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# **ASCALF BULLETIN**

**ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF  
CARIBBEAN AND AFRICAN  
LITERATURE IN FRENCH**

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## ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF CARIBBEAN AND AFRICAN LITERATURE IN FRENCH

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## Maryse Condé's *Desirada*: the end of the quest?

The most characteristic aspect of Maryse Condé's œuvre is the central subject of the quest for origins, a quest leading through the past to a truth about the self, or a search for an acceptable foundation narrative. Critics have seen this quest as moving towards a resolution of the issues which make existence so problematic. The quest begins in *Heremakhonon* (1976), where the narrator, Véronica, acknowledges her inability to accept the Caribbean versions of identity offered to her, yet fails to find the mythical pre-colonial Africa on which she wishes to build her sense of self. That the fierce, ironic disillusionment characteristic of the book is a position Condé has left behind her is confirmed, not without regret, by her preface to the reprint of the text of 1976 (republished as *En attendant le bonheur*):

A cette lectrice qui désirait faire connaissance avec moi dans ma jeunesse, je dirai que, si j'ai peut-être gagné en technique de conter et d'écrire, j'ai perdu, irrémédiablement perdu, cette faculté d'avoir peur, d'avoir mal, de s'indigner et de se torturer que je sais cachée derrière chaque page de ce livre. (p.15)

Yet the quest for a sense of self remains at the heart of Condé's latest novel, *Desirada*<sup>1</sup>. Even its title declares the ground it shares with *Heremakhonon* by combining location (*Désirade*, the island which represents the locus for Marie-Noëlle's identity; *Heremakhonon*, the villa of Véronica's lover, through whom she wishes to assume the link with an aristocratic African lineage) with a suspended spiritual state (*désire*, waiting). Wangari wa Nyatetu-Waigwa<sup>2</sup> has seen the evolution of Condé's position from *Heremakhonon* (1976) to *Les Derniers Rois mages* (1992) as constituting a shift from 'separation to liminality to reincorporation'<sup>3</sup> (p.551). Condé's earliest heroines reject their Caribbean identity in favour of a dream of Africa, identifying Africa as imaginative centre and the Caribbean as margin. This dream proves

<sup>1</sup> Laffont, 1997

<sup>2</sup> 'From Liminality to a Home of her Own? The Quest Motif in Maryse Condé's Fiction', *Callaloo*, 18, 3 (Summer 1995), 551-564.

<sup>3</sup> The definition is one Nyatetu-Waigwa borrows from Victor Turner.

impossible, and in later texts (*Traversée de la mangrove* and *Les Derniers Rois mages*), Condé's protagonists move towards an acceptance of the Caribbean as a locus for identity. This acceptance crucially implies the recognition of the Caribbean centre for what it is, not as a fantasy ideal. Mireille Rosello<sup>4</sup>, whilst rejecting the model of a 'retour' to a Caribbean 'pays natal', similarly recognises a move in Condé's writing towards a reconstruction of the locus of identity. She defines Condé's trajectory as being that of an 'insularization', that is, the redefinition of continent and island, such that every location is viewed by the regarding consciousness as an island: separate, coming into being as a function of the consciousness that creates it. This process accounts for the irony and distance characteristic of Condé's work: 'The process of re-imagining the relationship between identities and lands must perhaps remain ironic, tentative, as it is a dissolution rather than a solution' (p.576). The present article endeavours to see whether, in Maryse Condé's most recent novel, *Desirada*, this movement towards a secure identity is consolidated, as Wangara wa Nyatetu-Waigwa's analysis would suggest, or whether Condé's position has undergone yet another shift, as Mireille Rosello seems to predict.

*Desirada* takes the form of a spiritual journey in search of the self, as protagonist Marie-Noëlle slowly comes to discover the mystery surrounding the identity of her father. Through this exploration, which necessitates a number of physical journeys, the text examines the nature and validity of the quest which Marie-Noëlle undertakes, the narrative apparently offering a resolution to her plight. Interspersed with fragments of the story of her mother, Reynalda's, tragic childhood, the text follows the life story of Marie-Noëlle from the time of her birth, through her happy childhood in Guadeloupe with adopted mother Ranélise, her move to Paris at Reynalda's request, and her loveless adolescence which ends abruptly with her marriage to tortured musician Stanley. With marriage comes a move to America, where Marie-Noëlle begins to take stock of her aimless existence, helped by the friendship of Anthea, a committed Black American academic, who offers certainties that Marie-Noëlle cannot accept, but whose sponsorship of her studies and general attentiveness give Marie-Noëlle some new basis for her life. The death of Ranélise at the beginning of

Part Two provides the impetus for a return to Marie-Noëlle's beloved Guadeloupe, subject since her departure of nostalgic fantasy. This return prompts Marie-Noëlle's conscious assumption of the identity quest as a cure for her fundamental malaise. The Caribbean journey, however, serves only to destabilise those bearings which Marie-Noëlle believed that she had. The Guadeloupe of her imaginings proves to be purely a product of her nostalgia, and the much-desired meeting with her grandmother, Nina, reveals the fragmentary narrative of her origins offered to her by Reynalda to be unfounded. In Part Three, losing all sense of her bearings, Marie-Noëlle returns to America, and finally, on an impulsive visit to France, uncovers the truth of her parentage: namely, that she was fathered by the bishop who first brought Reynalda from Désirade to Guadeloupe. This revelation prompts an emotional breakdown which forces Marie-Noëlle to re-assess her view of herself.

The solution that Marie-Noëlle chooses seems to deny the possibility of the homeland as locus of identity. *Desirada* is remarkable in Condé's œuvre in that its protagonist seems to articulate a certain contentment, signalled in the final chapter by the switch to a first-person voice, as Marie-Noëlle takes control of her identity:

[Ludovic] ne comprenait pas qu'en fin de compte, réelle ou imaginaire, cette identité-là avait fini par me plaire. D'une certaine manière, ma monstruosité me rend unique. Grâce à elle, je ne possède ni nationalité ni pays ni langue. Je peux rejeter ces tracasseries qui tracassent tellement les humains. Elle donne aussi une explication à ce qui entoure ma vie. Je comprends et j'accepte qu'autour de moi, il n'y ait jamais eu de place pour un certain bonheur. Mon chemin est tracé ailleurs. (p.281)

Whilst Part Two of the novel traces Marie-Noëlle's detachment from the myth of a return to Guadeloupe, Part Three moves towards the resolution expressed in the above quotation. The assurance of this first-person voice is clear in the slight ironies (repetition of 'tracasser', 'monstruosité') which signal a re-definition of self-hood. Marie-Noëlle rejects any possibility of group identity: 'ma monstruosité me rend unique', or any identity based on place. The isolation imposed by this rejection precludes certain types of happiness ('un certain bonheur'), but is the only possible way ahead. Claiming to possess no affective links, Marie-Noëlle is free to choose an identity and a country, and whilst her choice at the end of the novel is for America, she defines herself not in terms of place, but as nomadic: 'mon chemin est tracé ailleurs'. This narrative trajectory seems strongly to reject any one

<sup>4</sup> 'Caribbean Insularization of Identities in Maryse Condé's Work, from *En attendant le bonheur* to *Les Derniers Rois mages*', *Callaloo*, 18, 3 (Summer 1995), 565-578.

location for identity, and to show the Caribbean centre as an illusion, even a dangerous one; it seems to propose America as a possible location for Marie-Noëlle precisely because of the formlessness of its urban society. In fact, at various points in the novel she affirms a predilection for those types of place which could belong anywhere in the world: 'A la vérité, Camden Town ressemblait à Savigny-sur-Orge. On pouvait s'y attacher' (p.105). The mixed immigrant community and the anonymous modern buildings create a sort of non-national, non-identified space. Maryse Condé seems thus to be promoting a model of 'errance' and isolation. In order to explore further Condé's position, we need to trace the manifestation of the particular 'misère mentale' from which her protagonist suffers and the patterns emerging from within the narrative itself which disrupt or support (in all senses) our reading of that 'misère'.

The first chapter of *Desirada* serves to define Marie-Noëlle's situation in relation to social and individual identity. It retells the birth of Marie-Noëlle, subject of the novel, and associates her with that dislocation by which she will be defined and by which she will define herself throughout the novel. The circumstances of Marie-Noëlle's mid-Carnival birth are in stark contrast to the surrounding atmosphere, defined in opposition to the centre: 'Le canal Vatable était désert, car tout le monde s'était rué sur le centre de la ville' (p.14). She comes into the world in a place which is spatially distinct: and it is empty not full. The noise of Carnival is contrasted with the silence of Ranélise's house where Marie-Noëlle is born and with the stifled cries of her mother Reynalda. This otherness and apartness from society is the gauge of Marie-Noëlle's illegitimacy. The real inappropriateness of this birth is not that it happens during Carnival, on the edge of a town when everything is concentrated in the centre, but that it should have happened at all. Marie-Noëlle is the child of a rape or a seduction; she is illegitimate, and both of unknown father and of mixed race, unwanted by her mother. Her birth is shown as being fundamentally out of place in that, at the moment of the birth, Reynalda is associated with death: 'Elle avait la figure d'une morte' (p. 15); 'une malheureuse qui venait de passer de vie à trépas' (p. 15).

Ranélise, however, re-inscribes Marie-Noëlle's difference as central. It is the fact that Marie-Noëlle's birth is inappropriate that allows her to claim the child as her own. She apparently acknowledges and confirms

Marie-Noëlle's dislocated condition, by naming her after the Christmas feast although she is born during Carnival. In doing so, however, she is following, in fact, a strategy similar to Rosello's 'insularization' in a temporal register: that is, re-organising the structure of the year according her own perception of it.

Elle serra le bébé contre son cœur, convaincue que le bon Dieu enfin faisait repentance de l'avoir si maltraitée. Le couvrant de baisers, elle lui choisit un prénom selon son goût: Marie-Noëlle bien qu'elle fût née en plein Carnaval. Car Marie, c'est le prénom de la Sainte Vierge, mère de toutes les vertus et Noël, c'est le rappel de cette nuit miraculeuse où Jésus s'est fait petit enfant pour racheter nos péchés. (p. 15)

The birth is of such importance that it reorientates temporal structure. However, this re-centring masks the most significant displacement of all: that of the transfer of the child from her real mother to her adoptive mother. This displacement will invert Marie-Noëlle's sense of belonging, creating a childhood idyll which will hide the problems of a dislocated self and form an alternative but impossible reality.

Marie-Noëlle thus represents familiar critical positions in the discussion of the Caribbean condition, being isolated from the centre, illegitimate, and of hybrid birth. Her exiled state, with which she is associated symbolically in the first chapter by figures of dislocation, becomes a literal reality once she is summoned to Paris by her mother. The trauma of this uprooting from her homeland will send her into a coma, which will leave its trace throughout her life in her frequent 'absences'. Since Reynalda refuses to divulge the identity of the father, as in turn her mother Nina had done with her, Marie-Noëlle's knowledge of her history is partial. Her knowledge of her origins derives from a myth created by Ranélise, which, even if it has taken on the texture of reality for her, will be shown to be unreliable.

Condé is thus quite consciously inscribing Marie-Noëlle's story in the critical debate about exile and Caribbean identity, by reproducing its commonplaces (exile, displacement, liminality, loss of history). However, through the series of uprootings and displacements that her protagonist undergoes, she also deliberately disrupts these views. When Marie-Noëlle experiences exile to France, she is at the same time being reunited with a part of herself in the form of her mother. Centres of identity are thereby rendered contradictory and unstable.

Because the regarding self has no fixed centre, the place from which the self is viewed is uncertain. The first lines of the book instantly draw



attention to the importance of the subjectivity which views events, by showing that the subjective identity through which Marie-Noëlle views her own birth is problematic and distanced:

Ranélise lui avait tant de fois raconté sa naissance qu'elle croyait y avoir tenu un rôle; non pas celui d'un bébé terrorisé et passif que Mme Fleurette, la sage-femme, extirpait difficilement d'entre les cuisses ensanglantées de sa mère; mais celui d'un témoin lucide; d'un acteur essentiel, voire de sa mère, l'accouchée, Reynalda elle-même qu'elle s'imaginait assise raide, lèvres pincées, bras croisés, une mine de souffrance indicible sur la figure. Des années plus tard, devant un tableau de Frida Kahlo, représentant sa venue au monde, il lui avait semblé que cette femme-là, inconnue, avait peint pour elle. (p.13).

Two external visions (those of Ranélise and of Frida Kahlo) have thus informed the version that Marie-Noëlle constructs of her birth. This version has taken on for Marie-Noëlle the authority of actual experience because of her desire to apprehend a fixed truth about herself, a desire which motivates the whole text. Marie-Noëlle thus remains the outsider who experiences the scene at one remove and the authority of her own viewpoint is fundamentally undermined in the text, as her memories of Guadeloupe are revealed in Part Two to be the product of a nostalgic fantasy. The scenes in Guadeloupe in Part One are characterised by a mythologising, exoticising gaze which opposes the greyness of Paris with the colour of Guadeloupe. With no fixed viewpoint from which to regard the self, Marie-Noëlle cannot create a sense of the geography of her own affective world, but relies on the creations of her desire.

The text also questions the traditional location of continental centre and island margin. For Marie-Noëlle, Guadeloupe is the centre from which she is exiled, and about which she entertains a dream of a return more usually associated with Africa.<sup>5</sup> Her search for her roots will be located not on the continent but on an island, and a most obscure one at that: the

<sup>5</sup> The text in fact explicitly questions the validity/nature of the search for origins. Contemplating what she initially regards as the failure of her visit to Nina (although it will eventually prove to give her the key to discovering her identity), Marie-Noëlle muses on the nature of her visit: "Elle se refusait à réduire en pur et simple récit de voyage exotique ce qui pour l'essentiel avait été une douloureuse chasse aux fantômes. Dans une lettre à Ludovic, elle avait tenté de lui expliquer ce qu'avait signifié son retour au pays natal." (218) She thus recognises three different functions: 'voyage exotique', 'chasse aux fantômes' and 'retour au pays natal'. All three suggest a borrowed cliché, inadequate to describe what in fact she has undergone. Nina dismisses the identity quest more readily still: 'l'identité n'est pas un vêtement égaré' (p.172).

barren outcrop and former leper colony of Désirade. Moreover, the exoticised vision which Marie-Noëlle entertains of Guadeloupe shows her as being other than that with which she is attempting to identify. Thus whilst Condé shows Marie-Noëlle's condition as being definable in terms of established theoretical patterns, the location of her point of view and of her identity is problematised. Marie-Noëlle's psychology is dominated by the experience of uprooting. This is shown to be decisive in shaping her affective responses. Her sense of loss at being severed from her island is underlined by her reaction to the death of the medium living on the top floor of Reynalda's building, a woman who befriends and charms her with stories of her childhood in the Guadeloupe they share. Mme Esmondas offers Marie-Noëlle the belief that she is keeping alive the spirit of her island: 'Car il ne faut pas se tromper. Les esprits émigrent eux aussi. Ils suivent le Guadeloupéen à la trace et fondent sur lui quel que soit l'endroit où il se trouve' (p.47). Marie-Noëlle's surprising response to the medium's death is desolation at being abandoned:

Au fond d'elle-même, Marie-Noëlle gardait espoir. Elle avait la conviction que Mme Esmondas ne l'abandonnerait pas après toute cette amitié entre elles. Elle lui signifierait son adieu d'une manière secrète, comprise d'elle seule. La nuit, elle l'attendait dans ses rêves. Mais les mois passèrent et elle ne la revit jamais. (p.49)

This response is only comprehensible as a re-enactment of the emotions she has undergone in being exiled from her home. She thus recasts the moment of rupture as being decisive and complete. The text portrays a carefree child who undergoes a transformation when she is summoned by Reynalda to join her in France. Upon hearing the news of her impending departure, Marie-Noëlle falls into a coma described as an experience of internal absence. Her statelessness is thus attributed in this early part of the text to a moment of separation. The profound melancholy Marie-Noëlle sinks into on recovery from the coma is only relieved by the comfort procured by immersion in the sea, and by long walks in which she measures the space of her island, a temporary reintegration with the physical identity of her island. However, the identification of this initial disruption and absence as the cause of her malaise is necessarily questioned by the discrediting of the fantasme of Guadeloupe upon her return to the island.

What is clear, however, is that Marie-Noëlle carries everywhere with her an emotional impoverishment and isolation. She is characterised

increasingly by an emotional incapacity that recalls that of her mother: 'une désolation, une monotonie qui venaient de l'intérieur' (p.115), a condition which, as she carries it with her, that cannot be cured by any change of location. From her early adolescence to her sexual rejection by Ludovic in the final chapters of the book, Marie-Noëlle is shown not to arouse male desire, a gauge of her emotional emptiness. She thus finds Judes Anozie's attentions misguided: 'Ne sentait-il pas qu'elle portait en elle la poisse?' (p.148).

Her inability to map her emotions is reproduced in the text by the confusion of three deaths at the end of Part One and the beginning of Part Two. We are told of the death of Arélis, a figure who only appears in that one chapter and who serves as a reprise of the paradigmatic story of Marie-Noëlle's severing from Guadeloupe:

Ce n'était pas seulement le remords qui la torturait. C'était la connaissance que cette fois encore, comme dans le cas de Mme Esmondas, son amie l'avait laissée sans un au revoir. (p. 131)

Part Two begins with the funeral of an un-named character, who turns out to be Ranélise. Finally it is revealed that Marie-Noëlle's husband, Stanley, has also died, a death announced obliquely: 'Stanley et Terri l'avait quittée, chacun à sa manière.' (p.143). Only later and gradually does the text confirm that Stanley had indeed died and in what manner. Thus the experience of severance and abandonment is consistently brought to the fore as that which re-enacts the initial trauma. Marie-Noëlle seems unable to distinguish between these deaths, or to identify the role they play; she seems able only to re-enact that particular emotional trauma which she has assimilated to the point of self-definition. Consciously or not, she thus casts herself as an exile, creating the fantasy of a resolution of the difficulties of what she is, a resolution which would be effected by the return to a home transformed not so much by the distortion of memory as by that of desire. Throughout the text, Condé describes place in a discourse which opposes reality with fantasy. The title suggests that this fantasy is born of desire, since it re-identifies *Désirade* with the etymology of its name, *Desirada*, evoking the way the island appears to Columbus: as longed-for land appearing out of the endless sea. The identification of the island with the desire for happiness is endorsed by Marie-Noëlle's own conceptualisation of her situation: 'elle se demandait pourquoi le bonheur est une île où elle

n'aborderait jamais' (p.96). This fantasizing is juxtaposed with her lucidity about her surroundings in France and America, just as the imagined reconstruction of her birth is contrasted with the status of her memory of the first meeting with her mother:

Mais personne n'avait jamais décrit à Marie-Noëlle le jour de son arrivée à Paris. Sa mémoire s'était chargée toute seule de ce souvenir-là. (p.33)

Other characters offer fantasies of a variety of locations. Marie-Noëlle's Guinean friend Awa and Awa's Russian mother Natasha, as well as Marie-Noëlle's American patron Anthea all share the dream of Africa. Despite the failure of her African marriage, Natasha becomes obsessively nostalgic after her return to Russia following her husband's death, Africa taking on for her the colours of 'un paradis perdu' (120). For Awa, the return to Guinea takes on the form of a return to her childhood, whereas Anthea indulges in the diasporic myth of an African homeland. All three dreams are discredited, either humorously, as in Anthea's uncritical enthusiasm which fails to see Africa's reality, or more painfully in Natasha's debilitating and fruitless quest for information about the death of her husband, killed as a dissident. Saran, Marie-Noëlle's childhood friend, and Stanley share a fantasy of America as land of opportunities and new beginnings. But when Saran's plan to steal her step-mother's jewels to pay for the journey fails, the young Marie-Noëlle realises the true status of Saran's planned journey:

On n'ôta pas de l'idée de Marie-Noëlle que, dans la réalité, Saran n'avait eu l'intention de partir, qu'elle avait parlé pour ne rien dire. Révé. Seulement révé. (p.60)

She assimilates Stanley's dream consciously with that of Saran. The consequences of this fantasy are suggested by the recurring evocation of Marie-Noëlle looking at her old home through the blinds of her room as though her fantasy of Guadeloupe was putting her at a distance and distorting her vision.

In *Desirada*, Maryse Condé explodes the universal mythic significance which characters bestow on location, systematically denying the mythic nature of place by opposing myth with reality, and offering alternative constructs. Each place is accorded a variety of imaginative statuses though being viewed differently by different characters. Thus the myth of Africa is balanced by Marie-Noëlle's suspicious indifference:

Le peu qu'elle savait de l'Afrique lui faisait peur. Elle en était sûre, la vue de plaies si béantes la sommerait de s'apitoyer, de chercher des remèdes alors qu'elle ne voulait se soucier que d'elle-même. (p.229)

Guadeloupe for Marie-Noëlle is the fantasy homeland, but for Reynalda it is 'un pays lointain, étrange', whereas Aristide Démonico sees the island as a place of constant improvement and modernisation. The difference in vision is entirely dictated by the role the country plays in each character's own view of self. In this, Condé underlines the individual subjectivity at the expense of collective viewpoint: individual perception takes precedence over subscription to collective myth. The similarity is striking between Marie-Noëlle's response to Africa and that of Véronica of Heremakhonon. Marie-Noëlle has more awareness than has Véronica of the reality of Africa, and of her inability to confront it, but she is no nearer to resolving her own problems. Like Véronica, she simply is not ready to face the complexity of a communal response, unable as she is to formulate an individual one. Listening to the reminiscences of Bonne-Maman, Marie-Noëlle recognises the role that Guadeloupe plays in a collective mythology:

Quant à elle, elle se laissait prendre par le charme et comprenait que la Guadeloupe ne valait pas par son présent constamment menacé, mais par son passé, légende rabâchée, offerte à la consommation des grands et des petits pour apaiser leurs angoisses. (p.162)

This is the only time that a communal outlook is expressed, but significantly Marie-Noëlle does not appropriate it as her own, observing it instead from the outside.

The removal of the myth of a home-coming to Guadeloupe reveals the real lack in Marie-Noëlle's situation, that figured by the recital of her birth in the first chapter: she does not belong to a social structure. The fantasy of Guadeloupe as a place of belonging is intensified in Marie-Noëlle's stay at the sanatorium in Vence because there she can imagine that the reason no-one visits her is that her real family is the one waiting for her in Guadeloupe. It is the fantasy of belonging somewhere that makes the sanatorium a haven. The dislocated vision she has of the world is once more underlined in her inappropriate response to leaving: whereas all the other patients dream of being free to resume their normal lives, she has no normal life to resume. Marie-Noëlle appears condemned by her family tradition (the very thing she seeks in

Guadeloupe) to be unable to create any social bonds. In *Les Derniers Rois mages*, Maryse Condé portrays a family dominated by nostalgia for a lost homeland: an inherited condition of exile. This inheritance reduces each generation to inertia, until it is squarely faced by the latest of the line, Spéro. In *Desirada*, the same sort of inherited condition is expressed in an inability to create the affective links that form community (that is, in an inherited marginality). Each generation is born of rape, and Marie-Noëlle, who escapes the same fate as her grandmother and mother, is unable to have children, breaking the curse but also realising its ultimate fulfilment. Mother-daughter relationships are consequently denatured and create isolation.

Moreover, Reynalda and Marie-Noëlle are each in turn cut off from their lineage by the lies they are told to prevent knowledge of their origins. Recognising the pain that Marie-Noëlle will have in living up to the ignominy of her parentage, the very best that Reynalda can do for her child is to hide from her the truth of her origins. Truth thus becomes an elusive and unstable element in the text. Reynalda half-apprehends what Marie-Noëlle discovers: the need to recreate the self by overcoming the past. But what she fails to understand is the need to assume the reality of the past. Whereas Reynalda re-writes the past as fiction, or as a fantasised autobiography, it is the acceptance of, and assumption of, her painful truth which will be the key to Marie-Noëlle's successful integration of herself. Reynalda's fantasies tell a truth which protects Marie-Noëlle, but which also makes her social integration impossible.

As the text progresses, the focus shifts more and more from a quest for identity or place to a quest for love. The abiding question 'de quoi souffrait Reynalda?' changes from a question about origins (Marie-Noëlle's search for her father) to one about emotions (an explanation of why the mother-daughter relationship cannot function). Towards the end of the novel, and just as she is about to resolve the mystery surrounding her birth, Marie-Noëlle attempts to re-define the object of her quest:

D'ailleurs, tout cela était en train de devenir inutile. Inutile? Elle n'en était plus très sûre tant qu'elle n'aurait pas retrouvé Ludovic. Elle n'arrêtait pas de se demander pourquoi il était parti pour la Belgique sans l'attendre. Cela ressemblait à une fuite. Elle avait à présent le courage de s'avouer qu'elle n'était venue à Paris que pour lui. Pourquoi est-ce qu'elle avait si longtemps méconnu la vérité? En fait toute sa vie, elle n'avait fait que chercher Ludovic à travers une quantité d'autres hommes et, à chaque fois, elle avait été flouée. (p.244)



Whilst she turns out to be mistaken in thinking Ludovic the answer to her quest, she acknowledges her need for love, which he alone tries to offer during her exile. This realisation is not entirely unexpected, as Reynalda increasingly becomes her obsession. The quest seems not to be about place or origin any more. Indeed after her visit to Désirade, Marie-Noëlle ceases to be visited by her dream of the hut on the barren plain. This change constitutes not so much a re-definition as a shift towards a self-awareness which had been blocked by the existence of the myth of belonging. The emotional need is instinctively felt by Marie-Noëlle and becomes increasingly articulated, accompanied by an emotional reshaping which will culminate in the breakdown which will leave her able to reappropriate her life.

But whilst Marie-Noëlle does manage to confront the unreality of her myth of belonging, her discovery is not of how to create new affective links. Rather it is the realisation that a communal identity is not possible for her. Repeatedly, other characters point out to Marie-Noëlle the importance of her choice of America as home. Yet she finds herself unable to speak of America, because she has not allocated any imaginative perception to it: 'Marie-Noëlle ne savait pas comment parler de l'Amérique, en dehors des mythes qu'elle secrète: rapports Blancs/Noirs, Puritanisme, Sexualité, Violence' (p.162). At the same time she succeeds in recognising it as being made 'pour ceux de son espèce, les vaincus, ceux qui ne possèdent plus rien, ni pays d'origine, ni religion, peut-être une race et qui se coulent, anonymes, dans ses vastes coins d'ombre' (p.163). She thus recognises it as a space that should be her own, but is unable to appropriate it as her place, since she has no means of doing so. She can feel comfortable there precisely because it offers no community, and thus she is not excluded. What community exists there is defined, as she is, by its marginality. In fact, Marie-Noëlle's instinct to look to her Caribbean origins for an understanding of her predicament is shown to be well-founded, but what she discovers is that she cannot use Guadeloupe as the basis for her identity, because she belongs to a lineage based on shame and secret.

This plot would seem to posit a decentred model for identity. The family unit is necessarily dispersed when love between the generations is impossible, so that society becomes fragmented. Truth of origin equally does not belong to one place, any more than identity does. Rather than being confined to the place of her birth, the clues to the truth

of Marie-Noëlle's origins are found in Désirade, Guadeloupe and Paris, and thus follow the trajectory of her mother's life. This re-evaluation of the link between place and identity is echoed by the positions adopted by a variety of characters. Garvey states readily that he has a securely rooted identity: his place is in Paris, as he has never known anywhere else, and to give himself any other identity would be anomalous. Ludovic does not even know where he is from, and offers the portrait of the nomad, whilst not needing to address the questions this raises. And even Nina, in dismissing Marie-Noëlle as an outsider to Désirade, suggests that not everyone has a place to which they can belong. Nins undermines the myth of the return to one's roots, defining Marie-Noëlle as both an outsider to Désirade, and as a stateless exile, in contrast with those who know their place:

Il n'y a pas de place pour toi ici. Tu es une terre rapportée. Ici chacun depuis sa naissance connaît le chemin dans lequel il doit marcher et la place où, à la fin, il faudra qu'il se couche. (p.202)

The individual is either tied to place or not, and if not, cannot try to manufacture that type of belonging. Belonging to place is one of a number of possible factors of identity.

In *Desirada*, as in *Les Derniers Rois mages*, Maryse Condé tells us that 'le passé doit être mis à mort, sinon c'est lui qui tue', and that, for this to happen, the past must be accepted, or the present too will be rejected. This does not imply the rejection of origins - they must be assumed, but it does not mean either that origins must be re-enacted in the self. Marie-Noëlle entertains the myth of the Caribbean 'retour au pays natal' identified by Mireille Rosello, and fails in her attempts at reincorporation with a Caribbean centre precisely because she allows the desire for a lapidary identification of identity and single location to replace the reality of her fragmented identity. Marie-Noëlle's emotional dispossession is the counterpart to her landlessness (territorial dispossession). In this she has come no further than Véronica of Condé's first novel, *Hérémakhonon*, whose un-rooted discourse represents her identical dispossession.<sup>6</sup> Wangari wa-Nyatetu-Waigwa suggests that

<sup>6</sup> See my article: 'Alienation and inaction: loss of discourse in Maryse Condé's *En attendant le bonheur*', *Mots pluriels*, nO 8, October 1998, <http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/MP898jl.html>

Véronica's inability to assume the 'nous' is redeemed in Coco's 'chez nous' of *La Vie scélérate*:

If, as I have suggested, one reads all Condé's novels as representing one continuous quest, these words complete Véronica's 'chez moi' in *Heremakhonon* and supply the 'nous' that is missing from her discourse. The sense of community, impossible to achieve in Africa, finally exists in Guadeloupe. (p.558)

In fact, I would argue that Véronica never really manages to say 'moi', refusing to assume responsibility for any discourse, because of her failure to identify with any community, which is the foundation for discourse. Marie-Noëlle, on the other hand, does progress beyond Véronica's predicament, in learning to say 'je', as is clearly demonstrated in the first-person narrative that takes over in the final chapter. However, the price of this is that she gives up any attempt to say 'nous'. Her subjectivity is gained by coming through an emotional breakdown, caused precisely by the breaking down of her illusions of belonging to a Caribbean identity, or of integrating herself into a family structure, just as she is forced to renounce any identification with Reynalda. Defining herself as a 'monstruosité' offers her an identity, but one which is characterised by non-identification: 'ma monstruosité me rend unique'. By putting to death the past which condemns her, Marie-Noëlle is forced to put to death that which defines communities: shared experiences which make up tradition. Tradition is the assumption of communal identity and destiny based on the past. Marie-Noëlle has succeeded in realising a new conception of identity which takes into account her particular status. By the end of the novel she has learned that she possesses no orientating centre. Her centre is not geographical, since what makes her comfortable in America is the neutrality of the space she inhabits. Her condition is thus one of isolation rather than the "insularization" Mireille Rosello's speaks of.

In this way, the apparent resolution of the text in the final chapter in fact invites further questions. Maryse Condé would appear, according to the logic of my argument, to suggest that a communal Caribbean identity is impossible. What defines Caribbean identity is, rather, its dispersion, and the only way for the individual to live this dispersion is not to assume liminality, in itself a form of identification, but to renounce any attempt at a rooted identity. However, whilst Marie-Noëlle's story may have reached a form of resolution, one relationship is left entirely unresolved:

[Marie-Noëlle] savait dans les secret de son cœur que leur premier regard avait scellé un pacte. Nina espérait son retour. Elle l'avait espéré dans le vacarme des grands vents de septembre quand, courant depuis l'Afrique, ils gonflent en cyclones, déracinent les pié-bwa et jettent les cases à terre. Elle l'avait espéré dans la fournaise du carême quand le ciel est chauffé à blanc comme une tôle. Parfois, la nuit, les aboiements du chien créole la trompaient. Elle s'imaginait qu'un visiteur s'approchait. Elle courait pour ouvrir la porte. Mais, seule, la noirceur était postée derrière les volets de bois. (p.225)

In fact, Condé suggests that a visceral attachment to origin and community, a sense of solidarity and re-integration are the next goals to be conquered. However, she also suggests that this is unlikely to be achieved. Marie-Noëlle has taken a first step in accepting her predicament, and in rejecting the illusions that make it easier to bear. But the end of the story recalls the end of *Les Derniers Rois mages*, of Spéro waiting at the end of the jetty for his wife's return home, with the constantly renewed intention of a new start. In other words, Marie-Noëlle's quest has opened up a future which has become possible, the success of which is, however, entirely uncertain.

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# Representing Senegal: Narratives and Counter-Narratives of the Nation in the Work of Ousmane Sembene and Aminata Sow Fall

The social function of narrative has been a commonplace theme in many recent literary studies. In particular, the parallel rise of both novel and nation in Europe, as well as the manner in which each feeds off the other, is a phenomenon that has been well documented by contemporary cultural critics.<sup>1</sup> Essentially, all nations rely on a complex series of narratives, not only for their legitimacy but for their very existence. This link between 'nation' and 'narration' (to borrow a phrase from the influential critic Homi K. Bhabha) can also be seen at work in the nation states of the postcolonial world. In the aftermath of independence, African states were obliged to forge and legitimise nations within the arbitrary boundaries they had inherited from their former colonial masters. The 'official' narratives of the nation as expressed in the discourse of the African state, through political speeches and other ideological pronouncements, are also reflected in the narratives of sympathetic creative writers (even if the work of such writers can rarely be reduced to a direct espousal of state ideology).

However, all writers do not participate in the elaboration of 'national narratives'. Oppositional artists, such as the Marxist novelist and filmmaker Ousmane Sembene, seek to develop counter-narratives of the nation by *rewriting* these 'national narratives' and challenging their authority. As a number of critics, and Peter Hawkins in particular, have pointed out, certain of Sembene's oppositional narratives have in turn been *rewritten* by his Senegalese compatriot, the traditionalist Muslim writer Aminata Sow Fall:<sup>2</sup> Sembene's *Xala* (1973) is *rewritten* as *La Grève*

*des battû* (1979); and *Le Dernier de l'empire* (1981) is *rewritten* as Sow Fall's *L'Ex-père de la nation* (1987).<sup>3</sup> I would agree with such critics in interpreting Sow Fall's versions of Sembene's narratives as traditionalist Muslim reworkings of these stories. However, I believe that it is inaccurate to follow their lead in describing her novels as 'official' *Establishment* narratives. In fact, it will be argued that Sow Fall's novels challenge both Marxist and 'official' state accounts of the Senegalese nation.

Before turning to look at Sembene's and Sow Fall's narratives of Senegalese society, it is necessary to examine the precise nature of the state ideology of Senegal in the period following independence from France.<sup>4</sup> Between 1960 and 1980, Senegal was governed (and still is to this day) by the *Parti Socialiste*, which was led throughout this period by the Poet/President Léopold Sédar Senghor. The meeting of artist and politician in the figure of Senghor serves as a useful demonstration of the means by which the political and the cultural can become intertwined. Senghor's notion of Negritude, which promoted the idea of essentialist black and white identities, was not only at the heart of his writing, but was also the official ideology of the Senegalese state.

Although Negritude claimed to be the voice of an *authentic* African or, in this case, Senegalese culture, it would be wrong to assume that this state ideology intended to represent African traditions in the face of the ever-growing influence of the West. In an essay entitled 'Représentations historiques et légitimités politiques au Sénégal (1960-1987)', the Senegalese historian Mamadou Diouf argues that Negritude adopted a museum curator's approach to African tradition, treating it as an object of historical curiosity rather than as a living and vibrant mode of being:

*de pouvoir chez les romancières d'expression française de l'Afrique sub-Saharienne* (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1993), pp.71-96, and Nwabueze Joe Obinaju, 'Human Rights Echoes in Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggars' Strike*, *Neohelicon*, 22, 1 (1995), 295-310.

<sup>3</sup> Ousmane Sembene, *Xala* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1973), and *Le Dernier de l'empire* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1981). Aminata Sow Fall, *La Grève des battû* (1979; Dakar: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1990), and *L'Ex-père de la nation* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> For an analysis of the politics of post-independence Senegal, see Mamadou Diouf, 'Représentations historiques et légitimités politiques au Sénégal (1960-1987)', *Revue de la Bibliothèque Nationale* [Paris], 34 (1989), 14-23. See also Momar Coumba Diop, ed., *Sénégal: trajectoires d'un état* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1992).

<sup>1</sup> See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981), and Homi K. Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (New York & London: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Peter Hawkins, 'Marxist Intertext, Islamic Reinscription? Some Common Themes in the Novels of Sembene Ousmane and Aminata Sow Fall', in *African Francophone Writing: A Critical Introduction*, ed. by Laila Ibnlfassi and Nicki Hitchcott (Oxford: Berg, 1996), pp.163-69. See also Jean-Marie Volet, *La Parole aux Africaines ou l'idée*

Le retour aux sources de la négritude est, en effet, un exercice intellectuel; traduire cet exercice sur la scène politique pour légitimer une démarche se résoud [sic] dans la pensée de Senghor, par l'acceptation de la parole du griot et du récit des traditions orales comme n'exprimant qu'un ensemble de valeurs. [...] Il n'y a ni anecdotes ni «tranches de vie». Seules les images ont leur valeur exemplaire. Le rôle historique du poète allait de soi dans ce contexte.<sup>5</sup>

Diouf effectively argues that Negritude, in its Senghorian form, serves purely to provide the poet-president with a reservoir of 'traditional' images with which to cobble together a composite image of a set of African values. In the process, the very real African 'values' and 'traditions' that were still held dear by the majority of Africans are neglected and marginalised. For Diouf, Senghor's Negritude was merely the literary side of a bourgeois nationalist political movement that sought to establish a narrative of the Senegalese nation stretching back into the mists of time while simultaneously refusing to acknowledge the worth of traditional African values in the modern political process.

As a Marxist, it is not surprising that Sembene shares Diouf's analysis of Negritude. For Sembene, Negritude is a nationalist discourse that aims to cast Africans, and more specifically, the Senegalese, in terms of race, before all other considerations, particularly those of class and gender. This allows the Senghor regime to appear as a radical left-wing movement while, in fact, remaining resolutely conservative (one of the characters in Sembene's novel *Le Dernier de l'empire* makes the following statement about the Senghor figure, Léon Mignane, and his ironically titled ideology of *Authénégrafricanitus*: 'Le coup du socialisme à la Léon Mignane paie toujours [...]. Tu signales à gauche pour tourner à droite.'<sup>6</sup> As was the case in many of the newly liberated countries of Africa, power became concentrated in the hands of the ruling party, the *Parti Socialiste*, which increasingly saw itself as *the* national party. Even though Senegal remained somewhat more liberal than other African states throughout the 1960s and 1970s the ruling national party nonetheless banned all opposition parties for much of this period and declared itself the simple executor of the nation's will. In such a context, Sembene's narratives of Senegalese society play an explicit political role

by refusing the discourse of Negritude and examining his society from a Marxist perspective that marries elements of African culture with the aims and aspirations of socialism. For Sembene, the narratives of his novels and films are engaged in developing a discourse of resistance which challenges the dominant discourses of his society and their claims to legitimacy. He not only challenges the 'official' narratives of the state, but also the narratives of social groups which he views as conservative and repressive (including the more doctrinaire positions of the Islamic community).

Aminata Sow Fall is also opposed to the ideology of Negritude but for very different reasons to those of Sembene. Essentially, Sow Fall represents a large strand of Islamic traditionalist opinion within Senegal which simply did not recognise itself in Senghor's poetic images of the sensual African. Therefore, one of Sow Fall's chief concerns is the desire to provide an Islamic narrative of the nation, a desire that is perhaps best illustrated in her novel *La Grève des battus*. Many Muslims in Senegal disapproved of Senghor's vision of a 'heathen' Africa where sensuality and sexuality reigned supreme. Even Senghor's successor as Senegalese president, Abdou Diouf, has attempted to distance himself from the ideology of Negritude, presenting himself as the champion of a living 'traditional' Africa that Negritude had essentially bypassed in favour of the creation of its own myths of the African past.<sup>7</sup> As a Muslim, Diouf was also seen to be much closer to the nation's Islamic leaders than the Catholic Senghor (who nonetheless had a valuable working relationship with most of the Islamic brotherhoods).

Sow Fall also presents a rival version of Senegalese tradition to the one presented by Senghor. In a 1984 interview, she makes the following claim, in relation to the works of the Negritude generation of writers, and also in relation to her own work:

Si cette revalorisation de nos cultures était importante, il m'a semblé qu'il fallait que la littérature évolue, que nous parlions, que nous parlions strictement de nous-mêmes, que nous découvrions notre âme sans éprouver le besoin de nous placer par rapport à l'Europe.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Mamadou Diouf examines the differences between Senghor's regime and that of Abdou Diouf in his essay 'Représentations historiques et légitimités politiques'. See also his full-length study with Momar Coumda Diop, *Le Sénégal sous Abdou Diouf* (Paris: Karthala, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> See Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana, *Ecrivains africains et identités culturelles-entretiens* (Tübingen: Stauffenberg, 1989), pp.103-04. Sow Fall expresses similar sentiments in an

<sup>5</sup> M. Diouf, 'Représentations historiques', p.16

<sup>6</sup> *Le Dernier de l'empire*, p.250. Hereafter, all page references for this novel will be given in the main body of the text, with the abbreviation DE

Sow Fall here rejects Negritude's negative construction of African identity, which was based on a strict opposition between the West and Africa. However, this does not mean that she wishes to abandon the search for 'authentic' African values. Instead, she proposes to locate the 'authentic African soul' within her own community (although despite her claims to the contrary, this, in fact, replicates Negritude's opposition between the West and Africa). It is hardly surprising that after twenty years of rule by such an autocratic figure as Senghor, the final years of his reign would bring about such a profound questioning of national identity. I would argue, therefore, that Sow Fall's novels represent a challenge to the narratives of Senghor's Senegal from within the conservative wing of Senegalese society. However, unlike Sembene, she does not criticise her society from an economic or a political perspective but rather on social and cultural grounds.

The attitudes of the two writers towards Senghor's regime can best be illustrated in Sembene's *Le Dernier de l'empire* and Sow Fall's *L'Ex-père de la nation*.<sup>9</sup> In *Le Dernier de l'empire*, Sembene satirises the hypocrisy of the Senghor regime through the figure of the Machiavellian Léon Mignane, president of the fictional state of Sunugal. Given the bitter nature of the many political and artistic disputes between the two men, it is hardly surprising that the portrait of Senghor/Mignane is highly vitriolic, poking fun at the diminutive size of the President and at his attempts to stave off the ravages of old age. In another bitter aside, Senghor/Mignane is said to have a blood group that is usually only found in Europe, leading the French ambassador to ask: 'un nègre aryen, où a-t-on vu ça?' (DE, p.39). Perhaps the crowning insult is that Mignane's wife is discovered to be having an affair with one of his government ministers.

Essentially, Léon Mignane is presented as an honorary French consul, ruling independent Senegal on behalf of its former colonial masters. In fact, one of the meanings of the novel's title refers specifically to the overthrow of Senghor/Mignane from power. To rid Senegal of Léon Mignane is the first step in gaining a meaningful independence from France. Above all, *Le Dernier de l'empire* is a novel that sums up

Sembene's frustrations with Senghor's regime. However, within the novel, there seems to be no coherent opposition to the regime, only fragmented pockets of resistance. It seems to be this lack of a true opposition that pushes Sembene to imagine the unlikely marriage of the military and the young urban unemployed, who together finally overthrow Mignane. However, despite its limitations, their coup d'état at least has the merit of putting an end to French rule in the country.

Sow Fall's portrayal of the Senghor figure, Madiama, in *L'Ex-père de la nation* is far more sympathetic than Sembene's vitriolic narrative. In fact, her novel is far more loosely based on events in Senegalese society (even the president, Madiama, is transformed into a six foot, six inch ex-goalkeeper in contrast to the diminutive Senghor/Mignane, so cruelly mocked in Sembene's text). The narrative is told from the President's point of view (which lends to the sympathetic portrait) as he languishes in jail after being deposed in a *coup d'état*. In contrast with Sembene's presentation of the manipulative character of Léon Mignane, Sow Fall depicts Madiama as a well-meaning man who enters politics in order to serve his society but ends up being corrupted by power, and particularly by the influence of his French adviser Andru. As in *Le Dernier de l'empire*, Sow Fall has her narrator rail against Africa's dependence on the West. However, unlike Sembene, she does not advocate an overthrow of the current regime (in fact, the *coup d'état* at the end of the novel merely replaces Madiama with a more corrupt leader). Effectively, the President's failure is cast in moral terms (it should be noted in this respect that his downfall is precipitated by the decision to raid the nation's mosques in the search for his political enemies, provoking a spontaneous popular uprising). Madiama abandons the beliefs and values of his society in favour of the absolute political power which has all too often accompanied the advent of the modern nation state in Africa. For Sow Fall, it seems to be the very concept of the state (a 'Western' notion) that corrupts Madiama.

In the second pair of novels, Sembene's *Xala* and Sow Fall's *La Grève des bâttu*, the similarities and contrasts between the two narratives are even more striking. Both novels tell the tale of the humbling of a powerful man at the hands of a group of beggars; both novels address the questions of polygamy and the treatment of women (even the sub-title of Sow Fall's book, *les déchets humains*, makes a deliberate reference to the manner in which beggars are described in *Xala*). However, despite

interview with Peter Hawkins, 'An Interview with Senegalese Novelist Aminata Sow Fall', *French Studies Bulletin*, 22 (Spring 1987), 19-21.

<sup>9</sup> Another Senegalese novel that deals with the cultural and political aspects of the Senghor era is Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Les Gardiens du temple* (Paris: Stock, 1995).



the surface similarities in the plots of the two books, they display a vastly different understanding of the problems facing Senegalese society.

Sembene's *Xala* is essentially the satirical story of El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye, a businessman who has just acceded to the Dakar Chamber of Commerce. On this very same day, El Hadji is to marry his third wife. As both a businessman and a respectable Muslim, El Hadji would appear to have reached the top of the social ladder. However, disaster strikes on his wedding night when he is struck down with the xala, the curse of impotence. For the rest of the novel, he desperately seeks a cure for his problem but, in the process, he spends his money wildly on *marabouts* and his business collapses. At the end of the novel, the blind beggar, who has placed the curse upon El Hadji, and his army of cripples and beggars burst into El Hadji's home and cure/punish him by spitting on his naked body. The political symbolism is plain to see: the neo-colonial bourgeoisie are presented as an impotent class whose downfall will be brought about by the destitute and the oppressed of their society. When the beggars spit on him, they are spitting out the anger of all those who are socially excluded from Senegalese society. Their impoverished condition is a metaphor for the destitution of the country as a whole. When El Hadji's daughter Rama threatens them with imprisonment upon the arrival of the police at the house, the blind beggar counters with the following words: 'Fille, ne sais-tu pas que, dans ce pays, le détenu est plus heureux que l'ouvrier et le paysan? Pas d'impôts à payer, en plus tu es nourri, logé et soigné' (*Xala*, p.188). Such is the state of the country that imprisonment holds no fear for them. In fact, life in prison would actually be preferable to their miserable existence. In *Xala*, Sembene effectively presents us with an embryonic class struggle. The *lumpenproletariat* may not have figured in Marx's plans for the overthrow of bourgeois society but Sembene follows Fanon's lead in giving a dynamic, revolutionary role to those at the bottom of the social scale.<sup>10</sup> The last line of the novel makes it clear that this revolt will be met with armed force by the authorities: 'Dehors, les forces de l'ordre manipulaient leurs armes en position de tir' (*Xala*, p.190).

<sup>10</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961; Paris: Gallimard, Collection Folio, 1991), pp.174-76.

Sow Fall's *La Grève des bâttu* also presents a narrative in which the poor and the dispossessed come together to exact revenge on their oppressor, Mour Ndiaye. It is Mour Ndiaye, in his capacity as *Directeur du service de la salubrité publique*, who is responsible for the beatings that the beggars receive from the police. The beggars are beaten and moved on to the outskirts of the city because they do not fit in with the picturesque image that the government wishes to present to the Western tourists who provide such a valuable source of national income. As in *L'ex-père de la nation*, the novel attacks the actions of a government which sets itself apart from the people, its 'Western' mode of power causing it to lose touch with the values of the community. It is in the face of this brutal repression by the government that the beggars decide to hold a strike.

However, unlike the beggars in Sembene's novel, their action is not based on economic grounds. In *Xala*, the blind beggar is constantly moved on by the police from outside El Hadji's office, the site where he gains his income. What is more, we discover in the final section of the novel that El Hadji is, in fact, responsible for the destitution of the blind beggar whose land he had stolen by changing the names on the title deeds, using his Western education in the name of corruption and capitalism (which are effectively synonymous terms in the novel). In *La Grève des bâttu*, the beggars' strike is based on moral and religious grounds: although beggars are argued to be destitute for a variety of concrete social and economic reasons, their position in society is seen in explicitly religious terms. Far from advocating revolution, the beggars are claimed to be a key element in the structure of society. One of the leaders of the beggars, Nguirane Sarr, argues this case in the following way:

Même ces fous, ces sans-cœur, ces brutes qui nous raflent et nous battent, ils donnent la charité. Ils ont besoin de donner la charité parce qu'ils ont besoin de nos prières; les vœux de longue vie, de prospérité, de pèlerinage, ils aiment les entendre chaque matin pour chasser les cauchemars de la veille et pour entretenir l'espoir d'un lendemain meilleur. Vous croyez que ces gens donnent par gentillesse? Non, mais par instinct de conservation. (*Grève des bâttu*, p.32)

Begging is here argued to be an integral part of the social and religious order. The giving of alms at specific times in the religious calendar, called *zakat*, is one of the five pillars of Islam. Equally, the casual daily giving of alms, *sadakat*, is also highly recommended for Muslims

(although as we shall see later, the Islamic function of almsgiving has become confused with animist and sometimes downright capitalist practices). In Nguirane Sarr's vision, begging forms part of the social bond within an Islamic society. Beggars need charity; and those who give alms need the blessings of the beggars.

The principal charge against Mour Ndiaye is that he is betraying his culture and his religion by outlawing begging in the city. The beggars constantly refer to the inhumanity of their tormentors who treat them as though they were animals. Mour Ndiaye's actions are therefore seen to be immoral: they are not an example of the exploitation of one class by another (as in *Xala*). Even the questions of polygamy and the treatment of women are seen entirely in moral terms. In *Xala*, El Hadji's third marriage to Ngoné is a sign of his social status: this young girl is literally just another consumer item that he possesses. However, Mour Ndiaye's second marriage is criticised because of the lack of respect he displays towards his first wife, Lolli. Furthermore, this immorality is seen to be a direct result of Mour Ndiaye's cultural alienation. Wrapped up in modern, Western consumer culture, Mour forgets about the traditional, religious and moral teachings of his society, in his dealings with both his wives and the beggars (as many critics have pointed out, the novel explicitly links the treatment of women to the treatment of the poor).<sup>11</sup>

However, Mour Ndiaye is not devoid of spiritual belief (just like Sembene's El Hadji, he combines consumer fetishism with the fetishes of the marabout). In fact, it appears that he can take no serious decision without consulting his own personal marabouts, whose religious doctrines reflect the syncretic nature of Islam in West Africa with its innumerable borrowings from local animist religions. Ironically, it is these beliefs that bring about the demise of his ambitions to become Vice-President of the nation. Advised by one of his marabouts to distribute a sacrificial offering to the destitute of the town, he is left unable to do so because the beggars are on strike and refuse to occupy their 'posts' in the city centre. The novel here criticises the way in which religion becomes simply another means of gaining social advancement. By questioning the relationship between the giver and the receiver of alms, Sow Fall invites the reader to consider the 'true' religious value of charity. Whereas in Sembene's narrative, the tenets of socialism and the

class struggle are argued to bring about equality and justice, in Sow Fall's vision, social order and justice are deemed to be guaranteed by Islam.

This paper has attempted to trace the lines of certain ideological debates within Senegal, and their reflection and refraction within a number of Senegalese texts. As I have shown, competing narratives of the nation can be seen at work in the novels of both Ousmane Sembene and Aminata Sow Fall. Both writers present counter-narratives of the nation to challenge the authority of the 'official' narratives of the State. The Anglo-Indian writer Salman Rushdie has written of the power of fiction to imagine alternatives to the narratives proposed by the State:

Redescribing a world is the first step to changing it. And particularly at times when the State takes reality into its own hands, and sets about distorting it, altering the past to fit its present needs, then the making of the alternative realities of art, including the novel of memory, becomes politicised [...]. Writers and politicians are natural rivals. Both groups try to make the world in their own images; they fight for the same territory. And the novel is one way of denying the official, politician's version of truth.<sup>12</sup>

While both Sembene and Sow Fall present counter-narratives to the 'official' narratives of the State, they do so for very different ends, with Sembene writing in the name of left-wing ideology, and Aminata Sow Fall writing from a conservative, traditionalist, Muslim perspective. Both writers are, in fact, largely hostile to the narratives presented by the other: Sembene challenges the authority of Islamic discourse, while Sow Fall explicitly *rewrites* several of Sembene's texts from her own ideological standpoint. Ironically, although Sembene's work attracts a wider readership, it is Islamic narratives of the kind presented in the less popular work of Aminata Sow Fall that increasingly occupy a dominant position in post-Senghor Senegal. Sembene's counter-narratives may hold the ascendancy in the literary sphere but it is the Islamic narrative of the Senegalese nation that is progressively becoming part of 'official' state discourse.

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<sup>11</sup> See, in particular, Trinh T. Minh-ha, 'Aminata Sow Fall et l'espace du don', *French Review*, 55, 6 (May 1982), 780-89.

<sup>12</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), p.14.

## Book Reviews

Bridget Jones, Arnauld Miguet, Patrick Corcoran, eds.  
*Francophonie: mythes, masques et réalités. Enjeux politiques et culturels* (Paris: Publisud, 1996)

It is made clear from the beginning of this interesting collection of essays that the editors have chosen to adopt a thematic rather than a regional approach to the notion of *la Francophonie*. Whereas the regional approach examines cultural, political or linguistic phenomena within specific geographical areas, the thematic approach offers the problematisation of the very notion of *la Francophonie* itself.

The essays are grouped under three thematic headings: politics, linguistics and culture. In order for such an approach to work, it is necessary that the political essays sufficiently problematise the rather ambiguous and hotly debated notion of *la Francophonie*, teasing out all the various opinions and ideas on the subject. Towards this end, Anne Judge's fascinating essay provides an informed and coherent introduction. Of those who paint a positive vision of *la Francophonie*, the articles by Jacques Legendre, and André Péloquin, stand out as striking examples of the ideals that motivate many of those who work at the heart of the massive administrative machinery of *la Francophonie*.

Unfortunately, there is no counter-balancing vision. Not only are all the essays in the first section favourable towards *la Francophonie*, but also none of them deals in any depth with the troubled relationship between France and other so-called Francophone countries, particularly those in Africa. Anne Judge departs from her discursive tone to claim that one would have to be a cynic to criticise *la Francophonie*. Equally, Arnauld Miguet ignores the many examples of France's neo-colonial and bloody interference in African countries such as Zaïre, Chad, Rwanda and the Central African Republic (to name but a few cases in a long list) to describe Franco-African relations as a mutually beneficial arrangement.

What makes the lack of criticism in the opening section all the more glaring is that there are two texts that are openly critical of *la Francophonie* to be found in the sections dealing with linguistic and cultural issues: Aline Cook's essay describes the stark economic realities of *la Francophonie* in Cameroon while Elie Stephenson defends *créole* culture in Guyana in the face of what she sees as the neo-colonial

dominance of French. The inclusion of at least one of these essays in the first section would have given the collection a better balance.

It is interesting to note that the essays in the opening section stress the importance of *la francophonie* as a mechanism for the defence of the French language in the face of the domination of English (similar ideas are expressed in the *préface* and in the *postface* by the editors). Several of the essays in the linguistic and cultural sections deal with this issue. For example, Peter Hawkins and Mat Pires examine French responses to the growing domination of English in the field of popular music. This question is further developed in a number of essays which analyse the position of the French language in Quebec, where worries about the domination of English are accompanied by the will to assert a distinctive identity from the French.

However, the defence of the French language against a rampant English appears limited to France and Quebec. In the essays by Aline Cook and Elie Stephenson mentioned above, it is French, not English, that is depicted as an alien language seeking to extend its sphere of influence. Equally, Dawn Marley and Zitoundi Ould-Dada examine the economic considerations that push Moroccans to learn French as well as Arabic or Berber.

It becomes clear that conceptions of *la Francophonie* and of the French language differ greatly from one part of the world to another. This collection of essays reflects these contrasts but, unfortunately, it is the French version which dominates. Nonetheless, the book is an intelligent contribution to the ongoing debate on *la Francophonie* and provides a useful overview of many of the issues at stake.

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Alexie Tcheuyap, *Esthétique et folie dans l'œuvre romanesque de Pius Ngandu Nkashama* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998)

Alexie Tcheuyap's study of the theme of madness in the work of Pius Ngandu Nkashama is both clear and well-argued. Rather than dealing with Nkashama's entire œuvre, the study focuses on five of his novels: *La Malédiction* (1983), *Le Pacte de sang* (1984), *La Mort faite homme* (1986), *Les Etoiles écrasées* (1988), and *Yakouta* (1995). Essentially, Tcheuyap combines a socio-historical and a 'textual' approach, which reflects Nkashama's own approach to madness in his novels. As Tcheuyap argues in his introduction, Nkashama 'tient un discours sur la folie' and 'il le couple à une folie du discours' (p.15). Therefore, the critic must deal with both the textual and the social interpretation of this madness.

Tcheuyap begins by establishing the ideological and socio-historical context in which Nkashama's novels are set. He argues that Nkashama (and indeed all 'Congolese' writers) are fascinated by the notion of *démence* for the simple reason that, within the one-party state of a dictator such as Mobutu, to express opposition is literally to show signs of insanity. Nkashama himself was branded a *fou* by the State-run media in Zaïre (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) because of his refusal to join the ruling party or take up ministerial office. Contrary to the other writers who have associated madness in Africa with African spirituality and belief in the supernatural, Nkashama views *la folie* as a social and political fact.

The rest of the study is effectively a textual analysis of the ways in which Nkashama writes this madness into his novels (what Tcheuyap calls 'la folie textuelle'). Borrowing from the work of Genette, Tcheuyap examines narrative voice, syntax, titles, language, and even the covers of the novels, which were designed by Nkashama. This 'folie textuelle' is divided into three basic categories. Firstly, there is 'l'aspect formel', which refers to typographical oddities, abrupt changes in form, the use of multiple languages without explanation. Secondly, there is 'l'aspect syntaxique', covering the lack of punctuation, the use of pronouns without any indication of the person to whom they are referring. Finally, there is 'l'aspect sémantique', which refers to the incomprehensibility of certain passages: literally, the text becomes a site of 'non-sense' or madness. These 'textual' aspects are subsequently applied to a number

of themes relating to madness, namely violence, revolution and obsession.

Overall, Tcheuyap's study provides a clear and thorough analysis of the aesthetics of madness within Nkashama's novels. The classic Genette-type structure with its exhaustive and slow-moving progression from one idea to the next may put off some readers but ultimately it is a rewarding and informative read. If the doubtful reader needs 'proof' of the worth of Tcheuyap's study, it is provided in the form of a critique of the book by none other than Nkashama himself, which appears as a 'postlude'. The exact status of Nkashama's text is not made clear but it would appear that Nkashama was on the jury for Tcheuyap's *soutenance*, and his critique reads like a report on a thesis. As one might imagine, Nkashama proves to be a most insightful critic and, rather confusingly, it appears that many of his criticisms of and comments on the thesis have been incorporated into the final published text that we have just read. This makes for a rather unsettling (if not quite mad) conclusion to an otherwise logical and coherent work.

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*Bayreuther Frankophonie Studien / Etudes francophones de Bayreuth*, ed. János Riesz & Véronique Porra (Bayreuth: Edition Schultz & Stellmocher, Friedrich-Puchta-Str. 12, D 95444 Bayreuth), 1 (1997): *Approches francophones* (ISBN 3-930638-13-4); 2 (1998): *Français et Francophones* (ISBN 3-930638-15-0); 3 (forthcoming): *L'Afrique centrale dans les littératures européennes*

Readers of the *ASCALF Bulletin*, familiar with the notable contribution of the team grouped around János Riesz at Bayreuth to the area of Francophone studies, will be interested by definition in the appearance of this new journal. Each issue contains articles in either French or German and focuses on a chosen theme. I list below those papers, invariably well-informed and sometimes punchy, which deal with African or Caribbean topics.

N° 1 contains: Justin Bisanswa Kalulu, 'Bref propos sur la littérature du Congo-Zaïre'; Véronique Porra, 'Batouala en France et en Allemagne. Genèse et conséquences d'une polémique'; Claudia Ortner-Buchberger, 'Elemente einer postmodernen Ästhetik in Romanwerk von Édouard Glissant'; Sonja Lehner, '«Mulattinnen erster, zweiter und dritter Klasse». Die Darstellung des biologischen und kulturelle métissage in Aboudalye Sadjis Roman *Nini, mulâtresse du Sénégal* (1935/1947)'; János Riesz, 'Un regard africain sur la société coloniale: Birago Diop, écrivain et vétérinaire'; and Katharina Städtler, 'Exotische Anthologien: Literaturen aus den französischen Kolonien (1920-1950)'.

In N° 2, more than twice the size and containing a review and a list of books received, we find inter alia: János Riesz, 'Introduction: tendances centripètes et centrifuges dans les littératures françaises/francophones contemporaines'; Ambroise Têko-Agbo, 'Marie Ndiaye, une romancière inclassable'; Justin Bisanswa Kalulu, 'Littérature négro-africaine et francophonie'; Ambroise Kom, 'Francophonie dévaluée, littérature atrophiée'; Guy Ossito-Midiouhouan/Roger Koudoadinou, 'L'édition en Afrique noire francophone: vers une autonomie', Papa Samba Diop, 'Du glossaire comme indice identitaire de pôles socioculturels: repérage et décodage de l'hyperculture. L'exemple de la production romanesque sénégalaise'; Sélon Komlan Gbanou, 'Dénominations et écritures dans le théâtre de Sénouvo Zinsou'; Romuald Fonkoua, 'Stratégies et

positions d'écriture dans le champ littéraire francophone: étude critique à partir des cas de Senghor et de Glissant'; Claudia Ortner-Buchberger, 'Retour et détour: Raphaël Confiant et Édouard Glissant face à la «créolité»'; and Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, 'L'Histoire décentrée': Bé-Maho de Monique Agenor et la perception de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale dans l'empire colonial français'.

Other articles deal with Belgian or Canadian material in this welcome addition to the range of journals in our field.

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János Riesz, *Französisch in Afrika: Herrschaft durch Sprache. Europäisch-afrikanische Literaturbeziehungen II*. (Studien in den frankophonen Literaturen außerhalb Europas, Bd. 17). Frankfurt: IKO, Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1998. xv + 419 pp. ISBN 3-88939-438-8.

János Riesz inaugurated this series in 1993 with his *Koloniale Mythen, Afrikanische Antworten. Europäisch-afrikanische Literaturbeziehungen I*, and this is another major contribution from him. It investigates, as its subtitle indicates, the role of language as handmaiden to France's 'mission civilisatrice' in Africa and its continuing effects on relations between colonised and coloniser. Although the focus is principally literary, starting with the mid-nineteenth century and covering colonial literature as well, predominantly if selectively, as important writings in French by lack Africans, a sub-section is devoted to the plight of present-day 'sans papiers', so bringing into sharp focus the inseparability of the literary and the socio-political in this field of investigation.

The range is impressive, well indicated by the titles of the principal sections into which the book is divided: 'Der Kampf um die französische Sprache', 'Der Kampf um eine afrikanische Literatur', 'Der europäisch-afrikanische «Papierkrieg»' and the concluding 'Geschichte und Autobiographie: Schlussbetrachtung'. The volume closes with a bibliography but regrettably has no index. The interaction of the political, the psycho-logical and the linguistic is established through relevant texts on assimilation/association and métissage in the nineteenth century, notably by Léopold Panet, David Boilat, Prévost-Paradol and Leroy-Beaulieu. Nor is the religious dimension overlooked, with the Church as an arm of government. After an investigation of the interaction between exoticism and colonial literature, attention shifts to the early African writers in French and to questions of plagiarism which have not lost their relevance (though Calixthe Beyala's case is not directly addressed). The relationship between war and writing not surprisingly focuses on ways in which tirailleurs sénégalais are represented, not omitting their sometimes forgotten use by the French in Morocco. Part 3 highlights the role of identity papers, necessary proof of existence in the eyes of French officialdom, meaningless scraps within the African tradition, and so a valuable index of the uncomprehending

confrontation of two cultures in many a text. The interplay of autobiography and history is studied finally in books by Amadou Hampâté Bâ and V. Y. Mudimbe to bring the story up to date.

Such a brief summary does scant justice to the wealth of documentation and critical percipience manifest in the book. Riesz is one of the relatively few scholars not to limit his interest to writing by Blacks but to recognise the importance of setting it in a broader historical and socio-political context. While such scope may leave out many a reference which individual readers would think important and/or interesting, it has the great merit of providing not only a stimulating overview of the tensions and distortions involved in the various stances adopted but also particular angles of approach which bring together scattered instances of significant themes. Those who do not read German (and mine is more than halting) will hope that a French translation of Professor Riesz's studies will become available in the near future.

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## Report on ASCALF Conference 1998

Le Xe Colloque a été inauguré par le Président, Peter Hawkins, qui nous a fait part du décès tout récent de Dorothy Blair, cofondatrice de l'ASCALF et a souligné son rôle de pionnière dans le domaine de la littérature francophone, tant comme traductrice d'oeuvres-clés que comme auteur du premier ouvrage critique sur ce domaine peu connu du public anglophone. Il a ensuite passé la parole à Geraldine d'Amico, la nouvelle Attachée Culturelle, qui nous a accueillis au nom de l'Institut Français et a souligné le rôle essentiel de l'ASCALF en Grande Bretagne dans le développement des études francophones universitaires.

La première journée était consacrée à l'Afrique sub-saharienne. János Riesz (Université de Bayreuth), qui participait pour la troisième fois au Colloque, a ouvert la première session avec une communication sur le rôle primordial de la lecture des oeuvres littéraires françaises comme vecteur de l'acculturation des colonisés. Il a néanmoins démontré comment la lecture peut déboucher sur une restitution de l'histoire occultée et sur une résistance à la colonisation comme chez Sissoko (*La savane rouge*) et Maran (*Batouala*) ou même aboutir à un retour à la culture d'origine: c'est-à-dire à une vision de l'Islam comme bouclier protecteur contre l'influence de l'Occident, comme dans *Mirages de Paris* d'Ousmane Socé ou *L'Aventure ambiguë* de Cheikh Hamidou Kane.

L'intervention de János Riesz a été suivie par celle de Justin Bisanswa de l'Université de Bukavu (mais qui poursuit des recherches à Bayreuth pendant l'année universitaire 98/99). Bisanswa a choisi de parler de la 'citation' dans le roman africain et surtout dans les oeuvres de Sony Labou Tansi, Henri Lopès et V.Y. Mudimbe. D'après Bisanswa, les écrivains africains prennent des citations d'écrivains occidentaux et les adaptent à la culture africaine. Par exemple, Henri Lopès commente et explique des citations "occidentales", tandis que Sony Labou Tansi les transforme et les mutile afin de se les approprier. Ce réseau de citations constitue un lieu de différents héritages culturels, une conjonction qui ne s'opère pas sans heurts.

Fatima Gallaire s'étant excusée, deux communications sur l'Afrique ont été reportées au samedi pour ré-équilibrer le programme. Joseph Mbele (St Olaf College, Maine) a affirmé que les premières lectures critiques

marxistes/réalistes de l'oeuvre d'Ousmane Sembene trahissent une méconnaissance des traditions culturelles africaines, et que l'intertextualité des *Bouts de bois de Dieu* réside en un dialogue entre Zola et l'épopée wolof. Il a soutenu que le rôle des femmes dans la grève est fondé d'une part sur une analyse socialiste de la société africaine et d'une lignée d'héroïnes (l'aveugle Maïmouna ayant pour référent épique l'histoire de Goumba N'Diaye) et d'autre part sur un dialogue entre tradition orale et texte écrit (comme dans les films *Emitaï* et *Ceddo*).

A partir de son expérience personnelle du contact des langues au Nigéria, la communication de Françoise Parent-Ugochukwu (Univ. de Lancashire) reprenait certaines des questions soulevées par les interventions précédentes des deux journées du colloque. Malgré la quasi-impossibilité d'articuler certains concepts culturels africains dans une langue européenne, des écrivains tels qu'Achebe, Soyinka, Laye, ou Dadié ont fait ce choix, sachant que les locuteurs africains ne peuvent pas lire leur propre langue mais qu'ils lisent le français ou l'anglais. Ces écrivains ont recours à une variété de procédés (mots se référant à la faune, à la flore ou aux coutumes transcrits littéralement, pidgin, onomatopées) pour faire passer le culturel africain. Ils se placent d'autant plus naturellement dans la position de traducteurs ou d'interprètes que le plurilinguisme est chose normale en Afrique.

David Murphy (Trinity College, Dublin) avait choisi de comparer deux lectures, marxiste chez Ousmane Sembene, islamiste chez Aminata Sow Fall de la période historique (1960-80) du Parti Socialiste au pouvoir au Sénégal sous Senghor. Sembene dans *Le Dernier de l'empire* dénonçait chez Senghor la confusion entre le politique et le culturel, la négritude comme "un exercice intellectuel" et un nationalisme bourgeois divorcé de la nation à laquelle il prétendait s'identifier. Aminata Sow Fall représente la tradition islamique majoritaire au Sénégal et de ce fait, dans *L'Ex-père de la nation*, elle accuse Senghor, pris au piège de ses contradictions culturelles, d'avoir gouverné au profit d'une minorité bourgeoise et catholique. Puis, dans *La Grève des bâttu*, elle accuse Sembene de donner une image culturelle fausse de l'Afrique et aussi de la mendicité, qu'il voit comme étant liée aux conditions économiques, alors qu'elle est indissociable, selon Sow Fall, de l'ordre social et politique. Ils sont d'accord sur les causes de l'échec du régime mais s'opposent quant aux remèdes à y apporter. Leurs analyses respectives montrent d'abord l'écart qui s'est creusé au Sénégal entre 1960 et 1980 et

posent la question des limites de l'influence que peuvent exercer les écrivains pour changer la société.

Pat Corcoran (Roehampton) a parlé du rôle de l'interprète dans *Monnè, outrages et défis* de Ahmadou Kourouma et dans *L'Etrange destin de Wangrin* d'Amadou Hampaté Bâ. Dans la société coloniale, l'interprète tient une place privilégiée dans la chaîne de communication entre coloniseurs et colonisés. C'est en effet l'interprète qui filtre et qui commente les valeurs et les traditions des deux côtés dans cette confrontation. Dans le livre de Hampaté Bâ, l'interprète devient un aliéné culturel qui perd contact avec ses racines. Dans le roman de Kourouma, c'est l'interprète qui "traduit" les valeurs des colonisateurs dans un langage que son chef peut comprendre et entre ainsi dans un jeu de duplicité au profit des Français.

Jonathan Carr-West (University College, London) a parlé de la réécriture dans l'œuvre de Sony Labou Tansi. Ses romans sont commentés la plupart du temps au niveau de leur critique politique de l'Etat contemporain en Afrique. A l'opposé de ces interprétations politiques, Carr-West s'intéresse plutôt à la représentation positive d'une identité culturelle dans l'œuvre de Labou Tansi. Cette représentation de l'identité culturelle rejette toute notion d'une identité normative ou authentique. S'appuyant sur les idées de Homi K. Bhabha entre autres, Carr-West soutend que les romans de Labou Tansi crée un discours qui articule une identité hybride et assimilatrice.

Amadou Seck (Portsmouth) a proposé une analyse de l'idéologie de Léopold Sédar Senghor et surtout des deux concepts de la négritude et de la francité. Pour Senghor, la négritude était l'expression d'une culture nègre qui participait à ce qu'il appelait la civilisation de l'universel, c'est-à-dire le total des cultures des différentes races du monde. la francité, quant à elle, était l'aspect culturel de la francophonie et illustrait le rôle du français comme langue de culture à vocation universelle. Cette notion de francité crée un dilemme pour Senghor: comment expliquer le lien entre la France comme oppresseur et la France comme pays de culture et source des valeurs humanistes?

Pour l'écrivain guinéen Tierno Monenembo, invité d'honneur au colloque, l'exil véritable n'a commencé qu'après les premières étapes (Dakar, Abidjan et l'atterrissage sans parachute au Mamouth de Caluire) d'où sont nés le recours à l'écriture et le roman, *Les crapauds-brousse*, heureusement remarqué par les éditions du Seuil. Ensuite, au hasard de

ses postes d'enseignant, en France, Algérie, Maroc et de séjours en Amérique Latine où il a retrouvé au Brésil et au Mexique un peu de l'Afrique, il s'est forgé une identité d'écrivain par "devoir de mémoire", pour combler une défaillance collective: "j'écris contre la bêtise et l'ennui." L'écrivain a besoin de l'exil pour conserver une distance nécessaire par rapport à la réalité ("Sassine est mort d'être rentré en Guinée"). Il applique une curiosité scientifique aux questions qui le confrontent, telles que la logique du génocide dont le dogme naît au 19e siècle. Il nourrit un projet né de sa propre errance, sur les Peuls et le thème du voyage, pour comprendre le monde en disparition des peuples pasteurs. Le rôle de l'intellectuel africain? Un pur produit colonial, incapable de produire des armes théoriques pour détruire le colonialisme dont il est infecté. Le choix du français limite-t-il l'impact des intellectuels? L'Africain est naturellement plurilingue, le français n'est pas un choix, c'est un moyen d'expression.

Day Two was centered broadly on the interplay of the literary, the linguistic and the socio-political in the relations of the Francophone and Arabophone worlds. The morning session was opened by Daniel Lançon (Université de Tours), who examined the dramatic erosion of the traditionally multi-cultural Egyptian society and its thriving francophone minority under the pressure of arabisation which followed independence. Whereas in the 20s and 30s French had been seen as the medium for expressing aspirations to modernity and independence under British rule, after 1956, Francophone writers found themselves marginalised and associated with the *ancien régime*. Like other cultural or religious minorities they were accused of undermining national identity and the Algerian war further compromised their position.

It was made equally clear by Abigail Descombes (Royal Holloway), in her study of the Beur generation of writers and their uneasy task of mediating between two antagonistic cultures that France is still far from accommodating its largest minority group within a multi-cultural society. She examined the ambiguous position of Azouz Begag's *Beur* characters, engaged in a two-way translation exercise, negotiating the cultural as well as the generation gap in order to win the right to their own dual identity. Begag plays with situations of deliberate mis-translation, putting a humorous gloss on his exposure of the basic intranslatability of two worlds, in the hope of creating a space for the *Beurs*, but at the risk of being disowned by them.

Aedín Ní Loingsigh (Trinity College, Dublin) used the example of Driss Chraïbi's *Les Boucs* in order to discuss the problems facing the North African writer in 'interpreting the immigrant experience'. Yalann Waldik, the narrator of the novel, has received a Western education and has mastered the French language. This role as an intellectual distances him from his illiterate compatriots (the *Boucs*), but it does not allow him to integrate with the French, for whom he remains an immigrant. The novel is both a study of the intellectual's role as spokesperson for his community and an exploration of the psychological torment endured by Waldik because of the complex nature of his role as 'interpreter' of the *Boucs*' experiences. The notion of an 'interstitial space' occupied by the non-European immigrant in Europe, espoused by Homi K. Bhabha, thus becomes problematised. Does the immigrant Maghrebian manual labourer really occupy the same social space as the immigrant intellectual?

Raynalle Udris (Middlesex) also discussed *Les Boucs*, as well as Azouz Begag's *Les Chiens aussi*, focusing in particular on the use of animal metaphor, the centrality of which can be seen from the very titles of these novels. However, the novels use such metaphors in very different ways. *Les Boucs* uses the central animal metaphor of the title in a thematic fashion, which constantly refers to the mythical connotations of the word. Begag uses the metaphor of the 'chien' throughout his novel as a stylistic device, often humorous, producing a less immediate social vision than Chraïbi.

The final afternoon began with a round table on translation, which gave a platform to two professional translators, Meredith Oakes and Isabelle Waterstone, as well as to a translation student from the University of Westminster, Saskia Hephher. The session was chaired by Debra Kelly (Westminster). Saskia Hephher began the session with a discussion of the translation problems which faced her in translating Mouloud Feraoun's *Le Fils du Pauvre*. She focused in particular on the difficulty of conveying information to the English-language reader about North African society without making a radical departure from the style of the original French-language text. Meredith Oakes then introduced another dimension by dealing with the problems involved in translating for the stage, speaking in particular of her own translation of Fatima Gallaïre's *Princesses*. When translating for the stage, it is necessary that the dialogue 'sound right' when spoken aloud, as well as conveying the

meaning of the source text. The final speaker, Isabelle Waterstone, dealt with her recently completed translation of Annie Cohen's *Le Marabout de Blida*. She spoke in highly personal and passionate terms of her efforts to find Western cultural equivalents for North African terms and ideas which might appear impenetrable to the English-language reader, particularly that of the 'marabout', which she chose to translate as 'oracle-man'.

The conference came to a close with a *vin d'honneur* to thank Christopher Thompson of the University of Warwick for his financial support for the new-look ASCALF Yearbook, and also to his wife for her eye-catching artwork on the new cover.

Denise Ganderton and David Murphy

## Exhibition: L'Afrique de Marcel Griaule Musée de l'Homme, October-December 1998

This exhibition, celebrating the centenary of the pioneering ethnologist, covers the whole period of his career, from his first expedition to Abyssinia in 1928-29, through his many missions to black Africa and notably into Dogon country, until his premature death in 1956. One of its many merits is to chart the development of his method and its philosophy. Certain guiding principles remain constant: his commitment to team-work, for example, which meant the precious collaboration of local specialists and informants as well as that of fellow professionals such as Germaine Dieterlen, Marcel Larget, Jean-Paul Lebeuf, Solange de Ganay, Denise Paulme, his daughter Geneviève Calame-Griaule and others, such as the writer Michel Leiris. But the early record-cards gave way to a much more diverse and complex recording system, "l'objectif [n'étant] plus de mettre toute une société en fiches pour accéder à un savoir général, mais de reconstituer à plus long terme un système de pensée et un savoir de type ésotérique." More and more, he came to see objects not simply as witnesses to a given culture, but as "l'expression d'un système de pensée". Thus we see in the exhibition objects at every stage of their development and usage: a worn specimen alongside a brand-new one, a pot before and after firing or decoration, as well as a sample of the clay used. There are also, inevitably, in the light of an earlier tradition, some unhappy specimens of dead birds, small animals and butterflies, killed for scientific purposes.

Griaule was able, of course, to benefit enthusiastically from developments in audio-visual technology which occurred in the course of his career, as the cylinder recordings of the 1930s gave way to the tape-recorder of the 50s, which he used to make transcriptions of circumcision-songs and funeral music, often used subsequently in ethnographic films. An enthusiastic photographer, he recorded in snapshot or on film everything he could: dances, rituals, craft-work.

Some splendid aerial photographs are also on display in the exhibition. Griaule's first expedition, to Abyssinia, accompanied by Marcel Larget, centred around the political organisation of the kingdom, oral literature and popular religion. With the coming to power of Mussolini, however, it became obvious that he would have to look elsewhere for future expeditions, and in 1931-32 he headed an impressive team for the Dakar-Djibouti expedition, the first such French mission to Africa. The team completed three major research projects, on the Dogon of Mali, the Kirdi of Cameroon and the peoples of Gondar in Ethiopia, studying in particular circumcision rites, magic and possession. One of his principal informants on the latter part of this expedition was the healer Malkam Ayyahou, photographs of whose majestic personage are on display. As priestess of the cult of the zar at Gondar, her information, notably on possession, was of vital importance to both Griaule and Leiris. Another impressive photograph is that of Ongnonlou, "théoricien des signes", together with facsimile reproductions of stick-men in charcoal - by Griaule? - clearly illustrating various aspects of human or divine activity. A precise interpretation is not given. There are many fine artefacts from this expedition: Ethiopian artwork such as icon-type paintings on canvas, created specially for the expedition, elaborate crosses, in silver or wood, and basketry, finer than that found today, and with its colours still remarkably intact. There are also objects that still seem to have about them an aura of their previous owner, like the circumcision bonnet made by and for Mamadou Vad of Bamako, circumcised in Rufisque. Perhaps the most impressive objects are two boli, made of clay and beeswax mounted on a wooden frame, the whole daubed in congealed blood. These are ritual objects discovered by Griaule in the Sau region of Mali and stolen on Griaule's behalf by Leiris and Lutten. Leiris recounts the episode in *L'Afrique fantôme*. A note on the display-case calls them "des pièces très polémiques", and it is not hard to imagine the dismay their disappearance would have caused. One in particular (see below), a massive, hump-backed animal shape, heavy with menace and ritual authority, has lost but little of its power in its transfer to museum status.

Increasingly fascinated by the Dogon, Griaule's next mission, to Sahara-Soudan in 1935, allowed him to deepen his knowledge of Dogon culture, crossing the Sahara to arrive in the end at the cliffs of Bandiagara. He was accompanied by, among others, André Schaeffner, a musicologist (the husband of Denise Paulme), and the exhibition



displays fascinating photographs of Schaeffner with a Dogon drummer, taking down musical notation. It was this and subsequent expeditions that produced Denise Paulme's fine *L'Organisation sociale des Dogon*, and much of her work on French Sudanese folktale.

Missions in 1936-37 to Sahara-Cameroon, and in 1938-39 to Niger-Lake Iro followed. Griaule was accompanied on each occasion by different members of the team who had been with him since the beginning, but each pursued his or her own specialist interest, and there was no sense of the others being merely assistants to Griaule. For instance, on the Niger-Lake Oro trip, Germaine Dieterlen remained in Dogon country to continue her researches, while Griaule and Solange de Ganay went on to join Jan Lebaudy in Zinder.

Between 1946 and 1956, Griaule made twelve visits to the French Sudan, now Mali, to pursue his work on the Dogon, concentrating on the Sangha region. On one of these trips, in 1946, he met Ogotemmêli, an old hunter who initiated him into Dogon cosmology (see *Dieu d'eau*). He and his fellow-ethnologists (Geneviève Calame-Griaule, Germaine Dieterlen, Solange de Ganay...) established a close relationship with certain local informants, who seem to have been struck by the tenacity of their singular guest. A Dogon interpreter, Amadigné Dolo, is quoted as saying of him: "Griaule était un drôle de bonhomme, il passait dans les endroits où on lui disait de ne pas aller. Il s'en allait directement à l'endroit approprié [...]. Si on lui disait que quelque chose était interdit, il s'arrêtait et demandait ce qu'il fallait faire pour passer outre. Il y allait alors et prenait des photos."

During this period the French were elaborating a project to construct a dam at Bara in Dogon country. Among photos taken by Griaule were aerial ones showing clearly the best location for the dam. The dam was duly built, and the Dogon in gratitude buried Griaule's image in the cliff overhanging the dam, an honour reserved normally for their own dignitaries. But at the same time, in 1950, Griaule made strenuous although in the end unsuccessful efforts to persuade the Union Française to adopt a less high-tech approach to development in Africa. Griaule's deep affection for and understanding of the Dogon people was recognised at the moment of his death in 1956, when he was accorded a traditional Dogon funeral.

Outside the main exhibition, in the large foyer of the Musée de l'Homme, a more general exhibition on the Dogon continues the theme.

Classed in 1989 by UNESCO as "patrimoine mondial", Dogon country is presented in all its inevitable fragility. Enlarged photos show the massive, sculptural mud buildings rising in total harmony with the surrounding landscape, sometimes built within a towering cliff, but always respecting totally their environment and the particular topography of the area. Openings are few, to conserve heat on winter nights and reduce the heat by day. Overall, the impression is of an architecture that is as close to aesthetic and ecological perfection as it is possible to be. The buildings cost nothing but the labour of the builder, and repairs are made seamlessly and equally economically. But it cannot be long before creeping breeze-block and corrugated iron menaces the very existence of this architecture, and consequently that of the civilisation which gave it birth, and which became the passion of Marcel Griaule's life.

J. P. Little  
Dublin

# Notices

## Forthcoming conferences:

2nd - 4th September 1999

### Caribbean Writing in French: Place and Displacement

Printed below is the provisional programme of a conference taking place in University College Dublin 2nd to 4th September 1999. To register and/or to book accommodation etc, contact Mary Gallagher at Dept of French, UCD, Belfield, Dublin 4.

Fax: +353.1.7061175 Email: maryg@ollamh.ucd.ie

Website: <http://www.ucd.ie/~french/events/conferences/index.html>

*Jeudi, 2 septembre*

14h00-14h30 *Accueil*

14h30 *Ouverture du colloque*

15h00-16h30 *Partir et revenir: entre-deux et circulation*

**Maximilien Laroche** (Université de Laval, Canada) Déplacements, repositionnements et métamorphoses dans la littérature haïtienne.

**Sam Haigh** (University of Warwick) Exile and the Haitian/Canadian Writer.

**Kathleen Gyssels** (UFSIA, Belgique), «La séparation est un grand océan»: distance et absence dans «Ton beau capitaine» de Simone Schwarz-Bart.

17h00-17h45 Table ronde avec la participation d'auteurs antillais  
Thème: *La place de l'écriture antillaise*

*Vendredi, 3 septembre*

9h30-11h00 *La place des aînés*

**Bernadette Cailler** (University of Florida) De "Gabelles" aux "Grands Chaos": une étude de la désode des sans-abris.

**Martin Munro** (University of Aberdeen), Something and Nothing: Place and Displacement in Aimé Césaire and René Dépestre.

**Véronique Bonnet** (Université d'Aix-Marseille) S'inventer comme poète: étude comparative des figures énigmatiques de Saint-John Perse et de Fernando Pessoa.

11h30-13h00 *Pour situer les Antilles: l'espace discursif*

**Charles Forsdick** (University of Glasgow), «Le Cachot de Joux»: transatlantic displacement and the problematics of space.

**Gavan Titley** (Dublin City University) Consuming the Caribbean.

**Romuald Fonkua** (Université de Cergy-Pontoise) Voyage et discours de voyage dans la littérature des Antilles françaises.

14h30-16h00 *L'écriture et le déplacement*

**Beverley Ormerod** (University of Western Australia) Displacement and self-disclosure in some works by Gisèle Pineau.

**Celia Britton** (University of Aberdeen) Place, textuality and the real in Glissant's *Mahagony*.

**Mayra Bonet** (University of Ohio) La poétique du déplacement dans les récits de plusieurs auteures antillaises: Margaret Papillon, Myriam Warner et Suzanne Dracius.

16h30-18h00 *Etre à sa place, être chez soi?*

**Maeve McCusker** (National University of Ireland, Maynooth) Home in the writing of Patrick Chamoiseau and Gisèle Pineau.

**Jane Lee** (University of Exeter) Liminal narratives in Maryse Condé's *Les Derniers Rois Mages* and *Traversée de la mangrove*.

**Marie-Annick Gournet** (University of Bristol) Identité et appartenance aux Caraïbes.

20h00 Table ronde irlando-caribéenne organisée en collaboration avec l'Alliance française/ et l'Irish Writers' Centre, à l'Alliance française, 1 Kildare Street, Dublin 2. *Writing and Displacement: the Writing of Displacement.*

*Samedi, 4 septembre*

9h00 -10h.30 *Espace et déplacement: le mouvement de la créolité*

**Ernest Pépin** (Guadeloupe) L'écriture de l'espace dans les romans de la créolité.

**Lorna Milne** (University of Saint-Andrews) Espace physique et déplacement imaginaire dans l'écriture de Patrick Chamoiseau.

**Roy Caldwell** (University of Saint Lawrence, USA) Pour une théorie de la ville créole: *Texaco* et le post-moderne post-colonial.

11h00-13h00 *Arabesques de la relation*

**Nobutaka Miura** (Université Chûô, Tokyo) Dialogue manqué entre l'universalisme français et le discours antillais.

**Stuart Murray** (Trinity College Dublin) Central questions in anglophone Caribbean writing: history and the future in Naipaul, Walcott and Harris.

**Marie-Dominique Le Rumeur** (Universidad de Cantabria) Les "oiseaux des îles".

**Nick Coates** (University College London) Stubborn Chunks: chaotic soups and Caribbean Identity.

13h00 *Fermeture du colloque*

*8th-10th September 1999*

### **Leeds Centre for Francophone Studies 2nd international conference**

As part of its research activities, the Centre for Francophone Studies at the University of Leeds is holding its second International Conference (8-10 Sept 1999). Further details available from Sue Hamelman, Conference Co-ordinator, Dept of French, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT

Email: flsh@Leeds.ac.uk Fax: 0113 233 3477

*23rd to 25th September 1999*

### **Conference to mark the retirement of Professor Roger Little**

**Thresholds of Otherness / Autrement mêmes**  
Identity and Alterity in French-Language Literatures  
Trinity College, Dublin

Aedín Ní Loingsigh and David Murphy are organising a residential conference to mark the retirement of Professor Roger Little, Chair of French (1776) at Trinity College, Dublin, since 1979. The conference, entitled Thresholds of Otherness/Autrement mêmes, will be held from 23-25 September 1999, in Trinity College College, Dublin. The aim of the conference is to examine Professor Little's lifelong interest in the notion of altérité: from the otherness of poetic language to the exploration of notions of Black/White identities. This exploration of otherness also seeks to question the use of categories such as 'French' and 'Francophone' by problematising the relationship between centre and periphery in the French-speaking world. Speakers will include Henriette Levillain (Caen), David Williams (Sheffield), Michael Sheringham (Royal Holloway), Nana Wilson-Tagoe (SOAS) and Pius Ngandu Nkashama (Paris III).

For further information, please contact:

Dr David Murphy or Ms Aedín Ní Loingsigh, Department of French, Trinity College, Dublin 2, Ireland.

Email: murphydf@tcd.ie/niloinga@tcd.ie.

See also website: <http://www.tcd.ie/French/Rogerlink.html>

### **Call for papers**

THE XIth ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF CARIBBEAN AND AFRICAN LITERATURE IN FRENCH (ASCALF) will take place on Friday and Saturday 26-27 November 1999 at the Institut Français du Royaume Uni, 17 Queensberry Place, London SW7 2DT.

The theme of the conference will be:

#### **The Future in and of Francophone Writing**

- Historical Perspectives in Post-Colonial Literature
- Linguistic Perspectives: writing in French or in African languages/  
The Literary future of Creoles
- The Future of Francophone Theatre in a multi-cultural society:  
production/publication/translation

Offers of papers, preferably in French or English, and accompanied by a brief summary (150-250 words) in both languages if possible to:

Denise Ganderton,  
ASCALF Secretary  
Flat 7,  
35 Anson Rd,  
London N7 ORB

Email: 106676.1146@compuserve.com

### **Invitation to publish!**

The next issue of the *ASCALF Bulletin* will be published in the Autumn (1999). Offers of book reviews,, conference reports, and relevant notices will be gratefully received until mid September 1999.

For the following issue, offers of short articles as well as reviews, reports, etc, will be very welcome. All copy to be sent in both hard and soft form (Word for PC) to M. Gallagher, Dept of French, UCD, Belfield, Dublin 4.

