



### Mariama Ba

Mariama Ba was one of the pioneers of Senegalese literature. Born in Dakar in 1929, she lost her mother soon after, and was raised by her maternal grandmother, who was of Muslim confession and strongly attached to traditional culture. Through the insistence of her father, an open-minded politician, the young Mariama attended French school, obtained her school-leaving certificate, and won admission to the École Normale for girls in Rufisque, from where she graduated as a schoolteacher in 1947.



*Mariama Ba around 25. Photographic archives from her family.*



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Service to her country through education was not Mariama Ba's sole vocation, however. From a Muslim Lebou family from Dakar, she also threw herself into the women's movement to fight for greater recognition of women's issues.

Throughout her life, she tried to reconcile her grounding in her culture, her Muslim faith, and her openness to other cultural horizons. As such, rootedness and openness constituted the two sometimes conflicting poles along her exacting journey. Towards the end of her life, her literary genius achieved full expression in *So long a letter*, a novel which directly confronted polygamy and the caste-system in Senegal – a predominantly Muslim country, firmly attached to its traditions, yet traversed by profound transformations, and confronted by the challenge of new models of society.



*Portrait of Mariama Ba kept at the Maison d'éducation Mariama Ba. Photography by Edouard Jouveaud.*