimony to the assertion:

"We have a tendency in this country, that when we say black, it automatically means Black Americans. But that's a big mistake... There are Blacks all over this entire world--even in Africa.<sup>35</sup>

The third reason--adaptation to RL cultural context<sup>36</sup>--demands a much more elaborate development.

Generally, the term "noir", as opposed to "africain", was in common use among many French-speaking Black African writers of the colonial period, especially those living in France: as victims of racism and/or acculturation, they saw their colour as the common denominator among them. That accounts for such titles as L'enfant noir by Camara Laye, Kocoumbo, l'étudiant noir by Aké Loba, and Le Docker Noir by Sembène Ousmane, in which the term "noir" refers specifically to Black Africans. Thus, the use of "noir" by black Francophone writers was a manifestation of the Négritude movement mentioned in the introduction.

As a matter of fact, the term "négritude" was coined by the Martiniquais poet Aimé Césaire, who defined it as follows: "la simple reconnaissance du fait d'être noir, et l'acceptation de ce fait, de notre destin de noir, de notre histoire et de notre culture".<sup>37</sup> Hence, the négritude movement involved students not only from Africa but also from Martinique and Guyana. Putting their hands together they created a small paper "L'étudiant noir," in which they aired the problems confronting them and then realized that these issues, far from being confined to one region, such as the West Indies or Africa, concerned the whole black race. The use of "noir" therefore reflects their desire to look beyond their particularisms in their struggle to assert their rights and gain recognition and ultimately self-determination for their home countries. This struggle characterized most of the Black French literature of the period (1930 - 1960) to which Tante Bella belongs. The movement, however, also met with severe criticism.

Some of the most incisive criticism has come from such Anglophone African writers as Wole Soyinka, who

generally, do not subscribe to the concept of négritude-- and this fact to an extent influences our translation of "noir". They contend that the movement is futile and is based on an abstract notion, and that Francophones, as a result of their French background easily fall prey to such abstractions. Some feel that as a literary creed, it fails to tell the whole truth about Africa and even falsifies certain realities. Many also attribute the birth of the concept to the colonial experience of the Francophones. Ezekiel M'phahlele, a South African writer states:

Il est significatif que ce n'est pas l'africain des territoires colonisés par les Anglais--un produit de l'Indirect rule, donc laissé dans son environnement culturel--qui aspire à son passé traditionnel, c'est plutôt l'assimilé qui a absorbé la culture française et qui maintenant tente passionnément à récupérer son passé. Dans sa poésie, il exalte ses ancêtres, les masques ancestraux et les bronzes et s'efforce de trouver les attaches de sa littérature orale.<sup>38</sup>

So, instead of yearning for the past and idealizing the African or Black culture as Camara Laye does in L'enfant Noir, the Anglophone writers opt for the ideology of "African personality" which, unlike that of

négritude, does not claim to embrace the whole of the black world, but refers only to Africa. In literature this involves a concrete and realistic depiction of the African within the framework of his anthropological or ethnographic milieu. It is then left to the reader to make his judgment. This attitude is clearly reflected in such great works of Chinua Achebe as Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God etc.

In the same "realistic" spirit of the Anglophone writers, it would therefore seem more appropriate to talk of "African women" rather than "black women" in the translation. Such a translation certainly overlooks the broader perspective envisaged in the use of "noir", but it is more specific, and more objective, because after all, the problems confronting black women all over the world are not identical.

Generally, this might be seen as a deviation from the author's purpose. In this particular case, however, it must be noted that the négritude writers had a limited immediate target audience: the French and the French-speaking blacks. The latter were reacting directly to

offences perpetrated by the former, so both groups were aware of the problems in question. As such, the use of "noir" is imbedded within that particular cultural context. On the other hand, the Anglophones had no corresponding movement that claimed the whole black race. Our translation can therefore be viewed as a necessary minimal adaptation which, while not entirely altering the message in the original, does modify it, to suit its new RL cultural context.

#### Conclusion

The various translation problems discussed may roughly be grouped under two broad headings: linguistic and extralinguistic.

The linguistic problems include fidelity, anisomorphisms, Cameroonianisms, words and expressions coined by the author; while the extralinguistic group comprises culture, connotation, sound effect and, the translation of "femmes noires". It must however be pointed out that no clear-cut dichotomy exists between the two groups, for the dynamics of language are such that the groups are intricately intertwined and ultimately inseparable. Some overlapping is

also discernible at the level of what might be called the sub-groups. For instance, "bourgeois-gentilhommiene" which falls under words and expressions coined by the author could as well be categorized as a problem of French-English anisomorphism.

In dealing with problems of anisomorphism, precisely (e.g. bourgeois-gentilhommiene, Camerounais.... Camerounaise, serviteur écossaise), we described the subtlety with which SL resources are exploited in the text. However, questions such as subtlety sometimes tend to have a rather subjective basis given that our linguistic or literary sensibilities vary from one individual to another. But, it should also be noted that even if there were some subjectivity in the cases discussed here, a certain amount of it is inevitable in literary appreciation, and hence in translation, where it is, one of the factors that make translation "a complex intellectual challenge".<sup>39</sup>

It might therefore be said that on the whole, while Tante Bella might not have been a milestone in

in African or even Cameroonian literature, it is nonetheless representative of a certain type of Cameroonian writing and, more generally, of Cameroonian culture: as such it certainly is interesting to study from the standpoint of translation.

NOTES

Notes

1. The question of translating the "dot" in the original by "bride price", rather than "dowry" is discussed in the commentary. (See "cultural problems").
2. It is, of course, generally recognized now that any given translation will to a very considerable extent be shaped by the receptors for whom it is conceived; in particular an adequate translation should produce the same effect on the receptor language (RL) audience, as the original had on the source language (SL) audience. However, it is often difficult to be sure how the original audience reacted or were supposed to react. As Nida states, in determining the suitability of a translation one should take into account the level of experience of the audience and its capacity for decoding the message. It is therefore hoped that the background information will provide an "ideal" audience for the RL text.
3. Littérature Négro-Africaine (1966), p. 45.
4. Actually, people from Quimper are called "Quimpérois" in French.
5. Actually, such elements are already translations-- "formal equivalence" translations--through which, in order to reproduce meanings in terms of the source context, the author "attempts to reproduce expressions more or less literally, so that the reader may be able to perceive something of the way in which the original document employed local cultural elements to convey meanings". Nida, E. (1968) p. 165.
6. L. Bousquiaux quoted in Emmanuel Kwofie (1979) p. 69.
7. Ibid., p. 108. Note that J.P. Vonosprach talks of "African French", which does not restrict it to any specific African country. In fact, some of the research done to date has brought out the existence of "striking resemblances" in the French language performances of African subjects despite the diversity of French-African language contact situations. However, further in this discussion, we talk of "Cameroon-ianisms" rather than "Africanisms" because of the risk

inherent in overgeneralization:

8. José Lambert (1976), p. 192.
9. Arabic swear word (By God!)
10. Fulfulde language spoken in most parts of North Cameroon whose population is largely Moslem.
11. Offices set up in colonial period to register births, marriages and deaths, and also issue the respective certificates..
12. In colonial days, approximately a year's take home pay for a school teacher. CFA = Communauté Financière d'Afrique (Franc Zone); 250 Francs CFA = \$1.00 (Canadian) - 1982.
13. High School Diploma in French educational system.
14. Government scholarships enabled Cameroonian students of exceptional ability to pursue secondary, technical and university studies in France.
15. CAP: Certificat d'Aptitude Pédagogique--(Primary School) Teacher's diploma.
16. Cameroonian tribe.
17. Neighbourhoods (in the Cameroonian city of Douala) with prostitutes and bawdy houses.
18. Essay on the Principles of Translation (1978) p. 109.
19. Ibid., p. 42.
20. After Babel (1977) pp. 401 - 402
21. Ibid., p. 402.
22. The True Interpreter (1979) p. 214.

23. Toward a Science of Translating (1969) p. 171.
24. Ibid. p. 166. "The closest natural equivalent to the source language message."
25. Ibid. p. 171.
26. Nida, E., Taber, C. (1969) p. 205. Referential meaning is "that aspect of meaning of a term which most closely relates the term to the portion of the non-linguistic world which it symbolizes...also called denotation; opposed to connotation". p. 199 "Connotative or emotive meaning is that aspect of meaning, which concerns the emotional attitude of the author and the emotional response of the receptor."

Nida, E. (1969), p. 70 "Referential meanings refer primarily to the cultural context identified in the utterance, while emotive meanings relate to the responses of the participants in the communicative act".

27. Langages, langues et Mémoire (1975) p. 36.
28. The nature of this commitment is reflected in this saying in the Béti language (author's mother tongue): nkoe nkyè-ngòn wakareki dzié" which has been translated into French by "Le panier des beaux-parents ne se remplit jamais" (Mviena, Paul (1968), p. 36) "Beaux-parents" here includes the bride's aunts, uncles and cousins to the nth degree, for marriage is conceived, not as a union of two individuals but as an association of two "families". To underscore the significance of "bride price" in Béti society, Mviena further points out that bride price is aimed at "la sacralisation du mariage et la concrétisation de la fidélité aux ancêtres... la dot est aussi un rite consécatoire du passage de la femme d'un clan à un autre clan endogame" (pp. 38 - 39). The cultural differences between "dot" (dowry) and bride price are therefore evident.

29. Even though "bride price" does not figure in any English language or anthropological dictionary consulted, it is widely used by many Africans and readily so, by Westerners in reference to the African context; as in the following examples:
- (i) 'When she marries, the old man concluded, 'her bride price will be mine not yours'.  
From "Akueke" in Girls at War by Chinua Achebe.
- (ii) (Story about a South African game reserve ranger):  
"The job had made him a wealthy and respected member of his tribe, one who could afford the bride price for three wives".  
From "Night of the Lioness" by Ann Haskell and Patrick Pacheko, Reader's Digest, January, 1982, p. 25.
30. Problèmes de l'analyse textuelle pp. 67 - 68.
31. Vinay J., Darbelnet J. (1973) pp. 6, 163, 189.
32. Ibid., p. 189: "Bien que nous restreignons l'application à des déplacements d'unités de traduction dans le cadre du message, il est certain que ce procédé s'applique en fait à l'ensemble des techniques de la traduction".
33. Connotation has been a question of great controversy among linguists and is rather difficult to define. It is perhaps easier to define denotation: the objective indication of an object or a concept without any overtones, implications or suggestions. Connotation, on the other hand, is the set of associations, evocations and suggestions that are linked with a word. It is, of course, difficult to draw a dividing line between connotation and denotation, for, some words have a certain power of suggestion that is often difficult to avoid. "Dog" for instance, has favourable connotations (faithfulness, humility, affection) for some people, and unfavourable connotations (meanness, despite) for others. (Cf. "On Limits to Translation" - taped lecture by Professors H. Schogt and B. Harris).

34. Connotations may be system-bound, i.e. they may belong to the language community as a whole and constitute part of the cultural heritage, but are not so widespread as to become the generally accepted and readily recognized meaning or denotation. Connotations may also be personal: they may result from the individual's feelings or past experiences. (Cf. Taped Lecture "On Limits to Translation" by Professors H. Schogt and B. Harris).
35. Ebony magazine, July, 1981., p. 92.
36. Cultural context: - "The part of context which includes both the total culture within which a communication takes place and the specific non-linguistic circumstances of that communication." Nida, E., Taber, Charles R., (1974), p. 199.
37. Senghor, Léopold S. Négritude et civilisation de l'univers. (1977), p. 270.
38. Quoted by Abiola Irele in Colloque sur la Négritude (1972), p. 92.
39. Nida, E., (1969), p. 155.

AN<sub>1</sub> "Nyalà" and "Gros-pieds" are nicknames. (In the SL text, they are not used consistently with or without quotes around them).

AN<sub>2</sub> A chief town in North Cameroon. In this part of the country, cattle rearing is the principal occupation of the natives. Hence, reference to bulls and veterinarians.

AN<sub>3</sub> Edible starchy tuberous root used as staple food in many parts of Cameroon and other tropical areas.

AN<sub>4</sub> Neighbourhood in the Cameroonian capital city of Yaounde—the setting of the story.

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APPENDIX

(Excerpt from Tante Bella)

Chapitre Premier

La complexité de la nature humaine confère à chaque individu un caractère propre. Ce caractère est sa réaction normale dans un milieu donné. C'est ce qui explique la diversité des problèmes qui se posent aux humains, et auxquels ils doivent trouver des solutions non moins diverses. Et, en principe, si les données d'un problème peuvent paraître identiques pour tous, les solutions le plus souvent, varient selon la réaction individuelle.

Ainsi, chacun de nous a son dada. Moi, comme les autres.

Car, autrement, pourquoi serais-je allé me fourrer dans des questions d'émancipation des femmes noires?\*

Une truc où vous êtes tout seul à prêcher à tout un continent sur la nécessité de faire évoluer la femme.

J'ai vaguement appris que d'autres ont essayé de s'occuper de la question, mais j'ignore où ils en sont. Quant à moi, j'ai vu assez tôt que ça n'intéressait pas les Camerounais, mais le comble c'est, que ça n'intéresse pas, non plus, les Camerounaises.\*

Alors, voilà! C'est à en crever de chagrin, quand je pense à tout le programme que j'avais élaboré pour fournir à mes compatriotes des femmes capables de les seconder dans la vie. Ils m'ont traité de défenseur de jupons\*

Soit, mais moi, puisque je prétendais avoir créé tout seul la doctrine de l'affranchissement des femmes, je ne vais pas la renier. C'est pourquoi je continue à la défendre chaudement quand quelqu'un s'avise à venir me taquiner sur mes petites idées lumineuses. Alors, je lui sors à ce moment-là tout mon programme que je connais par coeur, et il est bien obligé, lui, le gars en question, de reconnaître le bien-fondé de ma philosophie.

\* Asterisks indicate points discussed in Commentary.

Et je dois dire que ça m'arrive souvent.

C'est ainsi que je discutais l'autre jour avec Nyala Antoine Ekoa, un collègue de classe, infirmier vétérinaire, qui a des idées diamétralement opposées aux miennes sur la question de l'évolution des femmes. Nous étions une bonne demi-douzaine autour d'un verre, et la discussion a été rendue très animée.

C'est Antoine qui a ouvert cette querelle en me disant:

--Ah! j'oubliais, dis-moi, Gros-pied\$, pourquoi cherches-tu toujours à t'embarquer dans des histoires sans queue ni tête?

--Comment donc? que je lui réponde.

--Eh! bien, j'avais lu dans un Radio-Presse que tu t'occupais de faire supprimer la dot\*. Alors, je me suis dit: voilà, c'est encore sa sacrée originalité qui lui fait faire une bêtise pareille, parce que vois-tu, si tu n'as rien d'autre à faire pour passer le temps, tu ferais mieux, par exemple, d'inventer une machine à piler le plantin. Ça rendrait service aux femmes que le pilon habituel épuise depuis des millénaires. Mais supprimer la dot, voilà un caillou bien dur à croquer et encore plus dur à faire avaler ou digérer aux autres.

--Tu n'y as absolument rien compris, lui fis-je remarquer. La question dotale n'est qu'une phase du programme de notre action.

--Alors, explique-moi. De quoi s'agit-il donc?

--Il s'agit tout simplement de promouvoir l'évolution de la femme noire et de...

--De promou... quoi? \*

--Mais, espèce de... je dis: de promouvoir, de

pro-mou-voir l'é-vo-lu-tion de la femme noi-re.

--Ah! la la! Je te retrouve encore le même après dix années de séparation. Nous vieillissons, mais tu gardes toujours, toi, tes illusions idéalistes et enfantines. Autrement, pourquoi irais-tu chanter des histoires de promou... je ne sais plus quoi, toi qui...

--Mais, Antoine, laisse-le donc continuer, lui suggéra Sollo.

Je commençais à perdre patience, et je lui lançai:

--Ça ne m'étonne pas de lui, dis-je. Les types du Nord, on les appelait à l'école des "Quimpériens". Il se figure, peut-être, que pendant qu'il encaissait des coups de corne à Ngaoundéré, nous, au Sud, on dormait.

--Des coups de corne, répliqua "Nyala", oui, c'est le métier de vétérinaire qui veut ça. Je soutiens seulement qu'il faut...

--Qu'il faut être boeuf, n'est-ce pas, je dis.

Après m'avoir lancé un regard assassin, Antoine continuait:

--...qu'il faut être pratique et...

--Oui, je lui dis, tu ne vois que tes seringues et tes pinces Burdizzo, ou tes vaccins antipéri-pneumoniques.

--D'accord, fit "Nyala", mais veux-tu savoir ce que je pense de toi? Eh! bien, tu n'es qu'une espèce de prétentieux, ambitieux, un ridicule idéaliste, un...

Ce qu'il pensait de moi n'était, en effet, pas très louable, et si l'on sait qu'il venait de passer une dizaine d'années au Nord et que les Musulmans n'ont pas leur pareil dans le choix des insultes, on comprendrait que ce qu'il me dit, et comment il me le dit, ne saurait être imprimé.

--Ça va, espèce de "Quimpérien" de malheur, je lui retournerai.

--Lahila illala, jura Antoine courroucé. Bikéféro, birawandu (Fils de païen, fils de chien).

"Nyala" Antoine et moi, on continua ainsi pendant quelque temps à nous lancer des méchancetés, avec tant de conviction que nos quatre amis en restaient ébaubis. A la fin, Mbendé fut obligé d'intervenir.

--Dites donc, vous deux, nous dit-il, vaudrait peut-être mieux que vous réserviez vos compliments pour plus tard. Nous autres ici présents, nous ne tenons pas du tout à faire les frais de votre caractère de chien, et être obligés d'entendre votre pourriture de langage. Comme je vous connais depuis l'école, j'aurais dû me méfier en venant ici, mais je me suis dit que deux amis qui se rencontrent après tant d'années de séparation, c'est un événement de joie. Mais non, vous êtes toujours les deux petits malappris qui grimpaient sur la table du réfectoire scolaire et s'arrosaient de la soupe d'huile de palme de notre bon cuisinier Barnabas, se lançaient des tubercules de macabos sur la figure, sans songer au préjudice qu'ils causaient à leurs camarades, redescendaient, et, tout tranquillement, la main dans la main, regagnaient le dortoir, puis, à propos de rien, recommençaient à se distribuer des coups de poings dans le lit qu'ils se partageaient. Je n'ai vraiment jamais rien compris à votre soi-disant amitié pourtant si visiblement attachante et si sincèrement profonde. Quoiqu'il en soit, laissez-nous le temps de discuter intelligemment de cette question, sans passion. Il y a une ou deux petites choses que j'ai toujours voulu demander à "Gros-pieds" là-dessus. Cela nous profitera à tous, ne serait-ce que pour marquer le coup, rapport au retour d'Antoine parmi nous.

--Bien volontiers, je dis. Vous n'ignorez pas que ma position actuelle résulte de l'étude que j'avais faite auparavant sur la condition de la femme. Après avoir abordé le problème dotal sous tous ses angles, et d'une façon objective et impartiale, j'en conclus que la dot est responsable d'un nombre de misères humaines qui ne peuvent être évaluées et appréciées que par les personnes qui auront essayé de suivre et d'observer son

action dégradante sur la scène sociale de notre pays. Dans les régions du sud et du sud-ouest, le nombre de mariages a diminué de moitié, ou plus, en vingt ans, alors que le chiffre dotal monte en flèche dans des proportions telles que la moyenne des jeunes ne peuvent plus prendre femme au moment où ils en ont besoin, pour créer un foyer\*

Visiblement impressionné, mais sceptique, Mbendé demanda:

--Est-tu bien sûr que la dot seule soit responsable de la diminution actuelle des mariages, si diminution il y a?

--Pas de doute là-dessus, je lui répondis. J'avais visité de nombreux centres d'état civil, et le tableau que j'avais dressé du nombre moyen de mariages accuse une diminution de près de 50% en vingt ans. Bien entendu, d'autres considérations peuvent retarder ou empêcher les mariages, mais la dot est certainement le plus grand obstacle pour les célibataires camerounais, c'est, à tout le moins, l'avis de ceux que j'ai consultés, et ils sont nombreux. Enfin, le taux minimum de la dot actuelle, variant de 50 à 70.000 francs C.F.A., est assez éloquent, car il n'est pas très facile pour la moyenne des Camerounais de réunir cette somme qui s'accompagne toujours d'une quantité appréciable de biens en nature, d'une valeur parfois supérieure à la somme versée.

Depuis quelque temps, Mvondo semblait sur le point de me couper la parole. A la fin, il n'y tint plus.

--Il n'y a que les parésseux qui ne peuvent se marier, jeta-t-il. Aujourd'hui, comme il y a deux cents ans, ne se marient que les jeunes gens qui le désirent et qui travaillent à amasser la dot en vue d'un mariage.

Il lança un regard circulaire, comme pour recueillir une approbation. Sans doute déçu, il continua pourtant:

--Le principe de la dot, enchaîna-t-il, n'a pas

changé. Depuis longtemps, nous nous marions au prix de grands sacrifices. Les jeunes célibataires d'aujourd'hui n'échappent pas à cette coutume qui a certainement des avantages, puisqu'elle a vécu si longtemps dans nos milieux.

Il développa pendant un instant cette argumentation qui sembla faire beaucoup d'effet sur les autres, et l'expression de leurs visages tournés vers moi disait qu'ils me croyaient acculé. En tous cas, c'est ce que crut Kinfack lorsqu'il enchaîna, à mon intention, mi-questionnant, mi-commentant :

--N'est-il pas absurde, fit-il, que la coutume de la dot soit brusquement devenue antidémographique, alors qu'elle régit nos mariages depuis tant de siècles? Si vous voulez mon avis là-dessus, le voici: la dot est peut-être responsable, dans une certaine mesure, des difficultés rencontrées par les jeunes hommes pour se marier, sans pour autant qu'elle soit une cause antimatrimoniale. Car, comme vous l'a fait remarquer Mvondo, le principe de la dot n'a pas changé, ce qui a changé, ce sont les futurs époux, le jeune homme et la jeune femme.

Il paraissait satisfait, et pour terminer, il ajouta:

--C'est de ce côté-là qu'il faut chercher: travailler à faire renaître dans le coeur des jeunes gens des deux sexes le goût du mariage qu'ils ont perdu par les temps qui courent.

--Sans quoi, surenchérit Mvondo, même si l'on supprimait la dot, il n'y aurait pas pour autant une augmentation de mariages. Les jeunes n'aiment plus se marier, c'est tout.

Ces arguments, je les entendais toujours dans toutes les conversations sur la dot. C'est donc très calmement que je répondis.

--Un examen superficiel du problème permet d'aboutir à ces considérations hâtives, leur dis-je, mais lorsqu'on s'y est penché quelque temps, comme moi, on ne

peut manquer d'en découvrir toute la gravité et de chercher à tout prix à pallier le danger que comporte la dot actuelle. Je suis même persuadé qu'il ne sera pas facile de le faire comprendre à mes compatriotes, tant que chacun n'aura pas étudié le complexe par lui-même. Ainsi, lorsque vous deux vous insistez sur le fait que le principe de la coutume n'a pas changé, eh! bien, vous péchez par ignorance. Je sais que vous ne possédez pas toutes les données du problème dotal, aussi, je vais vous les expliquer.

La discussion semblait intéresser chacun de mes amis. Ils étaient, comme qui dirait, suspendus à mes lèvres, et leurs visages réfléchissaient des sentiments variés: doute, indécision, hostilité, etc.

Ce jour de dimanche à Yaoundé était comme tous les dimanches au mois de juin. La journée avait été chaude. Toutes les fenêtres de mon salon étaient ouvertes car, à l'intérieur, on étouffait. Au début de la discussion j'avais commandé à mon frigidaire "Electrolux" de la bière glacée "Beaufort" en bon Camerounais que nous étions. Mais jusque là, les six verres étaient encore à moitié pleins et la bière tiédie avait perdu de son écume, ce qui la rendait plus amère. Sur la petite table ronde autour de laquelle nous étions assis, le cendrier regorgeait de plusieurs marques de cigarettes dont les mégots s'incendiaient impitoyablement en distillant dans la pièce une fumée montante d'une âcreté écoeurante.

Je sortis mon paquet de "Nationales" et l'exhibai à la ronde, Personne n'en voulait, les autres fumant leurs marques favorites. Quelqu'un craqua une allumette et nous aida à allumer nos cigarettes. Une fumée bleue bizarrement frangée monta lentement au-dessus de nos têtes, et tandis que mes cinq collègues se renversaient sur leurs fauteuils, je me penchai en avant, et, sans m'adresser à personne en particulier, je repris:

--Voyez-vous, dis-je, lorsqu'on parle de la

dot en tant que coutume, ou qu'on la défend par pure sentimentalité, on pêche par ignorance. Je sais que notre point de vue, militant pour une suppression, provoque chez nous une réaction naturelle contre ce que nous appelons une "européanisation" de nos traditions. On ne pourrait nous en blâmer, et j'avoue que, lorsque j'avais mis mon nez, en 1949, dans ces questions, je désirais surtout réunir les données nécessaires pour prouver que la dot était bienfaisante, et ainsi combattre ses ennemis en réfutant les slogans tendant à la supprimer ou à la discréditer dans les...

A ce moment, je sentis une vive douleur à l'index gauche et secouai vivement le bras: la cigarette que j'avais oubliée m'avait brûlé. Je lâchai le mégot qui, malheureusement, atterrit sur les genoux de "Nyala" Antoine, placé à ma gauche. Ce dernier écarta brusquement les jambes, et ce mouvement eut pour résultat de renverser la table, corps et biens.

Total, casse de verres de bière et de bouteilles vides, évocation générale de mégots enfarinés de cendres. Une détente s'en suivit.

Les tessons ramassés, la bière fut remplacée par un Martini dry opté à la majorité.

Une diversion pareille est parfois salutaire dans une discussion difficile, quand on est obligé de défendre un point de vue cordialement combattu par les auditeurs. On a le temps de reprendre haleine et de consolider ses défenses.

Mbendé n'avait pas encore perdu le nord. Il nous rappela de revenir à nos moutons: "Alors, tu pars en guerre pour défendre la coutume dotale, dit-il, et pour terminer tu deviens l'ennemi numéro un de la dot, et le porte-parole des Européens et des missionnaires. A expliquer!"

--C'est ce que j'allais faire quand mon ami le "Quimpérien" a fait des siennes, répondis-je.

Sans me retourner, je sentis pourtant le regard de "Nyala" se vriller sur ma tempe gauche, à la naissance des paupières, et l'instant d'après sa voix courroucée suivait.

--Vise-moi cette espèce de discoureur à la gomme, dit-il. Je pense que tu l'as fait exprès, et tu voulais m'incendier, n'est-ce pas? Bon, d'accord, je ne reste plus une minute de plus chez toi; tu finiras par m'empoisonner.

En disant cela, il s'était levé et faisait mine de gagner la porte sans grand succès d'ailleurs: quatre paires de bras le remettaient dans son fauteuil avec des: "Allons, fais gaffe, Antoine, calme-toi, mon vieux."

Moi, je souriais toujours, car "Nyala" se payait tout simplement leur tête et n'était nullement fâché de personne. Il s'amusait à sa façon.

Je continuai donc, mine de rien:

--Je vous disais donc que, embarqué pour la dot, je débarquai contre elle. J'avais abordé le problème sans raisonnement préconçu, mais je fus rapidement gagné à mon propre jeu. Lorsque je connus tous les aspects du problème, je fis comme saint Paul. Au lieu de défendre la dot, je devins son ennemi. Je ne puis vous énumérer ici tous ses méfaits, mais je préciserai cependant que la connaissance du mal m'a convaincu que cette coutume est aujourd'hui responsable d'une multitude de troubles sociaux.

Je continuai ainsi à leur parler du danger dotal et insistai avec emphase sur la recrudescence des maladies vénériennes, la diminution des mariages et des naissances, la dépopulation.

Pour plus amples informations, je les engageai à lire mon étude sur "Le problème du mariage dotal au Cameroun français" publiée dans les Etudes Camerounaises, No. 39-40 de mars-juillet 1953, et dans laquelle la dot avait été présentée d'une façon impartiale.

Avec des chiffres contrôlables, relatifs à la diminution des mariages et aux statistiques de la population, ainsi que ceux illustrant l'ascension extraordinaire du montant dotal, je réussis à leur faire comprendre que la dot n'est plus la coutume bienfaisante de jadis.

A mesure que je continuais, je voyais apparaître sur leurs visages une expression de sincère commisération, ces visages tout à l'heure sceptiques, sinon franchement hostile à l'idée d'un empiètement quelconque sur la coutume de la dot, traduisaient maintenant des sentiments favorables pour la cause antidotale.

Mes paroles avaient porté et tous mes amis m'approuvaient, du moins semblaient approuver le principe d'une suppression de la dot. Il me semblait que j'avais touché la corde sensible de leurs coeurs en leur demandant de s'élever au-dessus des considérations purement et aveuglément raciales, individuelles ou purement traditionnelles, et de se poser la question: "La dot est-elle aujourd'hui, oui ou non, avantageuse à la société africaine?" Y répondre, c'est prendre une responsabilité et une position qui, selon moi, ne saurait être que favorable à sa suppression.

Je m'arrêtai pour rallumer une cigarette et je continuai:

--Quant au principe de la coutume, que certains ont défendu tout à l'heure, dis-je, je ne vous apprends certainement pas grand chose en vous rappelant qu'il a été largement dépassé. La dot coutumière comportait exclusivement des biens matériels d'origine locale qu'accompagnait parfois une forme monétaire. Avec un peu de volonté, chaque célibataire pouvait se constituer une dot en vue d'un mariage, ce n'est pas le cas aujourd'hui où la somme d'argent est devenue la partie principale des dots. Nous avons encore nos moutons, l'huile de palme, les houes, etc., marchandises qui constituaient la dot coutumière de jadis. Mais vous conviendrez que

100.000 francs, c'est tout de même une jolie somme d'argent assez difficile à réunir. Vous tous ici présents, vous aviez pris femme depuis assez longtemps, et, naturellement, les difficultés que rencontrent les célibataires vous laissent indifférent, et même, si vous deviez vous remarier maintenant, votre solde de fonctionnaire vous permettrait, sans doute, de réunir rapidement la dot exigée. Mais vous oubliez que la majorité des jeunes gens qui désirent se marier ne sont pas aussi favorisés... Alors, comme ils ne peuvent pas trouver la dot exigée, ils oublient le mariage et vivent en concubinage\* avec des femmes qui, elles aussi, n'ont pas rencontré de candidats\*fortunés. Le résultat est la licence de moeurs, l'exploitation des filles et toutes les misères qui l'accompagnent.

Mes auditeurs étaient visiblement vaincus. Ils avaient vu le danger.

CHAPITRE II

Ce jour-là j'avais complètement oublié que les Chambert et Mlle Azombo devaient prendre l'apéritif à la maison, à 18 heures. Or, il était exactement 18h. 20, quand ma femme traversa rapidement le salon pour ouvrir la porte de l'extérieur, en disant: "Entrez", presque au moment où nous parvenait le toc-toc-toc sur le battant vitré. J'ai su après qu'elle surveillait leur arrivée par la fenêtre de la chambre des enfants. C'était tout à fait dans ses bonnes habitudes:

Trois personnes entrèrent dans le salon, deux jeunes femmes et un Européen.\*

Ma femme, tout en sourires, dit: "Soyez les bienvenus, mes chères, et vous aussi, Monsieur". Et le trio répondit: "Merci" en lui prenant la main.

Notre groupe à nous était debout dans des attitudes qui pourraient bien être qualifiées de comiques: bras ballants, sourires de circonstance.

Je fus quelques secondes avant de retrouver le pôle. Puis, je me souvins qu'il fallait jouer le maître de maison.

--Nous commençons à croire que vous nous aviez posé un lapin, dis-je, retrouvant le pôle, et en même temps mon rôle.\*

Mme Chambert s'empressa d'intervenir avec sa petite voix:

--Mon mari a été débordé aujourd'hui, me dit-elle, et nous n'avons pu fermer la pharmacie qu'à 6 heures. Ensuite, on est allé prendre Mathilde. Nous nous excusons, vraiment, du retard, et espérons ne pas vous avoir trop contrarié.

--Mais pas du tout, Madame, je dis.

--Pensez donc, intervint ma femme.

Je me retournai ensuite vers mes cinq collègues et m'empêtrai jusqu'au cou dans la corvée des présentations. Après les poignées de mains, les sourires et les "Enchanté", ces dames furent priées de se donner la peine de s'asseoir dans le divan maintenant libre, tandis que mes copains réintégraient les fauteuils et que M. Chambert me remplaçait dans le mien. Quant à moi, je me perchai, un peu en arrière, sur une chaise de table, où j'avais l'air d'un prêcheur en chaire.

Je ne sais si tout le monde est comme moi, mais chaque fois que je suis obligé de présenter plusieurs personnes à plusieurs autres personnes, je sors toujours complètement éreinté de la scène. Aussi, je tâche toujours d'en finir le plus tôt possible en parlant vite.

Malgré les clins d'oeil de ma femme, j'étais quand même complètement désorienté. Elle fut bien obligée de prendre l'initiative, la pauvre Rosalie, en demandant à ces dames ce qu'elles voulaient prendre.

Ce fut "deux citron-Perrier".

Quant à M. Chambert, après avoir louché dans nos verres, il se déclara prêt à faire comme nous. Le frigidaire reçut à nouveau la commande et l'exécuta, en l'occurrence deux citron-Perrier, puis un Martini dry, le tout assorti d'au moins trois sortes de pâtisserie que ma femme avait préparées toute l'après-midi, des choses très croquantes et très sucrées.

Tout le monde mis à l'aise, la conversation redevint générale. Mes amis faisaient plus ample connaissance avec les nouveaux venus.

Ils apprirent ainsi que les Chambert étaient mariés depuis quelques mois. Lui, trente-cinq à quarante ans, Français et pharmacien particulier, établi sur la route de la Mission catholique de Mvolyé, près du camp de la Milice, propriétaire de la "Pharmacie de la Milice".

Elle, vingt-neuf ans environ, Camerounaise de race Bassa, titulaire du baccalauréat, cinq ans de séjour en France, et sage-femme à domicile où elle donnait ses consultations. Elle avait démissionné, un peu avant son mariage, et était connue, jusqu'alors, sous son nom de jeune fille, de Marguerite Ewené. C'était une camarade de classe à ma femme. Son mari l'aimait bien et ne le cachait point.

Mlle Mathilde Azombo était institutrice à l'école des filles de Messa, ex-boursière métropolitaine elle aussi, titulaire du baccalauréat et du C.A.P.

J'étais en relation avec Mlle Azombo à cause des mouvements de jeunesse dont nous nous occupons tous les deux, pour l'évolution féminine. A son instruction, elle avait ajouté de solides qualités de coeur. Vertueuse et travailleuse, elle était bien cotée en ville.

Je l'appréciais beaucoup, car elle était un sérieux appui moral pour moi et une preuve qu'on pouvait faire de nos femmes autre chose que ce qu'elles sont maintenant. Mais, beaucoup d'hommes la trouvaient déconcertante, parce qu'elle n'est souvent pas d'accord avec eux pour leur jugement sur les femmes évoluées.

Il était maintenant près de 7 heures et demie. Nous avons parlé de trente-six choses sans importance, des choses dont on ne parle que pour parler de quelque chose. Marguerite avait déjà essayé depuis quelque temps d'attirer l'attention de son mari, mais sans succès. Dès qu'il regarda enfin, elle lui fit un petit signe et presque aussitôt, Chambert déclara qu'il était temps de partir.

--Vous aviez des choses importantes à vous dire quand nous sommes entrés, dit-il, et nous regrettons de vous avoir dérangés.

--Au contraire, lui fit observer Mbendé, c'est nous qui nous excusons d'avoir gâché votre soirée en

vous imposant notre présence. Nous étions ici toute l'après-midi, et nous allions justement partir quand vous êtes entrés. C'est ce que nous allons faire maintenant, avec la permission de Madame, termina-t-il à l'adresse de ma femme.

--Oh! je vous en prie, Messieurs, intervint Rosalie, restez encore un moment, et veuillez croire que mon mari et moi nous prenons un réel plaisir à cette visite, ou à cette heureuse initiative qu'a eu le hasard de vous réunir tous ici ce soir. D'autre part, de la cuisine où j'étais, je suivais parfois votre conversation, et ce sont là des choses qui nous intéressent et que j'aimerais vous entendre discuter en présence de Mme Chambert et de Mlle Azombo, qui peuvent avoir leur opinion là-dessus.

Puis, se retournant vers les autres femmes:

--N'est-ce pas, mes chères? minauda-t-elle. Ils discutaient de l'évolution de la femme noire, vous savez.

--Ah! Oui? fit simplement Marguerite en regardant malicieusement Mathilde. Veux-tu dire un mot à ces Messieurs, Mademoiselle, toi qui en as l'habitude. Quant à moi, j'ai abandonné depuis longtemps l'espoir de me concilier le jugement de mes compatriotes. Je n'ai eu d'eux que de l'hostilité; on dirait que c'est un crime pour moi d'avoir eu mon éducation.

--Oh! tu sais, répondit Mathilde, ce soir il se fait tard, et j'espérais que vous me ramèneriez assez tôt pour apprêter mon dîner. Tu n'ignores sans doute pas que je fais moi-même ma cuisine.

Moi, je composai à toute vitesse ma voix no. 14, grave, suave et modulante, et roucoulai en prenant mon expression no. 31: galanterie bourgeois-gentilhommeienne.\*

--Je vous en prie, Mademoiselle, je lui dis, à Mathilde, faites-nous le plaisir de dîner ici ce soir. Et vous aussi, les gars.

Puis, je me retournai vers ma femme en quittant à regret mon expression no. 31 ci-dessus.

--Qu'en penses-tu, ma vieille, je lui demandai?

--Mais, bien sûr, dit ma femme, à l'intention de l'assistance.

La chose fut d'abord déclarée impossible par les uns et les autres: mais à force d'arguments et de persuasion, Rosalie l'emporta en nous rappelant à tous le principe de la bonne communauté: "Quand il y en a pour deux, il y en a pour trois."

Elle s'en fut vers la cuisine où elle sema des ordres à notre boy Joseph, le factotum boy-cuisinier-blanchisseur.

Nouvelle tournée de Martini dry et citron-Perrier.

Puis, des biscuits aux dames.

Je dis à Mathilde qu'en effet les copains avaient eu un échange de vues avec moi sur la question, et que c'est "Nyala" Antoine qui l'avait provoqué.

--Moi, je ne savais pas de quoi il était question, s'excusa Antoine. J'ai tout simplement voulu en avoir le coeur net, n'ayant entendu que des échos sur les mouvements de jeunesse féminine dont vous vous occupez. J'avoue que l'exposé de "Gros-pieds" m'a pleinement convaincu. Jusque-là, j'avais pensé que son but était de supprimer notre dot pour transplanter ici la coutume de mariage des Blancs, ce que je n'aurais jamais accepté si on m'avait demandé mon avis. Or, il m'a fait comprendre que tel n'était pas le cas, et le danger de la dot actuelle, tel qu'il l'a présenté, m'a fait reconsidérer la question sous un autre angle. J'ai révisé mon opinion sur la dot et je pense que, pour l'intérêt de la société

africaine, partout où la dot se présente sous l'aspect de facteur antidémographique et antimatrimonial, il y a lieu de recommander sa suppression.

J'étais très heureux et en même temps très surpris de voir Nyala prendre si rapidement position dans la discussion, et surtout d'abonder si nettement dans mon sens. Il avait toujours été contre moi dans ce genre de chose, aussi, ça me faisait plaisir de le compter dans mes rangs. Lui, c'est le genre de gars qui ne vous dépose pas en route pour se défilier à la moindre difficulté. Les beaux yeux de Mathilde y étaient-ils pour quelque chose?

En tous cas, ce fut une victoire, d'autant plus que mon ami résumait l'opinion des autres.

--Néanmoins, bien que la suppression de la dot s'impose, continua Nyala, il y a lieu de ne pas perdre de vue les difficultés qu'elle ne manquerait pas d'entraîner, en admettant que le principe en soit seulement admis, par les masses, bien entendu.

--En effet, reconnut Mbendé, Gros-pieds nous a gagnés sur le principe. Je dois cependant le prévenir qu'il ne lui sera pas facile de raisonner la population comme il vient de le faire ce soir avec nous. Toute la difficulté proviendra de là. Y a pas de doute, le danger est réel, mais il est tellement partout et on est si habitué à son évolution qu'on finit par ne plus le voir, à moins de le chercher comme il l'a fait. Et je vois d'ici l'une des principales objections qu'il faudra vaincre: les femmes noires, en mariage sans dot sauront-elles se considérer comme liées à leurs maris dans la tâche de la procréation et de l'éducation des enfants? N'y a-t-il pas assez d'exemples où les femmes non "dotées"\* ont fait preuve d'un manque total de respect pour une telle union? Je crains, pour ma part, qu'en modifiant la coutume, on aboutisse à un véritable dévergondage des femmes.

--En d'autres termes, commenta Mvondo, la suppression sera plus dangereuse demain que la dot elle-même ne l'est aujourd'hui. Si nous admettons le principe de la suppression, il convient, à mon avis, de faire

intervenir le facteur temps. Le temps est meilleur conseiller. On trouvera certainement, à l'avenir, une solution plus avantageuse qu'en adoptant une influence extra-coutumière qui ne manquera pas de buter contre l'hostilité non négligeable des traditionalistes et certains intérêts camouflés sous le couvert de la tradition.

Sollo n'était pas d'accord avec lui et le lui dit carrément.

--Mais, mon vieux, s'insurgea-t-il, nous avons reconnu tout à l'heure que le montant dotal n'a fait qu'augmenter depuis que la monnaie en est devenue la partie principale, et vous continuez à penser que le temps améliorera les choses, vous? Au contraire, le temps est favorable à l'ascension des dots. Cependant, je crois que la meilleure chose qu'il faudrait faire, ce serait de réduire et de limiter le mauvais usage que la femme libérée ne manquerait pas de faire de sa liberté dans les mariages sans dot. Il ne faut pas perdre de vue que, pour nos femmes, la dot est la garantie matérielle de l'union conjugale, et que, sciemment au non, elle subissent son influence depuis de nombreux siècles. Si donc nous sommes aujourd'hui obligés, dans l'intérêt de la race, de la supprimer, il conviendrait de trouver autre chose pour la remplacer dans l'esprit de nos femmes.

Je dis: "C'est exact", et j'ajoutai:

--En effet, ce serait méconnaître le problème que de ne pas se soucier de la réaction de nos femmes en mariage libre. Tout de même, il ne sert à rien d'exagérer ou de vouloir généraliser les cas d'insubordination dont certaines femmes "non dotées" se seraient rendues coupables.

Je continuai en faisant observer à mes interlocuteurs que l'influence de la dot est sur l'esprit de nos femmes, ce qu'est la chicote aux enfants. Etant donné l'évolution ou la transformation actuelle de la société noire africaine, il faut s'attendre à voir la dot perdre, comme elle le fait déjà, cette heureuse influence qu'elle a exercé jusqu'ici sur l'esprit des femmes, et qu'il conviendrait, plutôt, d'asseoir la famille sur des bases nouvelles, correspondant aux conditions de vie de notre époque.

Je finis par faire admettre à mes amis, surtout à Mvondo, qu'il était possible de remplacer la dot par d'autres facteurs pouvant influencer plus avantageusement sur l'esprit instable des femmes.

Il faut avouer que je reconnaissais le bien fondé de leurs arguments, d'autant plus qu'ils traduisaient l'expression de la majorité de mes compatriotes...

C'est Kimfack qui relança la balle en s'excusant à l'adresse de Mlle Azombo.

--Soit dit sans vouloir offenser personne, prévint-il. Nous voici en train de vouloir supprimer la dot. Permettez-moi de revenir tout de même sur ce que j'ai déjà dit cet après-midi, à savoir que les femmes ne veulent plus se marier. Les jeunes filles sont toutes grisées par les plaisirs de l'extérieur. Un seul homme ne peut plus leur suffire, ni satisfaire à leurs nombreux besoins. Total, les filles préfèrent rester filles, et les mariées divorcent pour les mêmes raisons. D'où dépravation des mœurs et tout le bataclan. En conclusion, ce n'est pas tant le montant dotal qui diminue ou empêche les mariages. Les femmes n'aiment plus se marier, voilà tout.

La discussion prit alors une direction nouvelle. Les trois femmes voulaient parler toutes à la fois. Chacune d'elles s'imaginait avoir été spécialement visée par les paroles de l'imperturbable Bamiléke...

--Vous n'avez pas encore compris! affirma Marguerite, impatiente. Vous n'avez pas encore compris, vous n'avez pas encore réalisé le mal que "l'homme" a fait à ces pauvres créatures, à ces femmes de rue, que ce soit du quartier Mozart, de Nkané ou d'ailleurs... Toute jeune, chaque femme se représente les traits de l'élue de son coeur et s'enivre des rêves de son futur foyer. Le mariage, c'est notre idéal. Surviennent alors nos ennemis, les hommes, avec leurs fourberies, prêts à vous servir à genoux comme à une reine. Ils n'ont pas la beauté du modèle que la jeune fille voyait en rêve. Mais qu'importe, ils parlent tous la même langue pleine de

douces promesses, qu'ils s'empressent d'oublier une fois le trésor pillé. On l'a vu un soir, on ne le reverra que dans un an. Et quand il y en a qui tiennent leur promesse, ils sont vite découragés par le montant de la dot qu'a demandé le père cupide...

Pendant que sa femme parlait Chambert nous observait et de temps en temps rongissait de plaisir et se passait la langue sur la lèvre inférieure. Mais parfois aussi, ses grosses lunettes de myope se retournaient vers nous comme pour nous incendier par le jeu de réflexions de la lumière qui donnait à l'homme un air menaçant.

Visiblement il n'avait pas l'air d'approuver notre conduite envers les femmes, et principalement envers l'ex-Mademoiselle Ewéné.

--Il y a beaucoup de bonnes choses dans vos coutumes, commença-t-il; je vous avoue même, et c'est le point de vue de beaucoup d'Européens, que certaines de vos traditions sont respectables et enviabiles pour leur heureuse influence dans la société africaine. C'est pourquoi, nous Français, nous nous gardons d'empiéter dans ce domaine, aussi longtemps que vos coutumes continueront à être conformes à l'ordre social dont nous avons la sauvegarde. Voilà, en grandes lignes le principe de notre politique sociale dans nos possessions africaines. C'est la politique de l'assimilation, souvent combattue par nos ennemis et même par nos compatriotes irresponsables de nos préoccupations administratives...

Rosie servait maintenant une nouvelle tournée de whisky aux hommes. Le pharmacien opta pour un Perrier glacé et vida son verre d'une seule lampée.

--La dot actuelle, continua-t-il avec plus d'assurance, crée deux sortes de complexes psychologiques: un complexe de supériorité chez l'homme vis-à-vis de la femme, et un complexe d'infériorité chez la femme vis-à-vis de l'homme. Le retentissement de cet état d'esprit sur les intéressés est tel qu'il rend malaisé toute harmonie dans vos ménages, surtout maintenant que vos femmes ont commencé à prendre conscience d'elles-mêmes.

De plus, la femme étant la réelle éducatrice de nos enfants, vous n'avez aucune possibilité d'espérer à une évolution plus stable des générations à venir, tant que vos femmes ne vous auront pas suivi sur la scène sociale. Au contraire, aussi longtemps qu'elles ne seront pas convaincues de leur importance et de leur rôle parmi vous, et qu'elles n'auront pas recouvré leur personnalité propre, elles resteront toujours un sérieux frein et un obstacle à l'évolution du continent africain... Le principe de la dot a été largement dépassé et il n'est plus possible maintenant de lui redonner le vrai sens traditionnel de jadis. Beaucoup la considèrent comme un capital ou mieux, une corde pour attacher la femme, au lieu d'une garantie d'alliance. La femme, non plus, ne la considère plus comme le symbole de la matérialisation de l'union conjugale, mais comme un joug qu'elle est obligée de porter, et qu'elle s'empresse de secouer dès qu'elle en a la possibilité. Pour moi, il est vraiment tard de défendre la dot sur le plan traditionnel. Il vaut mieux rechercher dans quelle mesure est-elle avantageuse au milieu africain, ou non. Votre évolution, je le répète, ne devrait pas être unilatérale. Pour qu'une société vive, il faut qu'elle vive à la base, et tant que vos femmes ne deviendront pas vos moitiés dans le progrès, votre évolution demeurera une demi-évolution.

Ayant ainsi conclu, Chambert se renversa sur son fauteuil, sourit à sa femme et ralluma sa pipe éteinte

Personne ne disait rien. Un court silence plein de gêne et de sens régna pendant près de trente secondes. Aucun de nous n'avait l'air de vouloir relancer la discussion.