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Graphology Mutations 65

John Kinsella

As the border vacillates around Calais,
Chunnel fences go down and the *consequences*
of THE COLONIAL are swept away with chemical spray.

I read Ghanaian poetry to Tim. There are clashes
and the village chants to the wider world. African
uranium and precious metals and chocolate and oil

feed the tongues of European politicians,
make the Queen's English. Poets get medals
and hissy fits are thrown if someone is left out.

New Jungle, sadness for stressed 'holidaymakers',
the spectre of banned pesticides for the 'swarms'.
We are sold Africa as *all* — a oneness, a totality:

Sudan, Chad, all that lies south. Go North,
young man, sans family, map in hand, family
executed in the desert. Theorise an ocean,

repository of tears: 'encourage' *them*
and they'll drown: 'First World' (*wold*)
mantra. Your hear it out *here* in the wheat —

2 John Kinsella

bush fire brigades and shooting parties,
cake stalls and cars pulled up on a side road,
window to window. A whisper echoes

down the valley like a car rally. Visa visa visa.
Rack up bank fees. Unchant, 'Turn back the boats...'
'Authors of their own problems.'

O, the privileges of curatorial space. Of
benefits held back. I can hear thunder
from *there*, here: *there*, in homes left

in homes to be made in homes denied.
Where concepts of home are like birds
without their migratory stations —

wetlands taken for building, wherever
the birds leave from but never arrive.
Birds and humans are combined —

the bird quality and human quality — wings.
Tim is listening to a sung version of Senghor's
Chaka composed by my friend Akin Euba

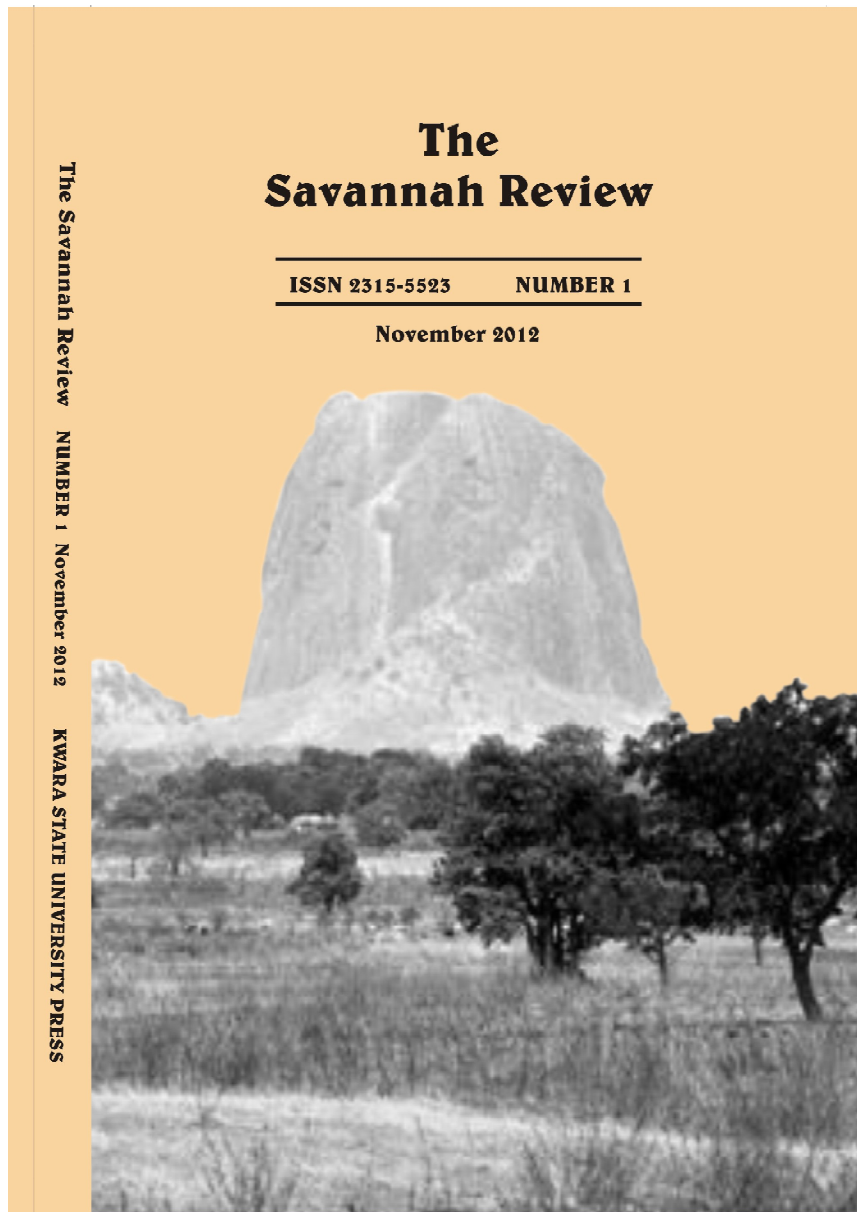
who I haven't seen for a long, long time.
Chaka is a complex figure. There is *bad* in there.
In opera a spoken word shakes the world village.

Voice roots. Kent. Operation Stack.
Tim needs to step his way through this.
Through this he is saturated in contexts

of Europe which he knows
for the fences it makes, the wetlands
it destroys. For its open departures

and monitored arrivals. He will
listen and he will build more pictures.
Hear the words. Hear the consequences.

Africa is not 'natural resources'.
Whose roots set deep. Keeping place
in place. A theory for each heartbeat.



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Mine de Rien

Léon Damas

'Bitter laughter' – four poems from the new posthumous edition of Léon-G. Damas, *Mine de riens*

Introduction

The four poems presented here in English translation are to be found at the beginning of Léon Damas's latest, posthumously published collection that the editors, Marcel Bibas and Sandrine Poujols, have entitled *Dernière escale*.¹ Presented in a luxury box, it consists of three parts: "Mine de riens" (with "riens" in the plural), "Îles-Elles", and "Amerind". As in his previous collections, particularly *Black-Label*,² (an English version of which, though extant, is still

¹ Léon-Gontran Damas, *Dernière escale*, Paris, Le Regard du Temps, December 2012, presented and annotated by Sandrine Poujols and Marcel Bibas. [box, 1 volume 144 p., 979-10-92079-00-5; 350€], also accessible online <http://www.leondamas-mine-de-rien.com/>. The text was apparently almost ready for publication when Damas died in 1978, as his biographer Daniel Racine also suggests ("Léon-Gontran Damas, l'homme et l'oeuvre", Paris, *Présence Africaine*, 1983) and by Damas himself in his liminary note to *Veillées noires* (1973). Actually he left several unpublished works such as essays, poems and a biography of Langston Hughes.

² The English translation of *Black-Label* has not yet been published.

unpublished) Damas touches upon the long memory of slavery as well as discriminations against indigenous and black people, or indeed homosexuals, and does so, as in all his writings, with bitter laughter.

“Mine de riens”, the title of the first poem, is a nice example of untranslatability, since as an idiom (“mine de rien” with “rien” in the singular) it means “in a casual way”, “as though nothing was the matter”, whereas racism still pervades most aspects of the Black condition in our postcolonial time. But then the word “mine” also refers to extraction (coal mines, gold mines, ...). In his travel report *Retour de Guyane* (1938, a title that echoes André Gide’s *Retour du Tchad*), he had accused the European colonizer of ransacking the Americas, a denunciation we clearly hear in “Blanchi”: “mon Afrique qu’ils m’ont cambriolée” (p. 59).³ Now while some mines are more active than ever and incidentally poisoning the environment with mercury, those referred to in the poems are abandoned, vacant. The notion of “vacancy” (“vacant looks”, “vacant shafts”) may partly fit the (translation) bill, since a “vacant look” doesn’t give anything away, and “vacant shafts” are definitely empty, but we miss the cheekiness; “brazen” might have worked for the looks but not for the mines.

The poem itself first celebrates the lushness of the place in –s alliterations though the violence of the extraction of ore and exploitation of labour is soon conveyed in words such as ‘sweat’ and “blood”. At this point, the translator chose to give up on the repetition of the same word (“peine” / “pain”) and to use what almost amounts to an oxymoron: ‘offered labour’. The splaying of the last words visually suggests steps leading down the mine.

The second poem entitled “N’attendez” may seem something of a joke. As in so many other poems Damas starts with an accumulation of ready-made phrases but achieves a jewel of implicitness and indirection. Here the translator’s choice was between the two verbs “wait” and “expect”; since in the second

³ Since he was expected to write some sort of praise for 300 years of ‘France septentrionale’ in the Americas, such outrage was hardly appreciated in official circles.

part the verb is pronominal, what is meant is clearly “expect”, and the poem works better with the same verb all through.

There is something playful about the next poem “À croupetons dans la nuit”. The title calls up children’s games, as indeed explicitly expressed in the second half (“games of Thursdays when penances are over”). In *Black-Label*, the poet also referred to “le jeudi-d’avant-l’orage” (BL 76) and to “les Pensums du jeudi”: Thursday in the French system at the time of his upbringing being the day when school stopped at noon (“un Enfer où le Maître a la main leste / la gifle rude / et vlan” BL 75). Besides squatting suggests the lining up of miners and of coolies, those indentured labourers “imported” from South Asia to British and the French colonies. It is also the meditative defecating position, with nostrils open wide to the smells of the night.

The usual meaning of the idiom “prendre de la bouteille” is “to become more experienced”, wiser, which may be somewhat ironical since the poet repeatedly portrayed himself as addicted to liquor (see the jocular “*in secula/seculo / rhum*” in “De la profonde et diffuse odeur”). This induces the (admittedly wrong) translation as ‘take to the bottle’, indulge in fermented drinks; indeed the poet of *Black-Label* spoke of his “Cœur mariné dans l’alcool” (his heart soaked in spirits). This makes more sense, since the Jar, and probably the Moon too, has lost its magic.

The teachers (next to the priests and the aristocracy, the “élite de couleur” and the “nonesses”) are ridiculed, through the nicknames schoolchildren give them, through their vain hope to leave for the metropolis, ironically contrasted with the train’s motionlessness, and further derided with biblical vocabulary (“verily / verily / we say unto you”). Indeed teachers and priests are both dismissed as part of the forces of colonial oppression since they banned all traditional forms of local or African worship and insisted on an artificial European culture. Several other poems in the collection have priests as their targets, as in “Je le confesse mon Révérend” or “Parce qu’elle avait eu pour père” [le Sacristain ou le Bedeau], or the reference to the bishop’s wandering and palpitating hand in “Sur un tableau de Max Ernst”.

“Sauvage-de-Bon-Sens” (a one-word title, as though it was a name) takes us from the Guyanese forest to “Paris sur scène”

(another impossible pun since the name of the river cannot be changed). It is one of the many puns retained only for readers who can hear the French word in English (Seine / scène / stage). Here fun is poked at ethnological approaches that label and define (known as “Savages” and “Cannibals”); for instance he coins the noun ‘allergogues’, keeping the notion of something alien but leaving out the extra syllable with which it would refer to physicians dealing with allergies (allergo*logists*) and indeed make any sense at all. As in “Réalité/s” and “Si souvent” he introduces the image of the “Savage” snatching the extended hand to eat it up, though this is negated.

The last lines of the poem recall Shakespeare’s *Tempest* as they point to Miranda’s marvelling at the “brave new world” she thinks she encounters in the figures of Ferdinand and his father, and which from our postcolonial perspective, was even then, the Old World of decadent Europe.

The poems presented here ought to give an idea of the verbal wit and revolutionary determination that characterize Léon-G. Damas. However, the poet’s work has been overlooked. In spite of his innovative approach to language and his blunt determination, the numerous publications on “négritude” hardly pay any attention to his poetry. Compared with the other two initiators of the négritude movement, Aimé Césaire and L. S. Senghor, but also to the following movements of “antillanité” (Glissant) and “créolité” (Chamoiseau and Confiant), Damas is the dancer in the dark, his poetry replete with Afro-Cuban songs, jazz, and “dirty dozens”. In almost every line he wrote he was explicitly or implicitly indicting any form of discrimination, acting also against the elitism and intellectualism of the “Nègre gréco-latin” and the supremacy of Paris, “navel of the world” (*BL*). This is not to say by any means that Damas was gay, but he was standing by the side of Langston Hughes, Claude McKay and so many others of his generation who suffered from a double impasse. Have his innovative approach to language and his blunt insistence on calling a spade a spade been part of the reason for the relative lack of attention paid to his poetry, compared with that of the other two initiators of the Négritude movement, Aimé Césaire and L. S. Senghor? It can certainly be claimed that almost in every line he wrote he was explicitly or implicitly indicting any form of

discrimination, all those “lines” (race, class, gender, language, religion) that are not supposed to be trespassed upon. And which he insists have to be trespassed.

—Kathleen Gyssels and Christine Pagnouille

Squatting in the night

Squatting in the purple-scented night
perfumed with citronella oil doused
with a generous splash of tafia as *payaca*
escutcheon of Provost Marshall for the Tour de l’Ille
which the waning Moon
sniffed in bruised lungs
of the limbo male of broken loves
in the Amerindian Legend
the Jar

Ear-

Eye-

Memory

had taken on wisdom
and the sheen reflected
in the mirror of half dead times
She had taken enough
or over much
of one and the other
not to be more accommodating or simple or pretty
than a target for red-hot bullets of clay
kneaded
rolled
baked
annealed
in a buccan slow fire of twigs
dry sparkling
in the eyes of the bawdy brats

eventually released out of doors
waow
and there you go
playing the game of Thursdays when penances are over
so many lines so many pages to be
calligraphed with a pen that *Naincoulé*
the Schoolmaster
with his ever open fly
had wanted
beautifully gothic
like his love for the past subjunctive
happily coiled
in the mouth like a hen's arse ready to drop an egg
all rounded and cheery
of a teacher called
Mortadelle
MP-Candidate
of a smattering of Frenchy windward islands
that
verily
verily
we say unto you
only want
the red lights
of tail cars
on rails
that are motionless
always motionless
why you may well ask
even more motionless in the tawny night anxious to see
at last the dawning of souls
put to death shadows
with regard to the Jar Ear-Eye-Memory

Common-Sense-Savage

Relayed by the Great Reporter of *Renaudot-Ma-Gazette*
a rumour ran through the Kingdom
poisoned arrow thrown
against the Old World
each according to his law
his faith
his Christ to bear
just like a predestined *Christophe*
Colon
whom Macumbo
native of Kayen-en-Wayana
son of Cépérou the Cacique
of the Paria Nation
known as Savages and Cannibals
red-skinned
to boot
had conceived
and
indeed achieved the dream
of up and sailing
and showing plenty of feathers
from his native Mahury on the Seine
and to reach Parisian stages
Not for laughs
but in earnest
and for good and all
Macumbo had bumped around to his soul's desire
with double paddles
against the wind
without compass
on the instinct of a primitive mind
to prompt the dreams and ratiocinations
in the nearby river
of all Lévy-Bruhl's allergologists
in a temper
in a dander

in a trance
And Macumbo
having thus travelled
a lot a lot
had been promoted
without his wanting
or wishing it
Common-Sense-Savage
in the salons of Madame Dessication of the Carousal
whose gracile hand
graciously offered
was not to be snatched
chewed
bitten
eaten
 yum-yum
except with your eyes
but merely kissed
as it was
with the savvy
decency
managed manners
that the Former Savage-with-ara-feathers
from the Great Tupi Country
had acquired
from rubbing shoulders
with the Old World
pretty
blasted
bloody fine world

Six Poems

Patrick Sylvain

Haiti: A Disavowal

Home, the center of intimacy is wilting in its solidity.
Am I fooling myself by shedding tears for that land rocked
By turbulence, where perched cardinals go on feeding
As eagles and other rapacious birds claw through sparrows'
Nests as if their existence was pure dispensable meat?

My enemies have shown themselves. Friends, beasts
With corporate smiles constantly slashing handshakes
For sugar, cacao as if nature is not fierce enough. Lunacy.
The lunatics are behind glass walls howling like wolves
For the pearl of the moon. The sparrows already consumed.

I feel naked, breached by hate for my nocturnal skin
As names, affixed to a collective, became settlements.
When my feathers are plucked, the bayonet of my beak
Knows the history of steel, clacking, and gashing through
Flesh avowing dignity. Centuries of my disavowed liberty.

The blood of my ancestors is no longer in the marrow,
And cardinal concords are signed where lives latched to capital

Exist on the margins with the stench of skins drenched
In centuries of field labor. Drudgers in tatters eating dust.
Under the eagle's claw, home is a nest of dead sparrows.

We've been on our knees since the viperous cross was planted,
And I've been naked underneath an oak's mistletoe, genuflecting.
I had no white bulls, no white cloak, just my blackness bonding
With the moon. I heard a choir versing the nation of the heart:
Home is the intimate abode even when cardinals are not sanguine.

The place of my birth is an irritant and its cardinals are moles.
Liberty aborted, and *Louverturean* sparrows are eaten by wolves.
I do not have drinking horns, but my lunar pendant is a gift
From Sulis Minerva, descendant of the Black Madonna.
Madre de la tierra, I am earth of the earth and my inheritance is earth.

Haiti Is

Haiti is where Columbus' men pissed blood.
Where the Tainos' bones scattered dust.
Where Africans broke their teeth biting
Into cast iron and chains linked to cauldrons.
Where the French built a citadel of torture:
Hot syrup on scalps, bodies buried neck high.
Where black bodies stood like bamboo stalks
And whipped the air until the wind howled freedom songs.
Haiti is where color lines became acid and shredded
The tri-color flag. Now, color stains the nation.
Haiti, where American Yankees stomped their Jim Crow boots.
Now, there are bloodied footprints up to the gold mountains.
Haiti is where spirits swell and twirl in stubborn heads
Who have forgotten that loss of identity
Is a hemlock offered in chalices.
Haiti is Atlantic's sacristy, where the frontier
Of the world is in the palm of the poor and on the drum.

Bacchanal

1-

My right-hand fingers
Stained with ink, I tapped at my
Window pane in vain
As my prized muse bacchanal
With my thoughts in the warm rain.

*Tout dwèt men-dwat mwen
Tache ak lank, m' frape
Vit fenèt an vèn
Pandan muz mwen bakanal
Ak panse m' nan lapli.*

2-

Blue flame eats paper.
Melted gold brands avarice.
Men dine earth, death laughs.

*Flanm manje papye.
Lò ki fonn tanpe visye.
Lòm bafre latè, mò ri.*

Allure

As a child, despite my grandpa's disciplinary
Belt, I felt the ocean's allure,
The thrill of the waves rocking my body,
Or thundering slaps against rocks,
Then the waning echo of suction as if
Swallowing its last gulp.
Minutes later, new waves repeated
Nature's symphony. I would hoot.

Over the years, the Caribbean Sea became
My secret companion.
Beyond the rolling waves, the salty mists
Against my face, I grew to love what I feared.
Underneath the blue wonder of life,
Lurked death. Eat and be eaten, the paradox
Of existence, the way passion and fury cohabitate.

I lived about a mile from two palm-crowned beaches:
“Ideal Domain”, and “White Woman” (*Fanm Blanch*)
Where Canadian tourists once flocked and flopped
Their bodies to be baked by the sun.
There, some swam with us naked,
Encouraging our native eyes to take in their foreign
Glow. Their nightly flow with local flesh.

I was too young to go into the clubs,
Despite my grandfather’s belt, I learned
To swim against the tide, to climb the rocks
And fearlessly dive into the warm depths
Like a scud without tainting my form.
Then, one late afternoon, I was challenged
By a girl, two years older, Canadian, topless and cocky.

Her athletic body with broad shoulders signaled
A stoutness that I discovered only after we dove.
Eighteen feet on the highest rock, we were
Expected to swim strokeless under water for fifty feet.
Perfect dive and perfect entry, but after thirty feet
My swimming skill reached its peak I panicked
When a young man’s limp body flashed,

And broke open my memory screen.
Two months prior his body was pulled
From the slow-rocking sea, lifeless as ringing
Screams stunned the air. We were not friends,
But I recognized his bow-legged walk.

The gaped mouth and half-open eyes that had been
Imprinted in the crevices of my brain flicked
To the surface when I needed air the most.

Taut muscles, ribcage compressed, stinging eyes,
I felt the gravity of the water like shore-waves,
Heaved back to the sea. I took a deep breath
And drifted downward. My acumen surrendered,
And I descended, wanting to hit bottom,
Until a pair of hands were against my soles thrusting
Me upward like a hurdling fish. I gasped.

When my vision cleared, Pauline was facing me
With a concerned look, our bodies touched.
I thanked her and we slowly swam sidestroke towards
The cove. Dusk streaked the sky when my feet should
Have been jetting home. But Pauline kept me planted.
The warmth of our bodies, pockets of air and salt
Of the sea made us one. Until Zeus's thunderbolt
Exploded from my spine and made me quiver for mercy.

By the time I reached home, it was past sunset
And grandpa's belt was the welcoming sentinel.
I closed my eyes, clenched my teeth and took
In a storm of lashes. His denouncing voice
Drowned out as my brain was lulled by waves.
That night, I dreamed of an elated mermaid
Luring me back to the cove where my new
Canadian maiden awaited another dive.

Birds and Rocks

Dry moss sprawls on taupe sand,
Along with starfish and crab.
Waves drained of energy slowly

Ebb-and-flow on the rocky shore,
Where white corals are spotted with heron
Droppings. They seemed like cataract-eyes.

Then I spotted a pair of flapping pelicans
That eyed a small school of red snappers
Their gliding turns and plunging dives.
I am moved by their secret communication,
The imprecision of their yields as they filled
Their pouches with slapping tails
Of an unfortunate supper. Did they care
For a splintered, perhaps murdered family?

On these rocks just above the sea and below
The mountains, bones and shells become rocks.
We've walked on the tombs of bones
For centuries where each step
Harvests a collection of particles,
Shadows from an un-resurrected world.

I sit on the rocks and I feel daunted
By the indeterminate ghosts that
Crawl upon the rumples of the water,
The crevices of the rocks, or the branches
Of palms rustling in the Trade winds.
For all the death and killings that ensued
On this island, I wonder if birds have
Nightmares, or do they simply litter shores
And mountains for fettered archaeologists?

And So...

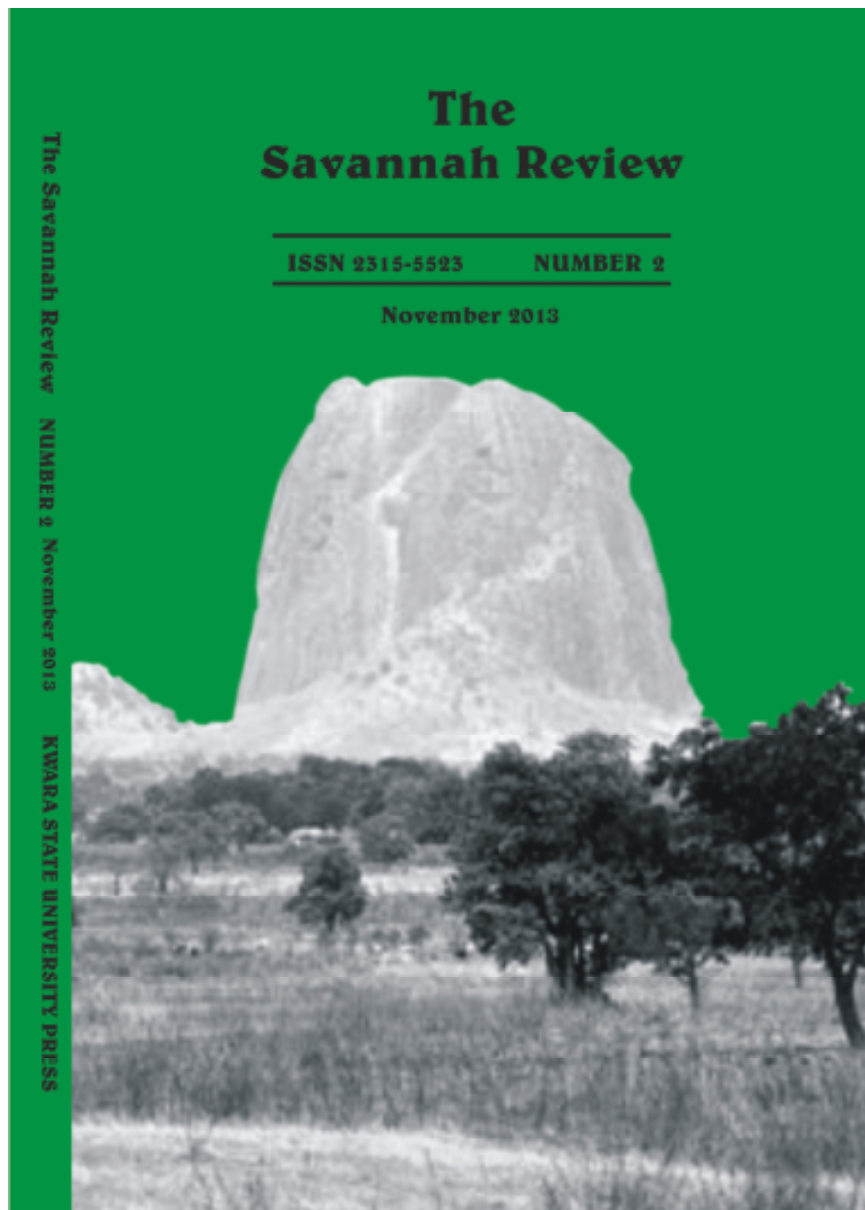
In the labyrinth of misery,
Despair has erected a cathedral

Where the prayers of the poor
Smolder on the ground.

This tropical island is awash with light,
But the darkness of gluttony spreads out
To the navel of leadership
Where the nation's wail is gulped.

Sometimes, I wonder if we are blinded
By the quick-silvery hands of corruption
That smears an everlasting fish-smell of death
On vines and on steps that children will climb.

And so, in the gallows of existence,
A row of crows hums a requiem
As mothers collect spoonfuls of tears.
Their tomorrow becomes an eternity.



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On Jean-Paul Sartre's Hegelian View of African History

Jody Benjamin

In 1948, when Jean-Paul Sartre published *Orphée Noir* as the preface to a volume of poetry edited by Léopold Sédar Senghor, the *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*, France was one of the largest imperial powers in the world. Its colonial possessions included lands in Asia, the Caribbean, South America and large swaths of northern, western and equatorial Africa. Cracks in the imperial edifice were beginning to show, but it was as yet inconceivable to many people in Europe and in Africa that most of France's colonies, including all of its African holdings, would soon be replaced by independent nation states. However, a mere thirteen years later, by the time Sartre published *La Pensée Politique de Patrice Lumumba*, in 1962, this enormous transformation had taken place. This period saw more than the reconfiguration of the political map. Scholars have shown that a major shift in Sartre's own thinking and writing also occurred progressively over these years during which he became more philosophically and politically engaged with anti-colonial struggle. In the late 20th century, Sartre's efforts in a series of major publications to interpret Marxism in light of existential philosophy survived neither the critical response of thinkers such as Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, and Claude Levi-Strauss (more will be said about these responses below), nor political

developments that broadly undermined the credibility of Marxism in France, both within the academy and outside it. Nevertheless, Sartre's writings influenced anti-colonial thinkers in Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America and Asia of that period and later periods as they posited a relationship between the pursuit of social justice through revolutionary politics and the development of new forms of knowledge.

The outcome of the Second World War initiated a shift in political alignments around the globe. In France, there was a general exuberance at having defeated Nazism that combined with a sense of utopian possibility, particularly among the intellectual Left. The first anti-colonial wars of the period began to take shape almost immediately upon the close of the World War in Europe. In the days following the Nazi surrender to Allied forces, violent French colonial police repression of Muslims in the Algerian town of Sétif initiated an increasingly bitter struggle between settlers and indigenous Algerians. In Indochina, the Viet Minh initiated a rebellion against French rule in December 1946.

In Africa, another generation of African soldiers returned to their homes in European-ruled colonies (their fathers had fought in the First World War) with a changed perception of European power, having witnessed Europeans at their most vulnerable and in their home context. Some had served in Asia where they were able to observe colonial apparatus from a different perspective. In addition to the social dynamic created in Africa by the impact of these returning soldiers, a similar dynamic was taking place in the colonial metropolises of Britain and France through political engagements that developed between Africans and Afro-Caribbeans living there. In Britain, a group of mostly Anglophone African and African diaspora intellectuals, including some future heads of state, met in 1945 at the Fifth Pan African Congress in Manchester, England to call for an end to colonialism. The same year in Paris, Sartre co-founded a journal, *Les Temps Modernes*, which published African, Afro-Caribbean and African American writers whose work further developed anti-colonial, anti-racist Africanist discourse. Two years later, Alioune Diop, the Senegalese professor of literature, edited the first number of *Présence Africaine*, the influential journal which later organized the First International Congress of Black Writers

and Artists at the Sorbonne in 1956. A constellation of prominent French intellectuals sat on the editorial board of *Présence Africaine* including Sartre, André Gide, Georges Balandier, Marcel Griaule and Théophile Monod.

For European-held possessions in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean, a wave of decolonization was imminent. Thus Sartre's essays on colonialism and the black condition, including introductions to seminal works by anti-colonial thinkers from the Caribbean and Africa, provide a mapping of the shifting intellectual currents of the period leading up to political independence. Thematically they move from his concern in *Orphée Noir* with poetry as a vehicle through which oppressed blacks might recover an 'authentic' subjectivity, to his political and structural analysis of colonialism as a system of exploitation, to his controversial advocacy of anti-colonial violence and finally to his assessment, after the collapse of colonialism, of the stubborn imperial economic relationships that remained between Europe and Africa.

Sartre's work is also of course marked by the major philosophical and theoretical concerns debated in Europe, which were significantly influenced by the intellectual legacies of Hegel and Karl Marx (himself influenced by Hegel). As a philosopher, Sartre had concerned himself with identifying the central characteristic of being human in his book *Being and Nothingness* (1943). In that work, Sartre rejected the formulation by Karl Marx in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* that individual consciousness is historically determined. Rather than arguing for an absolute historical determinism, Sartre sought to combine the notions of subjectivity and individual agency within totalizing structural concepts. Sartre reformulated Descartes' cogito with an emphasis on the individual and the active condition of being alive: "I am my choices" and "I am freedom." Sartre viewed power in dialectical terms with colonized and colonizer locked in a mutually contingent relationship, a position that accords with the master/slave dialectic proposed by Hegel and built upon later by Marx. Left largely uncontested by either Sartre or Marx, however, was the teleology implied by Hegel's dialectical view of history as a dynamic process moving toward a particular resolution (ie., the 'end of History'). Nevertheless, Sartre employed his modified Marxist analysis throughout a series of critical reflections on the social

condition of black people under colonialism.

Orphée Noir, Sartre's introduction to the anthology edited by Senghor, did much to establish the concept of Négritude (a neologism already coined by the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire) at the center of francophone discourse about black identity. But it also allowed Sartre to philosophically engage his quest to understand the workings of individual subjectivity within a Hegelian concept of dialectical power by analyzing 'the black condition' as he understood it to have evolved in the mid-20th century. Sartre's debt to Hegel is evident in the opening section of *Orphée Noir*, in which he employed the Hegelian notion of "recognition" to assert that the anthology's publication in Paris represented a shift in power relations between "black" and "white" peoples. Having long drawn power from their observation of others, whites were themselves falling under the critical gaze of those whose ancestors their ancestors once enslaved or who were then held by them as colonial subjects. For the "colonized," this gaze turned upon the colonizer effected the development of an authentic "subjectivity" or *prise de conscience* that stood against their objectification by colonizers. Black writers, Sartre argued, were then at the vanguard of a necessary process of self-actualization which must first attempt to access a subjectivity throttled by the colonial experience and even the colonizers' language. In keeping with his rejection of Marx's determinism, however, Sartre argued that the search for an authentic self involved a process of active choices rather than a quest for a pure pre-existing essence. Neither the outcome of this quest nor its particular consequences could thus be fully predicted. This black *prise de conscience* was distinct from that of the working class, generally, because blacks gained consciousness first through the concept of race (that is, through "un synchrétisme psycho-biologique"¹ drawn from their shared experience of exclusion from the category of 'human' in the western world). The disdain of white society for blacks went deeper than that of the bourgeois class for workers and therefore required a more profound response.

¹ L. S. Senghor, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (Presses Universitaires de France (PUF), 1969), 207.

As a Hegelian Marxist, Sartre envisioned the black *prise de conscience* in stagist terms, of which the first stage was a “racist antiracism”² that would eventually give way to a more mature stage: the awareness of class consciousness and a broader attack on the economic structures upholding unequal social relations. Abiola Irele cautioned against reading Sartre’s use of the term of “racist antiracism” as a contradictory embrace of fascism, rather that it was only part of an attempt to broadly conceive and envision the subjectivities of African and African Diaspora populations in the world.³ Sartre’s embrace of the Hegelian notion of historical process is at the core of his argument about Négritude, which he clearly sees as part of a process unfolding to resolution. He noted the commonality of the black struggle for consciousness with that of humanity itself. He cited nationalist struggles in Europe in which groups such as the Hungarians and the Irish prioritized reclaiming their language as an essential part of not only attaining independence, but of synthesizing a group experience and constructing a group or national identity. For blacks, the experience of suffering initiated a process of self-discovery. Or rather, what initiated that process was a fundamental refusal to accept suffering which opened the way to revolt and to freedom. It is this process of suffering and refusal that constituted the pivot between race and historicity, or the possibility for an alternative history of humanity to emerge along with alternative genealogies and epistemologies of the past.

La race s’est transmuée en *historicité*, le Présent noir s’explose et se temporalise, la Négritude s’insere avec son passé et son avenir dans l’Histoire Universelle, ce n’est plus un état ni même une attitude existentielle; c’est un devenir; l’apport noir dans l’évolution de l’Humanité.⁴

Sartre explained this ‘sudden’ emergence of black consciousness

² Ibid., 175.

³ Irele, Abiola. “A Defence of Negritude: A Propos of ‘Black Orpheus’ by Jean-Paul Sartre.” *Transition* 50 (October 1975–March 1976): 39–41.

⁴ Ibid.

as part of a process that itself performed a role within a larger ongoing process of human “History” as a totality. Because of its alterity in relation to oppression, this developing black consciousness was positioned to play a decisive part in the overall process. In one sense, Sartre’s essays on colonialism and on the responses of black peoples to it represent a continuum of French intellectual engagement with societies and individuals outside Europe, the production of knowledge about these peoples and the challenge that encounters with these ‘others’ represented for European self-awareness and knowledge about the world. Sartre’s evocation of the black ‘race’ clearly stems from Enlightenment era conceptions of the term that associated social characteristics with biological phenomena. Some of this thinking also informs the work of Gottfried Herder, the 18th century German philosopher whose concept of national cultures WEB DuBois reconfigured to argue for “Pan-Negroism” in his 1897 essay, “The Conservation of Races,” which in turn influenced the development of a Pan-Africanist movement that engaged Negritude writers Sartre knew personally. In another sense, however, *Orphée Noir* demonstrates Sartre’s willingness to push this Enlightenment tradition to its theoretical limits, in some ways demonstrating its weaknesses and failures and thus preparing the groundwork for its deconstruction by writers both influenced by and reacting against him.

“Colonialism is a System”

As mentioned the conflict in French colonial Algeria was an increasing preoccupation almost from the close of the Second World war. Sartre was an outspoken critic of the colony in Algeria that was first established in 1830 but throughout the 1950s was plunged into a struggle for its survival with a small but effective guerilla insurgency. Sartre’s essay, “Colonialism is a System” developed from a speech he gave in 1956 that outlined his opposition to the French policy of pacification in Algeria. Sartre’s first goal in the essay is to get below the level of reformist discourse that suggested the problems in Algeria were superficial and transitory. Sartre brushed aside these arguments in order to expose what he saw as an underlying cause of the dilemma, namely a structure.

“... qui fût mis en place au milieu du XIX siècle, commença à porter ses fruits vers 1880, entra dans son déclin vers la Première Guerre mondiale et se retourne aujourd’hui contre la nation colonisatrice.”⁵

For Sartre, the situation in Algeria represented the clearest distillation of the colonial arrangement, which, regardless of the good intentions of some of its actors, could only lead to the calamity then unfolding. Showing the influence of Marx, Sartre argued that colonialism was a laboratory in which the workings of capitalism could be observed in their most undisguised form. In arguing against this state of affairs, what was at stake for him was not only the freedom of Algeria but that of France, burdened by the contradictions between the ideals it fought to establish at home and the incompatibility of those ideals with the requirements of the colonial enterprise. In the historical narrative underpinning this argument, the colonialism that had become untenable in mid-century Algeria was not imposed as a mature concept but rather evolved gradually over time. Algeria was initially viewed by the French state as a convenient offshore location to ship unwanted peasants and retired soldiers. Gradually, French business interests saw an opportunity to profit using this small population across the Mediterranean. Sartre described a process in which these companies used these settlers as a new market for French products; in turn, the settler population would sell Algerian grown produce (including wine) at favorable prices on the French market. Colonial and business interests viewed local Algerian Muslims as culturally incompatible with the French and pushed them ever further away from desirable agricultural land, where they were to remain marginalized and exploited only for labor. These practices were supported ideologically by a discourse in which the native was viewed as less than human; a discourse that conceptually froze Muslim Algerians in a time warp of archaic underdevelopment outside the boundaries of civilized humanity and thus outside the reach of

⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations, V: Colonialisme Et Néo-Colonialisme* ([Paris]: Gallimard, 1983), 26.

human rights. Notions of race and racial difference between European settlers and indigenous Arab and Berber groups also informed this discourse. The political and economic structures of the colony maintained a hierarchical relationship and spatial separation between racial groups over time. That is, until the Algerians, pushed past a certain point, inevitably revolted. They would attack first at the political (ideological) level where they were being effectively marginalized and where France, having just fought a war for the humanistic ideals of freedom, was most vulnerable.

Again, Hegelian historicism helped Sartre in this essay to provide an explanation for the seemingly chaotic events unfolding around him that connected to an ongoing process developed over time. Because colonists (and the French military that supported them) were incapable of promoting humanistic ideals antithetical to their own position as colonists, anti-colonial resistance by the oppressed was an inevitable outcome.

Le Dénouement

Given the succession of dramatic political transformations that occurred in the five years between 1957 and 1962, it is easy to imagine that Sartre might have believed we were watching the climatic results of the evolutionary socio-historical process for which he consistently argued. Beginning with the independence of the Gold Coast, now renamed “Ghana,” these years also witnessed the Cuban revolution, the conclusion of the Algerian war with independence from France, the beginning of an anti-colonial war in Angola, and the independence of two dozen other European colonies in Africa. These are the years during which Sartre published new essays as introductions to Fanon’s *Les Damnés de la Terre* (*Wretched of the Earth*) 1961 and to *La Pensée Politique de Patrice Lumumba*, (*Lumumba Speaks: The Speeches and Writings of Patrice Lumumba*) 1962. He was directly connected to the events described in the essays, through his friendship and critical influence on Fanon and through his political support of decolonization in the Belgian Congo, of which Lumumba was a principal protagonist.

Sartre began the introduction he wrote for Fanon by succinctly restating an argument elaborated in *Le Colonialisme est un Système*,

which contrasted the relative social positions of colonizing and colonized peoples generally. The former group represented a minority of human beings entitled to rights and choice while the latter was a “native” majority (created through colonial processes of marginalization), lacking precisely in both rights and choice. The systemic relationship between these binary poles was structured to the economic advantage of the Metropole and supported rhetorically through a deliberately inconsistent embrace of Enlightenment humanism.

Sartre's denunciations of colonialism had sharpened in tone since his publication of *Orphee Noir*, and Merleau Ponty famously criticized him for the “ultra-Bolshevism” of his politics. However, it was also the case that the tone of anti-colonial critiques coming from writers like Fanon had become more strident, a development Sartre attributed to the arrival of a new generation impatient with its predecessors. Now accompanied by the demand for independence, this new tone was an open rejection of European political culture and values in as much as they might be characterized as a lust for power, wealth and technology derived from colonial exploitation. Sartre reports this critique by directly addressing the perspective of the Metropole on its erstwhile colonial subjects.

Les pères... [étaient] vos créatures... Les fils vous ignorent: un feu
les éclaire et les réchauffe qui n'est pas le vôtre... les zombies c'est
vous.⁶

Fanon personally embodied not only the episodic shift towards decolonization in Africa but also many of the ideas Sartre had been exploring throughout the period. It was Aimé Césaire, who had interacted with Sartre in Paris, and became Fanon's teacher in Martinique, who introduced Fanon to the poets of the Négritude movement. Fanon experienced the multiple contradictions of colonialism during the Second World War both in Martinique and in Algeria where he had gone to work as a psychiatrist for the French

⁶ Ibid., 174.

military. He later left the colonial military to become an active member of the Algerian resistance movement. Fanon gave psychological counseling to Algerian victims of torture by French soldiers, published critical essays in French and in North African newspapers and served as an ambassador of the Front National de Libération to Ghana for the All Africa Peoples Congress in 1959 where he met Patrice Lumumba.

As a francophone activist intellectual moving between the Caribbean, France (the Metropole), North Africa and West Africa, Fanon was greatly influenced by Sartre's existentialist writing, drawing on it heavily for his *Peaux Noires, Masques Blancs (Black Skins, White Masks)*. Nonetheless, Fanon critiqued Sartre's romantic assessment of Négritude (he also dismissed much of the poetry in Senghor's volume as not revolutionary, and as well as for implicitly inscribing it within a European worldview by "making an Orpheus out of... th(e) Negro looking for universality."⁷ For Fanon, the gaze between colonizer and colonized was not only asymmetrical in terms of power, it was historically constructed through the European practice of classification based on phenotype. Fanon's training as a psychiatrist and his theoretical emphasis on psychology also added a new element to Sartre's critique of the social and economic structure of colonialism, that the exploitative relationship between colonizer and colonized was first established through violence and that it was sustained by means of a psychological struggle at the individual level which had damaging effects on both sides of the colonial divide. Whereas Sartre had posited the development of a radical "black" subjectivity as a stage in a process toward revolution and universal freedom, Fanon's response in *Black Skins, White Masks* denied that the black *prise de conscience* could necessarily be understood in universal terms already defined by European experience.

By the time *Les Damnés de la Terre* was published, Sartre's restatement of the issue reflected his attentiveness to Fanon's critique. Sartre controversially argued in the introduction that the colonized

⁷ Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1967.

person finds a cure for his or her neurosis by turning upon Europeans their initial method of conquest: violence. He sees the violence of the oppressed reacting against the colonial system represented, not merely a stage in the dialectic, but the end of the dialectic itself. In a paradoxical move that inscribed Fanon into a universalist discourse emanating from Europe, Sartre called Fanon the first writer “since Engels” to refer to the “end of History.” The essay is suffused with the notion of history as a dynamic dialectical force. It closes with yet another evocation of the broader course of human experience throughout time and the sense that systemic forces will combine to produce a conclusive result. Before closing the essay, Sartre returned to a version of the metaphor used in *Orphée Noir* about the gaze of the colonized upon the colonizer who experienced for the first time what it is like to be observed, a role-reversal.

“...Nous étions les sujets de l’Histoire et que nous en sommes à présent les objets. Le rapport des forces s’est renversé, la décolonisation est en cours.”⁸

Pensée Politique

Sartre’s critical assessment of Patrice Lumumba came in the wake of the untimely deaths of both Lumumba and Fanon, within months of each other, both at the age of 36. Fanon was deeply moved by Lumumba’s assassination in January 1961 shortly after becoming the first democratically elected prime minister of an independent Republic of Congo, according to Sartre who met with him in Rome around the time. Yet Fanon himself had been suffering from leukemia while completing work on *Les Damnés de la Terre* in Accra, Ghana. His worsening condition forced him to seek treatment at Bethesda, Maryland in the United States where he died in December 1961 before the book was published. As an activist intellectual, Fanon was better educated, more widely traveled and arguably more intellectually sophisticated than Lumumba. However, Lumumba had

⁸ Ibid., 189.

the advantage of working on his native soil toward the narrowly achievable goal of ending Belgian rule. In that sense, Lumumba might be said to have been more directly engaged in attempting to remake an existing set of political relations with a state than was Fanon. Sartre's assessment of Lumumba takes this point further by concluding that Lumumba's fraught struggle to construct a broad political unity in the Congo encapsulated the ambitions of continental Africans more broadly in the face of European and American economic power.

As Sartre relates in the essay, Lumumba's personal trajectory was deeply informed by the colonial system that shaped his early life and finally produced in him an implacable enemy. Lumumba was born to a family of Catholic rural peasants in the Kasai region. His father began taking the boy to work in the fields at age six, but the young Lumumba's future became the locus of a struggle between competing European missionaries who wanted to send him to school—the Catholics wanted to make a catechist of him, while a group of Protestants wanted him to learn a trade. It was finally a group of Swedish Protestant missionaries, not his parents, who decided that Patrice would be among the select few to go to school at age thirteen, a life path that would in time take him away from rural life into the city. This was intended to be temporary as the missionaries imagined that, once-educated, Lumumba would eventually return to the village as a proselytizing wage earner, thereby advancing their longer-term goals to remake local societies.

It was not to be. After receiving a basic education, Lumumba got a job as a file clerk not in Kasai but for a Belgian company in Kindu, a mining city on the Congo river. It was in this urban environment that Lumumba first came into direct contact with racial segregation and other forms of racial hostility from whites that he had not experienced in the countryside. Thanks to his literacy, his wage earnings, and colonial urban life at Kindu, Lumumba had completed the transformation from rural peasant to *évolué*, a class of Congolese elite deliberately produced by the colonial system in order to perpetuate Belgian power in the Congo. Here also began his activism to reform a colonial system in which as a native-born African he would always be relegated to a subordinate status and earn less than a white worker of similar skill.

Through personal charm, skillful oratory and ambition, Lumumba resisted this outcome by transforming himself from a low level worker in a provincial city into a national political leader. For Sartre, the key to this transformation was Lumumba's status as an *évolué*. As such, he represented a socio-economic class caught between its pride at having assimilated the religious and cultural values of Europeans and the mass of non-literate Congolese demanding overthrow of the colonial order that held them in abject poverty. This class of *évolués* asserted its assimilationist values as representative of those of the majority of Congolese. Thus, Sartre argued that the interests of the two groups were actually at odds with one another.

With the elaboration of the argument, we have the by now familiar reference to a *prise de conscience* by the *évolués* of their class position and the sense that a dialectal process provides the connection for events that might otherwise appear unrelated. In the case of Congo, Sartre saw a disjuncture between the conceptual political models borrowed by Lumumba from Europe—that of the French Revolution, for example — and the specificities of this emerging nation state in Africa where no corresponding process of grassroots political unification had taken place. Instead, political power remained largely in the hands of local chiefs who were bought off by the colonial state, and whose more limited interests were at odds with the centralizing ambition of the political class of *évolués* who imagined an independent Congo ruled by a national party not governed by ethnicity. This break reflects that between the class imperatives of the *évolués*, who pushed for a theoretically unified national identity as the way forward and that of the impoverished and unlettered majority which argued for its rights through the fractious matrix of a multitude of local ethnic identities.

À ce moment de son histoire, la formule européenne correspondait mal aux besoins des Congolais; des liens plus frustes et plus solides les rattachaient au sol natal, à l'éthnie. La centralisation ne représentait que la conscience de classe des centralisés, c'est à dire des *évolués*.⁹

⁹ Ibid., 226.

Unlike Fanon, whose vision was shaped by his experiences in Algeria, Lumumba rejected violence as a revolutionary method. But Sartre pointed out that this position stemmed from Lumumba's own shrewd reading of his actual political circumstances rather than from some high-minded philosophical position: he was effectively a revolutionary leader with no army behind him. As a gifted orator, Lumumba was able to powerfully articulate African grievances, but that did not change the fact that he had no claim on the loyalty of the large majority of rural Congolese whose primary political allegiances were to local chiefs, not to him. An appeal to armed struggle would only further empower competing factions and displace the fragile unification Lumumba was trying to stitch together across a vast national territory. Even with this balancing act, the existing conditions were such that the class interests of the masses would inevitably isolate and overwhelm the ambition of the *évolués* as represented by Lumumba. Almost immediately upon having become prime minister of an independent Congo, the young leader found himself "seul, sans pouvoir, trahi par tous et déjà perdu."¹⁰ The capitalist interests of western countries were prepared to take economic advantage of this internal conflict and Sartre suggested that this agenda explains why Lumumba was so soon hounded from office and murdered. The petite bourgeoisie colluded with foreign companies and traditional leaders to remove the threat Lumumba's vision of unification represented to their own interests. To this must be added the Cold War calculations of the US government, which feared Lumumba might endanger its access to Congo's natural resources — such as the uranium that its military contractors used to make nuclear weapons — or make those resources available to US rivals if he were to succeed in establishing sovereign control of those resources.

In the late 19th century, the United States had been one of the first foreign governments to recognize the claims of the Belgian king Leopold on the Congo. A number of investigations have since

¹⁰ Ibid., 231. For a graphic documentation and narrative of this development, see Raoul Peck's film, *Lumumba—Mort d'un prophète*.

shown that during the period of Congo's independence, the US government funneled money to Lumumba's rivals in order to topple the prime minister from power, and then maintained the army chief that overthrew him, Mobutu sese Seko, in an infamously tyrannical rule over a divided nation for over thirty-two years. For Sartre, such developments represented nothing less than the shrewd re-establishment of a colonial relationship in Africa within the context of national independence, along the model of what obtained in most of Latin America where weak governments were held in place through an alliance of a thin elite, the army and foreign private capital.

...La solution néocolonialiste...consiste, au fond, à acheter les nouveaux maîtres, les bourgeois des pays neufs, comme le colonialisme classique achetait les chefs, les émirs, les sorciers. L'impérialisme à besoin d'une classes dirigeante qui soit assez consciente de sa situation précaire pour lier ses intérêts de classe à ceux des grandes sociétés occidentales.¹¹

With the death of Lumumba, the historical denouement of capitalism, and its contradictions of class formation would continue in the "post-colonial" Congo; only now with its eventual collapse pushed further into the future. Sartre ended the introduction to Lumumba's speeches with another suggestive allusion to Latin America in which he evokes the Cuban revolution that had taken place only a few years before. Just as the invocation of the 19th century independence martyr Jose Marti served as a unifier for Castro and his followers, Sartre claimed that someday the memory of Patrice Lumumba would serve as a signpost for future revolutionaries who would inevitably confront the same congeries of neo-colonial power in Congo.

Conclusion

National commemorations of fifty years of independence have recently taken place in states across the African continent. But for

¹¹ Ibid., 244.

all the pomp of official public celebrations, these occasions have also often been greeted with sober indifference by average people confronted by the difficulties of daily life and open frustration at the failure of post-colonial governments, to make good on much of their early promise. In Congo, the 32-year dominance of the Mobutu regime (reliant upon outside political, financial and military support) was followed tragically by the impotence of the national state when confronted with the transnational violence that exploded into mineral-rich eastern Congo from Rwanda in the 1990s, claiming millions of lives. Elsewhere, the reach (and ambition) of independent governments has been limited, as relatively small numbers of political and economic elites have hoarded resources to themselves at the expense of large pluralities of citizens, in many ways reflecting the neo-colonial relations that Sartre foresaw at the start.

The development of Sartre's own thinking shows the interaction between himself and the anti-colonial intellectuals whose work he sought to contextualize within a longer narrative of humanistic knowledge production and social change. Sartre had become increasingly radical politically throughout the period. Merleau Ponty criticized Sartre on the basis that his "Bolshevism" had overwhelmed careful analysis of historical and social change. More damaging critiques came from structuralist writers like Claude Levy Strauss and post-structuralists like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida whose work generally rejected the Hegelian dialectic as a workable formula. The structural anthropologist Claude Levy Strauss for example rejected the notion of one History as a total form of knowledge as inherently ethnocentric, while Louis Althusser, another structuralist, Marxist critic similarly challenged Sartre's assumption that contingent events must necessarily be part of a transformative process, thinking he viewed as teleological.¹²

In the same period, the greatly expanded academic production of African history has helped to decenter the universalist narrative

¹² Robert Young, *White Mythologies : Writing History and the West* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1990), 54.

that was implicit in much of Sartre's own thinking about historical change. The context of this production of knowledge about Africa, which began to occur in African, European and North American universities from the 1950s, was the political struggle against colonialism. This knowledge production has of course been characterized by huge inequalities with scholars in African universities suffering the limitations imposed by political dysfunction and deteriorating economic conditions. However, one of the general contributions of Africanist scholarship in this period has been to cast doubt upon the European-derived categories once taken for granted as measures of human progress and "civilization" that were used analytically to portray Africans and other "peoples without history" as fundamentally exceptional in negative terms.¹³ The Hegelian argument (and its traces in Marx) that Africa's political institutions were historically static, undifferentiated and frozen in an early evolutionary stage of development has long since been superseded. This development has had major implications for conceptions of "race", which have been revealed to be anything but stable across time and space—sometimes even lacking coherence when read against other social categories such as gender, class, religious identity, nationality, etc. Contemporary historians seek to construct "multi-centric" versions of the global past that can account for a variety of temporalities and subjectivities in Africa and elsewhere, versions that resist being subsumed within a singular narrative of progress.¹⁴ Instead the focus has shifted to the varied ways people over time have used (including strategically deploying discourses such as "race", "ethnicity", class identification or a religious affiliation) to achieve certain outcomes, often with unintended and unanticipated results.

¹³ Feierman, Steven. "African Histories and the Dissolution of World History." Chap. 6 in *Africa and the Disciplines: The Contributions of Research in Africa to the Social Sciences and Humanities*, edited by V.Y. Mudimbe and Jean O'Barr Robert H. Bates, 167-212. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993.

¹⁴ Simo, David. "Writing World History in Africa: Opportunities, Constraints and Challenges." In: Sven Beckert and Dominic Sachsenmaier, eds., *Global History, Globally*.

Sartre's impassioned advocacy for blacks was part of a legacy, inherited from radical French intellectual stretching back at least to the abolitionist Abbé Grégoire of the 18th century. Though limited by its embrace of Enlightenment-derived theories of racial difference and its universalist assumptions related to the direction and purpose of History, Sartre's advocacy represented an engaged scholarship that highlighted the relationship between knowledge production and social justice while significantly advancing the pursuit of both.

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Rumours of a Feast — Modernism and Narrative in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road**

Anastasia Townsend

To colonize is to relegate the native to an alienated existence. Those who are colonized are fed upon by external structures instituted to extract resources and subjugate their subjects to the status of object within specific, ideological discourses. Colonizing powers pursued the objectives of their grand narratives through the manipulation of both the corporal and the spiritual, under the guise of Ben Okri composed *The Famished Road*, a fugal, spiraling narrative thaols paradox, shifting ochcularity, and the difficulty, if not the futility, of establishing a new, imagined community in the modern sense in his country, Nigeria. Viable communities predated the colonial incursion in Afrca, and in post-colonial texts, their priorities inevitably seep through and between newer, imposed orders. Modern narrative techniques are undermined, hollowed out, and destabilized by Okri's textual expression of a society in constant

* "This essay was developed from the final paper written by the author at the end of the seminar on "The African Novel" at the 2015 session of the Harvard Summer School."

transition under a parade of masks. *The Famished Road* supports the authority of a wandering consciousness gathering interstitial truths from dispersed time, space, and all forms of sentience.

The Famished Road is resoundingly anchored in traditional West African ethos and forms. The text comingles the empirical and spiritual world in multiple episodes along a spiraling, narrative path. Its structure deploys as a vine grows and unfurls. Okri's protagonist, Azaro, an *abiku* child, allows for a perspective that straddles life and death, the mythical and the real. Azaro is a child-spirit incarnate who has passed repeatedly through both worlds. Born again in the land of the living, the reticent and observant Azaro becomes the vehicle for a privileged view of both worlds, from a tree top or a corner in the tavern, the crossroads of the marketplace, or the dark recesses of the forest and other nightspaces. Chimeric beings appear to him among the shadows of vegetation and in the crowded light of day. Azaro's liminal status is fixed yet mutable, forever pulling him towards the spectacle of wondrous suffering and joys of life or back to the perfection of death. He views this panoply of contradictions and corrupted forms from a position apart and above, as a third eye (Cooper, 1998).

Throughout *The Famished Road*, Azaro has the capacity to observe specters enacting the needs of the living. Their supernatural status does not preclude these beings from displaying human-like curiosity and appetites; ghosts share the same hungers as their human colleagues.

I blinked again and saw a spirit with eight fingers and a single twinkling eye. Another, in a policeman's uniform, had an amputated foot. He ate of the food with bloodstained hands a moment before the officer did. A ghost, existing as only a pair of milk-white legs, balanced on the head of the woman (Okri 25).

In some cases, as explained by Tutuola's narrator in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, certain gods began their existence in human form. Physical needs and spiritual states combine freely. In *The Famished Road*, the coexistence of human and spiritual beings on the same narrative plane within an unsettled political context reflects back to traditional beliefs in shared origins and adversity. Azaro spends his days roaming the landscape of the human condition, along a

shifting nexus of crossroads and dead ends that serve as backdrop and agent in both otherworldly and real encounters. He is soon singled out by the imposing tavern keeper, Madame Koto, to sit in her bar and draw in customers. Azaro realizes the clientele is quite “mutant” and Tutuolian:

Many of the customers were not human beings. Their deformations were too staggering and they seemed unaffected by their bodies. They seemed a confused assortment of different human parts. It occurred to me that they were spirits who had borrowed bits of human beings to partake of human reality (136).

The sum of Azaro's wandering eye-witness accounts do not amount to a linear, picaresque orepic journey. Okri's text is a lengthy series of painful, episodic conflicts. Each contained progression of events is composed of similar raw ingredients, though they vary slightly in formula and on occasion announce incremental “firsts” at the close of many chapters, a technique used in etiological folk tales. The interactions of characters are related in lush, violent terms, where sorrow, love, and bruised forms of happiness percolate and explode within the infested confines of the room shared by Azaro and his parents and the brilliant and ominous streets of the town. Okri's plot contrasts the culmination of the one Western text directly referenced in *The Famished Road*, Homer's *Odyssey*. Azaro's father referred to throughout the novel as “Dad,” increasingly more politically engaged and marginalized, asks Azaro to read passages to him. The Greek text depicts a mortal's maritime wandering among the realms of gods and demi-gods. Clear echoes of the Greek text arise in Okri's novel. The one-eyed beggar, Helen, who becomes part of Dad and Azaro's immediate entourage, is a beautiful, hybrid cyclops who presents an ideal form of vision; “I wanted to be with the beautiful girl who had defined all their deformities into a single, functioning eye, whose face would pursue me in dreams and loves and music (423).” Azaro's ideal is contradictory and ambulatory, whereas for Odysseus, his unified journey is a quest for home, a clearly known destination. Dad, Mum, Azaro, and their society have no such clarity on the horizon, no ultimate conception of culmination. “Our yearnings became blocked out of the realms of manifestation.” (496).

The most potent character in *The Famished Road* devolves into the monstrous, the abject. Madame Koto, once a captivating, relatively benevolent presence (though described as a rhino with a severed horn), becomes a profoundly dark and fearsome agent of corruption and decay, carrying a monstrous, growing pregnancy (triplets ...) in her womb, dragging a festering foot bound in dirty rags. A vesicle for life and death, she rots within and without. Eventually, her negative force and local power transform into politicized myth.

While Dad ranged the spheres crying for justice, Madame Koto sucked the powers from our area ... her colossal form took wings at night and flew over the city, drawing power from our sleeping bodies ... That was when I understood that conflicting forces were fighting for the future of our country in the air, at night, in our dreams, riding invisible white horses and whipping us, sapping our will while we slept (495).

Madame Koto is the first to usher in modern technology to the town, thanks to political connections. Azaro notes the long-anticipated, electrical light in the tavern which turns out to be a disappointment, for it is a force without any locatable origin. What good is a bulb that cannot even light a cigarette? Electricity in her tavern does not bring progress or illumination in a broader sense. It may be said that its effect is reminiscent of the lightbulb of "Guernica", a stark, ironic reminder of the potentially destructive nature of progress and the march of history. Electricity, as the cause of death of one of Madame Koto's prostitutes, along with three repair workers, is a direct indictment of the modern notion of Progress as a steadily advancing, teleological trajectory through time. White and light, such as the white suit peeled back to reveal the boxer's grotesque form, are the equivalent of a new blindness, a cataract forming its shell over the ailing collective of the town. A menacing blind man appears periodically to demand Azaro's vision, wishing to see as he does, through an aperture opened to life and death. In addition, the political agents/thugs of newly gained independence are violent and indecipherable, often portrayed behind the mask of dark glasses. They become close associates of the now infamous tavern keeper, the "Queen of the Ghetto Night". Madame Koto's

establishment could be in other paradigms a gathering place where ideas might be exchanged and collective imaginings might burgeon and find definition. However, the space of her tavern is a (dis)location filled with humans and spirits behaving badly. Unsettling, spiritual amalgams of body parts commit impetuous acts, outbursts, and aggressions, which are equally matched by the living. They are all “incomplete men”. Madame Koto’s transformation into a sponsor for an increasing numbers of ills is heightened by her obvious fecundity and growing feminine power. She becomes a symbol fully apparent in the operations of the public sphere.

Other women, including Azaro’s mother, Mum, establish themselves in the marketplace thanks to Madame Koto’s patronage. The mobility of women in the marketplace, a place of crossroads, negotiation, and exchange, creates a symbolic dissonance. To the extent that Mum serves as a forgiving and gracious presence in Azaro’s life, her new economic activity is characterized as an expression of demise. Mum had previously been bullied out of the marketplace stalls, but ultimately her advancement is guaranteed by a looming and corrupted, feminine overlord. Madame Koto’s rotting foot is a form of disaggregation similar to Ousmane’s Ramatou in the film, *Hyenas*. Ramatou is an “incomplete woman” composed of golden prosthetics who returns from a life of prostitution to exact revenge on her old lover and home community. Her missing limbs and extravagance mark her as a being destined to enact larger, chaotic imperatives.

The rain, guarantor of renewed life, both merciless and giving, provides the sole respite in Okri’s roiling sequence of calamities. The first chapter of Book Five begins with the longest realistic passage in the novel, entirely devoted to two weeks of heavy rains and their direct effect on people’s lives. Mythical elements do not interrupt this portion of the narrative until Azaro runs into the forest during a lightning storm and finds the frightful blind man once again. Massive flooding forces Madame Koto to relocate to a tent at the outskirts of the town. Her new positioning with regard to the community establishes a binary relationship between herself and the village; however, this is a lateral rather than teleological shift in the narrative. She circulates on the ground in a new, yellow car with a driver, now a mechanical, ambulatory menace, a

hybridized, wandering womb. On one particularly disastrous occasion, her driver plows into a crowd roused by indeterminate political sentiment and injures Azaro's new companion, Ade. In the ensuing chaos, emollient rain descends: "The tramps, who had come because of rumours of the feast, the people who had turned up to hail their new hero, the wretched and the curious, were all washed away by the gentle rain" (423). Immediately following Dad's victorious battle against the formidable colossus in the white suit, intemperate weather arrives again to cleanse and destroy, sweeping Madame Koto's tent away in the high winds. During the initial, great flooding, natural forces also cleanse history through destruction. One of the few direct references to whites in the text occurs in the passage where a white overseer is swallowed up at the roadside into a sudden mudslide. Three African workers follow to save him, but they, too, are lost to the mire. The colonizer brings collaborators down with him, piteously and inexorably. On the other hand, generalized violence and bloodshed among the people themselves alters the path of their very existence.

I think most of our troubles began that night. They began not with the devastation of voices and chairs and the car, but with the blood mingling with rain and flowing right into the mouth of the road. I heard the slaking of the road's unquenchable thirst. And blood was a new kind of libation. The road was young but its hunger was old. (424)

Overall, among the lives of the town, the boundaries between the domestic and the public sphere lack definition and clarity. Crowds clamor for and riot against the two political parties, the Party of the Rich and the Party of the Poor, both weak examples of simplified rhetoric which coil upward from the embers of independence. Alliances with either party appear arbitrary and invalid, as does all political discourse.

The three men picked up their large shirts, waving them like monstrous flags, and went up the street, arms held high, chanting the songs of ascendancy, the songs of the Party of the Poor, or was it the Rich. No one could be certain (194).

The community's inauguration into political life had been quite

simply, poison, poisoned milk, a corrosive twist on fertility and life. This crime is countered by declarations over the loudspeaker: "WE ARE YOUR FRIENDS. WE WILL BRING YOU ELECTRICITY AND BAD ROADS, NOT GOOD MILK, I MEAN GOOD ROADS, NOT BAD MILK" (153). The chaotic gifting of poisoned milk among a rain of blows fails to galvanize the community much beyond their immediate anguish and blind destruction of the opposing party's vehicle. A van overturned and burned in protest becomes a fixture of the street, a living reef about which daily affairs continue to circulate, and within which children play, "wrenching around its steering wheel, taking long journeys across great wastes of fantasies" (155). The political agents of new independence are violent and indecipherable, often portrayed behind the mask of dark glasses, and they ominously appear in public spaces without notice. More intimate struggles in *The Famished Road* are played out in equally permeable spaces. The door to the room where Azaro's family lives seems absent to either their insistent landlord or neighbors arriving with empty bellies or offerings of food. Also, the character of the photographer suddenly appears in the room on one occasion with the unique purpose of capturing an image of Dad recuperating on his bed. The patient drifts in a state of "childlike consciousness" after a mystical fight with a dead man, the Yellow Jaguar. The artist immediately retreats.

The character of the photographer raises the question of representation within tumultuous, shifting contexts. At first, his technology appeals to domestic needs. The poor incur debts to him for family portraits, Dad included. Once the photographer trains his lens on images of public outcry and injustice and is imprisoned briefly by imperial authorities, he becomes a wanted man running for his life, a photographer as a wandering eye. He is the only character in *The Famished Road* who effectively fulfills the role as a messenger of truth, fixing in images the oppression and violence committed by public authorities. The photographer enjoys a new heroic status, wryly grandiose and self-conscious. "He could have selected quite a few wives from the admiring female faces of that evening if he had not already permanently entered new mythic perceptions of himself that excluded such rash decisions" (156). As for the local inhabitants, they possess a new sense of agency, for their actions have found a mode of representation, a voice answering

back to alleviate their alienated existence. “For the first time in our lives, we as a people had appeared in the newspapers. We were heroes in our own drama, heroes of our own protest” (Ibid.). Initially victims and participants in an orgiastic scene of violence, here, the people, recognized, find themselves participating in a larger narrative, one that may be disseminated and deciphered, an “institutionalized activity” (Barthes 31). “We were astonished that something we did with such absence of planning, something we had done in such a small corner of a great globe, could gain such prominence” (Okri 156). The exterior gaze of the world seems necessary for recognition and the construction of narrative; however, phenomenal relationships between subject/object are fleeting and complicated by opacity in the novel. Azaro arrives at new existential understanding during his two weeks of self-imposed starvation in response to his father beating him severely. “I couldn’t get over the fact that we can look out of our eyes, out of our inner worlds at people, but that people, looking at us couldn’t see into our eyes, our thoughts, our inner worlds. How transparent one feels, but how opaque” (342). To gaze is a vital act, but one performed through masks. In her published photograph, Mum becomes a temporary icon of the street riot in question, although her countenance is overlain with a distorting aspect. As a public figure, she bears a new mask, “something wretched and weird”, that of “a starving witch-doctor” (156, 157). Masking is always assumed in the act of mimesis, yielding at times discomfiting forms and contingencies. For the townspeople, nothing is more remarkable to these new readers in Okri’s text than the confirmation of an individual represented in both image and text, “the photographer himself, with his name in print” (157).

Vision and images lead to distortions and inchoate truths, yet new forms of narrative may spring from the act of curating. The role of the artist is to frame, edit, and sequence. The photographer’s display of images in the street becomes a cabinet of curiosities that draws in many passers-by who peer into the glass case. In isolation, each photograph reveals the inherent limitation of fixing the temporal in a two-dimensional realm. A visual representation is an approximation. On the contrary, reading the collection of images as a gathered whole allows truths to germinate in the interstices of

their association. Azaro, again, is our reader with a roaming viewpoint and lens open to receive both temporal reality and timeless presences. The photographer's display case points to the necessity of fragmented, multiple perspectives, in lieu of a modernist, unified perception of Truth. Any semblance of unity must be a kaleidoscopic view of potentialities. The photographs on exhibit form an uneasy, approximate coherence in the eyes of Azaro, who examines the images of recent, popular unrest and individuals posed as still lives. A narrative is difficult to construct, though emotional truth manages to emerge.

After a while I went to look at the new pictures in the cabinet. They showed thugs beating up market women. They showed the leader of the Party of Bad Milk from odd angles that made his face seem bloated, his eyes bulbous, his mouth greedy. He had pictures of politicians being stoned at a rally, he caught their panic, their cowardice, and their humiliation. He also had pictures of beautiful girls and a choir of boys and a native doctor standing in front of a wretched-looking shrine. (160)

These last examples, portraits, intentionally staged, hint at a vague discomfort with fixing identities. At the end of the same chapter, Azaro goes "looking for the moon" in a vision and witnesses thugs crushing the photographer's camera. "And the people who were inside the camera, who were waiting to become real, and who were trying to get out, began wailing and wouldn't stop" (173). This suggests once more that individuals profess a problematic yearning to be realized by exterior manipulation of their representation. Azaro and the photographer flee together and are imagined as bound and shut in a glass cabinet, while outside "chickens fluttered and turned into politicians ... I stayed there, trapped behind glass, a photograph that Dad stared at, till dawn broke" (174). The imprisoning qualities of portraits resonate with the ethnographic impulse of imperial authority at the tragic close of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Okonkwo's body is cut down from the tree and his actions become a new story filed away in a chapter's worth of ethnographic discourse; his plight and the collapse of his traditions are contained as anecdote within an imperialist text (Achebe 117). In *The Famished Road*, the photograph of a hanged

man in the photographer's display case is the most unimaginable and mysterious to Azaro. The boy's queries are protectively answered. ("It is from another planet"). The dislocating effect of the image of such trauma denies it "connotative overlay" (Jay 442) or mythical potential. Roland Barthes states in his essay, "The Photographic Message" that "trauma is the suspension of language, the blockage of meaning ... One could imagine a kind of law: the more direct the trauma, the more difficult its connotation; or again, the 'mythological' effect of a photograph is inversely proportional to its traumatic effect" (Barthes 31). Even Azaro's world of comingled mythical and real suffering cannot absorb such a prosaic image of death that speaks only of its own grim and simple truth and the fact that it has been witnessed.

In harsh and destructive terms, colonial incursion led to the disaggregation of traditional, African societies. In the African novel, cultural production first came to express the "non-consensual terms of affiliation ... established on the grounds of historical trauma" (Bhabha 17). *The Famished Road* is a fugal, accretive narrative of striving, a textual bi-product of the colonial oppression of a people who through history had "grown smaller in being" (Okri, 457). In Okri's text, a broad perspective on human history is accessed from a viewpoint embedded near the earth itself. In addition to functioning as a reader and viewer between human and spiritual realms, Azaro transmits knowledge of human history through an animal oculus. The Abiku's liminal space is consistently flexible, for he becomes witness to history through the portal of a duiker's eye. "I stared into its hypnotic eyes and felt myself being drawn into its consciousness ..." (456) Azaro is cloaked with the physical husk of the running animal, through which his experience is intrinsically defined: "I galloped in dreams of abundant energies through the great jungles, bristling with the freedom of the wind and four feet and the soaring spirit that disintegrates the frames of all night-runners" (Ibid.). Within animal consciousness, historical time becomes a compressed mosaic of "stone monoliths of the deep nights of transition", from "serene ancestors" to "ghost ships of centuries who arrived endlessly on the shore", bearing the "helmeted ones", "the white ones" whose presence evoked the earth's cry (456-7). All beings find secret exile and "transformative retreat" during an age when nature itself feels

hunted down. The impact of the colonial incursion on shared, traditional narratives in human terms would be the “death of their many roads and ways and philosophies” (Ibid.). Hybrid narratives based on shifting perspectives would have to be forged within a “night forest”, where “all things exchange their identities” (Ibid.).

Non-modern narratives are required in response to violence played out on the very bodies of the oppressed, whose identities as palimpsests struggle to assert or narrate a singular experience. Endeavouring to do so lies outside the structural securities of the Modern and the unified perspectives that allow for their decoding. Azaro, transported through dance “out of the world of the living”, whirls through vast geographies and marketplaces, past signposts of both past and present suffering, most notably, past spaces occupied by the slave trade, “past slave alleys where innumerable souls had written their names on the walls with their flesh, along the precincts of drugged soldiers, the garrisons of slave towns ...” (460). The greatest interference with transition from pre-colonial, traditional society to the Modern dispensation is the direct, prolonged, corporal suffering which constituted the grammar of imperial discourse and the key to its application. It is by strategic shape-changing that African narratives from the indigenous perspective have found forms reflective of shared, ever-transitioning experience.

As a point of comparison, one may consider the traces of modernist narrative found in *Waiting for the Barbarians* by J.M. Coetzee. His hero explores the experience of oppression through the eyes of a sympathetic, colonial magistrate posted at the fringes of Empire. From his marginalized viewpoint, he engages in an abstract exploration of the consciousness of the tortured and those who torture. Bodies are inscribed with the text of the oppressor. Somewhat ontologically, the judge, in nightly sessions, pores over the traces of imperial power etched on the body of the scarred and blinded girl he brings into his home. The magistrate’s alliances drift as dunes but find greater definition. He is himself imprisoned and reduced to a body in pain, a hanged man in flight, beyond the shame of those who only bear witness. Once reduced to a beleaguered philosopher figure in tatters, the magistrate is sustained by small acts of kindness and the security of shadows, much like Wangrin in

Hampaté Bâ's novel. On the other hand, Coetzee's protagonist remains exterior to the indigenous experience. Granted, his disillusionment with Empire is complete. He suffers greatly, but his struggle does not bring him to immerse in an older, symbolic order; he functions as an exterior reader of the barbarian glyphs left behind, trusting there are messages to be revealed. Coetzee's hero is an archeologist. Okri's narrative, on the other hand, is anything but archival, for it includes all possible forms of consciousness and memory in riotous, suspended interaction. Coetzee ends his novel with his protagonist discovering his recurrent, snowscape dreams inaccurately reflected in reality. In contrast, *The Famished Road* closes with a dreamed survey of society's divisive condition, a disunity further flung into war, famine and "orgiastic squander". While Dad recovers from his third and greatest boxing fight, he dreams of wrestling with "advancing forms of chaos".

Among the ever-spiraling hungers of human existence, Dad prophesizes the continuance of his abiku nation and hints at its potential restoration. Hope is elusive yet imaginable: "We can redream this world and make the dream real. Human beings are gods hidden from themselves" (498). There is a hunger for expression of the infinite, circular struggle of life and death. "We need a language to talk to one another" (498), but this must come from self-examination and awareness, from looking "to ourselves" (498). Azaro's father's monologue is a call to an ever-present amalgam of man, nature, spirituality, and their histories ("everything is HERE") which the beggars' class, the outcasts, may be the first to herald. Dad's awakening into deepening wisdom creates a temporary peace and quietude. Azaro, the child-spirit, may enjoy a brief yet palpable reprieve from invading forms and turbulences (500). Upon waking the next morning, a state of constant transformation renews.

Narratives in post-colonial, social and political contexts require a permeability of spheres that modernist paradigms do not offer. Circular origins and liminal spaces within the cultural contexts of post-colonial or dispersed societies denote continuous rebirth. Ironically, this is where traditional societies found their grounding. Therefore, narratives that rise and culminate do not serve as an accurate template for the colonial or post-colonial experience beyond prosaic accounts of political independence. Much remains

to be told beyond the division of histories into eras and the construction of single-minded heroes. To designate an ipseitic destination in the wake of colonial violence is to dream beyond potentialities, such as the case of Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. Born from the Antillean context, this poem responds to the physical and spiritual dislocation of the Middle Passage and offers an essential resolution. *La Négritude*, in the African context, might be deemed limited by ascendant narratives, though differently, for the colonized in Africa had been alienated or set adrift *in situ*. In the world of *The Famished Road*, the depiction of constant waves of transformation draws continually from margins and interstices, traditional spaces of becoming, accretion, destruction, departure, and iterative return. "New spaces which we couldn't name, and couldn't imagine, but could only hint at with unfinished gestures and dark uncompleted proverbs." (449-50) Okri's work, an extravagant chorus of human need and paradoxes, resonates beyond the limits of the text. Azaro's passages between the spiritual and the real allow mystical actants to climb atop the photographer's apparatus, adjust or steal its lenses, and borrow the eye of the abiku artist himself.

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The Humanitarian Misunderstanding and the African Imagination

Cilas Kemedjio

Humanitarian practices have emerged as one of the most contested sites of misunderstanding between postcolonial elites and the West. Humanitarian interventions are motivated by the imperative of providing aid and alleviating suffering, claim the benevolent agents of the global humanitarian order. Postcolonial writers suspect that Humanitarianism and manufactured dependency are closely linked. Both sides, however, seem to agree that humanitarianism has emerged as one of the fastest growing articulations of “globalization.” The humanitarian phenomenon in Africa is both much praised and much criticized. In fact, it may be said that humanitarian aid, which is delivered through the transnational network of mostly Western non governmental organizations. The exponential expansion of humanitarianism since the collapse of the Berlin wall reflects an increasing “moralization of development assistance in general” (de Waal, 304) while development aid to poor countries has always been framed in humanitarian terms. Albert Schweitzer, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate of 1952, is one of the emblematic figures of the first “humanitarian mission” that was strictly articulated in the triumphant days of the colonial era. The Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 1999, the Franco-Belgian transnational group Doctors Without Borders, a worthy descendant of Schweitzer,

has, for its part, concentrated its interventions in the so-called failed States. Schweitzer and the self-representation of Doctors Without Borders as humanitarians is articulated around an amnesia on their collaboration with colonial or post-imperial power-brokers. François-Xavier Verschave and Pierre Péan have concluded that the humanitarian strategy that led to the birth of Doctors Without Borders was initially aligned with the positions defended by the French government during the Nigerian civil war. Starvation was used as a propaganda device to undermine the Nigerian central government and to legitimize military aid to the secessionists. The Humanitarian rhetoric was invoked as a shield to cover military shipments to the rebels; the Humanitarian rhetoric was thus used as a shield to advance French national interests in the subversion of the Nigerian State.

Faced with the incestuous relationship between these two iconic French humanitarians and their government's *volonté de pouvoir*, we may ask to what degree has the colonial enterprise of "civilizing mission" simply been retooled under an updated rhetoric of post-World War II, and now post-Cold War humanitarianism. After all, Humanitarianism thrives in a world where "new global empires rise to enforce their own *civilizing missions* in the name of democracy and free markets" (Bhabha x). We need to remember that colonialism presented itself as a humanitarian enterprise, and also produced some of the most famous humanitarians, including the aforementioned Dr. Albert Schweitzer. Calhoun reminds us that the First-World consciousness, initially shaped by colonial projects, remains "an uncomfortable feature of humanitarian action." (Calhoun, 41).

Gayatri Spivak asked a question in her famous article, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" We reiterate this question with reference to humanitarian aid: can the voice of assisted populations be heard? Is there room in refugee camps for critically engaging the very action that may be the difference between life and death? Humanitarian agents who intervene in Africa have fortunately begun to reflect critically on their performances and the broader structures of which they are a part : on what David Kennedy has called "the dark side of humanitarianism." Calhoun observes that "humanitarian workers are a highly self-critical group, struggling with the contradictions

of their work.” (Calhoun, 55) Kennedy notes that the “darker sides can swamp the benefits of humanitarian work, and well-intentioned people find themselves entrenching the very things they have sought to denounce.” (Kennedy, xiii). However, such an undertaking is rather uneasy because humanitarianism is allergic to critical analysis, as any attempt to even consider raising questions may unleash what Barnett and Weiss call an “ontological insecurity” in the humanitarian realm. The task is even made harder when interventions are framed as a moral duty originating in religious obligations: “The negatives are discussed privately, often cynically, but rarely strategically. With so much evil out there to fight, it hardly seems worth it to focus on the downsides of the few humanitarian practices which have been set in motion.” (Kennedy, xiii-xiv). The critical investigations initiated by humanitarian agents are therefore contained within their circles, protected as family secrets. These critical investigations on humanitarian interventions are closed because they are intended for local consumption, that is, restricted to western audiences. The recipients of humanitarian aid, “an actor that is largely absent and silent in many operations and policy-oriented conversations” (Barnett/Weiss, 46-47), remains excluded. Therefore, even the critical investigations fail to challenge the perpetuation of academic discourses that emerge from this field of studies.

Yet, the blind spots of humanitarian interventions in Africa ought to be critically investigated. While Western agents are largely afforded the means to represent themselves, the assisted populations are silent, rendered voiceless. I suggest that the field of critical investigations on humanitarian interventions ought to be broadened to make room for postcolonial voices. I have no illusions that starving bodies will be heard, or that entire communities caught in refugee camps amidst wars or natural disasters would inform our analysis. However, it is critical that postcolonial voices be made part of this discussion. These critical investigations are not designed for members only. These postcolonial critiques are directed at assisted populations, postcolonial governing authorities and donor countries or institutions as well as humanitarian workers. Humanitarian interventions, seen from this perspective, are part and parcel of this relationship, resulting in shadowy zones where

political calculations and altruistic concerns meet. What we refer to as the Fanonian imperative, then, is the task set by postcolonial intellectuals to unmask the imperial and market forces that drive humanitarian action on the African continent. The pragmatic and ethical tensions among donors, sycophantic governments, international financial institutions, and local and foreign citizens therefore need to be critically explored.

African voices have been significantly absent in the debate about the emergence of the humanitarian order as a significant dimension of global relations. The humanitarian narrative has therefore been mostly a monologue dominated by western agents engaged in humanitarian interventions. African writers and filmmakers have registered their presence in the humanitarian discourse. Bassek Ba Khobio's critical biography of Albert Schweitzer in *Le Grand Blanc de Lambaréné* is echoed by Sembène Ousmane who focused on issues of dignity in *Guelwaar*, *Emitai*, and *Camp de Thiaroye*. The theme recurs again in Ahamdou Seck's *Saraaba* or Mandé-Alpha Diarra's *Sahel! Sanglante sécheresse*. Sembène has forcefully articulated how colonial actions such as the draft during the two world wars and the requisition of food have worked to make food security more precarious.

Critical investigations that target the unintended consequences of humanitarianism as a practice theoretically agree with the good intentions professed by humanitarian agents. The critique is therefore localized in the fault lines of an otherwise noble enterprise. The critic that sets as her/his objective to challenge the politics of humanitarianism repudiates the entire enterprise because of its incestuous connections with the "forces of destruction" that have worked over the centuries to undermine the survival of the people of the "hidden face of the earth". The radical repudiation of humanitarianism proceeds from a genealogical unearthing of the layers of oppression that serve to undermine the good intentions that undergird humanitarian interventions. Emmanuel Dongala and Ngugi wa Thiong'o embody these two dimensions of the inscription of humanitarianism in the African Imagination.

In his novel, *Johnny Mad Dog*, Congolese writer Emmanuel Dongala articulates the contradictions of emergency humanitarian aid from the perspective of the dignity of assisted populations.

Dongala questions the sensationalism that is the hallmark of media coverage of humanitarian interventions. He challenges what has been dubbed the “pornography of aid”, raising ethical questions about the marketing of human suffering that has come to represent a major aspect of humanitarian ventures. Humanitarian redemption, Dongala suggests, may well come at the expense of the human dignity of displaced populations. *Johnny Mad Dog*, writes one critic, is “actually one of a cluster of recent novels about child soldiers in Africa” (Valdes, 27). She claims further that the plight of children enrolled in civil wars “appears to affect African writers as deeply as 9/11 has affected American ones.” (Valdes, 27). Although one may not agree with this argument, it does certainly mean that the genre is in vogue, at least with American publishers of African writers. Maureen Moynagh, speculating on the focus of the figure of “the African child soldier as a subject of violence in need of human rights intervention and rehabilitation,” thinks that the Western imagination, conditioned by colonial stereotypes, is ready for such depictions. The novel was made into a film of the same name, shot in location in Sierra Leone. Both the novel and the film received considerable attention in the mainstream popular media “for they believe that a news story from Africa without pictures of people dying from poverty, famine, or ethnic warfare could not possibly be interesting to their audience at home.” (Ngugi 2000, 74). Despite Dongala’s critical rendition of humanitarian agents, humanitarianism emerges in the novel as a force of redemption, therefore giving credence to what Mutua describes as the narrative of the “savage, victim, savior” (quoted in Coundouriotis, 193). The posture of the radical postcolonial critic, as we shall see with Ngugi, opposes the providential humanitarian impulse with a sustained recollection of its genealogy. I will start with the analysis of humanitarianism as a manifestation of postcolonial dystopia before exploring its anecdotal critique in Dongala’s novel.

Humanitarianism as postcolonial dystopia

The project of “postcolonial literary nationalism” is explained by the fact that African intellectuals, “whether as volunteers, draftees, or resisters in a struggle for the articulation of their respective

nations” (Appiah 1993, 53), made the legitimization of nations one of the imperatives of their writing. Still, narratives that seek to legitimize the nation do not survive the “*mésaventures de la conscience nationale*” (misadventures of national consciousness,) leading critics to observe the failure of the nationalist utopia beginning with the end of the first decade of the independence. Writers who were dreaming about the nation during anticolonial struggles therefore turned into doubters. The dearly won independence was soon ensnared in neocolonialism, cold-war politics, and globalization. They belonged to a class with no capital, no inventors among its members, no new worlds to conquer and rob—only a world in which to *beg* and a nation to rob” (Ngugi 2009: 81; my emphasis). The neocolonial State is repudiated and a new narrative, that of the delegitimation of the state, takes root. African writers, “anxious to escape neo-colonialism, are no longer committed to the nation” (Appiah 1993, 152). The humanitarian articulation of this global narrative derives from the fact that it reflects a failure of both the nationalist utopia and the dream of an Internationale of Resistance that was for a long time embodied by the Left. As I have argued elsewhere, the movement of decolonization was itself inscribed in the network of the International left (Kemedjio 2012). Humanitarian interventions, for these disillusioned writers of the nationalist legitimization, are only the latest variation of the old partition of imperial domination. Malawian historian Elias Mandala gives voice to this line of thinking when he claims that NGOs are the “West’s consulates in this era of informal empire”.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o (*The Wizard of Crow, Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance*), Mongo Beti (*L’Histoire du fou*), Werewere Liking (*La Mémoire amputée*) locate the irruption of humanitarianism within the narrative of the collapse of the postcolonial State. For these cultural producers, the humanitarian response must therefore be considered within the broader narrative of Africa’s relationship with the West. The generational identity of these writers, veterans from the anticolonial and neocolonial trenches, has led me to read their humanitarian moment as symptomatic of narratives of postcolonial dystopia. This postcolonial dystopia echoes the days, when, in *Remember Ruben* or *Petals of Blood*, Mongo Beti and Ngugi were trumpeting the national utopia

that they believed was going to emerge from the ashes of a “dying colonialism.” The collapse of autocratic African regimes, the unintended consequences of globalization and the proliferation of civil wars have transformed Africa into a theater par excellence of humanitarian interventions. Coundouriotis, in her analysis of recent child soldier narratives, shows how, from Soyinka to Iweala and Abani, the expression “beasts of no nation” has come to embody the shift from ultimate defeat of the “postcolonial politics of resistance.” (Coundouriotis 195-196). Humanitarianism rises on the ashes of the postcolonial state, henceforth fragmented into non-governed enclaves. According to Fassim, “the humanitarian seeks to present himself or herself as the one who intervene “precisely in place where sovereignty is either abusively exerted or temporarily suspended.” (Fassim 276). Schweitzer was against any idea of independence; Doctors Without Borders operates on territories that are devoid of any meaningful state control. The Postcolonial State that isn’t provides the ground for Doctors Without Borders’ brand of humanitarianism. From Schweitzer to Doctors Without Borders, I argue that the Humanitarian Misunderstanding has been globalized at the expense of weakened and fragmented postcolonial states.

Ngugi reminds us in *Globalectics* that the postcolonial has always been concerned with the global. Ngugi’s assertion takes us back to Appiah’s less charitable comment about the postcolonial intellectual as a borderline character, a comprador whose mission is to mediate the transactions between the West and the natives (Appiah, 1993). Ngugi has consistently articulated Africans’ misgivings with regard to humanitarian enterprises. Charity, Ngugi suggests, is more often than not coterminous with capitalism. This insight challenges the very idea of western aid to Africa. According to Ngugi, the looting of Africa, from the slave trade to current globalization by way of colonialism, is the main culprit in the manufacturing of humanitarian disasters.

The defeat of the Pan-Africanist utopia is translated by famished bodies that become the hallmark of failed States: “as a result of famines, massacres, denials of rights, insecurity, and intolerance—replicas of colonial times—virtually every African State is hosting refugees from its neighbors and citizens continue to flee from the

continent altogether—a brain drain that is much talked about.” (Ngugi 2009, 89). States depending on humanitarian manna for their survival reproduce the pathetic destiny of populations that, by being forced to beg, end up as touristic attractions: “Pictures of beggars or wild animals were what many tourists sent back home as proof of having been in Africa. In (fictional) Aburiria, wild animals were becoming rare because of dwindling forests and poaching, and tourist pictures of beggars and children with kwashiorkor and flies massing around their runny noses and sore eyes were prized for their authenticity.” (Ngugi 2004, 35). The proliferation of refugee camps swarming across the continent creates non-governed enclaves that call for humanitarian intervention.

It becomes therefore important to question the role of humanitarianism in the memory of exploitative and unequal power schemes that are, at least in part, responsible for scuttling the project of postcolonial State construction. In other words, is the Western humanitarian a challenge or a continuation of the very processes that plunged the African continent into darkness? Ngugi suspects aid, in its humanitarian incarnation, to be the tree that hides the forest of ravages brought on by the adventures of capitalism. According to Ngugi, the transnational financial networks, represented by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, are in the process of privatizing entire countries, especially postcolonial states. Such a process, that is conducted under the guise of democratization and good governance, has all the trappings of a remake of the colonial take-over: “Corporate capital was aided by *missionary* societies. What private capital did then it can again: own and reshape the Third World in the image of the west without the slightest blot, blemish, or blotch. NGOs will do what the *missionary charities* did in the past” (Ngugi 2006, 746; my emphasis). Barnett and Weiss share this assessment when they suggest that in the post-cold war era, aid agencies are effectively becoming “welfare workers as the neoliberal state outsources its basic welfare functions while focusing on the needs of the private sector.” (Barnett/Weiss 17). Ngugi approaches the criticism of humanitarian aid through its role in the deployment of the logistics of the subjugation of African peoples. Indeed, as noted earlier, the missionaries of aid, from the

beginnings of colonization, have had as their mission to place compresses on the wounds of a disaster brought about in part by the logic of capitalist exploitation.

The ethics of humanitarianism

Didier Fassin situates the origins of the modern humanitarian movement at the moment in history when “moral sentiments became the driving force for a politics, which was not simply a politics of pity, as Hannah Arendt argues, but also one of solidarity” (Fassin 272). Kwame Anthony Appiah, in *Cosmopolitanism*, suggests that the implementation of human solidarity requires us to go beyond particular and localized loyalties en route for a truly cosmopolitan ethics: “Each person you know and can affect is someone to whom you have responsibilities: to say this is just to affirm the very idea of morality. The challenge, then, is to take minds and hearts formed over the long millennia of living in local troops and equip them with ideas of institutions that will allow us to live together as the global tribe we have become” (Appiah, xiii). The difficulty of designating the very phenomenon of the “global tribe” speaks to the uneasiness about what is generally referred to as globalization. Appiah rejects this term because of its narrow economic connotations. Multiculturalism, in the same perspective, is less than satisfactory because it sometimes signifies or is at the root of the problems it seeks to redress. Appiah finally settles upon cosmopolitanism even though he recognizes that this term may suggest “an unpleasant posture of superiority toward the putative provincial.” (Appiah, xiii). Humanitarianism has emerged as one of the modalities of implementing this ethical demand. Appiah, in adopting “cosmopolitanism”, signals his misgivings about the term globalization because of its economic resonance. The humanitarian modality of universal solidarity emerges from the recognition of the limits of the normative economic model guided by “the cutthroat ethos of laissez-faire capitalism” (Klein 113). Calhoun suggests that Cosmopolitanism, precisely thanks to its humanitarian vocation, is an “ethically attractive part of the globalization package” (Calhoun, 86).

Some scholars have argued that the movement to abolish the slave trade can be seen as the prefiguration of modern humanitarianism (Rubio, 729; Pétré-Grenouilleau, 215-220). The movement marks the passage from charity to a more cosmopolitan form of action. Yet abolitionists do not necessarily challenge the hierarchical dimensions of philanthropy. French historian Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau, in a controversial book on the slave trade, suggests that abolitionism does not only foreshadow the current humanitarian ideology. He goes on to suggest that as a principle of universal human rights, abolitionism was conceptualized and implemented in Europe before being exported to Africa and other parts of the world under western domination. Abolitionism, despite its grounding in an ethics of universal solidarity, does appear to function as one of the markings of Western superiority. We all remember the image of a black man kneeling at the feet of a white man and asking, “Am I not a brother?”. This image is the most powerful inscription of the unequal distribution of power that is reproduced in the workings of non governmental organizations intervening in less fortunate parts of the world, especially in Africa (Appiah, 201; Archer-Straw, 2005).

NGOs from the global North are the most visible agents of the global humanitarian order. These NGOs are “top-down efforts in which money and expertise empowered some to act for-or in-others.” (Calhoun, 2010, 44). NGOs are organizations where charitable intentions meet the philanthropic arm of capitalist donors to make humanitarian practices possible. NGOs and capitalism proceed from two radically divergent motivations, and that’s why we need to suspect their alliance. Margaret Atwood reminds us in her book *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth*, that “Scrooge’s happy ending is [...] entirely in keeping with the cherished core belief of capitalism. His life pattern is worthy of Andrew Carnegie—make a bundle by squeezing and grinding, and then go into philanthropy.” (Atwood, 99). The debate over humanitarianism is also and foremost a debate over the meaning of the very act of redeeming. Redemption, which is also at the center of the Christian faith, cannot be separated from debt, as Atwood teaches us in her book cited above: “Christ is called a Redeemer, a term drawn directly from the language of debt and pawning or pledging, and thus also from that of substitute

sacrifice.” (Atwood, 67). We are reminded that colonial missionaries were bent on converting colonized peoples on the basis of Christian superiority. Éric Deroo, discussing the survival of imperial and colonial myths, evokes the case of *missionaries* of non-governmental organizations that who are convinced that their mission is to teach African mothers how to breastfeed. For Deroo, in order to fully comprehend the good faith and the civilizing spirit that undergirded colonizers in the 1930s, it is imperative to look at humanitarian agents of our times who are inhabited by the same “innocent arrogance,” believing that they have something to offer to others (Deroo, 20). The redeemed slaves, having received the gift of freedom, owe a spiritual or moral debt to their redeemers. Redeemed Africans ought to be grateful to their Redeemers, from abolitionists to agents of the humanitarian global order, unless they claim some unpaid debt from their self-proclaimed benefactors.

Barnett and Weiss suggest that “discourses surrounding rights, sovereignty, and justice have slowly but impressively created new standards for states, provided new metrics of civilization, and suggested a new rhetoric of justification for intervention on behalf of the weak and powerless” (Barnett/Weiss 20-21). The question we must therefore confront will be whether or not the full humanity of the “weak and powerless” is taken into account in the course of humanitarian intervention. Any attempt to even consider asking such questions may unleash what Barnett and Weiss call an “ontological insecurity” in the humanitarian realm. To ask questions is sometimes equated with automatic suspicion, if not outright condemnation of the good deeds of selfless good Samaritans whose only mission is to redeem the compromised humanity of the “weak and the powerless”. Empowering the “weak and the powerless” would certainly go a long way in achieving the goal of a cosmopolitan citizenship that “took root in the modern world [...] as part of an effort to remake the world so that it better served the interests of humanity.” (Calhoun 76). Appiah goes back to the fight to abolish slavery and remarks that the massive adhesion of English working classes to this cause could be explained by the fact that slavery expressed the idea of dishonor and alienation associated with manual labour. In a society that had little consideration for working classes, “claiming a dignity for them was a radical

proposition” (Appiah 2010, 131). Dignity, “an inner transcendental kernel, a core of value that must be protected above all else” (Rosen, 75), allows for a distinction between humans endowed with a capacity to think and animals bent on satisfying their basic needs. The concept of dignity emerges as a major component in the articulation of political theory in Kant’s ethical thought, which has come to play a vital role in the moralization of political behavior, as witness the emergence of human rights as the moral compass of international relations. Kant defines dignity as that which is priceless: “In the Kingdom of ends everything has either a price or dignity. What has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; what on the other hand is raised above all price and therefore admits of no equivalent has dignity” (quoted by Rosen 20-12).

Dongala’s *Johnny Mad Dog* explores the dark side of humanitarian interventions. The background to this intervention is a chaotic civil war that forces civilian populations trapped between the warring factions to flee. Laokolé, a teenage-girl, has seen her father killed during a rebel invasion at their home. During another chaotic displacement provoked by the assault of the capital city by one of the warring factions, she is in charge of her mother, who has lost her legs, and her younger brother who is eventually lost. Laokolé is the symbol of innocent victims whence her moral fortitude (Kearney 75). Johnny Mad Dog, a “vicious sixteen year old boy soldier” (Coundiriotis 195) in charge of a militia unit, symbolizes both the forces of destruction and the lost childhood. Henik Vigh, in his study of young soldiers in Guinea-Bissau, remarks that African conflicts are generally perceived as “messy, untamed and chaotic wars, with main agents of chaos being armed, irregular youth” (Vigh 28). Johnny Mad Dog and his gang of child soldiers fit this pattern as they steal, intimidate, kill and rape at will. The two characters are the dual narrators of the story, each one casting a unique, intimate view on the civil war. The chaos created by the war stands as a powerful symbol of the failure of the postcolonial state. The novel engages in a critique of ready-made theories that are used to explain away the responsibility of Africans in their own misfortune. Dongala challenges the all-encompassing, if sometimes hollow and ineffective

thesis, of western indifference and exploitation as the root cause of the civil war and the ensuing misery and chaos that it creates: “I couldn’t see what the exploitation of diamonds had to do with the cruelty of that militia fighter Mad Dog, who had coldly shot a little kid kneeling in front of him and begging for his life, or how our country’s mineral wealth is related to the brutality of the soldier who had killed Papa and broken Mama’s legs.” (Dongala 145). Laokolé repudiates the discourse of the Belgian journalist who attributes the despair of civilian populations to the indifference of the Western world. Such an indictment reinforces the centrality of the West in African affairs, therefore relegating Africans to a role as passive victims. The humanitarian narrative, in order to be effective as a tool of emotional mobilization, needs the image of the perfect victim. The construction of this victim sometimes requires a focus on the most sensational dimension of the suffering.

Laokolé’s mother, despite her suffering, is passed over by humanitarian agents who are more concerned about dogs, though her pain and suffering are not completely forgotten. “When it bleeds, it leads.’ In other words, the bloodier the image, the more visually compelling it is and the better it works,” says Katelijne, the Belgian journalist, in an attempt to convince Laokolé to allow her to film her mother. Laokolé refuses to have her crippled mother’s body filmed:

At that, I lost my temper. Mama’s stumps were our suffering, our pain. Katelijne saw them only as something that would attract the attention of an audience. Was she completely heartless? No, I don’t think so—she simply lived in another universe. She didn’t understand that poor people like us didn’t make a display of our misery. We had the right to keep it private. (Dongala, 147)

Johnny Mad Dog and his gang of child soldiers participate in what James calls “terror economies” (James, 26). Innocent and terrorized victims are at the center of this situation, because they can help humanitarian agents generate “compassion economies” (James 26). The valuation of the humanitarian portfolio depends on their capacity to convert the suffering of victims such as Laokolé’s mother into tools that can help mobilize financial, political, or strategic resources. “When it bleeds, it leads,” is a mantra that serves

to shock western audiences and transform them into advocates. They can then contribute financial resources or pressure their government to intervene. In the “growing humanitarian market” (James 33), brokers depend on powerful images to help shake complacent viewers into active volunteers or financial contributors. The media coverage is critical in the marketing of humanitarian disasters. Laokolé challenges the voyeuristic orientation of the representation of suffering. Yet she expects some assistance from western humanitarians. The press coverage, as troubling as it may be, represents an opportunity to call attention to the disaster in Western public opinion. Only such a strategy could eventually help raise the funds that would sustain humanitarian interventions.

The voluntary participation of some of the characters caught in the crossfire arouses Laokolé’s indignation, who considers the wide distribution of graphic images of suffering as an infringement of human dignity. The use of the distress of displaced populations as a marketing tool in raising funds that will eventually contribute to the alleviation of such ordeals may be interpreted as an instance of the “instrumentalization” of the human. This deontological transgression does raise a certain number of questions. One question that comes to mind is whether or not the preservation of the human integrity must stand in the way of the survival of these victims. Such a question does not directly amount to a conflict between human dignity and humanitarian action. On the contrary, humanitarian action sets as its ultimate goal the upholding of human dignity. It is more about the means mobilized to reach such lofty objectives. Kant’s categorical imperative, otherwise known as the Formula for Humanity, calls for a treatment of human beings as ends, not means. The formula of the Universal Law calls for all actions to be placed under the sovereignty of an eventual universal law. However, Kant is well aware that the duty to help others is fatally an imperfect undertaking (Rosen 87). Kantian deontology, in this case, may simply be read as an awareness of these imperfections and a call for constant vigilance. The humanitarian who is fully aware of Kant’s teachings will not necessarily become perfect, but he or she stands a better chance of rising up to the challenge enunciated by Appiah, for dignity is also the pledge to endure “suffering in the struggle to meet the demands of duty”

(Rosen 36). Dignity, understood in the context of this relation to the other applies to both the giver and the receiver of aid: “To respect someone’s dignity by treating them with dignity requires that one shows them respect, either positively, by acting toward them in a way that gives expression to one’s respect, or, at least, negatively by refraining from behavior that would show disrespect” (Rosen 58). The kantian conception therefore postulates an egalitarian idea of dignity, contrasting with the aristocratic conception of honor as part of a demarcating line between inferiors and superiors. The exceptionality of the human comes from the fact that he is endowed with morality: “Only morality has dignity and human beings carry the moral law within themselves, so it would be wrong to think of human beings as part of the natural world in the way that rivers, trees, or dogs are” (Rosen 24).

Calhoun reminds us that humanitarian operations are “top-down efforts in which money and expertise empowered some to act for-or in- others.” With the increasing (and corrupting) political and financial clout, humanitarianism may be tempted to reproduce the *aristocratic understanding of honor*, that is, the establishment of a hierarchy in the distribution of human dignity. In *Les aubes écarlates*, Miano suggests that Africans do not succeed in inscribing their experience into the global human condition because they are incapable of going beyond the negative representations that have so long excluded them from the human race (Miano 138). This exclusion from the human race has sometimes taken the form of unflattering comparisons between Africans and the animal kingdom.

Darlings from the Animal Kingdom

There are two instances in Dongala’s novel in which the protection of animals takes precedence over distressed populations caught in a vicious civil war. In the midst of interventions to rescue Westerners caught in the chaotic situation created by the civil war, saving a dog seems to be considered more important than helping afflicted women and children. The first instance when human beings lose out to animals comes during a rescue staged to extract western expatriates trapped in a United Nations compound:

Two soldiers got out of the truck, supporting a woman who was on the verge of hysteria. “My little one! My darling! I have to find him!” In the general confusion, the soldiers had no doubt forgotten to take her child, a baby who was probably sleeping blissfully in an impoverished cradle. The three of them went into the building. They wasted no time, and came out again almost immediately. They were no longer supporting the woman, who was holding a little poodle, its curly coat neatly manicured. Escorted by the two armed soldiers, she walked out the door caressing the animal. (Dongala 160-161)

Laokolé, who has lost his brother and whose mother has lost both legs, witnesses this scene. If the dog is the “darling”, then distressed populations are certainly pushed to the symbolic status of our neighbors from the animal kingdom. It is therefore significant that during the course of this rescue mission, a truck transporting Western citizens and their pets crushes Mélanie, a young woman displaced by the war. Emergency humanitarian workers are too busy saving the expatriates and their dogs to pay attention to Mélanie. When Laokolé is lost in the equatorial forest, “ecologists working to save endangered species” (Dongala 281) decline to provide her with any help, despite her repeated appeals: “Well by that point I considered myself an endangered species. If they could save animals, they could also save me.” (Dongala 181). The message seems quite unambiguous: saving gorillas takes precedence over assisting a distressed young woman.

Emily Apter writes that during the Bosnian conflict, “small differences in Serbo-Croatian (or what used to be Serbo-Croatian) were used to determine whether you were an animal or a human.” Based on these artificial differences, Serbian was spoken by humans, while the others were considered animals and “could be shot like dogs.” (Apter 53). Laokolé and other refugees are considered less than dogs who are either ignored or trampled over by trucks. Earlier in the novel, one character laments, “The West valued our gorillas and oil more than it did our people” (Dongala 145). The lament refers to a phenomenon that goes back to the early days of colonial encounters between Europeans and Africans. Hortense Spillers has stated that “modern history begins in slavery and colonization, periods during which the African personality is not just the other,

but the place where the human stops.” (Spillers, 53). By pointing out the priority given to animal rights, Dongala may be inviting the reader to consider the intervention of western humanitarian and environmental agents as another theater where African humanity stops. The story of Ota Benga illustrates Spillers’s point. Ota Benga, who finds himself on exhibition in the monkey cage at the Bronx Zoological Park, “represents the missing link between the higher man and the chimpanzee” (*Chicago Tribune* G22). Deprived of human dignity, he cannot count on the protection afforded by primatism, “the plea for the forsaken rights of animals” (Apter, 53).

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Alleluia for a Garden Woman

René Depestre

Translated from the French by Asselin Charles
From René Depestre, *Alléluia pour une femme-jardin*. Paris:
Gallimard, 1983.

*Et le cri que, la bouche tordue, cet être, en vain?, veut faire entendre
est un immense alléluia perdu dans le silence sans fin.*

— Georges Bataille

FIRST CANTO

One Friday evening, Aunt Zaza came to dinner at our house. She arrived a bit disappointed because no one in the family was available to accompany her to the country that particular week. Her air of annoyance enhanced her charms which quickly changed our humble dinner into a princely banquet. It was amazing: the glasses were finely cut baccarat crystal; the plates came from Sèvres; the cutlery was all of sparkling silver; and the tablecloth had been embroidered by Aubusson hands. The water from the tap had the flavour of champagne, and the bread tasted like some very rich cheese. The aroma of the fish soup conjured gourmet delights. The light in the

room did not come from the lamp but rather from Zaza's gold-studded green eyes. I was simply fascinated by her breasts.

"Why can't Olivier come to the farm with me?" she asked.

"You know why, Zaza," replied my mother, "Olivier must do his homework. Besides, he is too careless in the ocean, insisting on going farther out than everybody else when the gulf is infested with sharks. Accidents happen so easily."

"You're exaggerating, Agnès," said my father. "Olivier now knows how to behave properly. Nothing untoward will happen to him in Zaza's company."

"Very well," said my mother resignedly. "If he has an accident, however, you will be responsible."

"The mountain air will do him a lot of good. This boy is always locked in his books. Olivier, you won't swim too far from the beach, will you, darling? Promise?" appealed my aunt. I was speechless; I could only nod affirmatively.

"The best thing," continued Isabelle, "would be for you to come and spend the night at my home. That way we can be on the horses and on our way at dawn."

"Good idea," agreed my mother, while my father could not conceal his pride and, perhaps, even envy in seeing me leave alone with the most illustrious family member.

She had just turned thirteen when people in Jacmel began to speak of her beauty. Three years later, scouts from Port-au-Prince came to make her a *carnaval* queen. During the parade, men and women in the capital were frenetic with admiration. Everything about Isabelle Ramonet was so spectacular, like an offering that said: "Take a good look at me, for it's only once every century that one sees a human being whose flesh patently proclaims her a dazzling adventure of the species!"

On the wake of Isabelle's float, the crowd's adulation took mystical forms. A young man, after exchanging a smile with the queen, climbed up a coconut tree on the avenue in one breath, whimpering like a wounded animal. A peasant of mature age called out in a strangled voice, "I'll give you one hand if you throw me a kiss!" From her towering throne, Isabelle immediately sent a kiss to the stranger.

Keeping his promise, he pulled a huge knife from his pocket and

chopped his left wrist with a single stroke of incredible violence. Then, he took hold of the severed hand and threw it at the feet of Aunt Isa, splattering the bottom of her royal dress with blood. The mad man was led away discreetly, and the festival continued with increased frenzy. After the *carnaval* was over, hundreds of suitors asked the young girl to marry them. Graciously, she refused them all and returned unceremoniously to Jacmel where an arch of triumph was awaiting her at the entrance to this little southwestern Haitian town. “This is like the return of a princess, now a saint, in The Arabian Nights,” declared a local newspaper the following day.

A year later, Isabelle married the son of a coffee exporter; soon after the wedding, he was killed in a motorcycle accident. The rumour circulated that Daniel Locroy had died of a mysterious disease which he caught in the arms of his wife: the more he made love to her, the more his genitals shrunk, like the donkey skin in the fable. When he woke up one morning and found his penis had quite disappeared and only one testicle remained he killed himself with a single bullet through his head. A doctor stopped these mad stories because he had seen Locroy’s badly mangled body at the foot of a tree on the Meyer road, next to the wrecked bike.

New aspiring lovers appeared under the window of the young widow, but she adamantly informed the panting crowd that she had no intention of remarrying. When she ignored the parties organized in her honor, the horse rides, the acrostics, the love poems and the letters addressed to her, the *wangas*, and the provincial intrigues—all inspired by hot blood, she became the mythic emblem of the town. Her presence became one with the landscape, the old trees of the Place d’Armes, the waters of the gulf with the rusty hulk of the Albano, and the river La Gosseline. So, when Isabelle Ramonet left Jacmel for a prolonged stay in Europe only her closest relatives suffered from her absence.

On her return, everything would have been exactly the same as before but for an article in *Le Nouvelliste* that revealed that:

The still ravishing Isabelle Ramonet, the unforgettable queen of the 19—carnaval, has kindly declined a European director’s offer to act in the movies, preferring instead to return to her native town in the southwest. Some day, when the boredom of her life becomes

more oppressive than usual, she will bitterly regret having turned her back on such glory. Undeniably, we believe that Isabelle has lost the unique opportunity she was given to bring fame and glory to our little country as the new Greta Garbo.

Although it is unfounded, we still have hope that it is not too late for her to reconsider her incredible decision. This is what we at this newspaper and her thousands of admirers wish for her beauty in the future.

Aunt Zaza listened to this nonsense disdainfully, as she did to all the slanders that greeted her return. As indifferent to praise as she was to insult, she proceeded to build the first movie theatre in Jacmel with Locroy's inheritance. There I saw *Fanfan la Tulipe*, *Mathias Sandorf*, Charlie Chaplain's comedies and many other silent movies. Next, there was a rumour in Jacmel that she had built the theatre in memory of a famous actor who had been her lover in Paris before he finally left her for a Scandinavian star. That famous actor, so the rumour went, was a lucky man: had he persisted in his passion he too would have died in an accident on some European road. Such great beauty could only cause misfortune. It was whispered that the money used for the theater came from magic, from the pits that Isabelle's mother, the widow of General César Ramonet, had dug in her garden several years earlier. At the time, surrounded by scandal, she had discovered several jars full of gold *louis* and precious tableware. For respite from all this malicious gossip in Jacmel, Aunt Zaza made frequent stays in the country. She owned a farm at the place called "The Enchanted Mountain," on top of a cliff overhanging the ocean. She spent most of her weekends there, and, to avoid being given lovers drawn from the same well as those of the theatre, she always had a female friend or her mother along as chaperone.

In our family, the worship of Isa was not just tied to her physical charms. We constantly celebrated her tact, her goodness of heart, her simplicity, her generosity toward the poor. She was always ready to do a favour, to fulfil others' needs with her kind initiatives, never asking anything in return. She did not have the bursts of temper, the caprices, the fits of vanity, the mincing manners and the

eccentricities which so often spoil the beauty of women. She was not a sacred monster, but rather “a sword with an infinitely tender heart,” as a friend of her father’s had called her one day. For me, her favourite nephew, Aunt Zaza was inseparable from the screen that shaped the evenings of my adolescence. She was a dispenser of beautiful images. She would often come to the little theatre and sit by my side; her presence would add a new dimension to the film I was watching. For a long time I allowed myself to imagine that her flesh radiated the beam of light which narrated the dream-rousing stories.

When I turned fifteen, however, I began to admire Zaza for what she was in real life. Seated beside her in the dark, I began to neglect the tales on the screen and instead focused intensely on a movie that agitated my being in an altogether different way. Isa would innocently pass her hand through my hair, pat the nape of my neck, or my naked legs without being aware that her affection melted me from head to toe. I sensed her female presence as some animals sense the coming of a great storm or an earthquake.

SECOND CANTO

That night I slept on a folding bed in a room next to my aunt’s. “We must go to bed early,” she had said, chastely kissing me on the forehead. I had a lot of trouble getting to sleep; the ominous feeling I had was so intense that I felt my veins were ready to burst.

It was still dark when we left town. I was a young king riding through his happily sleeping kingdom, accompanied by my cousin, an exotic princess. We rode for nearly two hours, our horses galloping rhythmically, at the same pace. Zaza was a good rider. She was laughing, her hair blown by the wind, her body erect as if ready for flight. I was jealous of her horse, a thoroughbred who seemed conscious that he was carrying the Star of the city on his back. When we arrived on the mountain, we entrusted our horses to the peasant who took care of the farm.

“I wasn’t expecting you to get here so early,” said Laudrun. “We

came at full speed,” answered my aunt apologetically. “Olivier is a good horseman,” Laudrun said affectionately.

“He must be careful in the ocean,” my aunt said. “How about going there right now?” she proposed cheerfully.

A few minutes later, we were walking together down the goat path which, after numerous twists and turns through fields of corn and sweet-potato, ended suddenly against a pile of steep rocks whose sharp edges were gleaming in the mountain sun like sleeping lizards. After about three hundred yards of these jagged rocks, the path became gentler as, without warning, it suddenly revealed a beach of smooth, white sand. As we walked down, Isabelle leaned on my shoulder to keep her balance. I did not dare look at her in her bathing suit, but, once on the beach, she ran ahead of me, rushing towards the ocean. All at once, images began to develop in my head, haphazardly growing, swirling, chasing one another like banana leaves in a cyclone. I was born for the vital rhythm of the woman flying before me.

Her curves were lyrically, harmoniously, unfolding themselves in a flaming symphony of glands, fibers, tissues, nerves, muscles, flesh.

We started to swim vigorously toward the shore, and the swell finally swept us onto the beach. We lay there, out of breath. We looked at each other, laughing, not able as yet to articulate even one word.

“Don’t you think the water is fantastic?”

“It’s wonderful,” I replied.

“You’re glad you came?”

“Very glad, Aunt Isa.”

“My goodness, you’ve grown so tall!”

“.....”

“You’re already taller than I am.”

“I don’t think so.”

“Of course you are, darling. Want to bet?”

We stood up in one jump to compare our heights. She was indeed barely taller.

She was then thirty-two years old; I was exactly half her age.

“How fast time has flown, Olivier!”

“.....”

“I remember the day of your birth as if it were last Thursday. You were born feet first, with a veil over your head. Before you had been five minutes in the world, you were laughing. I was the first to rock you, the first to discover your eyes were as green as mine. You wouldn’t stop laughing and wriggling your feet and hands, as if warmly greeting the world you had just come into. Let’s call him Olivier, I proposed to Agnès.”

“Why Olivier?”

“Because it used to be a symbol of wisdom and glory.”

“I am neither wise nor famous.”

“You’re very wise for your age, and you shall be famous.”

“What about Isabelle? What does that symbolize?”

“It’s a *café-au-lait* colour, like mine. You can say an ‘isabelle dress’, or an ‘isabelle horse’ .”

“It’s also the name of a very famous queen.”

“There’s a charming tale about that. Once upon a time, there was an Archduchess of Austria whose husband was besieging a Belgian town. She vowed to change her shirt only after the town had surrendered. The siege lasted three years, so people gave the name of the princess to the colour that her shirt had become by the end of her vow.”

The sun was shining fantastically. We caught the glimmer of fishing boats in the distance. The sky and the sea were mixing madly, playing at being sky and sea. We told each other amusing stories which we interrupted with our bursts of laughter, and we repeatedly threw ourselves into the waves. At around nine o’clock, we took the road back to the farm. By the time we arrived, we were really sweaty— our lips salty and our eyes burning. We went down the path to the fresh water; Isa moved along with a tired, languorous walk, which was suffocating me.

Her hips were well arched, her buttocks round and full, and her flawless thighs long and smooth like burnished metal.

The clear spring water cooled my ardor. We went back to the house, a thatched bungalow which was always cool and shaded. It had two rooms surrounded by a spacious verandah: the living room and the bedroom. I saw the unique bed, old-fashioned and incredibly high. Then I caught sight of Isa, taking off her bathing suit, oblivious of me. My body started shaking. My teeth were chattering. I felt a

sort of tightening in my chest; I could hardly breathe. I quickly left the room. She joined me a minute later, dressed in white shorts and a flowered blouse. She was radiant.

I went back into the bedroom to change. I did not see any folding-bed; there was only that nuptial couch in the middle of the room. So I was going to sleep in the bed of an Archduchess of Austria. Perhaps there was a double mattress? No, only a single one. I climbed on the bed and let myself fall back softly. I had to bite on the pillow so I could bear the rush of blood burning my lower abdomen.

I collected myself and rejoined Zaza under the thatched bower where she was preparing breakfast. A pleasant smell of codfish frying in olive oil was rising from the charcoal stove. My aunt was busy removing the seeds from the goat-peppers before throwing them into the noisily crackling pan.

“You must be hungry, my darling. Breakfast will be ready soon. Here’s the menu: salted codfish with hot peppers, fried ripe plantains, avocado slices and eggplants. To drink: home-made punch. Landrun promised to bring fruits for dessert.”

We were seated at the table, tucked into the breakfast, when Landrun came in with a basket full of fruits— oranges, grapefruits, custard apples, purple mombin fruits, and bunches of genip fruits.

“Oh, really, you’re spoiling us,” said Isa.

“This year,” said the old man, “I don’t know what’s wrong with the papayas; they refuse to yield. I know how much you love them.”

“Thank you very much, Landrun. I have a little present for you, too.”

She got up and returned with a red scarf in her hand.

“Thanks ‘a pile’, ‘a pile’, my *commère*. It’s just what I needed to wrap General Brise-Fer in when I take him to the cockfight on Sundays. You’ve chosen the very thing I was thinking of.”

“Is your fighting cock still a champion?”

“Yes, he’s a valiant boy!”

“A warrior cock,” said my aunt, laughing.

We raised our three glasses to the victories of General Brise-Fer.

We spent the rest of the day visiting the farm in the company of the peasant farmer. We stopped at everything to listen to the history of the plants he was growing and to the lives of the animals he was raising.

Laudrun told us as well about the many injustices which the peasants of the region continuously suffered at the hands of the rural guards and big landowners. At the end of the afternoon we returned to the beach. The water was still warm, so we swam a few strokes and then returned to the plateau where the spring had cooled with the coming of dusk. It was already evening, a Haitian Saturday evening sparkling with fires on the hills. Everywhere the sound of tom-toms was harmoniously exploding, and there were cries in the tall trees as the birds were chattering as they readied to sleep. We lit a hurricane lamp and had a plain dinner of fruits, after which we installed ourselves in rocking chairs on the verandah. My aunt asked me questions about my studies. I told her that I was thinking of going on to study medicine after my baccalaureate. She confided to me that one of her sorrows in life was that she had not been able to go to university. She talked to me about her stay in Europe where she had discovered a world completely different from ours. People there, she went on, lived in the twentieth century. It was natural that anyone from Haiti would be speechless at the sight of Paris or London. But the lights of these metropolises were not as innocent as they seemed. At this point Laudrun arrived and interrupted our conversation.

Laudrun was a small, sinewy man. His talk was full of life and light. Although his features were severe, his laughing eyes mocked the rest of his face, especially when he embarked on one of his "tales". As soon as he had settled himself on the verandah, he said:

"Cric..."

"Crac," Aunt Isa and I answered as one.

"Once upon a time," Laudrun started, "there was a young girl who had fallen in love with a river fish. She loved him so much that she spent her life by the water where her lover lived. Her favorite occupation was, naturally, doing the laundry. When she had no clothes to wash, she would remain seated on the bank as though she were endlessly washing the precious cloth of her passion. From time to time, Zin Thézin would point his dazzling fins out of the water to exchange signs with his Lovéna. But the couple did not live only on fresh water and tenderness. Often Lovéna would take off her clothes and dive in the river to join her lover. Zin Thézin would bend his bow in the night of his Lovéna."

“Lovéna’s father, however, was very worried about the young girl’s prolonged absences from the house and one day he hid in a bush near the river, where he soon discovered the intrigue. He refrained from talking to his daughter about this; instead, he resolved to send her to the market several miles away, as often as possible. That way, he would keep her away from the farm. One morning, after Lovéna had left, he went to the river. He had learned by heart the passwords which Lovéna used to tell her prince that he could safely come up. The father began to imitate Lovéna’s voice. He felt a profound hatred for the impudent and reveled in the idea of annihilating him. Soon, Zin rose up over one meter above the stream, bursting with pent up desire. It had been several days since he had disappeared into the pulsing flesh of his mistress. Lovéna’s father gave him one violent blow to the head with his bludgeon. Zin Thézin sank fast. He had said to Lovéna one day that, if ever something bad happened to him, wherever she was at the time, she would be warned by a few drops of blood on the tip of her left breast. At the very moment Zin Thézin was dying at the bottom of the river as suddenly as if he had been struck by lightning, Lovéna, standing in the middle of the market place, discovered that her left breast was bleeding profusely. She dashed toward the river like a mad woman. When she arrived, there was still a large scarlet stain at the place where Zin had been struck. She did not utter a single cry. She went straight to the house and found her father on the threshold.”

“‘Father’, she said, ‘did you kill my fiancé?’”

“‘Aren’t you ashamed, *ti-bouzin*, you hussy, to grant your favours to an animal?’”

“‘Father,’ she interrupted, heaving with rage, ‘I didn’t come to discuss good and evil in the world with you. I want you to answer me yes or no: are you Zin Thézin’s assassin?’”

“‘Yes,’ said the father, ‘with one stroke of my stick I sent your miserable scum of a fish to where he belongs— at the bottom of ...’”

“Before he had time to finish his sentence, the machete chopped across his throat.”

“Lovéna dropped the weapon of patricide and ran back along the path to the river. She sat down on the sun-drenched grass bank and began to sing:

Zin Thézin, my crazy fish, Zin! (twice)

Captain of the water,

My crazy fish, Zin!

Prince of my thighs,

My crazy fish, Zin!

King of my sorrows,

My crazy fish, Zin!

My sole season,

My crazy fish, Zin!

Law of my blood,

My crazy fish, Zin!

My poor love,

My crazy fish, Zin!

Zin Thézin, my crazy fish, Zin!

“Huddled in the bush, Lovéna’s family was despondently watching the scene; the girl’s mellifluous voice was so hauntingly desolate, they could not utter a sound, even less make a move. They were all there— the mother, the brothers, the uncles, the aunts, the grandmother— all bewildered, more motionless than the bush behind which they hid. Lovéna was wildly singing the misfortunes of her fish, her eyes fixed on the river which an indifferent sky had filled. Slowly, without interrupting her farewell dirge, she let herself slip into the current. Even after her disappearance, her voice still soared above the water.”

“Indeed, some people have the gift of hearing it on some evenings; rightly or wrongly, these people believe there is an indestructible link joining the stones, the trees, the fish, and human beings ...”

Laudrun “drew” more tales from the old Haitian *romancero*. But it was the romance of Zin and Lovéna that moved us the most. When we had had our fill of tales, Aunt Isa said to Laudrun: “It’s very late. Time to go to bed. Thank you so much Laudrun for your beautiful stories.”

“Good night to you both,” said the man. “*Good night, compère.*”

THIRD CANTO

Isa preceded me into the bedroom; when I came in she was already in her night gown. I took my clothes off slowly, as if I were removing a sixteenth century suit of armor. When my aunt walked by the lamp to reach the bed, the sheer sight of her intimate shape made me absolutely breathless. For a moment I remained in my pajamas in a corner of the room, waiting for I don't know what.

'Open the window, turn off the light and come to bed now,' she said.

I complied. The sheets were cool and smelled fresh. I was warm and breathing with difficulty.

"Good night, my darling."

"Good night, Aunt Isa."

She fell asleep immediately, but I could not. Gradually my eyes got used to the darkness of the room and one could distinguish the outlines of each object.

Through the window, I saw the trees and a patch of starry sky glimmering overhead. How unfortunate not to have been born a star, a tree, a fish, anything besides this fear benumbed animal lying as I was behind my princess. Little by little I felt her own presence passing into my body; the fantastic transfusion circulated her overflowing blood in my veins. In this way, completely drugged by her, I sank into a deep sleep.

I was awakened by the cool after-midnight breeze blowing from the sea and I turned around to get warm.

"You're cold too?" asked Zaza.

"I'm going to close the window," I replied. "No, we'll need the air. Come close to me." I was in her arms.

I was lost in her arms. I was still alive in the vibrant arms of Zaza.

"Aren't we warm now," she said after a while.

I said nothing. I was not thinking of the act of love, or of anything else, only that I was madly lying on top of Zaza Ramonet.

"You're forgetting I'm your aunt?"

"....."

"Have you ever made love?"

“Yes.”

“With whom?”

“With Nadia.”

“With Nadia? Impossible! Where? When?”

“Last year, at Meyer, during the vacation.”

“Did you make love to her often?”

“Every day, all summer.”

I was not exaggerating.

“And I thought my niece was a virgin, and you a little boy. When did you begin to desire me?”

“On the beach, this morning; in the house, last night; and, to tell you the truth, since always; maybe since I was in the crib, as befits the name Olivier which you chose for me.”

“And I thought you were so well behaved.”

“.....”

“You are my big crazy fish!”

“And your father will kill me with a single blow of a stick!”

We slept until noon and awoke refreshed, with a ferocious hunger. A short while later, we were seated before a breakfast which Laudrun had been kind enough to prepare for us: grilled chicken with peppers, water-boiled ripe plantains, fish fritters, charcoal-baked sweet potatoes, eggplant and tomato salad, rice and red kidney beans cooked in coconut milk and stuffed with bits of salted beef, slices of pineapple and watermelon, and for drinks a mountain punch worthy of our recent soaring heights.

The table was set on the verandah. A warm breeze was blowing from the gulf, but Zaza's white skirt cooled the afternoon. We ate in silence, in quiet delight. Whenever I raised my head from the plate, I rediscovered in the sparkling, iridescently golden eyes of my beloved the wonders of the previous night. After the meal, I helped Isa wash the dishes and then we took an after-dinner stroll.

Before us, the sea was weaving meters of lace in which, at intervals, the mischievousness of the undertow would sprout an enormous flower of foam. Zaza was walking in front of me on the path. Looking at her sensuously undulating before me, I felt a homicidal rage against all those who have discredited the flesh of

woman. Where were they buried, the prophets foaming with premature ejaculation, who invented the lie that the charms of women lead to error and evil? I would dynamite the tombs of those vindictive and barbarous prosecutors who, through the ages, have sought to separate the rhythm of the female body from that of the seasons, of the trees, of the wind, of the rain and the sea.

As Aunt Isa was walking in the afternoon, I was chipping away from my life with cutting strokes the deadly, repugnant myths that have shrouded woman in darkness and humiliation by representing her sex as the most degrading side of human relations. We had reached the edge of the cliff, a spot where a coconut grove stood. We were overlooking the length of the Gulf of Jacmel.

“How about sitting down here,” said Zaza, pointing to a tree trunk.

We sat next to each other. The afternoon was without a wrinkle, as smooth as the sky or the sea, or Zaza’s life to my eyes. In the distance, the fisherman’s boats seemed motionless; flocks of birds were flying in perfect formation, the only motion between the sky and the water. Our memories were gaining room in us; like those seagulls flying to their evening nest, they magnified our joy to the limits of the gulf. Our silence was full of the previous night’s love and of what was yet to come.

The sea extinguished itself, little by little, drawing into its immense shade the boats, the sand, the ridges of the cliff, the sky, the coconuts, and us. A star appeared, followed by thousands of others. We followed the path to the bungalow and once there we dined hastily on goat’s milk and fruit salad.

Alleluia for thee, vibrant pulse of life!

Alleluia for the joyful patience of thy hormones in the night of woman!

I hail thee and offer thee for the veneration of the world! For thy love, I am prepared to cross deserts and virgin forests, to defy stakes and electric chairs, gas chambers and torture rooms! I plant thy seed on the corners of the world’s streets to convert to thy radiance those who see you in shapes of darkness. Thou art neither a star nor a mystic fruit shining over our destiny. Thou art neither a monster, nor a sewer, nor a source of sadness or hell. I am neither thy prophet, nor thy slave, nor thy great macho; I am simply a

fascinated man who, after having experienced thee, declares that thy rhythm follows the same laws that cause the wind to rise, the sun to succeed the night, the moon and the stars, the rain and the snow that fulfil their promises to the sweet harvests of the land! By thee, the unity and solidarity of life endure despite the immense chaos in which the living are immersed.

LAST CANTO

Our intimacy lasted two beautiful years. We managed to meet in the mountain every weekend. Far from suffering from our liaison, my studies rather found wings, and so I was able to reassure my parents. On the days Grandmother accompanied us, I would sleep on a folding bed on the verandah. As the result of an accident which left her with a half-paralyzed leg, Grandmother could not venture down the path which sloped to the beach. So Zaza and I either made love right in the sea, or we would do it on the rocks under the cliffs. Our long absences irritated César (Grandmother Cécilia had been carrying this man's name since the death of Isabelle's father, General César Ramonet, my grandfather, who was shot in the Jacmel mountains during a peasant revolt.) César would throw us suspicious looks whenever she saw us arrive from the beach with sparkling eyes, unsteady moves, in silence and altogether transfigured like trees after a storm. But her suspicion never went beyond a mumbling from her notorious lips. However, we were aware of it and behaved accordingly. In her presence, we avoided all glances, words or gestures that could have betrayed us. I was the well-bred nephew who was keeping company with the pearl among aunts.

As time passed, we were no longer satisfied to wait for our weekly meetings in the mountain. Often, at the end of the afternoon, after school, I would drop by her house on the way home. She was living in the lower part of town, in a villa lost among the trees. To get there, for the last two hundred meters, one went down a narrow street, like a staircase; that was one of the charms of old Jacmel.

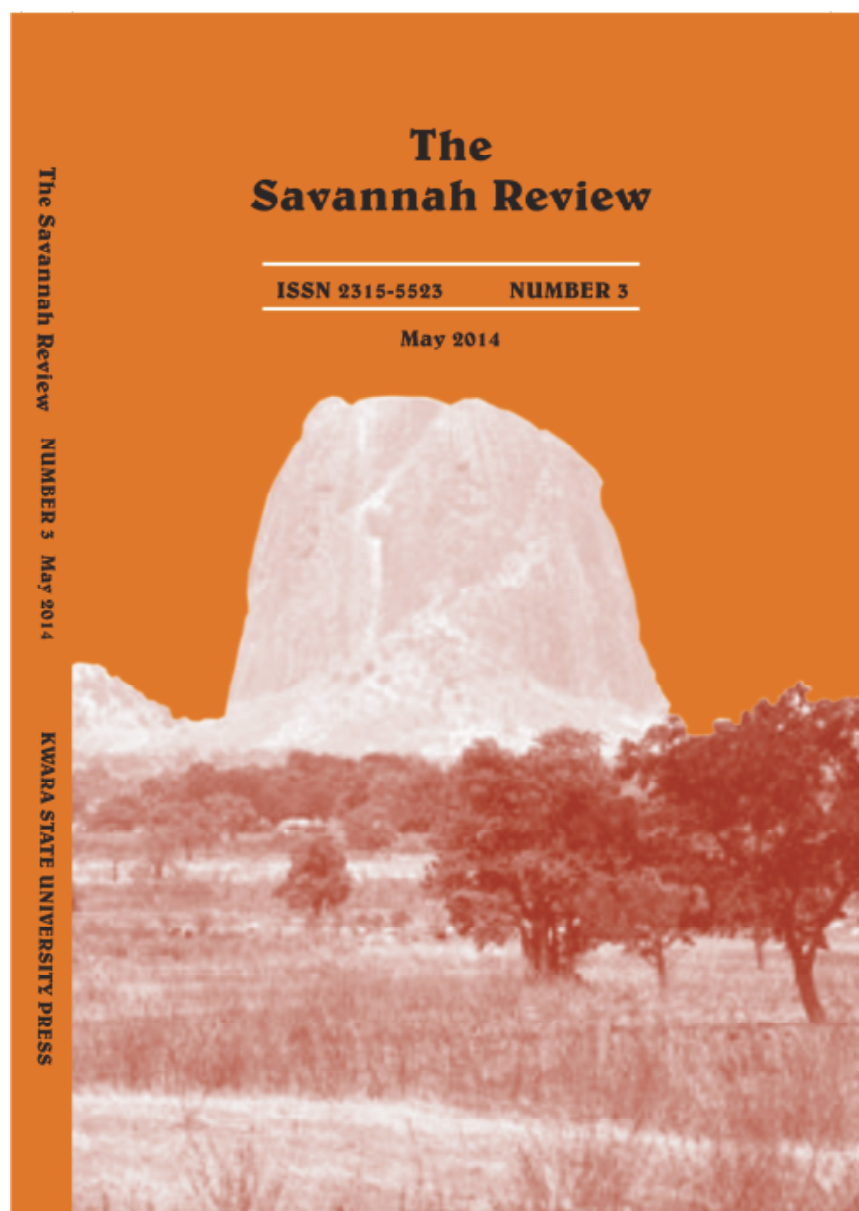
Since then, every time I go down the slope of a similar street in a foreign city, I am always, even in the harsh noon light, overwhelmed by the memory of the cool glade where Zaza, marvelously naked, had waited for me. We would succumb to the same ecstasy. We referred to our rendez-vous as my “second philosophy class”, and in that school, on the edge of the evening, one couldn’t tell who was the student and who the teacher.

One windy October evening, as I was poring over a Greek text, a rumor spread to my parents’ home, stepping in like a monster: the Parisian theatre was burning. All Jacmel rushed down to the site of the disaster. When I arrived at the site, the theatre was ablaze dancing in the wind of the Gulf. Isa was nowhere to be seen. Where had she gone? Had she stayed at home? Her name was flying from one person to the next in the crowd. Finally, the town’s idiot announced that he had seen her a few minutes earlier entering the theatre by a side emergency door, saying that she had heard someone cry for help inside. When the fire was under control, a strange, carbonized body was pulled from the furnace; a bracelet helped to identify it as the remains of Zaza Ramonet.

The following afternoon, the town accompanied her remains to the cemetery. During the immense procession, the grieving mouths of those who had loved her called her a queen, a heroine, a wonder. I also saw the bewildered eyes of those who had vainly coveted, defamed, ridiculed her, and who at this moment of her nothingness, did not know how to obtain the forgiveness of this bundle of carbonized bones that she was now, under the mountain of roses. The religious ceremony followed. Old Father Naélo, surrounded by his deacons, his candles and the other displays of sumptuous funerals, pronounced a brief funeral oration.

I could not believe my ears: he revealed that Isabelle Ramonet had been the most generous benefactress of the parish, and that so beautiful was her soul that Saint Phillip and Saint James, Jacmel’s two patron saints, had not been the same ever since they had seen and heard her in Church. He said that her horrible end was simply the disguise in which God had chosen for her to leave this world, and that in her new kingdom she had already found again her splendour—a splendour ceaselessly soothing the swollen hands and feet of the Redeemer, like flowing water in the morning!

When the procession started to cross Jacmel one last time, I noticed the ridiculous eagerness of several men, trying to help carry the coffin that was lighter than an abandoned bird's nest. Suddenly, the earth swallowed it in one bite, along with its flowers. In the evening, which fell early on the living and the dead, there was the return. It was the town's first night without its star. At dinner time, in their homes, people talked only about Zaza: the life she had had, her beauty, her goodness of heart, her refinement, the wind, the fire, the charcoal she had become in order to depart with her theatre.



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Review: Françoise Lionnet's Twin Volumes

Moradewun Adejunmobi

Françoise Lionnet.

Writing Women and Critical Dialogues: Subjectivity, Gender and Irony.
La Pelouse, Mauritius: L'Atelier d'écriture, 2012, 319pp.

Françoise Lionnet.

Le su et l'incertain, cosmopolitiques créoles et l'océan indien.
La Pelouse, Mauritius: L'Atelier d'écriture, 2012. 319pp.

These volumes on the literature, arts, and cultural politics of the Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius and Réunion, bring to the fore a geographical space that has hovered over the margins of the wide-ranging scholarship produced by Françoise Lionnet in two decades. The focus on the Indian Ocean islands is personal for Lionnet who grew up in Mauritius, studied in France, and earned a name for herself as a scholar in Comparative Literature, Francophone and Women Studies in the United States. Both books are, in sum, the record of an intellectual and deeply personal trajectory.

The first volume, *Writing Women and Critical Dialogues* comprises studies of the works of women writers and filmmakers from Réunion and Mauritius published in diverse journals between 1991 and 2012. The second volume, *Le su et l'incertain* reviews and addresses the cultural politics of both islands and their experience of multicultural encounter and interaction. I have come across some of these essays as they appeared in diverse journals over several years, but clearly see the wisdom of bringing them together in two jointly published volumes. Together, these books constitute a major contribution to the study of the cultures of the Indian Ocean. I will note however, that of the two volumes, *Le su et l'incertain* is likely to hold the greatest interest for scholars in African and postcolonial studies. For those working specifically on francophone literature, women writers or Indian Ocean literature, *Writing Women and Critical Dialogues* provides critical insight into the creative writing of a group of female authors who do not feature as prominently as they ought in anthologies of world literature.

The two volumes are multilingual with some chapters in English and some chapters in French. Both books have dual titles in English and French. Throughout this review, and in the interests of clarity, I will refer to each volume by only one of its dual-language titles. Lionnet's decision to write in two languages is deliberate and represents a move to confront the reader with the daily juxtaposition of languages that typifies communication in both islands, and especially in Mauritius. But it is also an attempt to foreground what Lionnet frequently refers to as "le malentendu Anglophone" or misunderstandings about these islands that are commonplace in English-language scholarship. Much of this misunderstanding stems not only from literal monolingualism on the part of certain scholars, but also from a reflexive inattention to the nuances and unique patterns of multicultural interaction exhibited in this part of the world. Indeed, and as Lionnet makes clear, not even Réunion and Mauritius can be considered completely identical. One island cannot be substituted for the other. Likewise, and despite a similar history of slavery, forced migration and colonialism, the cultural politics of the Indian Ocean islands also differ in significant ways from that of islands in the Caribbean. Finally, both volumes are published in Mauritius and are presumably available on the islands themselves

where they will hopefully factor into local discussion about identity and cultural politics.

Lionnet justifies her focus on these islands by advocating forcefully for the relevance of islands, insular spaces and archipelagos, “small countries” as she calls them, to our understanding of big issues confronting the world in the twenty-first century: multilingualism, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and interracial dialogue among others. She makes this argument while also acknowledging that islands “do not have the same status politically or imaginatively as larger continents” (*Le su et l'incertain* 166). The islands in question matter because they have long been contact zones in trade routes connecting Africa, Asia, and Europe. Contact zones offer repeated opportunities for evaluating varied modes of cultural interaction in a world where domination, hostility, and conquest are far more typical than cooperation and peaceful co-existence.

If there is a single word that sums up the major concerns in *Le su et l'incertain*, it would be the word Creole. This is a word and concept that has been far less prominent in postcolonial theorizing than that of the hybrid and hybridity. However, Lionnet's intention is not to elevate the Creole and Créolité as the forgotten and overlooked correlate to hybridity. What interests her here are the differential values attributed to the Creole and the Cosmopolitan. These differential values are for Lionnet, the result of a misreading. In Lionnet's words, the Creole is the global South's response to the Cosmopolitan of the global North. Creolization is in her words “a subaltern cosmopolitanism” while cosmopolitanism is nothing more than “creolization for elites” (*Le su et l'incertain* 1, 5). They are, in short, related rather than incommensurable terms. And yet, the concept of the Creole enjoys far less prestige and uptake than that of the Cosmopolitan even among scholars of postcolonial literature. Consequently, the significance of creolization for our understanding of cosmopolitanism as well as the parallels and divergences between cosmopolitanism and creolization have remained under-theorized. In this work, Lionnet undertakes to provide the terms Créole, Créolité, and creolization with the kind of substantive study that Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins among others have provided for the concept of cosmopolitanism. But unlike Anthony Appiah who

turns to cosmopolitanism as a pathway to a more tolerant form of cultural exchange, Lionnet looks to creolization. In postcolonial societies and among subalterns in the world, she claims, it is creolization rather than cosmopolitanism that offers the subaltern and postcolonial subject a way to live with multicultural contact.

In Lionnet's opinion, and of the two islands, Réunion and Mauritius, examined in detail in both works, Mauritius clearly offers the more productive experience of creolization. Where Réunion has followed the French republican ideal of imposed cultural uniformity, Mauritius has allowed multiple cultures and languages to flourish side by side. English is the official language, but French is widely spoken in schools. Almost everyone speaks Creole (*KreolMorisien*) which thrives side by side with communities speaking Hindi, Gujarati, Tamil, and Cantonese among other languages. Several of these languages are also optional languages offered in local schools. Though Mauritius has had its own experiences of violent uprisings, relatively peaceful coexistence among speakers of different languages with different faiths is not accidental, says Lionnet, but the result of policies that enable individual citizens to carefully manage multiple attachments and allegiances, instead of being coerced into embracing one identity while ditching all others.

Lionnet looks to representation, in the novel, in drama, in photography and in film to understand what has been misunderstood about the Indian Ocean communities, and how the misunderstandings have proliferated even among well-intended scholars of postcolonial arts. While postcolonial critics have done much to deconstruct the exoticizing images of the Indian Ocean found in canonical works of French literature by such authors as Bernardin de Saint Pierre and Charles Baudelaire, even they have not always been attentive to local details found in works by these authors. In this respect, Lionnet takes both Christopher Miller and Gayatri Spivak to task.

The writings of the Mauritian playwright, Dev Virahsawmy, and especially his rendering of Shakespeare's *Tempest* in the Mauritian Creole language with his play *Toufann*, as well as the Franco-Mauritian, Yves Pitchen's photography offer alternatives to the canonical Western and touristic representations of the Indian Ocean islands as unproblematic tropical paradise. The Indo-Mauritian

playwright, Virahsawmy, who speaks, neither the Hindi nor Tamil of his forbears, looks to Shakespeare, but also Bollywood in his Creole-language play. His chosen sources of inspiration embody what Lionnet describes as transcolonial forms of solidarity, and the multiple points of reference that typify contemporary Mauritian identity.

A scholar of African literature and African studies might very well ask: of what relevance are the questions examined by Françoise Lionnet in these volumes to those who work in African literary studies? As I myself have pointed out in some essays, a certain distancing from Africa remains entrenched in popular self-identification in the Indian Ocean islands. And yet, confrontations over ethnicity, citizenship, and religion have become ever more intense and fierce across the African continent in the early twenty-first century. It is for such reasons as these that the small spaces of the Indian Ocean remain relevant to us all, in African literary studies and beyond.

For example, the literary works examined in *Writing Women and Critical Dialogues* not only bring to light the works of such authors as Marie-Thérèse Humbert, Lindsey Collen, Ananda Devi, and Natacha Appanah among others. They also reveal the extent to which the questions examined by these authors are implicated in some of the most pressing debates currently unfolding among scholars of world, comparative and African literature. In other words, we would do well to include analyses of works by Indian Ocean writers in our theorizing about world literature, comparative literature, and most assuredly, African literature.

There are however, additional questions calling for reflection: how, for example, might Lionnet's Creole relate to Taiye Selasi's *Afropolitan*? Will the principle of creolization suffice as a response to the new nationalisms and fundamentalisms of the early twenty-first century? Will the principle of creolization suffice as a response to the tensions unleashed over identity and immigration around the world today? The specific relationship between creolization and cosmopolitanism as frameworks for understanding multicultural encounter is likely to be a subject of discussion for some time to come. Another point of debate for scholars in postcolonial studies: while Lionnet explores identified instances of political and economic

marginality in the Indian Ocean area as represented by writers like Ananda Devi and Lindsey Collen, these matters tend to recede to the background in her more theoretically focused discussions of the Creole and creolization. It is my hope that a new generation of scholars might pursue answers to these questions. If they do, it will not be the first or the last time that work by Françoise Lionnet has instigated debates and pointed the way to new research agendas.

Review: The Atlantic without Africa

H. Adlai Murdoch

Paul Williams

Paul Gilroy (Routledge Critical Thinkers) Routledge, Oxford, 2013.
Xii+ 177 pp.

This academic profile of the black British theorist and critic Paul Gilroy forms part of the Routledge Critical Thinkers series. Currently comprising close to forty titles, and including writers and thinkers ranging from Hannah Arendt and Roland Barthes to Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, F.R. Leavis and GayatriChakravorty Spivak, the volumes in the series place each key theorist in his or her historical and intellectual context while providing an accessible overview of the scholar's work. The corpus of each author is positioned within its specific cultural and critical background, and from this framework a detailed analysis of the themes, influences, and implications of their major works is engaged, with particular attention to identifying the impact and implications of their major ideas.

Professor Paul Gilroy, an internationally-known scholar of black and diasporic thought, criticism and culture, is Professor of American and English Literature at King's College, London, having previously been Giddens Professor of Social Theory at the London School of Economics (2005-2012), Chair of the Department of African

American Studies and Charlotte Marian Saden Professor of African American Studies and Sociology at Yale (1999-2005) and Professor of Cultural Studies and Sociology at Goldsmiths College (1995-1999). Among his best-known and most influential works are *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (1987), *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (1993), *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), *Between Camps: Nations, Culture and the Allure of Race* (2000; also published as *Against Race* in the United States), *After Empire: Multiculture or Postcolonial Melancholia* (2004; published as *Postcolonial Melancholia* in the United States), *Black Britain - A Photographic History* (2007), and *Darker Than Blue: On the Moral Economies of Black Atlantic Culture* (2010).

Paul Gilroy's best-known book is without a doubt *The Black Atlantic*, in which he uses the cultural transfers and exchanges wrought by the transatlantic slave trade to highlight the influence of "routes" on black identity. This approach allows Gilroy to inscribe the concept of the Black Atlantic as a space of transnational cultural construction, such that communities who descended from those subjected to the Atlantic slave trade are made the core of a concept of diasporic peoples that views them as sharing more similarities than differences. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Taken as a whole, this volume by Williams provides an excellent overview and analysis of the key aspects of Gilroy's thought and argumentation. Prior to the extended textual analysis, two prefatory chapters, entitled "Why Gilroy" and "Gilroy's Influences," situate the author and critic both with regard to the current and continuing prevalence of racialized thinking in the categorization of human groups, highlighting the ways in which the conflation of racial difference and processes of identification is essentially the product of racial oppression. In the former, also, Williams justifies the idea of a book that takes Gilroy's ideas as its subject by correctly pointing to his intellectual stature, to "his contribution to academic fields in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries." He goes on to cite his unassailable impact "across a wide spectrum of scholarly disciplines, most obviously in black studies, cultural studies, critical theory, sociology and literary studies" (3). Given the many fields in and across which the range and depth of Gilroy's work obliges critics to

take his work into account – whether or not one agrees with his stated positions – there is no doubt in Williams’ mind that, in terms of both the scale of his output and the substance of his analyses, Gilroy qualifies as a major critical force. In “Gilroy’s Influences,” Williams clarifies the formative role played by culture and upbringing as well as to the shaping force of movements like Negritude. Gilroy’s youth and adolescence in a presciently diverse postwar North London, and his subsequent formative exposure to the late Stuart Hall and the burgeoning Cultural Studies movement are given pride of place as his perspectives on and attitudes to race take shape in a swiftly-changing postwar Britain. With its range of theoretical positions and cultural approaches, including feminism, racism, education, history, leisure, and welfare, Cultural Studies joined with Hall’s transatlantic perspective to engage the complex interaction between cultural practice and academic research.

As an introductory chapter to the essential tenets of Gilroy’s thought, Chapter I provides a survey of the principles of “raciology” and of “race thinking,” approaches that tend to produce what Gilroy calls a sort of “ethnic absolutism” – whence the chapter derives its title – whereby even though ethnicity here is clearly differentiated from race, any appropriation of its conformist practices would in turn tend to lead to biologized compartmentalization. Similarly, Gilroy is opposed to the forms of race thinking condoned and practiced by Marcus Garvey’s UNIA, in large part because “it trades on fallacious notions of biological race” (33). And within the context of recent British politics, one also finds Gilroy opposed to what he calls “The New Racism,” in which “riots were read as an expression of black cultural identity” (35). By “contrast[ing] the lawlessness of black communities against the law-abidingness of white Britain, constructing them as mutually exclusive cultures” the “casual language and assumptions of politicians, activists and the press” (36) worked to embed a series of essentialist assumptions regarding the “natural” tendencies of black British culture, while denying the “irrevocably heterogeneous origins” of national British culture (38).

In chapter 2, entitled “Civilizationism,” Williams shows how Gilroy critiques the language that emerged out of the attacks of 11 September 2001 in America, specifically the ways in which this language presented the so-called “War on Terror” as “a battle

between two mutually exclusive cultures” (43). As a critical conjoining of racialized characterizations and trace elements recalling the heights of European imperialism, Gilroy sees a virtual recurrence of the philanthropic argumentation that framed a range of African imperialisms, an unabashedly essentialist approach whose countervailing discourse is the supposed superiority of “Western” civilization. Both essentialisms are summarily rejected. In Chapter 3, “Race is Ordinary,” Williams analyzes Gilroy’s take on “conviviality,” the “rubbing up next to each other” of cultural groups, especially in Britain’s big cities (49). Drawing on a far-reaching analysis of space, Gilroy’s point here is that leisure activities and other consumption activities become increasingly, if not prohibitively expensive for the poorer classes as a by-product of “the privatization of space and culture in London” (54). Here, the end result of these deliberate distillations of conviviality is a form of “corporate multiculturalism”; not at all to be confused with its uninflected form, this last insists on enforcing “a blueprint that society must conform to [...] and actually locks people into their racial compartments” (56). An integral, if often unacknowledged part of this process, particularly visible in the simplified and direct world of advertising, is the insistence that cultural difference(s), while presumptively equal, remain separate from each other, thereby foreclosing “the history of cultural cross-pollination whereby *all* nations and cultures have absorbed some kind of ‘foreign’ influence” (57).

Chapter 4, entitled “Postcolonial Melancholia in the UK,” examines a set of ideas put forward by Gilroy in his book *Postcolonial Melancholia*, published as *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture* in the UK. This book was published in 2004, and so jumps ahead, chronologically speaking, beyond Gilroy’s best-known work, *The Black Atlantic*, published in 1993, but its argumentation is thematically linked to the idea of conviviality outlined above. Here, Gilroy broadens the idea of conviviality and applies its tenets to an analysis of the national psychological mindset of the UK from a global perspective. As Williams explains, the dismantling of Britain’s empire in the wake of the Second World War, and the concomitant diminution of British sway and influence in the world, have engendered an inability to face up to the resulting lack of

international standing. As a result, for Gilroy, “Britain clings to the Second World War as a defining moment of national identity in an act of compensation for the absent Empire” (61). This sense of bereavement is what undergirds Gilroy’s reading of a pervasive melancholia that afflicts the country on a national scale, such that “national glorification” of select historical moments serves to contest the belief that the country is “sliding into mediocrity” (65). Drawing on key aspects of Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), Williams explains the importance within this theoretical framework of repressing the loss of the love object, resulting in “remembering the national past in fragmented form;” in the final analysis, it is the country’s attachment to its lost imperial greatness that determines the aim of “this highly selective act of memory,” and its goal is to “maintain the grandiose identity of the nation” (65), an end paradoxically accomplished through increasingly banal and self-destructive acts of conviviality, like binge drinking and the production and performance of satires grounded in cultural insensitivity.

Chapter 5 brings us to the first of three analyses of what is arguably Gilroy’s best-known work, *The Black Atlantic* (1993). Indeed, the extent to which Williams has divided his reading of this seminal text into several constituent and thematic parts is a testament to the far-reaching effects of Gilroy’s (re)location of the black Atlantic as a privileged if unheralded site of ethnocultural exchange. Subtitled “A Counterculture of Modernity,” the chapter concentrates on “the slaves and their descendants around the Atlantic,” examining common features of their shared culture, exchanged over time and across political borders in a form of cultural continuity that is “a consequence of their shared history of enslavement and racism” (73). Two of the key influences on Gilroy here are W.E.B. DuBois and C.L.R. James; Gilroy extends and deepens key aspects of their argumentation, highlighting how DuBois’s theory of “double consciousness” is a feature of blackness in the New World, and James’s principle that slavery and its corollaries were the unacknowledged basis for the Industrial revolution, the Enlightenment, and Marx’s critique of Western capitalism. The chapter also features cutout boxes of varying length, providing key background and analysis of the terms modernity, modernism, and postmodernism, and showing how they are related as well as how

they are distinct from one another. The chapter concludes with a salient summary of the central ways in which the African diaspora was positioned as a result of slavery, colonialism, and racism, to inscribe a counterculture to modernity as a result of their paradoxical, dual position at both center and periphery.

In Chapter 6, subtitled “The politics of vernacular culture,” Williams builds on the preceding analysis by highlighting performance and performance culture as the bedrock of a counterculture whose most pervasive form is that of music. Gilroy grounds this thesis in the refusal of an innate racial essence, opting instead for the position that “racial differences are not unchangeable but open to “endless play.” In a critical gesture, Williams inserts Gilroy into contemporary theoretical debates as he posits this approach as “a variant of postmodern thinking,” whereby race is “the product of unstable texts.” This series of positionings allows him then to inscribe the “key mode through which racial identity is transmitted and historically preserved: performance,” a conjoining of history and culture that recognizes slavery and its attendant terrors as “the *essential precondition* for black vernacular culture” (88; emphasis in the original). Key performative techniques and strategies are discussed, including the sound system, audience-specific antiphony (call and response), and a range of musical forms, including “spirituals, ragtime, blues, jazz, soul, funk, reggae and hip-hop” (94) that together epitomize what Gilroy calls “the politics of fulfillment” (95). The six “typical characteristics of black vernacular culture’s codes” (93) that Gilroy identifies – drawn on the past and elaborated in and focused on the present – highlight the core principle of cultural exchange that emerges from the praxes of transportation, confrontation and exclusion that mark the transatlantic black experience. Together, they “keep the memory of slavery alive” (93) even as they “express a critique of modernity” (94).

Chapter 8 completes the third installment of this Black Atlantic survey. Through its subtitle “diaspora and the transnational study of visual culture”, Williams shows the ways in which Gilroy’s core principle of transatlantic cultural exchange operates through a range of cultural practices shared by different groups of black people. By assessing the applicability of Gilroy’s work to the category

of diaspora and the field of visual culture, Williams demonstrates how transnational and diasporic cultural production mediate the construction of “a sense of identity and belonging” (113). In this new schema, thematic and structural similarities between communities are stressed, leading to the formation of new cultural and political entities. Here, the performative acts of “black cultural practitioners” from a variety of contexts are conjoined as a result of “their collective history of slavery and oppression.” What emerges from this reading is not only the fact that movement is stressed over origin, but the extent to which the principle and praxis of cultural exchange are not only paramount, but produce new cultural artifacts in an intriguing iteration of Edouard Glissant’s theory of creolization; “Travelers and migrants brought different cultures into contact with each other, and new cultures were produced out of this intermixture [...] these migrations inspired political movements” (114). From this extended intermingling of cultures and influences, what ultimately becomes clear is that inscriptions and expressions of black culture are not – and indeed cannot be — the property of a single nation.

The chapter that precedes this final installment, entitled “Iconization,” looks briefly at Gilroy’s assessment of the role of racialized images in contemporary society. His reading of such phenomena as the commercial success of black figures within today’s pop culture is an interesting one. Concentrating on commercial visual culture, Gilroy reads “the presentation of blackness as hyperphysicality and bodily spectacle” as a form of exploitation that “transform[s] African-American performers into fixed, static racial icons” (103). This bleak vision ultimately “sees black people as physically superior specimens but not thinking subjects” (104), so that the reinscription of the superficial essentialisms by and through which black people were re-presented seem, at bottom, barely to have moved.

As Williams shows, Gilroy’s goal has been to shift the contexts and boundaries of most discussions of race so that they take place in a more “politically astute and ethnically sensitive manner” (3). In doing so, his influence on the fields of critical race studies, cultural studies, and postcolonial studies, to name only a few, has been both profound and pervasive. Certainly *The Black Atlantic* remains far

and away his best-known and most influential work; indeed, it is almost impossible for any scholar or teacher of the history of Atlantic colonialism, slavery and resistance not to refer to it in some way or other. Yet, at the same time, it is important to note that all are not convinced, and many of the unconvinced are scholars of, or from, the African continent. Indeed, in the Introduction to a recent special issue of the journal *Research in African Literatures* entitled “Africa and the Black Atlantic,” Yogita Goyal points out that “But while Gilroy rightly critiques Afrocentric frameworks of return to Africa, he fails to provide any alternative way of thinking about Africa and offers little guidance as to how to extend his particular model to Africa” (v-vi). But such approaches are by no means new; almost twenty years ago, a 1996 special issue of *Research in African Literatures*, entitled simply “The Black Atlantic” and edited by Simon Gikandi, articulated a critique of Gilroy’s exclusion of Africa itself from his conception of the Black Atlantic. From this Africanist perspective, Gikandi, in his introduction, recognized the intrinsic value of Gilroy’s work as “a revisionist history of modernity and modernism” (1) even as he raised critical questions about the way in which Gilroy elided discussions of slavery from his thesis; for many critics, as he points out, there is “uneasiness about the haunting shadow of Africa in the making of modern culture” as well as regards “his desire to detour historicity as he tries to transcend both European rationalism and its anti-humanist critique” (2). In addition, the critic Joan Dayan, in particular, pointed out that in Gilroy’s analysis, “the idea of slavery ... becomes nothing but a metaphor” (7). A number of other contributors to the volume also accused Gilroy of neglecting the formative role of colonialism in Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America, while highlighting slavery as the primary historical crucible for modern blackness. For the African historian Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, the constraints intrinsic to Gilroy’s approach are even more clear-cut: “Gilroy’s central concern was to deconstruct the idea of the black race, to divorce it from any African essence or presence, to demonstrate its fluidity, mutability and modernity, and that black Atlantic cultural identities emerged in the transnational and intercultural spaces of the diasporic experience itself, in response to the terrors of racism and out of transoceanic transactions in which creolized and hybridized

experiences, ideas and cultural artifacts, especially music, emerged and were exchanged.” (36-7). What all of these approaches share, at bottom, is a vision of Black Atlanticism that practices an exclusionary cultural politics and displays a clear disdain for Africa.

To sum up, then, whether or not one agrees with its central tenets, it is evident that Gilroy’s work cannot be ignored or dismissed. What Paul Williams demonstrates clearly in this useful work is the extent to which Gilroy’s almost two decades of critical work have (re)shaped critical discourses of race, diaspora, culture, and identity. This is so in large part because of his work’s firm grounding in the history of slavery as the central shaping force of Atlantic modernity. In establishing his counter-narrative to modernity and to linear, progressive history, his work compels us to reassess nationalism and Pan-Africanism as well as such contemporary concepts as diaspora and transnationalism, even as we take a fresh look at the intersectional and interdisciplinary relationships among a number of well-established fields.

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Review: The Francophone Utopia

Dominic Thomas

Gary Wilder.

Freedom Time: Négritude, Decolonization and the Future of the World.
Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015. 384 pp.

Gary Wilder's *Freedom Time: Négritude, Decolonization and the Future of the World* builds, in a number of ways, on his earlier research in *The French Imperial State: Négritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (2005), updating the analysis from the interwar years to the postwar period and subsequent era of decolonization and "global restructuring" (12). Attentive readings and critiques of the creative and political writings of the Martinican poet and politician Aimé Césaire (1913-2008) and philosopher, poet and former Senegalese President Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906-2001) yield an "intellectual history" framed within a comprehensive theoretical apparatus aimed at "[inventing] forms of decolonization that would secure self-determination without the need for state sovereignty" (1). As Wilder underscores, "Not satisfied with securing a favorable place for their peoples within the existing international order, they [Césaire and Senghor] sought to transcend it; rather than simply pursue sovereignty, they envisioned unprecedented arrangements for dwelling and thinking through which humanity

could realize itself more fully” (12).

Wilder sets out to evaluate and interpret the significance and lingering pertinence of the political paradigms Césaire and Senghor conceptualized and ultimately deployed in order to rethink the symbiotic network of relations between empire and metropole: “[their] refusals to reduce decolonization to national independence derived from their convictions about the difference between formal liberation and substantive freedom” (241). “In different ways,” as Wilder writes, “Césaire and Senghor hoped to fashion a legal and political framework that would recognize the history of interdependence between metropolitan and overseas peoples and protect the latter’s economic and political claims on a metropolitan society their resources and labor had helped to create. Rather than allow France and its former colonies to be reified as independent entities in an external relationship to each other, the task was to institutionalize a long-standing internal relationship that would persist after a legal separation” (2). Having closely scrutinized “their self-conscious relationships to predecessors,” and extending the conclusions in *The French Imperial State, Freedom Time* simultaneously “looks forward from the postwar period to what Césaire and Senghor anticipated” (14), given that “Decolonization raised fundamental questions for subject peoples about the frameworks within which self-determination could be meaningfully pursued in relation to a given set of historical conditions. These were entwined with overarching temporal questions about the relationship between existing arrangements, possible futures, and historical legacies” (1).

A cursory glance at the French intellectual and political landscape today would call attention to the tenuous relationship between advocates for a concerted reckoning with colonial history and the incorporation of that historical period into the national narrative and those who refuse to do so (or remain entrenched in either a “positive” discourse pertaining to the benefits of colonial actions overseas or adopt positions of “denial” concerning documented transgressions overseas). Wilder examines the issue of the “duty of memory” and “intersecting calls for historical truth, legal reparations, state apologies, and public commemoration in order to honor suffering, remember crimes, and assume

responsibility” (41). The numerous publications of the Paris-based ACHAC Research Group (www.achac.com) focusing on the colonial legacy and postcolonial challenges in France attest to this, underscoring “the charged political stakes of historical knowledge” (41). These heated debates and “memory wars” are not therefore unrelated to the initial call during the interwar years that France “accommodate itself legally and politically to the interpenetrated and interdependent realities its own imperial practices had produced” (7), or to positions “[claiming] within ‘France’ those transformative legacies to which they were rightful heirs and attempted to reawaken the self-surpassing potentialities that they saw sedimented within it” (7). In fact, the process of imagining political affiliation later in the postwar years entailed a paradigm shift when it came to thinking of the projected outcome of emancipation, since “without understanding this distinctive orientation to anticolonialism, it is difficult to appreciate the political specificity of Césaire’s and Senghor’s pragmatic-utopian visions of self-determination without state sovereignty” (7).

As Wilder remarks, “scholarship long promoted one-sided understandings of Césaire and Senghor as either essentialist nativists or naive humanists” (8). In the case of Césaire, for example, “There were tensions within and among the different aspects of Césaire’s postwar initiatives. But once we challenge the political logic that opposes departmentalization to decolonization, it becomes easier to recognize the underlying tensions between Césaire’s anticolonial writing and his legislative initiatives, his aesthetics and politics, and his desires and acts” (20-21). To this end, *Freedom Time* shares points of commonality with Christopher L. Miller’s rejection of the harsh critiques of Césaire’s work (predominantly with reference to the interwar period), who demonstrates in *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (2008) how “The restoration for which Negritude is rightly famous” contributed to “rebuilding the broken trajectory from the New World back to Africa is effected in the *Cahier* but not [...] in any simple, straightforward, final, or ‘essentialist’ way” (338). Analogous advances in Césaire and Senghor scholarship are also evident in a number of other important recent works, most notably Bachir Souleymane Diagne’s *Léopold Sédar Senghor: L’art africain comme*

philosophie (2007), F. Abiola Irele's *The Négritude Moment: Explorations in Francophone African and Caribbean Literature and Thought* (2011), Romuald Fonkoua's *Aimé Césaire: 1913-2008* (2010), H. Adlai Murdoch's *Creolizing the Metropole: Migrant Caribbean Identities in Literature and Film* (2012), John Walsh's *Free and French in the Caribbean: Toussaint Louverture, Aimé Césaire, and Narratives of Loyal Opposition* (2013), and Cheikh Thiam's *Return to the Kingdom of Childhood: Re-envisioning the Legacy and Philosophical Relevance of Negritude* (2014). As these works, and Wilder's *Freedom Time* confirm, "rather than debate whether Césaire's and Senghor's writings were African-rooted or European influences, we should read them as *postwar* thinkers of the *postwar* period" (9) whose "reflections [...] become legible only if we recognize them as postwar thinkers of the postwar conjecture" (258).

In the eight chapters that follow (themselves augmented with a chronology of major cultural, historical, and political events [261-274], footnotes, and a comprehensive bibliography [275-384]) the introductory "Unthinking France, Rethinking Decolonization" (1-16), Chapter 2, "Situating Césaire: *Antillean Awakening and Global Redemption*" (17-48) and Chapter 3, "Situating Senghor: *African Hospitality and Human Solidarity*" (49-73) offer close readings of a broad range of works by these authors, incorporating multiple other voices – such as Suzanne Césaire and René Méné in the case of the former – and engaging with a substantial and far-reaching theoretical corpus that includes Benjamin, Derrida, Halbwachs, Adorno, Koselleck, and Arendt. The post-liberation moment was of course crucial, and Chapter 4, "Freedom, Time, Territory" (74-105) turns its attention to debates on sovereignty and territorial integrity as elaborated in the interventions of a number of key thinkers, notably Simone Weil, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Albert Camus, the latter maintaining that "traditional political thinking, focused on territorial national states, be revised" (81). Wilder fastens upon the significance of Camus' question, "Given the emerging realities of global economic interdependence and the powerful superstates, what political frameworks would best allow small or weak peoples to enjoy substantive human freedom and social justice?" (81). Chapter 4 therefore examines the range of political solutions that were considered and explored, including a

federation, various nationalist imperatives, the option of self-determination, juridical autonomy, sovereignty, and commonwealth status.

Chapter 5, “Departmentalization and the Spirit of Schoelcher” (106-132), Chapter 6, “Federalism and the Future of France” (133-166), and Chapter 7, “Antillean Autonomy and the Legacy of Louverture” (167-205) extend these and related questions (including links with Haiti and Toussaint Louverture’s reputation as a “patient and visionary political strategist” [192]) and provide comparative insights on both Césaire’s and Senghor’s distinctive approaches to the challenges associated with departmentalization and federalism, as well as their respective propositions and interventions at the Assemblée Nationale that in turn provide invaluable insights on the profoundly complex and intricate nature of deliberations at the time. These were of course unique, foundational moments in terms of a sphere of intellectual influence in the history of representation and constitutional reform at the Assemblée, since of the 64 elected representatives from overseas in 1945, 29 were from Africa, statistical figures that would remain relatively constant through the 1950s (as the work of Yves Benot, *Les Députés africains au Palais-Bourbon de 1914 à 1958*, has demonstrated), indeed levels of minority ethnic representation that remain unparalleled in the contemporary postcolonial period (as works such *La France noire. Trois siècles de présences* by Pascal Blanchard et al have shown). Ultimately, as Chapter 8, “African Socialism and the Fate of the World” (206-240) convincingly shows, gradual reorientation would invariably occur, with Senghor “[regarding] federalism and socialism as inseparable elements of a decolonization” (206), and that “In other words, socialism required federalism and federalism would renew socialism; together they would resolve Africa’s local problems, its problems with France, and France’s own problems” (214), thereby “[playing] a vanguard role in a process whereby the imperial republic would be elevated into a plural democracy” (214). Wilder methodically traces the gradual process through which Senghor’s vision and interpretation of decolonization would subsequently be “recalibrated” (225).

The concluding Chapter 9, “Decolonization and Postnational Democracy” (241-259), evaluates the “attempt to think *through* their

work about the processes and problems that defined their world and continue to haunt ours” (3) and assess their respective “plans to reorganize society, reconstitute France, and remake the global order” (241). In so doing, Wilder is also careful to avoid considering their writings as purely “instrumental” since such a gesture “forecloses the opportunity to let their thinking illuminate the problems they confronted and those that we have inherited” (243). Having said this, the post-independence political reality of sub-Saharan Africa remains relatively gloomy, and longstanding, largely unacknowledged corrupt neocolonial practices (commonly referred to as *la françafrique*) continue to define not only Franco-African relations (confirmed more recently in French military intervention in Mali), but as I argued elsewhere in *Africa and France: Postcolonial Cultures, Migration and Racism* (2013), the constitutive aspect of these imbricated transnational relations are contained in the fact that French “domestic policy and foreign policy can no longer be decoupled, since they unambiguously concern both facets of immigration: namely, the dynamics of internal race relations and policies aimed at controlling the entry of migrants into France. Naturally, these mechanisms reinforce existing paradigms concerning the criminalization of poverty in the *banlieue*, and these have been transferred to economic models that essentialize the criminality of immigrants” (70). Likewise, when it comes to assessing the Antillean context, Wilder recognizes that “To many they appear frozen in a relationship of colonial dependency” (246), an experience certainly confirmed by the actions of the Collective “Lyannaj kont pwofitasion” (Union Against Exploitation, <http://www.lkp-gwa.org/>), and their published *Manifeste pour les “produits” de Haute Nécessité* (Galaade, 2009) that included such distinguished signatories as Patrick Chamoiseau and Édouard Glissant. But this is not of course the whole picture, and “departmentalization” has enabled a formation of a distinct and autonomous juridopolitical system that does not simply mirror its metropolitan counterpart and that allows for a large degree of independent maneuvering (Wilder 248).

Wilder repeatedly emphasizes the pertinence of Césaire’s and Senghor’s postwar thinking to increasingly globalized identities given how they sought to “fashion political forms that were

democratic, socialist, and intercontinental” and in so doing “envision new forms of cosmopolitanism, humanism, universalism, and planetary reconciliation, forms that were concrete, rooted, situated, and embodied in lived experiences and refracted through particular but porous lifeworlds” (5), in other words “futures that were once imagined but never came to be, alternatives that might have been and whose unrealized emancipatory potential may now be recognized and reawakened as durable and vital legacies” (16). As such, *Freedom Time* is both an incontrovertible reference on the history of postwar France, on the history of consciousness of a crucial period of cultural, racial, and social reorientation, but also a convincing and powerful demonstration of the extent to which Césaire and Senghor “were planetary thinkers” (258) whose literary and political contributions and legacy continue to both define and haunt 21st century conversations, and maybe even to partially remedy the current deficit in interrelationality and empathy that exacerbates economic asymmetries. In other words, as Wilder argues, “how imperial history had transformed the republican nation into a polity composed of multiple cultural formations, administrative regimes, and legal systems. [And] how the fact of empire, including how colonial subjects reflected upon it, invites us to radically rethink ‘France’ itself. [...] Treating empire as an irreducible unit of analysis and refiguring France as an imperial nation-state confounds conventional distinctions among national, transnational, and international phenomena and recognizes the challenge of cultural multiplicity” (5).

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Review: V.Y. Mudimbe as Philosopher

Lewis Gordon

Pierre-Philippe Fraiture, *V.Y. Mudimbe: Undisciplined Africanism*.
Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2013. 256pp.
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Fraiture's book is a study of the thought of the main title's namesake in a manner that transcends the immediacy of the avowed subject. The subtitle brings forth the underside, through which Mudimbe's life and thought are more than such as they exemplify an idea and a challenge—namely, the question of what it means to study Africa as a place of ideas and by extension the problem, and, indeed, problematic, of the contradictions wrought from thought born and borne from that which, in hegemonic terms, is unthinkable.

Born in colonial Congo and having lived through the transition from Congo to Zaire to the Republic of Congo, V.Y. Mudimbe (formerly "Mudimbé") stands as perhaps *the* towering living exemplar of Francophone African philosophy, especially of the form affected by poststructuralism. In his thought and life, then, is also the story of the study of ideas in and about Africa in the Francophone world. That context is affected by reverberations from former colonial centers as various movements from Bergsonian vitalism

to the existentialism of Sartre and the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss. A difficulty, after all, of African engagement with European thought is the racist philosophical anthropology governing thought itself in Euro-modernity, where its (thought's) proper home is in Europe. Thus, governing the question of thought in the African context is the presupposition of its supposed homelessness there. The path from Anténor Firmin in Haiti, W.E.B. Du Bois, Edward Blyden, C.L.R. James, and Frantz Fanon in the Americas to Cheikh Anta Diop, Léopold Senghor and others in Africa is thus subsumed as effect of European radiance.

The classic response to such an epistemologically claustrophobic reading is often a collapse into a binary of Eurocentrism versus African authenticity, a false dilemma to which Fraiture pays close attention as an organizing problematic of his study. He correctly identifies Mudimbe as seeking a way beyond such constraints, oscillating more in one direction and then the other throughout his career, with the unfortunate result of his work in general being read today as simply applied poststructuralism in the study of Africa.¹

One immediate virtue of Fraiture's book is the copious examples of the political history of Congo/Zaire/Congo and his reminder of Mudimbe's *existential* leanings, which, as many should realize, are not always well aligned with poststructuralism and structuralism. For example, Fraiture offers Mudimbe's objection "that Lévi-Strauss's anthropology is a 'Kantisme sans sujet transcendantal' [Kantianism without a transcendental subject]" (p. 92). Mudimbe's erudition and creativity reached for intelligent reflection wherever he could find it, even amidst upheavals in which thought became a threat, as Fanon had earlier lamented in *Les Damnés de la terre* in his discussion of nationalism, to avowed causes of national development.

¹ The critics are many. See, e.g., Oyèrónké Oyiewùmí, *African Women and Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), and see also Kwame Gyekye's, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, rev. edn (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995) and my discussion in *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008) of his position as a more nuanced position than applied poststructuralism.

Mudimbe, as many of us who know him immediately recognize, is an exemplar of scholarly dignity constantly on the verge of a collapse into scholasticism. This appearance often leads to misrepresentations of the man, who, for many, is as indecipherable as the many codes he explores in his recent writings. To read him demands always reading beneath the printed words in layers of subterranean possibilities. This doesn't elide moments of public manifestations of his efforts, which Fraiture invites us to consider in terms of Mudimbe's own political investments:

Mudimbe is not a political activist in the truest sense of the word but from the very early days of his academic career he was driven by an ambition to develop, by way of a historical and epistemological analysis of colonialism and neo-colonialism, a socially transformative set of principles (p. 84).

Fraiture makes it clear that anti-colonial and liberation struggles emerge on many levels, including those that are academic and intellectually public. In Mudimbe's native country, this took form in the work of a variety of intellectual giants of which Mudimbe is one. Particularly useful is Fraiture's discussion of Katumbagana Kangafu (the authenticity line), Johannes Fabian (challenging imposed primitivism in anthropological conceptions of denied coevalness or "allochronism"), and Benoît Vernhaegen (on the question of historical anthropology in Africa). Primitive man was the proverbial bread and butter of Euro-modern anthropology, which placed African intellectuals, as primitive subjects, outside of the legitimate frameworks of their own study, a phenomenon continued through the hegemonic formulation of African studies as a white discipline.² To overcome this circumstance of epistemic dependency and colonization, Africans interested in the study of Africa must, in the end, demonstrate their contemporaneity *as Africans*. Fraiture outlines this debate well, with the virtue of including Mudimbe's

² For an outline of this debate, see my discussion in *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy*, pp. 211 and 220.

African Fault Lines, his most recent reflections on this problem.³

The path to *African Fault Lines* is marked, however, by Mudimbe's most influential theoretical work in the English language, his Herskovits Award-winning *The Invention of Africa*.⁴ An important achievement of Fraiture's study is the contextualizing of the debates that accompanied Mudimbe to the United States at a time in which French poststructuralism had taken the Anglophone academies by storm and in effect transformed the relationship of literature departments to the rest of the humanities and social sciences. Mudimbe was welcomed in that environment under the unfortunate expectations of being an African Foucault, despite his long history of thinking through the question of what the Jamaican novelist and poststructural theorist Sylvia Wynter would call the human after the imposition of, according to Foucault in his analysis of the effective object of the human sciences, "man" in Africa. He took as his critical task the interrogation and unraveling of the calcified disciplinary models of an Africa in which lived, even when closely studied, no human beings. Thus, Fraiture's identification of the existential elements of Mudimbe's thought offers insight into the project at hand in this great work and the reasons for its methodological interrogations—similar to Fanon's on method despite the avowed connections to Foucault—of seeking alternative ways of knowing (*gnosis*) and, by implication, studying.

Fraiture's discussion of Mudimbe's relation to Blyden, whom, contra Senghor, he situates not solely in terms of his influence on Negritude but also as a proto-version of his own intervention on the construction or invention of Africa in which Africanism and African studies, as a human science, emerged as an effect of a search for a type of "man," in this case "the African," is illuminating. Fraiture meticulously works his way through the twists and turns of Mudimbe's archaeology of Africanism, of which African

³ V.Y. Mudimbe, *On African Fault Lines: Meditation on Alterity Politics* (Scottville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013).

⁴ V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988).

philosophy (a particular way of knowing) is a part. African philosophy is, however, bifurcated by the Africanist forms of reductionism that led to ethnophilosophy on one hand and an effort to move beyond its pitfalls, which, Fraiture correctly points out, isn't as neat a divide as it at first appears (p. 138).

To this I should like to add, as it is not made explicit, the peculiarly *metaphilosophical* dimensions of this argument. Though assessing the status of particular forms of philosophy is also a philosophical enterprise, we should bear in mind that it is not necessarily so. There could be sociological, psychological, anthropological, and more in terms of ways of knowing philosophy, and Mudimbe's appeal to *gnosis* is a way of not privileging even varieties of philosophical ways of doing the same. Thus although the critique of ethnophilosophy resurrects the earlier critical work on authenticity, there is as well the important question of the lived-reality of knowing beyond the metaphilosophical exercise *on* knowing. Here, there is an ironic element of the overall argument, as the privileging of *knowing* is a patently Euro-modern philosophical enterprise in which epistemology is advanced as first philosophy. Moving into the things to know, the analyses and ways of knowing themselves, may, as Kwame Gyekye argued, offer insights *from which* to build questions of African philosophy.⁵ This is akin to flying so high above that one forgets there are situations working themselves out below. Gyekye, who by the way is sympathetic to Mudimbe's argument about invention, which he takes K. Anthony Appiah to task for misrepresenting, offers as a synthesis of Akan critical thought and professional philosophical argumentation for the greater goal of working through problems of lived relevance to Akan and related African peoples. I would characterize this task as a teleological suspension of philosophy, where a philosopher is willing to go beyond philosophy as narrowly conceived in her or his training for the sake of reality or greater ethical and political challenges.⁶

⁵ See Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*.

⁶ See Lewis R. Gordon, *Disciplinary Decadence: Living Thought in Trying Times*, (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2006).

A virtue of Fraiture's study is the wealth of ideas from African and non-African thinkers it offers. It is a demonstration of a point argued in much recent Africana philosophy, namely, that engagement with African thought is a relational enterprise, which means that learning about Africa always incorporates its relationship to the proverbial "rest of us." Paget Henry has, drawing on Du Bois, aptly described this as a form of potentiated double consciousness.⁷ Whereas Eurocentric scholarship fails to see its particularity through self-delusions of universality, African-focused scholarship is always aware of what is at work beyond Africa precisely because of the ever-cognizant reality of Africa as a *produced* or invented reality through which its inventors are able to hide from their own constructivity. I bring this up because of the absence of this important intellectual contribution in Fraiture's study. Mudimbe's *Invention of Africa* is at no point a metaphysical correction through appeal to "real universality." It is thus a plea for an ongoing practice of self-interrogation as part of the epistemic decolonial enterprise, which Fraiture acknowledges early on when he writes: "To my initial question "the West or the rest?", Mudimbe would most certainly answer "the Rest *and* the West" (p. 112).

Appealing to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's formulation of "Empire," Fraiture concludes the book with a discussion of Achille Mbembe's and Mudimbe's recent writings as converging with Hardt and Negri's observation of declining nation-states and centerless sovereignty (pp. 187–188). Though not Fraiture's intention, the logic is seamless with the continued leitmotif of Euro-modern—or perhaps Euro-postmodern—legitimation practice, for, as anyone who reads Fanon and even C.L.R. James could attest, Hardt and Negri's observations on the disintegration of neat models of revolutionary subjects, nation-states, and sovereignty, from the perspective of Africana philosophy, are late comers to an already problematic discourse. Hardt and Negri in this context are, simply, unnecessary.

⁷ See Paget Henry, "Africana Phenomenology: Its Philosophical Implications," *The C. L. R. James Journal* 11, no. 1 (2005): 79–112.

Though an excellent study in terms of contextualizing the formative years of Mudimbe's thought and its relevance for studying the contemporary condition of global disintegration and realignments, this book also suffers from a problem in British scholarship and its imitations in the global south—namely, the tendency to exclude scholarship outside of the framework of the UK, France, and Germany and their satellites in former colonies. Mudimbe played a central role, after all, in the development of African philosophy in the United States beyond simply his moving there and his monograph *The Invention of Africa*. The near avalanche of writings and citations from African Diasporic scholars there and in the Caribbean and South America, in addition to his impact on debates in such developments as Decolonial Studies, which include his Duke University colleague Walter D. Mignolo and Nahum Chandler (now at University of California at Irvine), are absent in Fraiture's portrait, even though the most recent exemplars of Mudimbe's writings and those in the British academy are present. The consequence of this failure is not merely demographic. The inclusion of critical considerations from the Jamaican Sylvia Wynter, whose explorations of poststructuralist debates in the American academy and their relevance for theory in the now global south is akin to Mudimbe's majestic intellectual journeys, would have enhanced the reader's understanding of Mudimbe's global significance (as Wynter recognizes his importance for the study of secularized transformations of theological concepts such as theodicy). A similar consideration is there with regard to Nahum Chandler and also the very critical feminist voices of Oyèrónké Oyewùnmí and Nkiru Nzegwu.⁸

This is not to say the overall value of this book is wanting. I doubt very much that Fraiture imagines offering *the* story of Mudimbe, and his reflections at the end suggest that the study is a portrait of disciplinary practices in which Mudimbe played a major

⁹ Oyewùnmí, Nkiru Nzegwu, *Family Matters: Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy of Culture* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000).

part and is himself also symptomatic. We therefore have here a very rich and erudite part of an important story, which, with proper supplements, contributes much against varieties of misunderstanding of the thought of one of Africa's greatest sons and the contemporary world's finest thinkers.

Review: The Idea of Marronage

Teodros Kiros

Neil Roberts.

Freedom as Marronage, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015

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Political Theory will not look the same again, now that Professor Neil Roberts has challenged some of the dominant premises of the discipline on the perennial topic of freedom as it applies to the lives of blacks in the Caribbean world. Roberts promises his readers that he will engage two questions:

- (1) “What are some distinct concepts of freedom emerging out of the experience of slavery?”
- (2) What important insights does analyzing the relationship between slavery and freedom provide to political theorists that they do not know, have ignored, or have not sufficiently investigated? (Introduction, p, 3).

To address (1), he uses the rich concept of marronage to provide an understanding of the world of slaves as they heroically sought to survive the desolate, cruel and suffocating temporality and spatiality

of slavery, by refusing to become socially dead. Social death was challenged by the refusal to die. Negation was displaced by affirmation. Roberts begins to present his understanding of marronage early on as follows:

Marronage (maroonage, maronage) conventionally refers to a group of persons isolating themselves from a surrounding society in order to create a fully autonomous community, and for centuries it has been integral to interpreting the idea of freedom in Haiti as well as other Caribbean Islands, and in Latin American countries including the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Brazil, Cuba, Colombia and Mexico (p. 4).

Conventional political theory has not focused on these ancient geographies of slavery. Equipped with the heuristic concept of marronage, Roberts takes us to these places of slaves surviving their situation through the prism of the political imaginary and poetic vision.

Roberts gives us extensive portraits of slaves locating themselves on mountains faraway from the corrupt and wretched cities to think, dream and act as they organize themselves to fly towards the sunlight of freedom and away from the corrosive weight of slavery. Slaves say no to social death and yes to freedom through the resources of marronage. Passion, imagination and self-organizing are the vehicles of marronage. Slaves on the hills are not merely dreaming to overcome. They are overcoming by acting. The dreams themselves are contours of a future society, potential locations of a new reality principle. Marronage is an exercise of Great refusal and the recognition that every newly born slave is a potential agent of change, a harbinger of novelty, and of revolution, understood deeply as the birth of innovation and new location of autonomous communities of free human beings, new leaves, as Fanon would have called them.

Whereas political theory has ignored these new geographies of reason as in the Haitian Revolution, Roberts originally treats them as new and rich data from which the notion of natality, as defined by Hannah Arendt) could benefit and by which political theory could take a new turn towards the poetics and historicism of marronage.

Social death is displaced by natality. Roberts insists that

marronage is not merely a negation of social death but rather an original home of the political imaginary, the imaginary of vision, action, ethics and more importantly, the zone of being. Marronage moves slaves from the zone of non-being to the zone of being by their very own self-activities of reason in concert with emotion.

Roberts puts it best, “Flight from the zone of nonbeing involves struggle and assertion, and creates the possibility for actualizing revolutions against slavery through the natality involved in its processes of movement” (p. 20).

Flight from slavery is a dynamic movement in time; it is not as in conventional political theory, a static frozenness in time. Slaves are acutely aware of temporality, of the transitory nature of servitude, which they consciously regulate by the agency of the political imaginary in order not to succumb to the ontological status of servitude.

The possibility of freedom, argues Roberts, is imagined by marronage, the self-activity of the slave subjects, the innovators of their life chances after they overcome the temporary condition of slavery (55).

If no condition is permanent, why should slavery be a deviation from this rule of reason and the situatedness of the human slave? Slavery like everything human is temporary and slaves were deeply aware of this and they withstood the horrors of their condition with the heroic attitude that they were going to overcome it by effective political action mediated by Marronage. Natality as a practice of freedom in the Caribbean context makes creolized language and human beings as inherent in the slave condition. The Caribbean world is a world of mixing, a world of interracial languages. For Roberts, Glissant is the late modern voice of creolization, which began on slave ships, plantations and the postcolonial streets of the Caribbean world.

There, as Jane Gordon has argued in *Creolizing Political Theory*, new subjects and languages come into being on parallel lines, which meet at the tangent of time and space. In these new zones of being, nothing is permanent and there are no absolutes (145). Styles of existence, ethics of living and possibilities of being are fluid, ever changing. They are dynamically blended in Creolization as a practice of the Caribbean self. There are possibilities of being without

an absolute being. Creolization thus understood is Plantation, Rhythm, and performance (145) in which Slaves suffer and dream, sing and also write and document their lives, as in the case of Frederick Douglass, the black symbol of resistance. He is the first modern practitioner of marronage in the heat of slavery.

Principled resistance has now become the style of marronage in the practices of the Rastafari, the perpetual survivors. *Freedom as Marronage* ends with a brilliant chapter on Marronage as a vocation and as a definitive answer to question (2), which Roberts addresses in these words: “Marronage is neither reducible to fleeing from states nor to movement within state borders. It is perpetual flight from slavery and an economy of survival. Late modernity poses obstacles to the achievement and maintenance of this vocation. But then again, the absence of a struggle to survive on the landscape would mean that we had not experienced the process of becoming free in the first place.” (171).

It is these living practices of survival that Glissant and Roberts following him find in the act of marronage, and they give the concept of marronage its contemporary radiance and its heuristic power.

Review: Daughters of the Empire

Odile Cazenave

Marie-Paule Ha. *French Women and The Empire. The case of Indochina.* Oxford University Press, 2014, 283 pages.

While the scholarship on French colonial history, the role and status of colonizers and the dynamics involved between colonizers and colonized, is quite abundant, few have looked at women specifically, particularly when it comes to Indochina.

Well-detailed and thorough, Marie-Paule Ha's writing of colonial women's history is most compelling. In her introductory chapter, pondering on the writer Marguerite Duras's portrayal of her mother—Marie Donnadiou—as impecunious and vulnerable, Ha raises a number of key questions about the paradoxes of French women in the Empire, and how they fared economically and socially speaking. In her unpacking of the term "French women", Ha evidences that these questions do not pertain to an issue of status and economic situation alone, but also extend to research methodology and access to archives, including the implications of using personal letters and narratives made public.

Chapter 2 on Gender and migration details the origins of these women, where they were coming from, why, how many of them were single, how many married, and in what capacity they came.

In the process, Ha retraces a history of familial colonialism and the shifting perceptions of colonies as a safety valve and a site for disenfranchised people. She shows that the idea of the potential benefits of bringing women to the French empire was modeled after the approach of the British Empire with regard to the formative role British women were considered to have played in the British colonies. Part of the rationale for female emigration, as Ha points out, was also due to economics, and what was considered an “excess” of single white-collar women, who could not find adequate employment in the metropole; whose lack of financial support, and of a dowry, essentially disqualified them for marriage. Organizations such as SFEF (Société Française d’Emigration des Femmes) and OCFE (Oeuvre Coloniale des Femmes Françaises), helped further promote the idea of French female emigration as an anchoring of French cultural presence.

The chapters that follow proceed to debunk a number of clichés about French women and the Empire. Chapter 3 revisits the idea of a mission imparted to the *coloniale*, and the expectations placed on these young women in terms of education, homemaking, motherhood or wifehood, all aiming at recreating the national French *habitus* of the metropole. At the same time, they were also “called upon to serve as emissaries of progress” (67) and bond with their native counterparts, essentially in the areas of social chores, knowledge, manners, and health care. Chapter 4 explores further the promotion of female emigration through a number of government strategies: via colonial literature, through advertisements and products, songs (such as the *Tonkinoise*), photographs and postcards, government periodicals and *bulletins*, informational talks, lectures on health issues or on a specific area such as *Cochinchina* or *Tonkin*. A number of these were geared to the female readership and audience, and successfully so, which brings Ha to raise several astute questions: about “measures [to] be taken to prevent the growth of a white female proletariat that would undoubtedly seriously jeopardize white prestige in the colonies” (99), about the possibility of underemployment or unemployment for female labor, yet the overwhelming silence in literature at the time; about the impact and success of promotional literature on migrating to Indochina. Also examined is the double

bind situation in which the colonial administration was caught: “In conflating whiteness and superiority, the colonial administration found itself confronted with two similarly unpalatable alternatives of white pauperism and miscegenation, both of which were equally damaging to white hegemony” (115).

In Chapter 5, looking at census, maps, and demographics, Ha reflects on the definition of “Français d’Indochine,” and the role of origins, mixed heritage, settlement, or naturalization. Her analysis of figures and documents demonstrates most convincingly that contrary to the initial expectations—that the presence of French women would encourage European marriages—the reality was that there were many more mixed unions; that marriages between a French woman and a native man were frowned upon, not to say sabotaged, by the French colons and administrators. The last section explores the numbers of single French women and reasons that may account for it.

Going back to Marie Donnadiou’s plight as a “defenseless widow, bereft of a male protector” (159), Chapter 6 focuses on “poor, white, single” women and colonial gender politics. Ha puts pressure on a number of assumptions, notably, that “the colony was no place for white single women” (150). She ponders the reasons why Marie Donnadiou’s situation may not have been that unusual because of a high mortality rate of soldiers in tropical climates during the period of conquest, and decimation due to illness that affected civilians as well. In response to this situation, a circular was issued, reserving a number of positions with customs or the postal services for surviving members (orphaned daughters and widows) of deceased colons. Once they married or remarried, they lost these positions. Chapter 7 explores another scenario—the case of single women, that is, professional *coloniales*. These were *institutrices* (primary public school teachers) and the purpose and type of teaching they were to provide, their modes of recruitment and the terms of their service. Women healthcare personnel including physicians, constituted another category. Ha notes the relatively low number of accepted applications, especially during the interwar years. “Given the centrality of the civilizing mission in colonial politics,” she remarks, “why did the government not capitalize on these opportunities to showcase the moral, cultural, and material

superiority of the mother country?" (197). Because of sexism, most positions of physicians were held by men, and barely a dozen of women physicians got a position in Indochina during colonial times. Finally, in chapter 8, Ha examines French women as spouses and mothers, and their homemaking of the Empire. She re-appraises a number of assumptions on home décor, interactions with Vietnamese servants and nannies, expectations put on women spouses as hostesses, and their ability to re-create a French table, home, and bring an air of "Frenchness" to the colonies.

Ha's conclusions leave us with a set of provocative questions and perceptive remarks on the surprising heterogeneity of the French female population in terms of class, and ethnic, cultural and educational affiliations (250). Undoubtedly, with *French Women and the Empire*, Marie-Paule Ha has contributed a great piece to the "vast puzzle" and to our understanding of the colonial gender politics of the Third Republic (250).

Review: Voices of Global Africa: Reconsidering Sissako's *Bamako*

Sara C. Hanaburgh

One might argue that inscribed in the phrase, “global Africa,” is a sense that Africans are reconquering a term that has mostly been an invention of the West. What is currently referred to as globalization is an economic and political system which, in spite of claims its proponents assert, displaces and relegates Africans to the periphery of the global political economy. Thinkers and artists critical of globalization as a dominant form of control urge an understanding of globalization not only as a financial and political system, but also, inevitably, cultural. A re-imaging/re-imagining of globalization and its processes is particularly notable in African cinemas. Increasingly since the 1990s, Francophone, Anglophone, Southern African and Nollywood productions stand out not only for their innovativeness and the ways in which they renew notions of global cinema, but also for their resonant demands for African voices in globalization. In many respects, Francophone African filmmaking has taken on an active, pioneering role in bringing Africans to voice on a global scale. The films of the late Ousmane Sembène are most often cited in this regard (Diop 2004; Gadjigo 2010). Among the “New Millennium” directors, Abderrahmane Sissako has received considerable attention in academic and public forums, as well as at numerous international film festivals for his

2006 film, *Bamako*, which stages a simulated trial of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (Armes, 145). Ironically, emphasis on the film as an overt denunciation of globalization has not only limited discussions of how Sissako's innovative artistic strategies probe at theoretical notions, but it has also stifled the voices of global Africa that the talented director brings to the big screen.

Sissako weaves a sort of macramé of discursive modes together with compelling imagery, and with that, creates his own film language of resistance to the exclusionary processes of globalization. He utilizes the cinematic medium as a transmitter of the voices of global Africa, which is the focus of this essay.

Bamako poses the problem of Africa's exclusion from the global economy and its effects in a transnational context. Sissako's exposé mobilizes in particular the anti-colonial discourse of the late Martinican poet and thinker, Aimé Césaire. References to the precise historic discursive language of Césaire signal the filmmaker's attentiveness to the continuous oppression that Europe exerts over Africans, forty years following independence, placing Sissako's stance in his creative production alongside that of other Malian artists, writers, intellectuals and scholars, such as Aminata Dramane Traoré and Hamadou Hampaté Bâ— each of whom in their own writings overtly recall Césaire's call for Africans to come to voice. Sissako's resistance is clearly modeled after some of Césaire's principal ideas and is enunciated through an artfully crafted film language. Privileging the body and voice as cinematic sites, the filmmaker's language of resistance is achieved at once through discursive means, poetic imagery, *mise en abîme*, and a rich "soundscape" – not simply the sound effects and dialogue, but also the overlapping of speech, sound effects, music and dialogue (Stilwell 167-8).

The adaptation of a Césarian "cri" to address late 20th and early 21st century globalization is striking, even if it is evoked much more subtly than in the filmmaker's earlier feature, *La vie sur terre* (1998). Nonetheless, a subtext of anti-colonial discourses merges with the articulations that bring the characters in *Bamako* to voice against the present silencing mechanisms of western global dominance. One of the few overt references to the poet in the film occurs during plaintiff Professor Keita's testimony where he cites Césaire in his

address to the court. This example is significant in the context of the overall message that Sissako aims to convey through his film, which he stated in an interview: “J’ai toujours eu envie de faire un film qui dirait que, aux gens, les explications qu’on donne très souvent à la situation de l’Afrique, c’est à dire, sont très, trop simplistes pour moi. Dire que c’est parce qu’ils ont des chefs d’état corrompus et c’est tout, je pense que c’est pas la vérité [...]” (2009). With these words, Sissako points to a complex set of historic issues—just as the professor does in the film with the reminder he provides about the long history of Western dominance on African states that began with colonization. Sissako’s concern is with an analysis that can go beyond the present internal political and economic problems, linking past and present, to an historical “global” experience.

Exemplary of such global experience, Sissako’s film delves into the important theme of immigration during the testimony of Madou Keita. It is a striking flashback scene in which a group of thirty young Africans—from Guinea-Conakry, Ghana, Liberia and Mali—embark upon a trek across the Sahara desert in hopes of reaching Spain. However, the journey becomes one of death, as they are all turned away upon reaching the borders of Morocco and Algeria. Keita, who is among the few to survive the trip, narrates; and his testimony is paired with imagery which in effect gives much more resonance to the story. The scenes are exemplary of the ways in which the filmmaker pairs voice and silence in the film as an instrument for expressing bodily experience. Particularly forceful is the insertion of a series of projected images accompanied by a silent soundtrack—as if the viewer of the film, *Bamako*, is now watching another film—that match the actions and movements of the group in the desert exactly as Madou Keita recounts them in his testimony. Furthermore, interspersed among these frames is a series of cuts to the daily activities inside the courtyard: young women dyeing fabric as they listen to the story of the youths; a young Malian man the same age as the migrants who stares directly into the camera, framed by two pieces of dyed cloth; a pool of water rung out from the dye process, deep red in color, seeping yet stagnant on the earth of the courtyard as if it were blood; and, finally, an audio track where a small group of men and women speak of the recent passing of their friend, Raymond, whose cause of death is an unexplainable

“nothing” since there were no health services to help him (*Bamako* 33:04).

The aborted migration scenes alongside the metaphoric trail of ants that fill the final frames of this film within a film produce a call to consciousness as to some of the most devastating effects of globalization. With its artistic mastery, the sequence makes a strong statement: whereas borders are practically nonexistent for tradable goods, humans do not flow so easily across lines of political demarcation, particularly when seeking a better economic situation. The global system relies upon African migrants and immigrants to carry out laborious tasks both on the continent as well as in global cities; however, their labor is not rewarded with laws and policies that incorporate value and protect them.

Additionally, Sissako’s manipulation of narrative structures, such as the courtroom drama, masks a much more carefully crafted artistic response to the contemporary questions that globalization raises for the human population in general today. With regard to the setting of the film itself, Sissako’s film literally creates a space where the effects of globalization are shown to be relevant to local, daily life as well as to the region overall. The courtyard doubles as the interior of a family compound and at the same time serves as the international court for the legal proceedings of Sissako’s fictional trial of the IMF/World Bank. The visual and audio texts that make up the soundscape inside and just outside the walls of this courtyard tell a parallel story and reveal Sissako’s critical examination of a Western-driven consumerist globalization. In this way, the soundscape provides an alternate narrative that shows and comments on the negative effects of globalization on the privatized, daily lives of African children, women and men. In addition, *Bamako*’s use of five cameras invites viewers to rethink the dominant voice over of the West and, rather, recast the Franco-American duo as the outmoded cowboy.

In one of the two very divergent roles he plays in the film, American actor, Danny Glover, alongside Sissako himself and postcolonial filmmaker Elia Suleiman, play ruthless cowboys in the spaghetti western film within a film, “Death in Timbuktu.” The blurring of fiction and reality in these exemplary scenes are merely a few of the instances where Sissako deftly manipulates image

through a mirroring technique that ultimately points to globalization as a closed system, one which is set up by and in service of Western-driven consumer society *à la Baudrillard*.

In the quiet of the evening, the court/yard is returned to those who live inside the compound. The viewer sees a family—mostly children—settling in to watch a movie on TV. The setting is the Sudanic-style adobe walled city of Timbuktu. The streets are rather still, with the exception of a young woman and her baby and a boy; and the camera zooms in close enough on the boy on a bicycle to decipher the word “Rambo” painted across its frame. Cut to the stars of the film, two sets of rivaling cowboys—obviously from out of town—take their places for a shoot-out. When one cowboy tells another to “spare the kids,” the action in this movie takes on a life of its own, though still, mostly, imitating the cowboy western. Instead of shooting one of the other cowboys, the first to draw his pistol strikes down a man, a villager who was just passing through the streets.

As this film within a film continues with some bullets hitting the rival cowboys, others ricochet, and the next fallen victim is a woman. The camera (of the film within a film) zooms in on her inert body; and the baby she had been carrying lies crying on her stomach. The camera shifts to show the viewer (of *Bamako*) the attentive eyes of one of the boys in the family as he watches his family’s evening entertainment. Cut back to the images on the small TV screen: The cowboys gather as the shooter is roaring with laughter. He says: “I fired once and two fell.” And, at this, most of the other cowboys fall over laughing hysterically. The main camera shifts once again to film the family watching the scene; and after a brief moment of silence, all the young children join the cowboys in laughter. One cowboy (Danny Glover) is appalled; and he shoots the cowboy that started the hysteria. The scene erupts into a full on shoot-out; and, although the cowboys are mostly just putting bullets in the air, one frame zooms in on the dead cowboy and the title screen appears: “Death in Timbuktu” (*Bamako* 39:47).

By creating this *mise en abîme*, where the viewer watches a film (*Bamako*) and the characters in the film look back at this viewer as they watch a film, Sissako carries out an interesting critique of globalization and its dominant feature of western-driven

consumerism in particular. Using again an American genre—though this time one that has had tremendous popular success in West Africa—the filmmaker likens the ruthless violence of the cowboy in the film to the fatal destruction of globalization. While the *western* symbolizes in so many ways America and the popular culture it has exported throughout most of the globe via Hollywood, it also stands in as a metaphor for the pleasure in consuming violence and the violence of the image. Sissako’s cowboy movie asks the viewer of *Bamako* to rethink such enjoyment, and not on the grounds of some kind of moral purity that rejects violence on the big screen for being unwholesome; rather, he mirrors the viewer through the little children who are led to laugh as they watch the killings of an innocent man, woman and the uncertain fate of a motherless child. Here Sissako takes a stand against the normalcy of projecting on the big screen the African bodies—dead, slaughtered, or hungry or poor—that the West has created through its media empires.

Bamako also brings to the fore and contests Western modes of self-fashioning where, as Achille Mbembe has argued, Africans are projected as a “negative” image of whiteness. The film achieves this in part by mirroring the active role of the West in sustaining problems, such as violence, poverty, untreatable illness, and death. Visually, the film shows the West literally imposing itself inside the walls of a family compound in order to attempt to defend the actions of the global institutions the defense represents. Also, the five cameras that Sissako uses draw the viewer into life on the continent as a sort of reality as opposed to the West’s “reality” that dominates lives through media, consumerism, and global policies.

Moreover, metaphorically, the international court itself—which the court in the film represents (or even parodies)—is shown to be at once a product and a recipient of the benefits of a closed system. Emblematic of this is the filmmaker’s very choice to represent court proceedings, because it points to the broader question of an open—public (democratic?)—globalization in contrast to the closed system of a small elite engaged in privatization schemes. In an interview, Sissako reminds his listeners and viewers that, indeed, the “procès c’est un genre américain” (2008). He utilizes the genre as a primary narrative in order to expose and resist Western dominance. The formal setting and proceedings of the court are a metaphor for the

dominant language of the global powers and the privatizations they promote and which are in service of their interests. On a meta-level, the manipulation of the courtroom genre is also a means of de-centering representational strategies associated with the Western canon as the supreme cinematic standard or model.

In contrast to a Western model, the film projects various modes of oral expression that assert not only a richness and diversity of cultures, but also dignified voices that establish their eagerness to be productive participants in global decisions.

Particularly, like in his previous production, *La vie sur terre*, this film also relies upon language as a mode not only of resistance to globalization, but also as a way of asserting African agency. In *Bamako*, the African plaintiffs who take the stand argue not only on behalf of Malian, but also Cameroonian, Ghanaian, Guinean, Ivorian, Nigerien and Senegalese experiences in the simulated trial. Notably, in spite of their diversity, none of the witnesses who speak at the trial speak the same *language* as the IMF/World Bank. On one level this means that often a witness speaks an African language, such as Bambara, which is translated on the spot into French. As the official language of the court, French maintains a position of power and offers a constant reminder of its colonial legacy and continuous potency in the context of globalization. Further, French also metonymically represents the rules of the court as *language*—the acceptable ways in which a witness may present proof for his or her argument, the order in which individuals may speak, the duration of their testimony and when they must conclude their remarks and sit down. The trial lawyers on both sides adhere strictly to these rules and deliver constant reprimands to African witnesses who do not oblige. Moreover, the court language is shown to be a form of one-sided communication; the court is ultimately the party responsible that turns on (and off) the loudspeakers that disseminate the court proceedings throughout the nearby streets just outside the compound. Each of these aspects of the French language in its dual sense shows it to be integral to the silencing mechanism of globalization.

Sissako counters the dominant language by privileging the language of African characters. By language, I mean that which the late Édouard Glissant refers to as integral to his theory of relation.

Distinct from its relational counterpart, “*langue*”—the language in which one speaks (French, English or Bambara, for instance)—Glissant’s concept of language (“*language voice*” or *language*) is the means by which one understands the Other: “I speak to you in your language voice [your tongue], and it is in my *language use* [my own language] that I understand you” (*Poetics* 107, my emphasis). The film highlights, for instance, diverse traditions and indigenous languages that make up the social fabric of Malian and other African cultures of the region. Stylistically, the filmmaker mirrors the multiplicity of languages and cultures as desirous in obtaining a voice in globalization by overlaying dialogue with other elements of the soundscape, such as the squeaking of a baby’s booties, the droning hum of the loudspeakers when silence resounds, speech, and visual scenes of daily life that literally move through or take place inside the court/yard walls. The prosecution’s witnesses engage a rigorous debate that effectively problematizes the *language* of the court so that the latter will hear the former and understand their experiences through the privileged *language* of West African cultural expressions.

One cultural form that Sissako privileges and celebrates is “orality.” Evoking strong cultural connotations, orality sets rhythm, inflects voice and functions as a rhetorical device (Irele 32). The most resonating example of orality occurs during the pre-credit opening sequence (and in a later scene toward the end of the film) with Zégué Bamba’s elocution of his desire to tell his story and be heard. His arrival at the witness podium already elicits a quelling of his testimony by the court and, consequently, underlines the great rift that exists between the *language* of the international court and that of a shepherd from rural Mali. In addition, difference—cultural, linguistic, of experience—is marked by Bamba’s use of Bambara in this scene, which the court translates into French.

Incorporated as well into the dynamic notion of language in the film, is silence, which proves especially effective in the mode of resistance. In spite of the judge’s repeated orders for him to sit down and wait his turn, Bamba does not accept being silenced; nor does he accept the rules of the court, which, as his words point out, are inorganic to the desire to speak and engage in dialogue: “Words are something [...] They can seize you in your heart. It’s bad if you

keep them inside.” His utterance of these first few words already evokes his culture—his *language*; and the court’s insistence that he come back when it is his turn to speak does not suppress his resistance to the court’s—and by extension—globalization’s silencing. Rather, insistent upon dialogue, he proceeds, beginning with a proverb: “The goat has its ideas and so does the hen. When you come for something, you have to do it [...] But coming and leaving without speaking [...] My words will not remain within me” (*Bamako* 4:40). Whereas he does not literally give testimony according to the court’s standards in this segment, the words of Zégué Bamba mark the first enactment of a language of resistance in the film. He replies in his own language—at once in the literal sense as well as metaphorically in a way that effectively sets the stage for characters’ refusal to remain silent throughout the entire trial.

Zégué Bamba does return to bear witness to his experiences toward the end of the trial, as he promised he would. He rises up and passes by the audience unable to contain his voice any longer; and, unlike during his first attempt, this time he commands the attention of the court and everyone present inside and outside the walls of the compound—including the viewer, whose focalized gaze shifts directly to him and the performative testimony he delivers. He speaks and sings this time in a language his listeners do not understand; and this untranslatability—of what he is saying, of the language he is speaking, and of the place he comes from culturally—makes his testimony stand out even more as a refusal of the language of the trial and what it represents in the larger context of globalization. Sissako’s select editing and his choice to incorporate the scenes with Zégué Bamba show that the film advocates cross-cultural listening and an understanding of *other* experiences that are routinely ignored in Western-led globalization, left out, silenced.

As cinematic text, *Bamako* is an artistic response to a certain historical phase—a third phase—to which one increasingly refers as the current “globalization.” Sissako’s references to Césaire’s anticolonial posture in his 2006 film rely upon the familiarity of both his characters *and* his viewers with such a discourse to question a shared set of concerns about colonization and globalization. The film responds to the social, economic and political conditions of a

certain historical moment and in the specific context of former colonies of France, with clear references to French colonial history, and evidences an attempt to respond to the long-debated postcolonial theoretical problem of whether the subaltern can speak. This essay has thus focused on an historical poetics. I use “poetics” to draw attention to the rich texture of Sissako’s film—its various modes of cultural expression, its strength in producing visual narratives, and its appropriation of narrative structures. Further, in David Bordwell’s conceptualization of poetics, authorial intention is inscribed in a film, and this can translate not only to indicate a *cinémad’auteur*, but also evokes that the filmmaker consciously takes a political stance (2008). The making of the film itself is one side of a political act that functions as a complement to the film’s content and the interpretations it elicits. The filmmaker is thus equipped to recast the way one perceives inter-cultural relations; as a result, he or she is also (ideally) actively engaged in producing rhetorical changes to such perceptions and has influence over future cultural interactions. Finally, an historical poetics is revealing of the metadiscourse inscribed in *Bamako* as an individual work which this author sees as one component of a larger corpus of cinematic and literary works.

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WHEN LEMONS GROW ON ORANGE TREES

Diekara Oloruntoba-Oju

KRAFT

WHEN
LEMONS
GROW ON
ORANGE
TREES

The title is written in a green, stylized, hand-drawn font. The word 'LEMONS' has two lemons integrated into the letters 'M' and 'S'. The word 'ORANGE' has a whole orange with a green leaf integrated into the letter 'A'. The background is a light green, textured surface.

Diekara Oloruntoba-Oju

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From the Last Dancer – Remembering Stuart Hall

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Edward W.Said died in 2003. Jacques Derrida died in 2004. Kofi Awoonor was killed in Westgate Mall last year. Now Stuart Hall is gone. And then Ernesto Laclau. A generation of intellectuals and activists, intellectual/activists, is disappearing.

Academics worldwide could not think “Black Britain” before Stuart Hall. And, in Britain, the impact of Cultural Studies went beyond the confines of the academy. That quiet, gentle, witty, tenacious, learned, original political thinker, inspired generations of students into intellectual and cultural production that spilled over into hands-on activism. Paul Gilroy, Angela McRobbie, Isaac Julien, Michelle Barrett, John Akomfrah, the list goes on.

It was my good fortune to meet Stuart Hall with an opportunity of spending quality time with him in discussion, at the Marxist Cultural Interpretation Institute in Champaign-Urbana in 1983, under the shadow of Shabra and Shatila. Stuart Hall recounted the days of the saving of *New Left Review* when the Russell Foundation no longer supported it, in, if memory serves, 1963. (I was in Britain that year, a young Bengali woman tyrannized by a pre-feminist white alpha-male financially dependent resentful companion, a transient research student at Girton, two years out of India, not part of the radical mainstream.) Hall was among the founders in the fifties of the *New Left Review*.

I cannot museumize Stuart in the widely claimed Euro-U.S. protest scene of the sixties, as widely claimed as the Naxalbari movement at home. He surely belonged to it as a passionate participant, even a charismatic leader, but mourning takes me elsewhere.

Today, I remember that it was also the moment of the death of Lumumba, Fanon, Du Bois. In other words, Hall came in and participated without epistemic recognition, at the inauguration of a new way of thinking the world, long-haul, not just immediate protest or resistance. I cannot confine him to a merely British Cultural Studies alone, even as it preserves its political difference from U.S. Cultural Studies identitarianism betraying the austere hospitality of democracy; I read him rather in the world that worked for social justice in the diversified field of the struggle for citizenship in the metropolis after the waning of territorial imperialisms; and after the passing of the initial dreams of negritude and Pan-Africanism.

It was Awoonor who made me imagine the early 60s in this worldly way. Awoonor came back to Accra with a good Brit Lit degree from Leeds even as the New Left was consolidating itself at Oxford. Smart boy from Africa, not in the radical British mainstream. Awoonor became Du Bois's minder. He remembers the move against Du Bois's sympathies with a peculiar communism which meant passport denial in the United States, but might mean going with the Eastern bloc in newly-fledged Ghana. (Remember Padmore's *Pan-Africanism Or Communism?*¹ And that Marcus Garvey was still taken seriously as an alternative?) More important, he remembered the 1959 Pan-African Congress, with both Lumumba and Fanon ("the tall one and the short one") in attendance. I want to place Hall, young man lately arrived from Jamaica, in this broad world, for the philosophers of the future, rather than keep him local. I wish he were here for me to be having this discussion about global connectivities. You listened, Stuart Hall, contradicted, but also, sometimes, agreed.

¹ George Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism? The Coming Struggle for Africa* (New York: Roy Publishers, 1956).

I can sense the shadow of this re-constellation in “When Was the Postcolonial?”² Although the essay apparently relates to a debate by now forgotten, between “postcolonial critics,” and Arif Dirlik, Ella Shohat, Anne McClintock, Lata Mani, Ruth Frankenburg, Mary Louise Pratt, Robert Young, Homi Bhabha. Larger issues are “at stake in these debates than the criticisms which have been widely signalled sometimes suggest” (256).

Paragraph after paragraph describes – without mentioning Africa — the predicament of postcolonial nation-states in Africa, a predicament that clearly signals Africa’s nationalism, division into regionalism, unexamined culturalism. As we are today reeling under the dismissal of a good governor of Nigeria’s Central Bank, or looking at an aging FLN member running again for president in Algeria, tremendous ethnic conflict in Kenya, an inequitable infrastructure and education system below a certain class in Ghana – and, indeed at the well-known fact that the difference between rich and poor is most aggravated in sub-Saharan Africa with South Africa coming close behind, we read Hall’s words about “the emergence of powerful local elites managing the contradictory effects of under-development, characterised by the persistence of many of the effects of colonization, but at the same time their displacement from the coloniser/colonised axis to their internalization within the decolonized society itself” in the context of Africa, not, as he does, in the context of the Gulf States, where

² Hall, “When Was ‘The Post-Colonial’? Thinking at the Limit,” in Ian Chambers and Lidia Curti eds., *The Post-Colonial Question* (New York: Routledge, 1996), page numbers included in text.

we are looking at Sykes-Picot.³ Rather do I hear Assia Djebar, in Paris/North Africa, bringing colonial and postcolonial violence together, exclaiming in October, 1988: “*Once more, O Frantz, the wretched of the earth!*”⁴ but now it is Algerian killing Algerian.⁴

In some quarters, the desired solution is to make the countries safe for foreign direct investment. This is Hall’s “devil and the deep blue sea,” not the contradictions in Dirlik’s, or Shohat’s, or yet Robert Young’s arguments.

It should be noticed that Hall’s arguments do not apply to the proliferating examples of the removal of bad heads of state by popular movements being signaled as “revolution,” with no preparation for building new states. It is in the context of “Africa rising,” looking at tradition surviving interregionally rather than favoring conflict, that we can read Hall’s words about “some other, related but as yet ‘emergent’ new configurations of power-

³ I refer here to the Sykes-Picot agreement – between the French and the British – that carved out boundaries of separate states – breaking promises earlier made with Arab muftis – in the Middle East in 1917. This was part of the de-Ottomanization undertaken at the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century by European powers. It can be argued that this de-Ottomanization displaced an earlier conflict within the Holy Roman Empire and continues to this day. That today’s Middle Eastern conflict against what is perceived as an Israel United States combination has retained this as cultural memory is reflected for example in an apparent dissolving of the boundaries between Syria and Iraq in ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), with its allegiance to a Caliph. “Their [the leaders of ISIS] stated goal is to obliterate the existing Middle Eastern borders drawn as spheres of influence by Western colonial powers after World War I. They aim to undo ‘the partitioning of Muslim lands by Crusader powers’” (Francis X. Clines, “ISIS Storms the Barricades, Justices Unite, and Republicans Sing,” *New York Times* 6/29/14, p. SR 2). This is a different configuration from the effects of the absence of the practice of freedom under colonialism in literally post-colonial new nations.

⁴ Assia Djebar, *Algerian White: A Narrative*, tr. David Kelley and Marjolijn de Jaeger (New York: Seven Stories, 2000), p. 92. The problem in South Asian postcoloniality is related but also different, organized by the *longue durée* of the caste-system morphing itself into a unique Islamophobia that is distinguishable from the international variety, taking us back to Sykes-Picot. Although the practice of freedom is not accessible to any colony, South Asia is determined by a different style of European imperial policy.

knowledge relations ... beginning to exert their distinctive and specific effects” (254). We can read them in the context of emerging informal markets competitive *within* the ruling view of the world that can no longer think democracy.⁵ “Cultural Studies” material, for analysis, not just celebration.

While the New Left was organizing itself at Oxford, W. E. B. Du Bois in Ghana was looking carefully, as Marx looked at Lewis Morgan, at responsible critical scholarly anthropological texts describing West, South, East Africa, making notes, marking indexes – to combat the stupidity of declaring the Negro slave population stupid because violently withdrawn from impressively structured social organization, tremendous statistical and historical achievement inscribed on mnemonic material and altogether impressive linguistic sophistication, where the line from figurative practice to rational choice was always alive in daily life. (No mere romanticization of Africa, this. Du Bois had no interest in denying the cruelty and absolute hierarchization in these political formations.) He is looking to examine how post-slavery African-Americans in the American South could possibly have worked so quickly with the structural principles of Reconstruction and parliamentary administration and, if his marginalia and index markings are to be trusted, he is thinking of something operating in the absence of any entry granted into intellectual labor – something that Fernand Braudel would later call the *longue durée* – persistent perennial residual structures unrecognizable by Southern gentry and benevolent collecting types – so that we are dealing not just with exceptions such as Phyllis Wheatley and Frederick Douglass but also with the general community of emancipated slaves.

It is here that Stuart Hall’s work on ideology and national identity can be made intertextual within a field that is usually not recognized as his. The work of Gilroy and Julien, in their different ways, have elaborated such possibilities.

In the evenings there in Ghana, back from Du Bois, I read

⁵ Dayo Olopade, *The Bright Continent: Breaking Rules and Making Change in Modern Africa* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2014).

Awoonor's posthumously published *The Promise of Hope*. There is a moving tribute there to the Jamaican activist writer Neville Augustus Dawes, a writer involved in the transformation of Pan-Africanism in postcoloniality. Stuart Hall was resolutely North London. Yet I want to close with some words from that inclusive homage, because I, a New Yorker, have tried to write this tribute to my friend Stuart Hall in the spirit of conjunctural inclusiveness and solidarity. There was a time when I would say I was the chick vocalist in the theory performing band – Stuart Hall, Edward Said, Fredric Jameson, Hayden White. I put here a picture from that era, courtesy Rainer Ganahl.⁶ And that casual often-repeated comment of mine lets me borrow the grander metaphor of the last dancer from the poem.



Am I reading him right? Who can read anyone right? I am reading him, claiming him. The editors asked us to take as “[g]iven the points of intersection between [our] thought and the work, the project, of Stuart Hall.” Am I doing more than attempting to stand

⁶ Rainer Ganahl, Seminar/Lecture, Teresa de Lauretis, Stuart Hall, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Moderator: Mark Nash, Conditions of Identification, Questions of Difference, New York University, New York, 10/12/96.

at one of those crossroads? In 1985, Hall warned us away from a “continuous slippage away from any conceivable conjuncture.”⁷ I am shifting from an embedded into an embedding conjuncture, away from his deep involvement with the British context, the CND, the disappointment over Hungary, from working class to mass culture, the Open University; to the open ocean of Du Bois’s Stalinism in the face of disappointment with capitalist democracy, Lumumba’s betrayal by East, West, Africa; Fanon as a bridge, if you like – creating “an articulation in terms of *effects* which does not necessarily correspond to its origins.” Put it down to my unease with Little Britain, as his with “post-structuralism.” Standing in the crossroads, I am grasping at the refractible moments.⁸

In “What is This ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture,” Hall invokes a shift from the Euro-U.S. and speaks of the diaspora. But what if a “global” Nigerian dreams a different Kingston? It will not be, as Hall says somewhere, reggae, and canned fruit raining down from coconut palms. Allow me, then:

I come again I say
half-clansman of the ritual goat
tethered to a forgotten tree
in a ruined and alien field:
I am the last dancer in the circular team
kicking only dust
after the graceful ones are done,
the jeers and sneers echoing
down the vast Saharas of my history
on whose corner
this day, this natal day,
I weep anew

⁷ Hall, “Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2 (1985), p. 92-93, 95.

⁸ “How is this refraction of existence in the ideological sign determined? By an intersection” – my crossroads – “of differently oriented social interests, in every ideological sign” (Volosinov quoted in Hall, “Rediscovery of ‘Ideology’: Return of the Repressed in Media Studies,” in Michael Gurevitch et. al. eds., *Culture, Society, and the Media* (New York: Methuen, 1982), p. 79.

for historical follies I could not shed
abilities I did not realize
victories I did not savor
hopes I did not endure⁹

When I heard of Stuart Hall's death I was in Calcutta, writing a piece on Coleridge where I was discovering when the postcolonial was.¹⁰ That essay is dedicated to his memory.

⁹ Kofi Awoonor, "In Memoriam: Return to Kingston," in *The Promise of Hope: New and Selected Poems, 1964-2013* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2014), p. 76.

¹⁰ "Willing Suspension of Disbelief, Here, Now," forthcoming in Forest Pyle III, ed. *Constellations of a Contemporary Romanticism* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press).

A Daughter's Call: In Memory of Assia Djebar

Clarisse Zimra

First came a daughter's e-mail that shot an arrow into my heart: "call me!" A continent away, miles away, worlds away, Assia Djebar was preparing to make her exit. I made the call, "You be sure to tell her she is loved". A few days later, the friend who had sat with her through her last hours gently relayed the news. Bereft, we remained silent on the line a long time, anguish and grief and memories rustling along the telephone wire. Silent now "la grande dame", the lady, ya Llala, our most powerful female voice in North Africa, the writer, the poet, the essayist, the war journalist, the stage director, the stage performer, the film-maker, the historian, the chronicler of wars, the generous friend; she who was supposed to outlive us... Gone to the Ancestors during a Friday night, to be lain in the native land on the following Friday.

With her customary elegance and innate grace, she had chosen the most auspiciously sacred day in the Muslim faith to leave us. She wanted, whispered her daughter, "des adieux sans ostentation" ("to say goodbye without ostentation"), in keeping with the sweetly tolerant Sunni faith she never abandoned. She had chosen to be accompanied by the music of Bartok she had used in her first film, *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua*. Yet surrounded by men and women both, against the segregated tradition that allows only male

kin to perform the public ceremony, those bleak and sour men-only burials she had first described bitterly in her first short-story collection, “Les morts parlent” (*Femmes d’Alger dans leurs appartements*).¹

She would rest, looking out to sea, next to her father. In keeping with the names she had chosen for herself, she would console and protect the parent who had so long ago sent her on to another life, out from the harem. “Il y eut d’abord ma sortie du harem” she used to remind us, smiling a bit whimsically, speaking of French as the booty of war. The “*haram*” is that which is forbidden, but it is also that which is protected. Unbreachable ambivalence.² And to the memory of the Algerian school-teacher, who proudly walked his daughter to her first French school, she dedicated her discourse to the Académie française.

Upon formally welcoming her on 22th June 2005, as protocol required, Jean-Pierre Rémy, had praised her thus: “Assia, c’est la consolation, et Djebbar, l’intransigeance. Quel beau choix!” (your first name means consolation and Djebbar means intransigence. What beautiful choice). She had, she said, selected the first name in order to turn her gaze Eastward, “je voulais rester tournée vers l’Orient, et vers l’Egypte” (I meant to keep myself turned, looking Eastward, and toward Egypt).³ A figure honored in Islam, Assia was the Pharaoh’s young wife who had rescued Moses from the bulrushes: protected and consoled. In sweet homage obituary, Egypt called her “a major writer” and praised her *Fantasia* as “a milestone.”⁴ But the young would-be writer also knew that “assia”, in dialectal Arabic, was the everyday name for the edelweiss, little flower of immortality otherwise called, in French, “immortelle.” There is satisfaction in knowing that, half a century later upon her election

¹ Paris: Edition des femmes 1980.

² French as the booty of war; cf. “Du français comme du butin”, *Quinzaine littéraire* 1985 n°436: 16-31

³ Memories and notes taken during our collaboration on the first American translation of *Femmes*, translated as *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*. Charlottesville: U.of Virginia P 1999.

⁴ Obituary of 14 Feb. 2015 by Mohamed Samawy, in the English internet version of the Egyptian independent Al-Masry Al-youm daily.

to the Académie, she would be henceforth entitled to the honorific title of "immortelle." The Parisian newspaper *Le Figaro*, thus announced her passing on 7 February "Une Immortelle disparaît."

As she explained during the long interviews made to accompany the American translation of *Femmes*, the last name was selected on impulse. Moved by the euphonious beauty of the first name, "la beauté de ce long 'A' féminin répété" (the beauty of this extended feminine alliteration), she wanted a match, two syllables for harmony. She selected her last name even before knowing what it meant, while her fiancé recited the 99 names of Allah, inside the famous Parisian taxi that hurtled them to the signing of her first contract. She has often joked that, had they not been stuck in traffic, she might not have had time to choose: *si non è vero è ben trovato*. The resulting French transliteration yielded both "Jabbar": one who is mighty and dedicated, "intransigent"; and "Jabir": the one who protects. But becoming a member of the most prestigious French body did not mean blind admiration. Her elegant response of 22 June, printed in full and immediately on the Académie's website, did not shy from reminding the colonizer that he still had deeds to atone for: "Le colonialisme vécu au jour le jour par nos ancêtres, sur quatre générations au moins, a été une immense plaie!" (This colonialism, lived through day after day by our ancestors, this over at least four generations, was but an immense festering wound). Among the French writers she admired, citing Rabelais and Diderot, and slipping in Césaire's indictment of colonialism, she inserted such African scholars as Averroes, "the Andalusian", Apuleus, the comic, Tertullian, the woman-hater. But left pride of place to Augustine of Thagaste, the Christian convert, bishop of Hippo, Berber by birth, whom she was to include in the fourth novel of the projected quartet in progress. These luminaries belonged by right to the common patrimony of the West and, she added, should be reverently taught to all school children.

Thus, celebrated anywhere but in a homeland that never forgave: France's President Hollande conveyed his condolences within hours of February 7, well before Algeria's Bouteflika did. Nor did Algeria see fit to give her the national funeral she deserved. No surprise to those who knew that she had no patience for those aging "apparatchiks" she had herself known so well in her Tunisian and

Moroccan exiles during the long eight years of the war against the French. Now grown fat on plentiful desert oil, announcing “grands travaux” of Pharaonic pretensions that never came to pass, they let their people starve. Such contempt may have cost her the Nobel Prize, since she would have had to suffer their official presence, as the Oslo protocol required.

The wound ran deep

At the announcement of her passing, Algerians suddenly discovered she was famous, celebrated by young and old all over the world. Back home, neither bookstore nor library had a single work of hers. Mentions of hundreds of graduates theses, hundreds of academic colloquia, as well as tear-stained hommages on social media poured all over the internet, praising “une puissante lumière de la littérature ... immense écrivain ... prodigieuse éclareuse” (a powerful literary light ... immense writer ... prodigious beacon).⁵ Not one of her fine novels had ever been suggested high-school reading, nor were either of her two films ever made available. The wound ran deep.

Filmed throughout 1976-77 in the hinterland of the Chenoua mountains that was her mother’s ancestral place, *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua* had been produced for the state when Djebbar was still a civil servant. It made full use of Algeria’s multi-glossic condition, interweaving French, classical Arabic, dialectal Algerian, and mountain Berber. It was anchored by a series of interviews of former female participants in the war against the French who, Djebbar often said, because she was her mother’s daughter, trusted her and spoke freely. The regime expected a paean to national heroism, as did the public. Shown only once in downtown Algiers in 1978, it was promptly banned. More painful for the director presenting it, she was heckled by the young people she had hoped to reach. Calling it unpatriotic, they were offended

⁵ A small example of many such outputs, Karim Amellal, “hommages des écrivains amazigh” in *chouchou.com*, dated 7 Febraury 2015.

by its dreamy oneiric visuals and fluidly looping narratives that made pointed references to pre-colonial internecine wars, as well as deconstructed the first colonial war of the 1830s, Abdel Kader's resistance and his 1847 surrender: nothing heroic, but the very messy past rubbing against the grain of the socialist paradise. Years later, Djébar still smarted. As the director of the Center for Francophone Studies of Louisiana State University, presiding over a film colloquium honoring Trinh Mihn Ha and Yvonne Rainer, whom she had invited, she insisted on the matter of non-linear structure: "un film ne doit pas raconter" (film must not narrate).

Nouba was this wildly experimental journey into a collective memory of pain and grief denied. Many years later, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* (LParis: Albin Michel 1995 2), a threnody to murdered friends, would cover the same ground.

Given the ten "black years" of the brutal civil war of the 1990s, this first film was prescient. Presented as an independent to the 1979 Venice Biennale Film Festival, because Algeria had refused her official sponsorship, she won the prize, *Grand Prix de la Critique internationale*; a moment of poetic justice. Hereafter banned from filming in her own country, she had to drop the next project. Followed ten years of self-censored silence and exile. If literature has flourished, cinema certainly lost. But whatever the medium, her poetics never shifted. Interviewed on French radio about her last work, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* (Acte Sud, 2007), she insisted that it was decidedly not an autobiography because it did not move along a clear and linear teleological purpose; but, like memory, looped over and over itself. Djébar's difficult experimental poetics have been consistent to the end.

By the time of her death, Assia Djébar had been writing for nearly sixty years. Written when she was 19 and published weeks before she turned twenty, *La Soif* (Julliard, 1956) was preceded by a long "historical novel", some hundred pages she later lost. Trained as a historian, she has taught at universities on three continents, Africa, America, Europe; and earned many an honorary doctoral title: Vienna in Austria (1995); Concordia in Canada (2002). Under her real name, Fatima-Zhora Imalhayène, she has also obtained a "real" one at the Université Paul Valéry in Montpellier (1999), a doctorate in French Literature and Civilization. Her rather unusual

dissertation consisted in the culling and gathering of her hitherto unpublished or hard to find lectures, a trove that she turned into a reasoned critique of her own poetics. Within months, it was produced as a book jointly published in France and Canada.⁶

The 1990s were maelstrom years for her country and for herself. *Ces Voix qui m'assiègent* came out in a white heat of furious writing and multiple professional commitments. Living on and off airplanes, it seemed, she was teaching and directing graduate research while at the helm of the Center for Francophone Studies at Louisiana State University in Baton-Rouge; writing what would become the book of the oratorio or musical drama, *Filles d'Ismaël dans le vent et la tempête* (unpublished); then seeing to costumes and staging in Europe, as well as finding the music and a musical director in Italy. Defined as musical drama in five acts and 25 tableaux, it was eventually rehearsed in Holland, its première put off because of a threatened fatwa against its Moslem actresses and director, Djébar herself, in Amsterdam. Eventually, brave souls staged it twice with her in Italy in September 2000.

Such dedicated output garnered major international prizes, including the Maurice Maeterlink Prize in Belgium (1991); the Neustadt Prize in the U.S. (1996); the Prix Yourcenar (Boston University, 1997), fitting since Marguerite Yourcenar was the first non-French born woman admitted to the Académie française; the Palmi Prize of Italy (1998); the Peace Prize at the Frankfurt Book Fair in Germany (2002). She was a member of at least two "academies": the Belgian Académie royale de langue française (1999) and the French Académie française (2006). The world famous Neustadt Prize awarded by the University of Oklahoma's journal, *World Literature Today*, to writers of undaunted courage (Ngugi and Maryse Condé were so honored) was generally considered the good luck forerunner to a Nobel. Djébar narrowly missed, coming twice in second place, to Austria's Elfriede Jelinek in 2004 and Le Clézio in 2008. Whether Algeria's minister of culture was consulted as protocol required, history does not say.

⁶ *Ces voix qui m'assiègent: en marge de ma francophonie*, Paris: Albin Michel ; and Montreal: Presses Universitaires, 1999.

At memory's gate

This prodigious corpus (even lackadaisical *Wikipedia* lists 19 books plus 2 films but forgets the oratorio) has been translated in well over a dozen languages, including Turkish, Russian, Swedish, Bosnian, Slovene and Japanese, except into her own until now. It was a prospect she had simultaneously desired and resisted because she did not want her writing “tampered with.” Her intuitive reluctance increased as she resumed her own studies, plunging with scholar friends into classical Arabic texts for the preparation of *Loin de Médine*.⁷ She knew the varieties of contemporary registers in the Middle-East as well as the intractability of the multi-glossic Algerian dialectals. To tilt her world toward a Tunisian register or a Syrian register, as had once been proposed, worried her. By 2014, her very last, melancholy and overtly autobiographical book was finally distributed in her homeland with her permission. First reprinted in French, then translated under a national aegis, it was an all-too belated honor. For Algerian readers, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*⁸ became “Bawabat eddhikrayat”,⁹ a phrase that translates somewhat pedestrianly as “aux portes des souvenirs” in French. Or, perhaps more elegantly, in English, “at memory's gate”.

In response to the spontaneous public sorrow during the national book fair in Algeria, as readers and writers expressed outrage that such a great writer should be so long neglected in her own country, a prize has been created, with a generous award to be distributed at the next convening of the national book fair in November 2015. Under the aegis of Salon national du livre, the Prix Assia Djébar will recognize the best work in French, or Arabic or Amazigh, the language of her forebears.

Her simple grave bears two simple white marble markers. Two lines, in two scripts, on one stela: Assia Djébar and Fatma-Zhora Imalhayène. The second stela is engraved with a line often repeated: “J'écris comme tant d'autres femmes écrivains algériennes avec un

⁷ Paris: Albin-Michel 1991.

⁸ Paris: Fayard 2007.

⁹ Tr. Mohamed Yiahiatène. Alger: Editions Sedia 2014.

sentiment d'urgence contre la régression et la misogynie" (I write as do so many other Algerian women writers, with a feeling of urgency against regression and misogyny).

Two white marble plaques. Without ostentation, said the daughter, engraved as her mother had wanted. Wherever you stand in Cherchell cemetery, you can hear the sea.

Notes on Contributors

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John Kinsella's many books of poetry include *Divine Comedy: Journeys Through a Regional Geography* (2008) and the *Jam Tree Gully* (2011). His critical books include *Activist Poetics: Anarchy in the Avon Valley* (2010).

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